

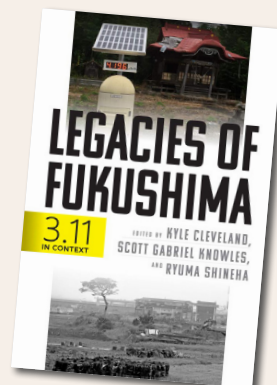
BOOK REVIEW

Legacies of Fukushima: 3.11 in Context

Edited by Kyle Cleveland, Scott Gabriel Knowles, and Ryuma Shineha

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021
344 pages.

Reviewed by Wesley CHEEK



Legacies of Fukushima: 3.11 in Context, edited by Kyle Cleveland, Scott Gabriel Knowles, and Ryuma Shineha, is a new installment in the Critical Studies in Risk and Disaster series from the University of Pennsylvania Press. One of the difficult issues in writing about the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Dai'ichi nuclear reactor is separating the particulars of that event from all of the surrounding events of the 3.11 disaster, while simultaneously integrating them into the larger picture. This may sound contradictory at first, and that is why it is so complicated. For many people, especially for those outside of Japan, "Fukushima" is synonymous with the entirety of the 3.11 disaster. It is possible that equating Fukushima with the totality of the disaster is a self-centered concern. Nuclear radiation is the facet of this disaster that had the potential to impact on people located well outside of the disaster-affected area; it is possible though that this conflation is just a normal reaction to the terrifying threat of a nuclear meltdown. One outcome of this merging of the nuclear meltdown in Fukushima with the disaster as a whole, however, is the subsuming of a complex crisis involving a large and diverse geographic area into "Fukushima."

Fortunately, what *Legacies of Fukushima* does effectively is to frame the events at Fukushima Dai'ichi into the broader context of nuclear power in Japan. This not only serves to alleviate the problem of conflation, it also offers an approach to the issue from a variety of academic disciplines and a focus on how researchers from differing backgrounds understand the production of nuclear power in Japan. It is not possible within the limits of this review to comment upon each chapter of the volume. Instead, I will discuss some of the main themes that emerge.

The picture that the varied sources gathered in *Legacies of Fukushima* reveal is one of the "nuclear village" as a formidable coalition that serves to smooth over public concerns with nuclear power, to downplay its risks, and to ease its continued existence. The nuclear village is depicted here as comprising, roughly, the alliance of the nuclear power industry, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, the business lobby, investors, and the conservative media.

This village does what it can to obscure the risks of nuclear power while engaging in boosterism of the industry on multiple fronts. Few accounts of the 3.11 disaster delve into the complexities of the existing Japanese political economy; several chapters in this book do

so. The cozy relationships that permeate the technocratic ruling class of Japan's development economy are interrelated and integrated within the nuclear village. This entanglement led to the conditions that would produce the nuclear meltdown in Fukushima, and also worked to reestablish control over the narrative in its aftermath.

One begins to detect a trend reading the diverse chapters in *Legacies of Fukushima*. Regulatory capture, the preeminence of the technocracy, and the exclusivity of the managerial class are at the heart of the powerful political machine of the Japanese economy and how it is reflected in the built environment. This political machine influences not only the site selection and approval process that allowed for a nuclear reactor to be built upon this specific piece of coastline in Fukushima, but also the small towns surrounding it which have an economic dependence upon the continuation of the production of nuclear energy.

As someone who has worked in, and continues to research, the areas affected by 3.11, I found several chapters that helped to fill in holes in my knowledge. Robert Jacobs's chapter "Fukushima Radiation Inside Out" goes into great technical detail about the issues with measuring radiation levels in Fukushima, and how these concerns factor into political decision making. In "The Politics of Radiation Assessment in the Fukushima Nuclear Crisis," Kyle Cleveland describes the tensions that emerged between the U.S. military and the Japanese government. Scholars of different disciplines will surely find chapters here that bridge gaps in their own knowledge.

One difficulty with an edited volume like this is that it can be hard to read straight through. Of course, that is intrinsic to the nature of commissioning multiple authors from varied backgrounds to write on a centralized topic. This reviewer felt the need for more of a unifying thread to bring the chapters together. Another small but related quibble is that for all of the evident expertise on the nuclear power industry, the book is light on the broader world of disaster scholarship. The majority of the chapters discuss nuclear power and relate that to the 3.11 disaster, but they rarely make the connection to other facets of the disaster, or to the study of disasters in general. This, however, is a minor complaint. What the volume does do is provide sources which disaster scholars can then use to make connections in their own work.

Legacies of Fukushima is a solid primer for those not familiar with the ins and outs of nuclear power in Japan. If we are to refer to the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami as the 3.11 Triple Disaster, then understanding the nuclear facet of that triumvirate is critical. Each of the chapters in this book can serve as useful reading for undergraduate or graduate courses on disasters, risk, or Japan in general.