### People

“In this global world we have to be responsible in a new way ... not to a country, but to the rest of the world.”

Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

### Companies

“They know the train is not coming ... but they keep cleaning the place. When you see something like that, you have to go on. You have to.”

Masahiko Mochizuki, M.D. of Sanriku Tetsudo (Railways)

### Organisations

“I gradually realised our team cheered them [people in Tohoku] up by winning the championship and I was a small part of it.”

Ginji Akaminai, Baseball player, Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles

### Experimental Travel

“great ship from afar an abandoned mining town alone and weeping

“Battleship Island” Hashima Island Nagasaki Prefecture

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**JAPAN’S SPIRIT**

*Strength through the Storm*
We feature people who have the courage to step out of their comfort zone to question, take action and stand up for what they believe in.

COURAGEOUS QUESTIONS

DR. KIYOSHI KUROKAWA

Written by Jacinta Plucinski
Interviewed by Cassie Lim
Photography by David Lalanne
It was a chain of events that changed the world:

A magnitude 9.0 subduction earthquake that shifted the earth’s axis and moved the Japanese island of Honshu east by 2.4 metres.

A series of successive tsunamis up to 30 metres - the highest in Japan’s recorded history - that began to pummel the east coast of the country 26 minutes later, and was responsible for 94.3% of the nearly 20,000 lives lost.

A nuclear disaster rated “7: Major Accident” at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant - the highest rating on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale (INES) - a situation which remains unstable.

The Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission (NAIIC) – the first independent inquiry in Japanese constitutional history - was established to discover why such an accident occurred.

“THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAS HAPPENED IN A REASONABLY HEALTHY DEMOCRACY.”

“This is the first time something like this has happened in a reasonably healthy democracy,” says Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, Chairman of NAIIC. “Japan is known as the third largest economy. Its reputation is based on excellence in science and technology, manufacturing and precision and so why did this happen? That is the question. That is the reason the world is really surprised.”

Amidst the destruction, shock and loss, it was a question that would take reason, compassion and courage to answer.

Former President of the Science Council of Japan and medical professional, Kurokawa was chosen to lead the team of nine commissioners. His credentials are lengthy and noteworthy.

He is currently Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo, Academic Fellow of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), Distinguished Research Affiliate of MIT Media Lab and Chair and Founder of IMPACT Foundation Japan. He advises and sits on the boards of various global committees, such as the Earth Institute of Columbia University and Global Health Innovative Technology amongst many.

In 2012, he received the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) award for Scientific Freedom and Responsibility and ranked amongst the ‘100 Top Global Thinkers’ by Foreign Policy, alongside the likes of Aung San Suu Kyi and Thein Sein, Bill and Melinda Gates and Malala Yousafzai.

Kurokawa’s connection and sense of belonging to the international community was crucial to the credibility of the report and to rebuilding the trust Japan lost during the disaster.

“In this global world we have to be responsible in a new way... not to a country, but to the rest of the world, to the people of world,” Kurokawa says.
Under Kurokawa, NAIIC was guided by three principles. It needed to be “A commission of the people, by the people and for the people.” Through its study of the past, it needed to look to the future and share lessons learned with the world.

“Transparency is a foundation of trust in this flattening world,” Kurokawa says. Its process needed to be transparent, independent and international.

Over six months, NAIIC made site visits to the nuclear plants, conducted over 900 hours of interviews and hearings with 1,167 people, received over 10,000 responses to surveys by residents and on-site workers of approximately 500 related contractors, made 2,000 requests for documents and sent teams overseas to interview experts from the U.S., France, Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus.

“All but one of the commission hearings were streamed online with simultaneous English translation and it communicated with the public through social media. The 592-page report was released in both Japanese and English.

The answers Kurokawa and his team found were brutally honest and painful. The report’s executive summary states that the nuclear disaster was “man-made” and “…could and should have been foreseen and prevented.” “Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to ‘sticking with the program’; our groupism; and our insularity.”

Kurokawa warns, “The mindset that supported it can be found across Japan. In recognising that fact, each of us should reflect on our responsibility as individuals in a democratic society.”

With approximately 440 nuclear plants operating across 31 countries worldwide and 70 more under construction, it’s a reflection urgently needed by all. As energy demands rise, more countries may turn to nuclear power without the skills or expertise to maintain and operate plants. International co-operation, thinking critically and asking questions will be vital safeguards.

“The nuclear business is like the airline business,” Kurokawa explains. “It needs international policies and regulations to ensure safety and security.”

He continues, “To make this accident a lesson to be shared in this very fragmented, fragile world, Japan should lead the way to develop a new safety agency [with the international community]; if new countries want nuclear power then they need to join this agency and adhere to the regulations; for example operators receiving certification every three to five years.

In the meantime, the situation at Fukushima continues unresolved. For Kurokawa, any solution needs to be a global one that is “…run by an independent body with principles of international transparency and using the best science available at this time.”

“Nobody’s experienced such a thing. Nobody knows the answer. So why not ask?”

For Japan, the most difficult challenge it faces is embracing international expertise, moving away from the complacency of “Groupthink” and denouncing the old cliché “The nail that sticks up must be hammered down.”

Kurokawa’s personal experience offers insight into how.

In his commencement speech to the 2013 students of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS), where he is an Academic Fellow, Kurokawa explains his own journey of stepping away from a medical career path where he was assured “…life-long security as a member of the nation’s elite.”

He states, “I accepted an offer to go to Philadelphia for two years as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. As expected my research skills and knowledge advanced rapidly, but what I didn’t expect was how my worldview began to evolve.

After 30 years in Japan of being told what to think, for the first time in my life I had to think for myself and where that led me shocked my family, my friends and my colleagues.

What I brought back with me was a very different mindset, a different perspective and a habit of speaking my mind.”

His message is a challenge:

“Today you are probably as far from your own society’s strain of it [Groupthink] as you will ever be, so the question I invite you to
consider is what are you going to do with this independent consciousness when you go home?”

For Kurokawa, our ability to think for ourselves and ask questions is not only necessary for healthy dissent. It is also what makes us truly human and unlocks our deep compassion.

Over the coming decades, the world is facing major transitions.

With the advancement of science and technology, the global population is exploding. As the world’s wealth consolidates, the middle class is disappearing. As cities become larger and more powerful, national entities that once encompassed urban, suburban and rural become less relevant.

“The world is really changing to a different paradigm since the industrial revolution,” Kurokawa opines. “Nobody knows what will happen.”

What we do know, as Kurokawa explains, is that the pace of technological progress is accelerating and with it our ability to generate, store and access vast amounts of knowledge. He believes we’re heading towards “singularity” – the moment when artificial intelligence exceeds human intelligence.

With such unprecedented amounts of information at our digital fingertips, what then defines us as human is not knowledge, but our ability to ask questions that line the pathways of our quest for knowledge.

“All knowledge is digitalisable in principle. If you don’t know [something] you Google it, but why do you Google it?” Kurokawa asks. His answer is simple, but astute. “That is a very important thing, because you have a reason to ask. With singularity everything is there, but if you ask that’s you.”

Wisdom then becomes an endeavour of questions and actions.

“It’s like tennis,” Kurokawa continues. “You have everything you know about tennis there, videos and everything, but if you never play [it doesn’t mean anything]. If you play tennis, then you know what this word [really] means.”

Kurokawa passionately emphasises, “You have to do it! You have to earn the wisdom, so you learn and you fall and you learn and you become wiser. Then you become humble.”

If it is questions that make us human, then asking courageous questions guided by reason and compassion will fulfil our potential and smother our complacency.

In the same commencement speech he elaborates:

“When I commend you to reason, I mean the capacity each of us has to think independently, applying logic, common sense and intellectual rigor in everything we do.

No matter how brilliant you may be, without compassion you are useless. Compassion is the one thing you cannot teach, because it has to come from inside. The only thing you can do is to create an environment that encourages and rewards compassionate behaviour.”

Reason, Compassion and, at the end of the day, Courage.

These are the principles by which Kurokawa endeavours to live, because this is how we protect the world and ourselves against our own apathy and foolishness.

Courage to use reason, courage to be compassionate, courage to ask questions and courage to be the upright nail.

“NO MATTER HOW BRILLIANT YOU MAY BE, WITHOUT COMPASSION YOU ARE USELESS.”

Original part of the bridge. The tsunami swept this concrete block to its current location.
REGAINING THE WORLD’S TRUST

by Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa
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At the beginning of July 2012, as Chairman of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission (NAIIC), I delivered a report to the Japanese Diet.

It was the first such commission in the history of democratic Japan and we believed that the report would galvanise the various arms of the nuclear “family” in Japan, and that, through exposing the loose governance of the Japanese government and TEPCO and showing their lack of awareness, it would make them rethink their way of operating. We also believed that it would help regain the trust of the world by showing Japan’s determination to deal with the disaster.

Since its delivery 18 months ago, what has actually changed?

Well, the government response has not been overwhelming, to say the least. Half of one recommendation out of seven – to set up a Diet committee to supervise nuclear regulation – was adopted by the Lower House of the Japanese Parliament.

There was no response at all by TEPCO, or anyone else in the nuclear industry, despite all of our detailed critical analysis of their actions leading up to and following the accident. In other words, the problems we highlighted in the report have yet to even be acknowledged, much less dealt with.

Curiously the Japanese media has also lost its courage, with less and less critical coverage of the issue. I wish the Japanese press would pressure the government and TEPCO in much the same way that the foreign press tries to.

And, finally, it is very unfortunate that most of the Japanese public don’t understand the importance of checks and balances in a democratic government with three branches. There has been little public pressure on the government for prompt action.

I had hoped that what made our commission such a success – the commitment to openness, transparency and global awareness – might have some effect on the way the nuclear elite did business, but now it is impossible to believe that the situation is improving. The current state of the Fukushima Nuclear Plant and the actions from responsible parties is a case in point. The briefings on the situation from TEPCO are undecipherable, with no attempt to ensure either the Japanese public or the international community understand them. Their statements imply that they think this is all someone else’s problem; one that has landed on their plate purely by accident.

The central government’s information is just as opaque, as are their plans for the future handling of the crisis. Sufficient scientific proof should be in place prior to extolling the safety of the country to the world.

Yet, in the midst of the immovable barriers the present system embodies, barriers that seem to heighten the difficulties faced in this nuclear disaster, rather than reduce them, I still find moments of hope. Several come directly as a result of the NAIIC Commission itself.

They come from people who, after being involved in NAIIC, have undergone dramatic changes in their careers.

One is Tsuyoshi Shinya, who went on to become a Diet member and is a member of the Diet committee on nuclear oversight mentioned above. Another is Satoshi Ishibashi, a senior team manager, who launched a project with a dedicated team of young people called, “The Simplest Explanation of the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission.” This website is an excellent resource that explains clearly and succinctly the complicated scientific discoveries made by the commission. Amongst the information provided are a series of videos, narrated in English and Japanese, that visually illustrate the commission’s findings. French, German and Chinese versions are currently in progress.

Yurina Aikawa was doing research on the nuclear accident for one of Japan’s leading newspapers. She left behind a budding career with the newspaper to join NAIIC. After the commission was dissolved, I asked her about her plans. She told me that she was going to continue her research on the victims of the disaster on her own. I had been surprised at her decision to leave her career at the newspaper to join NAIIC. I was even more moved by her decision to continue researching the disaster after the commission.

Last August the results of her research were published. Entitled Hinan Jakusha (“The Vulnerable Evacuees”), the publication records the cases of the many victims whose fates are out of their control. It is a powerful book and I was honoured to write a comment for it.

Individuals like Shinya, Ishibashi and Aikawa are helping to ensure that the nuclear accident and its victims remain on the nation’s agenda. Given the recent political and social climate, this is not an easy task. As much as we can hail their efforts, we cannot in any way excuse the
continued floundering by everyone involved in the governmental and industrial efforts since this crisis began.

At a lecture at the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in June 2013, I pointed out how the true meaning of the word “accountability” has been lost in its translation to Japanese. I explained that in Japanese accountability is translated as “the responsibility to explain,” rather than “the responsibility to carry out the duty one has been given.” Accountability in fact has more weight than the word “responsibility” — except in Japan, it seems. That has to end. We need to hold those responsible to account.

In the NAIIC report, accountability makes up a large part of our recommendations, though they have been largely and unfortunately ignored. As I believe our recommendations go a long way in not only helping us move constructively beyond the present situation, but also help us learn from these awful events, I’m going to repeat them.

What we still need is an independent international committee, committed to scientific principles and transparency, that devises solutions to the problem and makes proposals to the government, which in turn will make decisions and execute these solutions; we still need a plan of action that deals with the mid and long-term developments of the Fukushima disaster; and we still need these developments and solutions to be shared with the world.

Independence, transparency, public disclosure, adherence to scientific principles and an international approach are crucial. They are the first steps towards the recovery of trust in this globalised age of hyper-connectivity.

It is precisely because of these factors that NAIIC was so highly respected and earned the trust of the global community. There is an urgent need for the Japanese and global public to understand this and to demand the same from their government and all the other parties involved in the nuclear accident in Fukushima who betrayed them.

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“I’M HOPING THROUGH BE MOVEMENT, JAPAN GETS MORE CONNECTED WITH OTHER NATIONS AND THE REST OF THE WORLD. IN THE PAST, THE CONNECTIONS WE HAVE WITH OTHER COUNTRIES WERE BUSINESS BASED, BUT I THINK AT A CULTURAL LEVEL, ON A DEEPER LEVEL, BE MOVEMENT COULD BE THE BRIDGE, BECAUSE I’VE NEVER SEEN A PUBLICATION LIKE THIS BEFORE.”

Masa Kogure, Director of TABLE FOR TWO International, awarded Asian Social Entrepreneur of the Year 2013 by Schwab Foundation