

The National Diet of Japan's Accident Independent Investigation Commission, which investigated the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima nuclear power plant, pointed out in a report published in 2012 that the accident was caused by a phenomenon known as the "Regulatory Capture". In the eyes of Kiyoshi Kurokawa, a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo who chaired the commission, how does the current state of Japan when viewed from outside the Diet?

In the decommissioning of the No. 1 Fukushima nuclear power plant, it has taken considerable time in deciding how to dispose of the contaminated process water.

Large amounts of groundwater from the Abukuma mountain system on the west side of the nuclear power plant flows into the building every day, and when fuel debris (melted nuclear fuel) is mixed with cold water, it becomes contaminated water. The contaminated water accumulates in tanks and is treated using the ALPS (ALPS, multi-nucleodes removal system). Even if you look at nuclear power plants abroad, the water, which contains the radioactive substance tritium, is discharged into the sea or rivers.

However, radioactive materials other than tritium remain in Fukushima's treated water, and even if those concentrations get lowered by ALPS to within national standards, it can never be reduced to zero, which may make it difficult to get public consensus and acceptance on the matter.

What should they have done?

If we don't do something about the source of the contaminated water, it will continue to accumulate in the tanks, and the only way to stop it, is to stop the groundwater from flowing into the power plant.

I once suggested to the Government that we should look at the technology used by Ota Dōkan (known for building Edo Castle). In other words, a deep moat should be built around the site, including the building, and the groundwater flowing into the building should be blocked or diverted so that it flows to the sea.

However, the current measure for now is a frozen earthen wall built into the ground and encircling the entire structure, requiring a constant supply of electricity. Despite the significant outlay and running costs to maintain this, it still has not managed to prevent the inflow of the contaminated water into the power plant.

I have to say that they were only thinking about "how to get by - for now" and did not have a long-term vision. Even now, I would like to see them conduct a more thorough examination of what can be done.

The report of the National Diet of Japan Accident Independent Investigation Commission (NDAIC) cited the key phrase "regulatory capture" as an underlying cause of the nuclear accident, pointing out that the half-century-long one-party rule of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the distinctive organizational structure of the bureaucracy and industry, such as seniority-based hierarchies and lifetime employment, and the public's "belief" that this was "natural", were behind the accident. In the wake of the nuclear power plant accident, the Japanese government has been in a state of crisis. In response, you have called for change in Japan.

The point is, when there is problem, like contaminated water, how do you process the medium to long term direction of the solution, as well as acknowledging the background of the problem?

Japanese people are good at thinking about how to solve the problems, but I sometimes think that we are not good at thinking about the root of the problem from the perspective of "why? "

Post-WWII, the country was still able to achieve economic development, but our progress in political and philosophical development did not always go as well. We were lucky to be able to export and sell our manufacturing products within the framework of the Cold War and reaps its benefits.

However, just as the digital transformation (business transformation using information technology) of the past two decades has been slower than expected, the same sluggishness is also being seen in the economy. While the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of major Western countries continues to grow, Japan's has remained stagnant.

Leaders in various fields who face the challenges of solving problems need to be humble, and they need to take into account the size of the world and the length of its history and look ahead at the same time.

First of all, we need to show what we need to be like 10 to 20 years from now in a larger framework.

Next, if we think about "what we need to do to reach there?", then we can see what we need to do in the next five years. This will naturally lead to a plan of what needs to be done every year.

The officials in Kasumigaseki are busy thinking about many things, but they tend to be precedent-oriented and because they often avoid taking responsibility, it makes it difficult to come up with best solutions.

The Diet has not changed either. The National Diet of Japan established the National Diet Accident Independent Investigation Commission for the first time in its constitutional history. After that, I thought that the Diet would continue to have a third-party investigative body, but that was not the case.

My question was, "Is there a mechanism to check the performance of the government? "

That is the role of the Diet. There is a separation of powers. There is the Diet, which sets the laws, the government, which enforces the laws, or in other words, creates and implements the details of the policies, and then there is the law itself.

When we think about the functioning of this separation of powers, we wonder if the Diet, which checks the performance of the government, can truly fulfill its role. I think the fact that the National Diet Accident Independent Investigation Commission was the “first in the history of constitutional government” was symbolic of this. The fact that the Diet has not established an independent investigative body since then means that there is no effective functional check on the government. It is not enough to simply just examine the policies of the government.

Whenever there is a problem in the society, there is often a third-party committee or a panel of experts in the government or a company, but if you think about who chooses the members of the committee, it is the government or the company. This does not necessarily make them objective third parties, and no matter how much they claim, “but it was investigated by a third party”, it will fall on deaf ears for those overseas.

-There are many issues that should be investigated by the Diet, including contaminated water and COVID-19.

However, it is not good to leave too much to the government. In the U.S. and the U.K., it is the legislators who draft laws. In Japan, it is the bureaucracy. When I look at Japan from the perspective of having lived in the U.S. for a long time, I feel that this indeed is a strange situation.

I got the impression that when the National Diet Accident Independent Investigation Commission (NAIIC) finished its report, many thought, "It's a good thing that the highest authority of the state investigated it." It did not talk about what was different from the past.

Intellectuals and the media needed to repeatedly explain to the public why a role like that of the National Diet Accident Independent Investigation Commission was necessary, so that the public would think about it. Here, too, we need to discuss why it was a good idea, and why there has not been a continuance of an independent investigation body by the Diet.

When I discussed this with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tadamori Oshima, we talked about the need to do something about the Diet's legislative process. The House of Representatives and the House of Councillors each have their own House Steering Committee. The NAIIC was established in December 2011 by agreement between the House Steering Committees of both House of Representatives and the House of Councillors. I think that a mechanism to check the government, such as the NAIIC, would work if the ruling and opposition parties decide at the both House Steering Committees.

It was one of the worst nuclear accidents in history, but they still couldn't change?

If you ask me whether the government has faced the people head-on, even with regard to nuclear power plants, the answer is that it has not. When I give lectures overseas and am asked why Japan cannot change, I am at a loss. I have no choice but to say, “This is Japan”.

Unlike Europe, which is connected to the rest of the world and has historically maintained a tense relationship with each other, I wonder if it is a characteristic of an island nation that Japan is so relaxed. This is one of the weaknesses of the Japanese people. I understand that they are working hard on the frontlines to decommission the reactors, but the shock of the nuclear accident is fading away and we need to take it more seriously. However, middle-aged and older people are always saying why they can't change Japan, so I have high hopes for the young people who will support Japan in the future.

Could you describe it?

When you are a working adult, it is difficult to take long periods of time off from work, so it is better to experience life abroad when you are a university student.

I once gave a speech for the entrance ceremony at Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa Campus. Referencing the school's founder, Yukichi Fukuzawa, and citing one of his books, "Encouragement of Learning", I provided a piece of contrarian advice to the students and emphasized the importance of taking a break from school. I urged the students to take a year off from school and go abroad, whether for study, fun or wandering about.

It doesn't matter if it's in a developed country or a developing country. What you can do in that year is to meet various people and make your own unique friends. This is the age of the Internet, so if you can make such friends, you can stay connected even after you return home. This will help you when you encounter difficulties in the future. In addition, when you learn about Japan through the news while you are abroad, you can see the good things, but also the bad and weak points. This is difficult to notice when you are in Japan. By looking at Japan from the outside, we can develop a healthy sense of patriotism and think, "We need to change this. The weak points of Japan become a concern and a motivation to change.

We can't rely on young people alone. What can we do to create a bigger vision for a new beginning?

The world has become a digital society and the times have changed, and the success stories of Japan no longer hold the validity and relevance they once did. Even so, bankers, for example, are expected to continue to work at the same bank as "XX bankers", and few of them are able to move between two or three banks. In the rest of the world, this kind of "other game" is the norm, and we need to aim for a society where there is inexhaustible interaction.

In such a society, heads of organizations – leaders - must have experience and virtue, which is rare these days, even among politicians. I feel that in the Age of the Internet, people have become shallower. On the other hand, the Internet has made the world a more globalized place, and it has made it easier for each and every one of us to realize our own potential. This is why the question is not how to behave in an organization, but how to grow and develop one's potential to its fullest and share that accordingly with others.

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