

**JAPAN: BACKING NUCLEAR POWER  
WITHOUT LIKING IT****By Keiko Tabusa**

Japan now has 38 nuclear power reactors, producing 27% of the total amount of electricity generated in the country. Thirteen more reactors are under construction. According to the long-term prospect for supply and demand of electricity which the Research Council for Comprehensive Energy Policies (an advisory organ to the Minister of International Trade and Industry) announced in June 1990, nuclear power is expected to supply 43% of the nation's total energy production by 2010. The Japanese government has consistently committed itself to a policy of vigorous nuclear energy development since the mid-1950s when it initiated the R & D program.

**Declining Approval**

Public support for nuclear energy and the government's energy policy, however, has been declining steadily in the 1980s. Those who feel "uncertain" about nuclear energy increased from 56% in 1980 to 86% in 1987. The major sources of uncertainty have always been fear of radioactive contamination in case of accidents, the long-term effects of radiation on the human body and for future generations, and unsolved problems about the storage and processing of nuclear waste. Support for increasing Japan's nuclear capability has also been in decline. Those who back the government's policy to build more nuclear plants decreased from 62% in 1979 to 29% in 1988, while those who oppose it increased from 21% to 46%. A consistent trend is apparent, although the dramatic decline of support between 1984 (47%) and 1986 (34%) can be attributed to the Chernobyl accident. The general stance of "no more nuclear power" was confirmed in another survey in June 1989, in which 51% of respondents chose the option, "no more nuclear power plants with the existing plants allowed to continue in operation." Eleven percent opted for more nuclear power plants, and 16% chose total withdrawal from nuclear power (no more construction and shutdown of operating plants).

Trust in the ability of both the government and the nuclear industry to enforce adequate safety regulation has also declined. Responding to a question "Do you feel that the safety measures taken at nuclear power plants are adequate?" 52% of the respondents answered yes, just 23% no in 1980. Four years later, those saying yes decreased to 30%, and those saying no increased to 38%. In a January 1990 survey by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, 46% of respondents indicated they trusted the government and utility companies, while 51% said they did not.

**No Alternative**

Growing antinuclear sentiment has boosted what had been a stagnant antinuclear movement in Japan—but only slightly. Antinuclear activities in the 1970s were based on local action—fighting to stop construction or operation of individual nuclear power plants by site occupation, litigation, and local elections. One might expect the declining public backing for the national nuclear energy policy we see today would provide a base for a strong national antinuclear campaign, but it really hasn't. This is so because, while overall support for nuclear power has clearly waned, many Japanese see no realistic alternative to it.

Surveys by the Prime Minister's Office include a question asking respondents to choose which energy source would be the major source of energy in the future. Thirty-three percent chose nuclear energy in the February 1980 survey, and the proportion has been gradually increasing ever since. Most Japanese feel uneasy about nuclear energy, but the majority of them predict that nuclear power will be the major energy source in the future. A 1987 survey by the Prime Minister's Office gave respondents 5 choices to indicate their opinion about the future of Japanese nuclear development: a major increase in use of nuclear power plants; increase use but with caution; no increase in use; decrease use; decrease use drastically, including shutdown of presently operating plants. By far the largest proportion—50%—chose "increase with caution," while the next largest, 23%, chose "no increase in use."

Japanese people aren't happy with the government's policy of vigorously expanding the nation's nuclear capability. Many of them fear that a nuclear accident on the scale of Chernobyl could happen at a Japanese nuclear power station. But they can't say no to nuclear energy: they do not see a viable alternative. And the psychological impact of the 1973 oil crisis was so strong in a resource-dependent country like Japan that people are convinced that they cannot depend too much on imported oil. In the absence of anything approaching an outright rejection of nuclear energy, the government pursues its policy of expanding the nation's nuclear capability, even in the face of diminished public confidence.

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