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The China Communist Party's Perception of Nuclear Power Plant Crises: A Discourse Analysis of the *People's Daily*

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Yuki Arisawa

yuki_arisawa10@yahoo.co.jp

Keio University Global Research Institute

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Professor Takahashi Nobuo, Faculty of Law, Keio University

The China Communist Party's Perception of Nuclear Power Plant

Crises: A Discourse Analysis of the *People's Daily*

Yuki ARISAWA

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, China has placed importance on both domestic and global nuclear power energy policy. China currently has 38 active nuclear power plants with a further 19 under construction,¹ and also started exporting them abroad from 2013.² As such, nuclear power stations are a key factor in China's global strategy.³ It is clear that nuclear power is considered the most important energy source in China, and warrants significant diplomacy. Indeed, the country's strategic use of this resource is significant compared to the global trend of reducing the dependency on nuclear power.⁴ China has evidenced its confidence in managing the security of nuclear power—including the presentation of General Xi Jinping, the Secretary of the China Communist Party (CCP), at the Fourth Nuclear Security Summit, which was held in Washington DC in 2016.⁵ Therefore, it is imperative to understand China's intention and nuclear power strategy. This necessity is compounded by the fact that the development of and changes in China's nuclear power strategy have been understudied.

This paper takes a slightly different approach in correcting this academic oversight: identifying cases of nuclear power plant crisis, and analyzing how they were covered by

¹ Most of the nuclear power plants in China are the pressurized water reactor type, which is adopted worldwide. "Country Statistics: People's Republic of China." January 30, 2018.

<https://www.iaea.org/PRIS/CountryStatistics/CountryDetails.aspx?current=CN>, (accessed January 30th 2018). World Nuclear Association provides details of the types on nuclear power plants. <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/nuclear-fuel-cycle/nuclear-power-reactors/nuclear-power-reactors.aspx> (accessed January 30, 2018).

² "国家能源局印发建立服务核电企业科学发展协调工作机制实施方案"中国核电网, 2013年4月10日, <http://np.chinapower.com.cn/201304/10/005715.html> (accessed January 30th 2018).

³ 中国核工业建设集团公司党组"打造核电'走出去'的国家名片"求实网, 2016年12月31日, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2016-12/31/c_1120211759.htm (accessed January 30th 2018).

⁴ "International Ministerial Conference 'Nuclear Power in the 21st Century' Abu Dhabi, October 30th to November 1st, 2017 Concluding Statement by the President of the Conference" IAEA website. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/cn-247-president-statement.pdf> (accessed January 30th 2018).

⁵ Xi Jinping stressed that no nuclear power plant accidents have occurred in China. 杜尚泽, 章念生, 谢环驰"习近平出席第四届核安全峰会并发表重要讲话介绍中国核安全领域新进展宣布中国加强核安全举措"《人民日报》2016年4月3日。

China's official news media.⁶ It focuses on nuclear power plant crises because few studies have examined such cases. Moreover, this paper draws attention to the recent academic tendency to overemphasizes China's aggression in its rise, and which overlook historical changes in Chinese policy.

Conducting research on the CCP's nuclear energy policy and the actual conditions on the ground has many obstacles due to limited access to the official documents. Despite this challenging situation, however, some media scholars have succeeded in partially revealing the CCP's perception of nuclear energy. Among others, Yongxiang Wang *et al.* have analyzed the coverage of nuclear energy by two of the CCP's official newspapers, the *People's Daily* (人民日报) and *Guangming Daily* (光明日报).⁷ Wang *et al.* used a text mining method to implement a quantitative content analysis of newspaper coverage between 2004 and 2014. Their research finds that almost all of the articles in official CCP newspapers are informational and pro-nuclear statements, while little antinuclear sentiment is presented.

Wang *et al.* suggest that the *People's Daily* news coverage follows and repeats the CCP's nuclear energy strategy. This is hardly surprising considering the sensitivity of the nuclear power energy strategy. However, their article has two weaknesses. First, they provide no explanation for the why they start their analysis at 2004. Second, Wang *et al.* fail to explore policy changes concerning nuclear energy. These analytical gaps may be due to the vulnerability of academics in China, as they may place their position at risk by taking the political factor into consideration. Nonetheless, there were significant member changes in the CCP's Politburo in 2003, resulting in several major policy changes—including nuclear power energy strategy. In order to understand such policy change, it is necessary to trace earlier news coverage regarding nuclear power policy and situate it within the changing political context. Moreover, as is often practiced by Chinese specialists, the discourse analysis method

⁶ This paper does not intend to analyze nuclear weapons strategy. For nuclear weapons strategy, see the following research: Hisako Iizuka. "China's 'Nuclear': Reconsidering the Success of Atomic Bomb and its 'Peaceful Use'" in Nobuo Takahashi ed. *'Nuclear' and Us in Asia*, Tokyo: Keio University Press, pp.97–132.

⁷ Yongxiang Wang, Nan Li, Jingping Li "Media Coverage and Government Policy of Nuclear Power in the People's Republic of China". *Progress in Nuclear Energy*, No.77, 2014, pp.214–223. In the following section, I focus on the *People's Daily* coverage in order to further Wang's analysis.

needs to be applied when dealing with the CCP's official media and documents.

As such, this paper traces news reports about nuclear power plant crises from all available issues of the *People's Daily*, an official mouthpiece of the CCP.⁸ This paper predominantly focuses on comparing two nuclear power plants incidents: the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, and the 2011 Fukushima accident.⁹ In so doing, this paper reveals how the *People's Daily* covered the two accidents in the unique political context of China.

Chernobyl

The CCP's perception of nuclear energy before the Chernobyl accident

Since the United Nations held the first global conference on the environment at Stockholm in 1972, environmental movements have gained momentum.¹⁰ At the same time as this landmark environmental conference, antinuclear movements emerged in Western Europe.¹¹ Germany, for example, experienced anti nuclear protests in the mid-1970s, when the government selected Wyhl as a site for a nuclear power plant in February 1975.¹² This initiated an opposition campaign, in which local residents occupied the site and conflict with the police occurred.¹³ France also experienced antinuclear movements at this time. In May 1975, locals in Flamanville and Port la Nouvelle began demanding that the government disclose information regarding plans to construct a nuclear power station.¹⁴ In 1977, one person died during an antinuclear power plant protest against Superphoenix, a nuclear power plant prototype in Creys-Melville.¹⁵ Within this era of the emergence of environmental movements, the Three Miles Island nuclear power plant accident in Pennsylvania occurred in

⁸ Guoguang Wu "Command Communication: The Politics of Editorial Formulation in the *People's Daily*." *The China Quarterly*, Volume 137, March 1994, pp. 194–211.

⁹ The IAEA states that Chernobyl and Fukushima have the highest nuclear power accident scale to date. "Fukushima Nuclear Accident Update Log" IAEA website. <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/fukushima-nuclear-accident-update-log-15> (accessed January 30, 2018)

¹⁰ The official name of the conference is the "United Nations Conference on Human Environment." This conference is also known as the "Stockholm Conference" due to its venue. For details see Norichika Kanie. *An Introduction to Environmental Politics*, Tokyo: Maruzen, 2004, pp.43–46. Environmental Chronology Editing Committee, *An Environmental Chronology: Japan and the World*. Tokyo: Siurensa, 2010, p.527.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.527.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.527.

¹⁴ Environmental Chronology Editing Committee, *An Environmental Chronology: Japan and the World*. Tokyo: Siurensa, 2010, p. 522.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.522.

1979—and remains the most significant disaster in commercial nuclear power plant history in the US.

China holds a socialist doctrine towards nuclear power plant, which mandates that a nuclear accident never occur. The socialist doctrine indicates that business companies serve the people in a socialist country. In contrast, business companies in capitalist countries only serve their own profits and thus neglect the people. According to this logic, nuclear power plant accidents would never occur in a socialist country, like they do in a capitalist country.

The CCP evidences this socialist perspective when the Three Miles Island accident occurred on March 28, 1979.¹⁶ The *People's Daily* delivered its first direct coverage of the incident on April 5, 1979—one week after it had occurred. The paper titled the story: “Serious Accident in United States Nuclear Power Plant Arouses Strong Reaction.”¹⁷ The *People's Daily* reported the process of the accident, as well as the reactions of government officials and ordinary people. However, the main point that it emphasized was that antinuclear power plant movements were emerging in several cities across the United States—including Rhode Island, Massachusetts, California, and Ohio. By reporting the antinuclear power plant movements, the *People's Daily* highlighted the growing fear of both government officials and ordinary citizens in the United States.

The *People's Daily* framed the antinuclear power plant movement as a contradiction between capitalism and socialism. On April 23, 1979, the *People's Daily* published an article entitled: “Nuclear Power Plant Accident in the United States Causes Social Anxiety: Mass Demonstrations Protest against the Capitalist Class Pursuing Profit despite People's Lives.”¹⁸ As inferred by this title, the *People's Daily* reported that the Three Miles Island accident was caused by the capitalist characteristics of the nuclear power plant company. The *People's Daily* reported that mass meetings and demonstrations opposing the usage of nuclear energy

¹⁶ Three Mile power plant is located in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, United States. As a result of the accident, the State Governor of Pennsylvania declared a state of emergency and 90 million residents were evacuated. Antinuclear power plant movements emerged in the United States soon thereafter, and resulted in the cancelation of all planned construction and running of nuclear power plants. Ibid., pp.568–569.

¹⁷ “美国核电站严重事故在国内引起强烈反响”《人民日报》1979年4月5日。

¹⁸ “美国核电站事故引起社会震动和不安广大群众游行示威抗议垄断资产阶级只顾追求利润不顾人民死活”《人民日报》1979年4月23日。

were occurring in cities across the US, including San Francisco, New York, Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, and Detroit. It also reported that 90 groups—including peace, environment, labor, and religious organizations—were planning to march on Washington DC. The *People's Daily* framed all these antinuclear movements as an opposition between capitalist and socialist classes.

On May 8, 1979, the *People's Daily* published a follow-up story covering the protest meetings, titled: “Citizens in the United States Protest the Usage of Unsafe Nuclear Power Plant.”¹⁹ The newspapers reported that seven million people had gathered for the antinuclear protest in Washington on May, 6—activists having contacted each other following the Three Miles Islands accident. The *People's Daily* further reported that the protesters had gathered in front of the White House before marching through Pennsylvania Avenue towards Capitol Hill, led by 1,500 people who lived near the Three Miles nuclear power plant. The report ended with the words of the demonstration’s organizer, who noted their intention to increase awareness regarding the danger of nuclear energy throughout the country. As such, the *People's Daily* not only reported on the nuclear power accident in the US, but supported the antinuclear movements from a socialist perspective.²⁰

However, there were only five news reports about the Three Miles Island accident in 1979. While this shows that the CCP paid little attention to the nuclear power plant accident at this time, it also reflects the influence of the socialist doctrine—an influence that became especially apparent when Chernobyl accident occurred in 1986.

Missing officials?

During the 1980s, antinuclear movements and environmental party politics gained momentum in Europe and the United States. For example, France experienced their first

¹⁹ “美群众示威抗议使用不安全核电站” 《人民日报》1979年5月8日。

²⁰ The aggressive attitude of the *People's Daily* regarding antinuclear power plant movements is possible because China had no nuclear power plants at this time. The CCP initiated the construction plan of their first nuclear power plant at Qinshan, Zhejiang province, in January 1982. 肖关根“秦山核电厂主厂房动工” 《人民日报》1982年1月25日。

nuclear power plant accident in Super phoenix on September 1987.²¹ Meanwhile, confrontation had already occurred in Germany between protestors and police regarding the construction of the Wackersdorf nuclear power plant in 1986.²²

The Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident occurred on April 26, 1986. Located 130km north of Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor necessitated the evacuation of 12 million people living within 30km of the power plant to evacuate.²³ The area burned and spread radioactivity for more than ten days.²⁴

The *People's Daily* delivered the initial coverage on Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident on April 30, 1986. The attitude of the initial coverage was ambivalent. On one hand, the *People's Daily* supported the attitude of Western countries in blaming the Soviet reaction to the accident. Indeed, for the several weeks following the accident, the *People's Daily* reproduced the news directly from other West Europe countries, while relying on incomplete news from the Telegram Agency of Soviet Union (TAAS), the Soviet news agency. *The People's Daily* thus transferred news blaming the Soviet attitude.²⁵ This reflects the CCP's dissatisfaction with the Soviet reaction to providing information about the accident.

On the other hand, the *People's Daily* supported the Soviet attitude to managing the nuclear power plant accident. The newspaper published the words of Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, who blamed Western countries—especially the United States. Originally reported by the TAAS, the *People's Daily* quoted Gorbachev's argument that western “politicians and media are maneuvering an ‘anti-Soviet movement’ on the accident. The organizers of the campaign are trying to ‘damage the reputation of the Soviet Union and its foreign policy to cancel nuclear testing and nuclear weapons.’”²⁶ This indicates that while the CCP blamed the Soviet Union for not sharing information, they supported the protection of Soviet sovereignty. The CCP was also cautious of Western

²¹ Environmental Chronology Editing Committee, *op. cit.*, p.523.

²² *Ibid.*, p.527.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.560.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.560.

²⁵ “苏联部长会议发表公告谈核电站事故情况日本将把苏联核事故提到七国首脑会议紧急讨论”《人民日报》1986年5月2日。

²⁶ “戈尔巴乔夫首次谈苏联核电站事故建议加强合作建立安全发展核能的国际制度”《人民日报》1986年5月16日。

Counties undermining the legitimacy of their socialist regime. In the 1980s, Gorbachev was promoting the political reform or “Perestroika” of the Soviet Communist Party. China was also in the midst of political reform, the CCP promulgating its reform and opening-up policy since late 1970s, and which was encouraging notions of economic and political freedom among the urban youth.²⁷ Thus, the CCP was carefully observing how the Soviet management of the Chernobyl disaster—as Soviet failure would imply a similar destiny for China as a socialist country in the age of reform.

On May 22, 1986, the *People’s Daily* published the first official statement from the leader of the CCP regarding the incident²⁸ also marking the first time that the Chernobyl disaster made the front page. However, their coverage on the CCP leadership was fairly simplistic. The *People’s Daily* reported that Li Peng, the vice secretary of the CCP, visited the construction site of Daya Bay nuclear power plant at Guangdong province on the May 20, where he reportedly stressed upon the workers that China had learned to make safety and quality their top priorities following the Chernobyl power plant accident. They further reported that Li Peng had argued that while their technique and equipment were more sophisticated than that used at Chernobyl, they should not be overconfident. As such, the *People’s Daily* tried to show that the CCP leadership was also concerned about the Chernobyl accident. Framed Li Peng’s remarks as a dialogue between the CCP leaders and nuclear power plant workers, the *People’s Daily* excluded the local residents around the Daya Bay and the people of Guangdong. Indeed, according to *Li Peng’s Diary on Nuclear Power* published in 2004, Li and his colleagues decided against inviting journalists to the Daya Bay power plant visit, and provide information regarding the event via a news report instead.²⁹ This shows that the CCP did not have enough confidence in their ability to sweep away the anxiety of local residents regarding the nuclear power plant.

²⁷ Shigeo Nishimura, Ryosei Kokubun. *Party and the State: A Locus of Political Regime*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009, pp.167–169.

²⁸ 何云华“李鹏视察大亚湾核电站工程时指出国家正采取五项措施确保核电站安全”《人民日报》1986年5月22日。

²⁹ Peng Li. *Start to Development: Li Peng’s Dairy on Nuclear Power Plant*. Beijing: Xinhua Publishing, Vol.2, 2004, p.409.

In *Li Peng's Diary on Nuclear Power*, Li provides an account of his perception of the accident as follows.³⁰ His first entry about Chernobyl appears on April 29, 1986, when he was in Yichang City in the Hubei province, in central China, for a conference on the *Gezhouba* dam project. Li only recorded basic information about the accident in this first entry, having received the news through the radio news show "Voice of America." Li noted that "even in the strong propaganda of western newspapers, the result of radiation leakage is serious." This indicates that while Li was somewhat aware of the seriousness, this did not prompt him to immediate action. Indeed, Li continued his work at the dam project and returned to Beijing. Yet it would still be several weeks before an official statement was released. This shows that official statements regarding the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident by top leaders was significantly delayed.

Managing the Hong Kong problem

Despite the CCP's nervous attitude towards the Chernobyl disaster, they had to manage the anxiety of Hong Kong residents.³¹ On September 5, 1986, the *People's Daily* delivered news regarding the visit of members from Hong Kong Legislative Council to inspect the construction of a nuclear power plant in mainland China.³² The newspaper explained that the inspection group submitted a report to the Hong Kong Legislative Council stating that an accident similar to Chernobyl was unlikely to occur at the Daya Bay power plant. The *People's Daily* noted that the Hong Kong branch of the Xinhua News Agency had been invited to join the inspection group in meeting authorities from the Daya Bay station in Beijing on September 18.³³ However, the *People's Daily* did not originally intend to report on this inspection group. The CCP had been deciding whether news of the inspection group would generate a positive or negative effect in promoting the construction of nuclear power

³⁰ Ibid, pp.405-406.

³¹ The CCP could not directly control the anxiety of Hong Kong residents because Hong Kong was under British rule until July 1, 1997.

³² "香港立法局举行内务会议通过立法局议员核电考察团报告书" 《人民日报》1986年9月5日。

³³ The Xinhua News Agency is the first news agency of the CCP since its foundation in 1931. For detailed history, see the official website: <http://203.192.6.89/xhs/static/e11273/11273.htm> (accessed January 20, 2018).

plants in China.³⁴ After the CCP was sure the report written by the inspection group would have a positive influence, the *People's Daily* was instructed to deliver news on this topic. By contacting the Hong Kong branch of the Xinhua News Agency, the CCP succeeded in negotiating with the inspection group on the ground. Consequently, on August 21, the *People's Daily* reported that meeting between Li Peng and the inspection group had been a friendly one.³⁵

Moreover, the *People's Daily* did not cover the actions of previous visitors from Hong Kong in that period. According to *Li Peng's Diary on Nuclear Power*, on August 16, a group named "Meeting for Stopping Daya Bay Nuclear Power Plant Construction" visited Beijing.³⁶ Li noted that when the members of the meeting visited the nuclear station on August 19, 1986, they made a speech opposing nuclear energy.³⁷ Li further noted that the vice president of the nuclear institute opposed the speech and the leader had to apologize.³⁸ Nevertheless, the *People's Daily* did not cover this news, or any news that might harm the legitimacy of the CCP.

On September 24, 1986, the *People's Daily* reported on the meeting between General Secretary Zhao Ziyang and the managers of a British-French nuclear power plant company regarding nuclear power plant policy.³⁹ This article was special: not only did it appear on the front page, it also included statements from both Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng. The report claimed that China would continue friendly cooperation with the United Kingdom and France to develop its national nuclear power plant strategy. This article was also intended as a message to foreign countries. This article also listed some of the attendees, which included the president of the Hong Kong branch of the Xinhua News Agency. According to the news

³⁴ Qinshan is the first nuclear power plant in China. Located in the Zhejiang province, it started operating on December 15, 1991. 唐庆忠, 张军“我国和平利用核能的一项重大成就秦山核电站并网发电”《人民日报》1991年12月18日。Daya Bay nuclear power plant started operating on August 31, 1993. “李鹏电贺大亚湾核电站一号机组并网发电成功”《人民日报》1993年9月2日。

³⁵ “李鹏对香港立法局核电考察团成员访京团说办好大亚湾核电站保证其安全是我们同香港居民的共同愿望”《人民日报》1986年9月21日。

³⁶ Li, *op.cit.*, p.426.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ 冯秀菊“赵紫阳会见法英公司和银行负责人时指出中国发展核电方针不会改变通力合作是大亚湾核电站安全可靠的关键”《人民日报》1986年9月24日。

report, Li stated that China would send the manager of the nuclear industry bureau to the upcoming IAEA conference as the leader of Chinese delegation. Similarly, the articles regarding the Daya Bay nuclear station were not purely for domestic circulation. Rather they were a message intended to reassure their counterparts about the construction of the Daya Bay nuclear power plant, as Li was worried that England and France would abandon the loan agreement for Daya Bay. Li's anxiety to complete the construction at Daya Bay was largely due to his career resting on its success.

According to *Li Peng's Diary on Nuclear Power*, the CCP had been facing opposition to Daya Bay construction from the residents of Hong Kong since July 1986.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the *People's Daily* only published the statement of Deng Xiaoping, the Secretary General of CCP, stressing the safety of Daya Bay power station and that their plan for nuclear power plant development would not change.⁴¹ The *People's Daily* never reported news about the antinuclear movements in Hong Kong. This attitude shows that the CCP did not limit reporting on antinuclear sentiments abroad, but were reluctant to do so with regard to domestic antinuclear movements. The CCP's perspective of the antinuclear movement in Hong Kong was sensitive.

On September 26, 1986, the *People's Daily* concluded the emergency phase of its initial coverage of the Chernobyl disaster, reproducing news straight from the Xinhua News Agency regarding the decision of the IAEA president to continue developing nuclear energy.⁴² On the same day, the *People's Daily* also reported that the Soviets had completed the initial phase of eliminating the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster. Thereafter, the *People's Daily* delivered news about Chernobyl more sporadically—once a week compared to almost daily reporting on Chernobyl prior to September 26. As such, the CCP used news regarding the IAEA and Soviet action to draw an end to the initial coverage of the emergency phase.

⁴⁰ Li, *op cit.*, p.426.

⁴¹ 顾文, 福丁文 “邓小平会见嘉道理祝贺广东核电站合同正式签字开放政策不会导致资本主义社会主义比重将始终占优势” 《人民日报》1985年1月20日。

⁴² “我代表团团长在国际原子能机构特别会议上发言中国有步骤发展核电是必要的” 《人民日报》1986年9月26日。

The Decline of Green Politics

After the initial coverage of Chernobyl disaster, the *People's Daily* focused on green party politics in Europe, reporting on antinuclear movements several times. For example, on November 25, 1986, the newspaper published an article entitled: "Choice of a Non Reusable Energy Resource: Visiting Western Germany." According to this article, the Germans attitude towards nuclear power plant was wavering as a result of the Chernobyl accident, which had led to an increase in antinuclear power plant movements and strengthened "Green Parties" in the political arena. The *People's Daily* reported that Green Party movements urged further reflection on nuclear power plant policy.

From June 1989, however, the *People's Daily* coverage of green party politics and antinuclear power plant movements decreased. This shift in attitude was due to the Tiananmen Square incident of June 4, 1989. Following China's reform and opening-up since, which had been initiated in 1978, people began absorbing knowledge from the western countries. As this reform deepened, economic corruption among government officials became a serious problem. In particular, students in urban areas started demanding political freedom from the CCP, which led to confrontation between students and police at Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.⁴³ Consequently, the CCP became increasingly sensitive to political movements—including antinuclear movements and green party politics.

Fukushima

Critical views on nuclear power plants?

The Fukushima nuclear power incident occurred on March 11, 2011, due to a tsunami following the Tohoku Earthquake. The tsunami caused the nuclear meltdown and release of radioactive material from Fukushima, necessitating the evacuation of local residents within 30km of the power plant.

The *People's Daily* immediately began reporting on the Fukushima incident, and

⁴³ Nishimura, Kokubun, *op. cit.*, pp.167–169.

compared it to Chernobyl. Meanwhile, the CCP leadership also reacted rapidly. On March 12, 2011, the *People's Daily* reported that Prime Minister Wen Jiabao had delivered his condolences to the Japanese government regarding the earthquake and the tsunami.⁴⁴ The next day, the National Nuclear Safety Administration declared that there was no radioactive pollution in China.⁴⁵ On 17 March, the newspaper reported that a State Council Executive Meeting held by Wen Jiabao, had officially stated that China's radiation monitoring stations had found no abnormalities, and that all of the nuclear power generating units were running properly.⁴⁶ That the CCP immediately directed its leader to comment on the nuclear power plant accident shows that its intentions to reduce fear among China's citizens. The CCP was well-aware that such fear had the potential to cause antinuclear sentiment.

Half a year after the Fukushima accident, the *People's Daily* shifted their focus towards the Japan and how its ruling party was handling the aftermath of the incident. Here, the *People's Daily* followed the Japanese news media's narrative. Quoting a survey taken by Kyodo News, a Japanese news agency,⁴⁷ the *People's Daily* noted that an inquiry showed that 66% of governors and mayors were opposed to the construction of new or additional nuclear power plants in Japan. It further noted that 88% of the respondents in this inquiry were dissatisfied with the Japanese government's handling of the nuclear leak in the Fukushima incident. The *People's Daily* also addressed questions to the Japanese government's ruling party; quoting the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission's report, which called the Fukushima nuclear incident a "composite disaster."⁴⁸ By framing nuclear accidents as a human disaster, the CCP could show their citizens that the nuclear power plant itself was not a problem, and that such incidents will not occur under the correct management of the CCP. Nonetheless, the *People's Daily* coverage of Fukushima reflected the same critical views towards the ruling party of Japan as the Japanese news media.

⁴⁴ 于青, 崔演“日本发生特大地震海啸温家宝总理致电慰问”《人民日报》2011年3月12日。

⁴⁵ 孙秀艳, 刘毅“我国境内未发现任何放射性异常”《人民日报》2011年3月13日。

⁴⁶ “温家宝主持召开国务院常务会议听取应对日本福岛核电站核泄漏有关情况的汇报”《人民日报》3月17日。

⁴⁷ 于青“日本近九成民众对核事故处理不满”《人民日报》2011年9月12日。

⁴⁸ 于青“日本反思‘复合灾害’”《人民日报》2012年3月1日。

However, the *People's Daily* did not publish oppositions to nuclear power plants after the occurrence of the Fukushima accident. In February 2012, He Zuoxiu, a fellow of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, strongly opposed the construction of a new nuclear power plant in central China, claiming that the promotion of an unsafe nuclear power plant was akin to the political mobilization in the 1950s.⁴⁹ The *People's Daily* coverage of such opposing voices was incomplete. On March 11, 2012—a year after the Fukushima accident—the *People's Daily* published an article entitled: “Our Nuclear Power Plant will defiantly not follow the ‘Great Leap Forward’: Emission Standards in Inner China Nuclear Power Plant are Stricter.”⁵⁰ In this article, the *People's Daily* mentioned the existence of opposition to the construction of a new nuclear power plants in inner China, but claimed that this came from “some related bureaus” rather than a fellow of Chinese Academy of Sciences. As such, the *People's Daily* not only failed to deliver the voices of experts in opposition to nuclear power, but stressed that all problems relating to nuclear power plants have already been solved.

Reporting on the antinuclear power plant movements

The *People's Daily* began focusing on antinuclear movements when the Japanese government resumed operation of the nuclear power plant. The content of the news was well balanced, introducing both positive negative opinions regarding the protests against the nuclear power plant, even though it reported the antinuclear movements more emotively. For example, on July 17, 2012, the *People's Daily* delivered a relatively detailed report on an antinuclear protest the day before, when ten million people gathered in Tokyo Yoyogi Park at noon for the “Goodbye Nuclear Energy Movement.” According to the *People's Daily*, at 2 PM, participants holding placards, shouting slogans, and clapping in rhythm, divided into three directions. The newspaper even provided information for the next “Antinuclear Congress Siege” action, which was scheduled for July, 29.

From the perspective of political history, the word “Antinuclear Congress Siege” can

⁴⁹ Iizuka, *op. cit.*, p.127.

⁵⁰ 贺勇, 侯露露, 孟海鹰“我国核电发展绝不会搞‘大跃进’: 内陆核电站排放标准更严格”《人民日报》2012年3月11日。

be perceived as sensitive for the CCP. In 1999, Falun Gong members—a religious group—surrounded Zhongnanhai, the central headquarters for the CCP and the State Council, without being noticed.⁵¹ Thereafter, the CCP regarded Falun Gong as a threat. Nevertheless, the *People's Daily* used the words “Antinuclear Congress Siege” in their coverage, one which could make readers think of the Falun Gong incident. This indicates that neither the CCP nor the *People's Daily* perceived the image of the mass surrounding of the political headquarters as a threat.

However, the newspaper's choice of photos does reflect the sensitiveness of the CCP towards mass demonstrations. To date, the *People's Daily* has published five photos showing antinuclear movements,⁵² each of which show less than 20 demonstrators. For example, while the *People's Daily* reported the occurrence of ten antinuclear demonstrations on July 17, 2012, the photo accompanying the article only shows about 14 people holding their placards in the demonstration. The size of the photos used in the news reports was also small. Of the photos showing antinuclear demonstrations, two were a ninth of the paper in size, and the other three were even smaller. Compared to the photos in a Japanese newspaper, the photos in the *People's Daily* are smaller size and quantity. Indeed, the Japanese newspaper published photos of thousands of people gathering in front of the National Diet, while the *People's Daily* has clearly avoided photos depicting people gathering or surrounding the National Diet. As such, while the *People's Daily* did not perceive the image of masses surrounding the political headquarters as a threat, they did perceive a photo of such a mass surrounding as a threat.

Conclusion

More than 30 years have passed since Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident

⁵¹ For details of the Falun Gong incident, see Kazuko Mouri, *Politics of Contemporary China: Portrait of the Global Power*, Nagoya: Nagoya University Press, 2012, pp.98–99.

⁵² 刘军国“电价飞涨，日本告别‘零核电’”《人民日报》2012年6月18日。刘军国“日本民众大游行欲告别核电政府提出将最大限度利用海洋能源”《人民日报》2012年7月17日。刘军国，廉德瑰“参议院选举拉开帷幕日本执政党欲改变‘扭曲国会’”(国际视点)民众心理矛盾，既渴望稳定政权，又怕修改和平宪法”《人民日报》2013年7月5日。刘军国“日本政府必须交代清楚”《人民日报》2014年6月10日。田泓“不顾争议，日本又要重启核电站”《人民日报》2014年9月12日。

occurred. Although China still claims itself a socialist country, the CCP do not use the socialist doctrine to defend its legitimacy in governing nuclear power plants. Rather than believing in socialist doctrine or optimistic myths, the CCP faces greater risk of nuclear power plant accident than it ever did before.

Despite the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989, the CCP delivers news on environmental parties abroad. While the age of environmental party politics in decline, it is unclear whether observers should assume that the CCP will perceive the environmental party as a threat again. Even when the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident occurred, the *People's Daily* did not focus on environmental parties frequently.

In contrast, the CCP is sensitive to antinuclear movements. The CCP seems to have little restriction on the reporting of antinuclear sentiments abroad in the *People's Daily*, except for in Hong Kong. However, the CCP is sensitive to the usage of photos depicting such movements. The CCP perceives that photos showing a massive number of demonstrators gathering in front of political symbols will be linked with the Tiananmen Square incident from 30 years ago.

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