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Vesal Stoakley
College of DuPage

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Nuclear Fallout of a Japanese Disaster: The State vs. Fujin (God of Wind)

by Vesal Stoakley

(English 1102)

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury. We've heard what the State's defense has to say, and no doubt they will close their argument shortly saying they've learned their lesson once and for all. They will tell you we should all return back to a relative business as usual, with only a few minor reforms put in place. However, now that, in the course of this trial, all the facts have been laid out as to why we are facing unprecedented danger in this age of anger-fueled - no, nuclear-fueled - debate, we must ask ourselves, what are our responsibilities? Where will our conscience lie in the weeks, months, and years ahead before the next great calamity strikes (And we know it will)? Will we go forward blindly or, instead, can these so called anomalies of circumstance be completely averted? Is the future of our society greater than our past, or is it only a faint shadow, an obscure and ominous representation, of the greatness we once possessed? These are the questions before us.

On the morning of March 11, 2011, Tokyo Electric Power Company's (TEPCO) ten nuclear reactors in the north of Japan, in Fukushima Prefecture, ran as normal. Workers ate their lunch that afternoon, same as any other day, and returned to the routine operations at assigned stations. The rest of the day would be anything but normal. At 2:46PM a magnitude nine earthquake struck Japan (McDonagh 12), and knocked out power to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant (Fukushima Daiichi), causing it to shut down. Cooling from backup generators began to occur to compensate for the damage to the facility. Just a few hours later, a tsunami twenty meters high formed and plowed down on the plant and its surrounding territories, destroying the generator's fuel tanks. This led to an explosion at the Unit One Reactor, blowing off its roof, which released contaminants, and cracked the pressure containment apparatus of the facility. This allowed radioactive material to begin to seep into the Pacific Ocean.

The State would have you believe that such disasters are preventable going forward, and that they have learned the lessons necessary to keep such events from reoccurring. They, however, are wrong. Their closing argument will surely try to show that the costs of closing nuclear energy facilities outweigh the costs of operating them. But that is why the conscience is so important in reasoning through the details of this case. Nuclear power must be abandoned in Japan. We can ill afford the human toll it takes, and not enough has been done to scientifically guarantee the safety of our populations, despite previous assertions.

An immediate moratorium is in order, not only to ensure the safety of the Japanese people, but to also set an example that the continuance of nuclear energy production is detrimental to the entire world, and all its peoples. Nuclear technology is not up to the task of keeping us safe. At Fukushima, the reactor's pressure reached double its capacity, after being hit by the tsunami (McDonagh 12). Let's consider that for a moment. If you were to prepare an unfamiliar food in the microwave, heat it up for ten minutes per the directions, then took it out, ate it, and it damaged your tongue, mouth, and esophagus to a point where you would need to see health professionals on-going for many years to come, for care and rehabilitation, and then found you would never recover, would you continue preparing it the same way? Even if it saturated the room with the fragrance and aroma of the freshest chrysanthemums imaginable, would you risk such discomfort and trepidation? Of course not! So why would we, after coming face to face with nuclear Armageddon, continue to walk this same treacherous path?

Fukushima Daiichi unleashed some of the most harmful toxic elements, of the greatest

possible hazard, into our environment. Radionuclide atoms (radioisotopes), which come with a large degree of volatility because of the unsteady nucleus they contain, are now roaming free amongst our fellow citizens of Japan (Fukuda et al. 1). The process these atoms undergo causes the release of gamma rays and radioactive material. Under controlled administration, these atoms can have beneficial applications. But do we want such particles of instability, which influence and meddle with the fundamental functions of the body, permeating the fabric of the environment we and our families live in indiscriminately? Currently, that is what's occurring.

The nuclear disaster has contaminated not just the Pacific and the sea life we eat, but the heart of Japan itself, Tokyo (Pullen, Chang, and Hanna 2-3). "In the atmosphere, there were multiple release events in the first several weeks that delivered the bulk of the radioisotopes to regions downwind. During those several weeks venting ("feed and bleed"), explosions, and fires plagued the various reactors...and deposited radionuclides via atmospheric transport and dispersion...Radioactive elements spread toward the outer regions of Tokyo and some deposition occurred with rainfall" (Pullen, Chang, and Hanna 2-3). There was no control of where these radioisotopes were delivered, and consistent testing only identifies the outcomes of where they've reached. There is no means of prevention when it comes to their distribution during nuclear power plant failure. We can implement all the modeling and statistical analysis we want but, in the end, they're only as reliable as our nightly weather forecasts. Worse still, alternatively, they consist of heightened, aggressively advancing consequences, joined with prolonged effects which resist dissipation over a more contained course of time, unlike inclement weather.

Are you starting to grasp the full scope of this disaster? This is the storm of our century. Each disaster is like an indiscriminating, tornadic cyclone, growing to eviscerate a residing population up to the size of an entire Japanese prefecture. No one can say with certainty where precisely they'll strike, what they'll suck up inside and destroy, but we, with the minds to discern between right and wrong, must refute the use of any technology with the already demonstrated potential for such destruction. For every day that passes without a complete stand-still of production of nuclear energy, the potentiality for further instability of our well-being grows.

My client Fujin, God of Wind, has tried to bring us evidence first-hand of the dangers of nuclear energy. He shook the earth and whirred up the seas, and still we do not listen. It's as though we were already submerged, deep beneath the sea, long before the tsunami came, oblivious to the realities on the surface, too busy trying to survive the numbing isolation of its treacherous waters. But, sooner or later, we must come back to the surface for a deep, chastening breathe – the fresh air which my client Fujin brings.

The costs associated with producing nuclear energy are outside the bounds of all reason. A lawsuit is being pursued by U.S. military personnel, against TEPCO, who say that when they provided emergency assistance, they were lied to about the levels of radiation present at Fukushima Daiichi. As a result, they state, they've contracted testicular cancer, gynecological bleeding, and leukemia ("Radiation Lawsuits" 1). Also, pulling uranium from the ground has harmful, lasting effects on the soil and vegetation it is mined from, not to mention there are very limited amounts of uranium available long-term (Flasbarth 2), so the costs of energy infrastructure development begin to diminish once the uranium supply becomes exhausted. And let's not forget the greatest threat of our time, the war on terror. If one terrorist group were able to mount a credible attack on one nuclear facility in the world, the consequences would be unheralded catastrophe.

There are mitigated risks and then there's the nuclear industry's campaign of negligence. Even Hollywood's blockbusting budgets are put forward within the realm of caution. If the costs begin to outweigh the gains, then such enterprises are abandoned. Godzilla may be able to barrel through Tokyo, destroying life-like sets and all its visual effects wizardry on display for two hours, only for audiences to return calmly to the safety and security of home, but the same cannot be said when we come under attack from each imminent, unintended nuclear disaster.

What did the State do after Chernobyl? They made us their expert guarantees and promises, their enchantment into lethargy, and Fukushima Daiichi followed. The financial gains of nuclear power are clouding the moral and ethical judgment of the most advanced of nations, including our own. Put mildly, this State and others have shared in the coziest of relationships with the industry of nuclear energy, massaging data and statistics into morose and morbid deformation. Chernobyl, in the intervening years to the present, has been under-reported in the number of causalities and deaths by a ratio as possibly large as 196,000:1. According to a World Health Organization Report in 2005 (McDonagh 103), approximately fifty people died as a result from Chernobyl. However, a New York Academy of Sciences article, the oldest peer-reviewed scientific journal in the United States, cited by McDonagh, says instead there were as many as 980,000 deaths related to the effects of the Chernobyl meltdown, calling sharply into question the credibility of the World Health Organization (McDonagh 103).

We have seen this same undervaluing of those truly affected here as well. Nearly 100,000 residents surrounding the site of disaster at Fukushima Daiichi are displaced (McDonagh 161) and forty percent of children living in Japan's Fukushima prefecture have seen thyroid abnormalities (Harpers Index, Feb 2013). In their recent letter on nuclear energy, Japan's Catholic Pastoral Ministry of Bishops dispel the "safety myth" (McDonagh 106) and state "In the message 'Reverence for Life', we, Japanese bishops could not go so far as to urge the immediate abolishment of nuclear plants. However, after facing the tragic nuclear disaster in Fukushima, we regretted and reconsidered such attitude. And now, we would like to call for the immediate abolishment of all the power plants in Japan."

They most certainly should. What has become of the value for human life in our culture? Do we only see value now in the yen, U.S. dollars, and exchange rates? Why is no one afraid of the realer inflations of ego, greed, and self-congratulation, literally permeating into the people, places and things we interact with in our daily lives? Even the most advanced economy in the world, the United States, could not escape nuclear disaster, Three Mile Island, whose impact has largely been covered up by "soft studies" done by the TMI Public Health Fund setup by the nuclear industry who provided them ample funding (McDonagh 106), devastated land and no doubt countless lives, which were purposely unreported as the surrounding population was never consulted or tested. We are foolhardy to think that as Japanese we have the means to fully control such awesome power. We once lived in sobering fear as a people of the consequences of our actions, but now live in comforting delusion.

How many of us remember the era of nuclear cinema? Akira Kurosawa was one of the filmmakers who gave us goose bumps exploring the further consequences of the radiation of nuclear war (Kaplan 1) in his film "*I Live In Fear*," alternately titled "*What the Birds Knew*." We as a nation once looked onward and upward toward the noble sky with prayer for answers. When they came, we would accept them, as they filled us with the new breathe of knowledge, unabated. Today, instead, we look to our neighbor, to the television screen, and to the internet, awash in misinformation, and forget our most credible of sources which have never failed us throughout our long, tumultuous history. People like Fujin. Disasters like Hiroshima and Fukushima. The key difference today is, unlike the title industrialist character of Nakajima in Kurosawa's film, whom flees to Brazil, there are few if any places left for us to escape to for safety. "The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) states that 88 of the current 442 nuclear installations worldwide are located in areas of high seismic activity" (McDonagh 113).

Disaster and tragedy are the tools we must use to grow. We must leverage them for good instead of self-interest. My client Fujin has tried to show us a better path, a more sound way, to conduct ourselves in a civilized society globalizing at a frenetic pace. We must look at our neighbors around the globe and acknowledge that their well-being is in our own best interest also. Fujin entrusted the Japanese people to heed the lessons of this triple-threat disaster, and to sew the seeds of

change before disaster reaches its point of reclamation once more. We must begin a strategic, systematic winding down of our nuclear power capability, in the fullest pursuit of compassion and reason, and more fully assess the purpose and costs of such a program destroying the irreplaceable components of our environment and national heritage. We must look squarely in the face of the dangerous dragon of governance, its hot breathe full with rhetorical equivocation, and without fear say: No more!

At every turn in this trial, the State has repeatedly shown a willingness to justify the consequences of this disaster, as well as distance itself from the reality of what should be the final nail in the coffin of nuclear energy. Our Japanese tribe is drowning in the turmoil of Fukushima Daiichi, suffering once more the wages of complacency. Some will tell you the danger has passed. Ladies and gentlemen. We are a long way from taming this fathomless beast, and we would be foolish to think otherwise. Nuclear energy is the black cat in the bamboo grove, a dangerous entity shadowed over and lurking beneath this crop of tall, looming promises laid bare, and we must all find our way out safely, before it finds us once more.

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