

# Poetry from Fukushima on the 8th Anniversary of the Earthquake-Tsunami-Nuclear Meltdown

By [Lit by IMAGINATION](#)

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*March 11, 2019 is the 8th anniversary of the Earthquake-Tsunami-Nuclear Meltdown, the first of a type of techno-natural disaster predicted in the 1990s by seismologist Ishibashi Katsuhiko. He coined the Japanese term *genpatsu shinsai* (原発震災, literally a nuclear power-earthquake disaster) to highlight the way a horrific natural disaster would be worsened by the co-occurrence of nuclear reactors melting down because of the earthquake.*

I wasn't physically or materially affected by the *genpatsu shinsai*, but it happened close enough to my home in Japan that it deeply affected me, and I was able to observe the way Japanese society reacted to it. Even at the time there was a wide range of reactions in society. Some people never thought twice about it. Others were devastated and angry, and they demanded that the national energy policy abandon nuclear energy. But this anger never transformed into a broader and more radical shift in politics. No one was connecting the issue to Japan's attachment to the US military-economic alliance and the traditional export-driven capitalist model that requires infinite growth in a finite world.

I've always had a lot of sympathy for the people dislocated by the nuclear disaster, but I've also sensed something narrow and naïve about the way the problem is viewed. The victims should have expected a nuclear disaster, but they never should have expected anything different than the treatment they got. There are hundreds of disasters throughout the world that they could have looked to as examples of victims being abandoned. Few victims ever receive any kind of justice or a return to the life they once had. A nuclear accident is a rare and unique cause of an internal refugee crisis, but the plight of the refugees is not much different than that of others throughout the world who are uprooted because of natural disasters and war. Right after the *genpatsu shinsai*, large numbers of refugees began to enter Europe because of the destruction of the Libyan state and the war against Syria. Unfortunately, there was never a popular solidarity movement connecting Japan's internal refugee crisis to the larger international crisis. In fact, during the aftermath of the *genpatsu shinsai*, the US government and the Japanese establishment were finishing off a soft coup against the elected Japanese government that had tried to challenge the status quo of the US-Japan alliance and the nature of the Japanese economy. No one was in the mood to keep fighting that battle.

I read and wrote about such things for five years after the disaster until I felt written out, or perhaps written into a corner. I felt trapped by the success of my self-education. If I wasn't preaching to the converted, I was encountering people who disagreed and had a level of confidence in their opinions that was inversely proportional to their knowledge of the topic. They wanted to "debate" me for five minutes at a noisy social gathering, but they didn't want to read a book on the topic (my reading list is at the end of this blog post) and talk to

me about it afterwards. The same thing happened after I read several books on the history of the cold war and post-cold war era. Now instead of the pointless debates, people just shut me down. I have had to listen to people saying, “No, I don’t want to talk to you about Russia.” Who needs to have their views challenged when you can learn all you need to know from covers of the *Economist*?



I had once hoped that the *genpatsu shinsai* would change everything and make energy and environmental issues the top priority in politics. That’s why I made the effort to learn about it and talk about it, but the toxic legacy of the nuclear age remained on the margin of the margin of public consciousness as every nuclear state prepared to rebuild and upgrade its nuclear arsenal and nuclear energy facilities. Fukushima? You would think it never even happened.

Other blogs and news sites will be running stories about the 8th anniversary today, so I tried to think of something to discuss that wouldn’t be covered elsewhere. What follows is a short excerpt from a book of poems by a Japanese author, Kojima Chikara, who joined the anti-nuclear movement decades ago and wrote about it before and after the *genpatsu shinsai*. Many of his poems describe the era of nuclear expansion during which there were minor unreported accidents and radiation exposures of the invisible sub-contracted laborers. Their health problems were never tracked by regulators or the curious branch of science called “health physics.” These poems make it clear that the disaster really began when the reactors were first switched on.

This short sample has been reproduced here for the purpose of review (fair use claimed) and to help the author get some exposure for his work which is not well-known outside of Japan.

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A Selection of Poetry Works: My Tears Flow Endlessly

*Forced out of House and Home by the Fukushima Nuclear Power Accident*

by Kojima Chikara, translated by Noda Setsuko

Tokyo, [Nishidashoten Publishing](#), ©2017

123 pages. Excerpt from pages 42-46.

The book was published with the original Japanese poems alongside the English translation.

Kojima and Noda are surnames, listed first here as in Japanese publishing style.

1.5  $\mu\text{Sv}$  around the entrance of my house

Where daisy fleabanes bloom.

1.7  $\mu\text{Sv}$  under the trees

Covered with overgrown vines in my garden

2.45  $\mu\text{Sv}$  on the surface of the ground

In my backyard where wet leaves pile up.

0.6  $\mu\text{Sv}$  around the heated table sunken into the floor

Which is no longer in use

Except during our short visits.

0.9  $\mu\text{Sv}$  in the sunroom

Looking out through the pane of glass

0.8  $\mu\text{Sv}$  in the second floor bedroom

where nobody has slept since the accident.

We cleaned our house after an absence of a year and four months.

Wiping away the rat droppings on the tatami mats

And clearing all the dust in our house that day

We didn't manage to return to our 0.05  $\mu\text{Sv}$  temporary house in Tokyo.

Near the sunken heated table

We placed floor cushions, each 0.7  $\mu\text{Sv}$

And took blankets of 0.6  $\mu\text{Sv}$  out of the closet,

Which is now difficult to open and close.

We slept somewhere between 0.6  $\mu\text{Sv}$  and 0.7  $\mu\text{Sv}$ .

We slept shuddering in fear

Of being exposed to the radiation all night.  
We slept with the knowledge  
That we might not live in our house and homeland again.  
Worrying about our future in the dark of night,  
We slept.  
Kashi, kashi, kashi    Kashi, kashi, kashi  
From the very darkness at midnight  
I can hear a faint sound.  
It reverberates across the whole room.  
Kashi, kashi, kashi    Kashi, kashi, kashi  
The sound has continued non-stop  
for about an hour since I was woken up.  
Kashi, kashi, kashi    Kashi, kashi, kashi  
As soon as I awoke I turned on the light  
And identified the origin of the sound.  
Kashi, kashi, kashi    Kashi, kashi, kashi  
It's a little young rat, not even as big as an egg.  
I came home for a short visit after two months absence  
And was enraged to see droppings all over the tatami mats.  
I set a trap and it worked.  
The rat scratched the edge of the cardboard with its rear claws  
Because it was trapped with its belly glued to duct tape.  
Rat, rat,  
You are not hurt at all.  
Besides, "There are no immediate effects on your health."  
I don't want to help you,  
Let alone pay you compensation, or give you donations.  
I only listen to you struggling, not sleeping at all.  
Kashi, kashi, kashi    Kashi, kashi, kashi  
I must live in a temporary shack.

Somebody might really make a fool of me if I pity you

Snickering at me beyond the darkness.

Kashi, kashi, kashi    Kashi, kashi, kashi

Kashi, kashi, kashi    Kashi, kashi, kashi

Half dead, Half dead    Half dead, Half dead

Half dead, Half dead    Half dead, Half dead

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A Nuclear Age Reading List, 2011-2019.

Until now I have been too unassuming to stress all the reading and work I've put into learning about the nuclear age and the history of the 20th century. However, today I look back on several experiences when I had to tolerate people shutting me down or giving me their thinly supported opinions—people who were utterly uninterested in reading books on these subjects or listening to someone who does. I've also seen historians having similar experiences when they are interviewed on television, so I thought for once I would mention the fact that since the nuclear disaster, I've read the seventy books listed below cover to cover. I'm employed as an educator, so I have an advantage by having some extra time to do this research, but still I want to stress that anyone can start reading and learning again. When I was young no one thought I was special. I was a B student who struggled to get the occasional A. I kept reading because I turned off the TV and left my country. You may not be able to do both of these things, but you can at least do the former.

A.V. Yablokov, V.B. Nesterenko & A.V. Nesterenko, *Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment*

Ace Hoffman, *The Code Killers*

Alla Yaroshinskaya, *Chernobyl: Crime without Punishment*

Andrew Nikiforuk, *The Energy of Slaves: Oil and the New Servitude*

Bruno Barrillot, *Les irradiés de la République : Les victimes des essais nucléaires français prennent la parole*

Buddy Levy, *Conquistador: Hernan Cortes, King Montezuma, and the Last Stand of the Aztecs*

Charles Forsdick & Christian Høgsbjerg, *Toussaint Louverture: A Black Jacobin in the Age of Revolutions*

Charles C. Mann

*1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus,*

*1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*

Chris Hedges, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*

Christopher Boyce, Cait Boyce, Vince Font, *The Untold Story of the Falcon and the Snowman*

David Graeber

*The Utopia of Rules*

*Debt: The First 5,000 Years*

David Talbot, *The Devil's Chessboard: Allen Dulles, The CIA and the Rise of America's Secret Government*

Douglas Valentine, *Hotel Tacloban*

Edward Herman & David Peterson, *Enduring Lies: The Rwandan Genocide in the Propaganda System, 20 Years Later*

Eileen Welsome, *The Plutonium Files: America's Secret Medical Experiments in the Cold War*

Eri Hotta, *Japan 1941: Countdown to Infamy*

Eric Schlosser, *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety*

Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*

Gar Smith, *Nuclear Roulette: The Truth about the Most Dangerous Energy Source on Earth*

Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands*

Gavan McCormack & Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States*

Gayle Greene, *The Woman Who Knew Too Much: Alice Stewart and the Secrets of Radiation*

Gerard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*

Grover Furr, *Blood Lies: The Evidence that Every Accusation against Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union in Timothy Snyder's Bloodlands Is False*

Greg Poulgrain, *Incubus of Intervention: Conflicting Indonesia Strategies of John F. Kennedy and Allen Dulles*

James W. Douglass, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why it Matters*

Jared Diamond

*Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*

*Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*

Jim Albertini, Nelson Foster, Wally Inglis, Gill Roeder, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Hawaii in a*

## *Nuclear World*

Jim Garrison, *On the Trail of the Assassins*

Jim Harding, *Canada's Deadly Secret: Saskatchewan Uranium and the Global Nuclear System*

John Reid, *Ten Days that Shook the World*

Joseph Mangano, *Mad Science: The Nuclear Power Experiment*

Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*

Judi Rever, *In Praise of Blood: The Crimes of the Rwandan Patriotic Front*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*

Kate Brown

*A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*

*Dispatches from Dystopia: Histories of Places Not Yet Forgotten*

*Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*

Kristen Iversen, *Full Body Burden: Growing up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats*

Leon Siu, Ke Aupuni O Hawaii, *The Basis for Restoration of the Hawaiian Kingdom*

Matashichi Oishi, *The Day the Sun Rose in the West: Bikini, the Lucky Dragon, and I*

Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua et al, *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land and Sovereignty*

NHK TV, Tokaimura Criticality Accident Crew, *A Slow Death: 85 Days of Radiation Sickness*

Nicolas Lambert, *Avenir Radieux*

Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*

Oliver Stone & Peter Kuznick, *The Untold History of the United States*

Penny Sanger, *Blind Faith: The Nuclear Industry in One Small Town*

Peter van Wyck, *The Highway of the Atom*

R.T. Howard, *Power and Glory: France's Secret Wars with Anglo-America*

Richard Cottrell, *Gladio, NATO's Dagger at the Heart of Europe: The Pentagon-Nazi-Mafia*



*Terror Axis*

Richard Rhodes

*The Twilight of the Bombs: Recent Challenges, New Dangers and the Prospects for a World Without Nuclear Weapons*

*Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*

Robert J. Johnson, *Romancing the Atom: Nuclear Infatuation from the Radium Girls to Fukushima*

Robert Jacobs, *The Dragon's Tail: American's Face the Atomic Age*

Roger Keeran and Thomas Kenney, *Socialism Betrayed: Behind the Collapse of the Soviet Union*

Roger Stone, *The Man Who Killed Kennedy: The Case Against LBJ*

Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda*

Sheldon M. Stern, *The Cuban Missile Crisis in American Memory: Myths versus Reality*

Stephanie Cook, *In Mortal Hands: A Cautionary History of the Nuclear Age*

Stephen F. Cohen, *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives: From Stalinism to the New Cold War*

Stephen Kinzer, *The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain and the Birth of American Empire*

Susan Southard, *Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War*

Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*

Takahashi Hirose, *Fukushima Meltdown: The World's First Earthquake-Tsunami-Nuclear Disaster*

Tom Zoellner, *Uranium: War, Energy and the Rock that Shaped the World*

William T. Vollman, *Into the Forbidden Zone: A Trip Through Hell and High Water in Post-Earthquake Japan*

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