Yasumasa Matsui Explores

the Frontlines of Nuclear Energy

Interpreting the Future of Energy Through Dialogues in the Field

Part 1 | MESSAGE

What I Want to Know and Communicate as an Announcer with a Science Background
The Present and Future of Nuclear Power Generation

The transition to a decarbonized society, increased electricity driven by digitalization, and concerns over energy security amid ongoing geopolitical conflicts have led to significant changes in the energy landscape. Faced with the challenges of ensuring a stable supply of power and creating a decarbonized society, recognitionr of the importance of nuclear energy as a low-carbon and reliable baseload power source has been reevaluated, and the Japanese government's energy policy and basic plan have shifted toward making use of nuclear power generation as much as possible.

In this context, we are launching a special feature series that will communicate the current state and future of nuclear power generation through the efforts of the Hitachi Group's nuclear energy business, research and development, and engineering.

As the first graduate of a science and technology university to work as an announcer for a major commercial broadcaster, Yasumasa Matsui, who has made use of his scientific knowledge in news reporting, will visit various sites related to the Hitachi Group's nuclear energy business, investigate the current state of nuclear power generation technology, and share his insights in his own words.

In this first installment, Matsui shares his own personal connection to nuclear energy and his enthusiasm for this series.

■ The role of nuclear power generation in a digital and decarbonized society

Energy is the backbone of our society. In today's world, where digital transformation is advancing in all areas, it is no exaggeration to say that our entire

social system would grind to a halt if the supply of power were interrupted. On the other hand, faced with the global issue of climate change, efforts are now underway to review and revise the energy mix to create a decarbonized society. To enhance convenience through digital transformation while ensuring sustainable social development, it is essential to have an energy system that includes baseload power sources capable of stably supplying low carbon electricity. This context is driving the recent global increase in demand for nuclear power generation, with several major US tech companies recently announcing plans to utilize nuclear power to supply power to generative AI data centers, which consume massive amounts of electricity.

It was at this pivotal moment that I was asked to cover Hitachi Group's nuclear energy initiatives. Having worked in journalism for many years, reporting on social issues such as the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident, I feel that this is a rare and meaningful opportunity.

The Chernobyl nuclear accident: a turning point for an announcer with a science background to engage with nuclear energy

Actually, I have always felt a deep and somewhat mysterious connection to nuclear energy.

I graduated from the Department of Chemical Engineering at the Tokyo Institute of Technology (now the Institute of Science Tokyo), and my dissertation was on the design of power plant facilities for thermal power generation. I joined TV Asahi on April 1, 1986, as the first announcer from a science and technology university at a major Japanese television network. Just weeks later, on April 26, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident, widely regarded as the worst nuclear disaster in history, occurred. At the time, the staff at commercial broadcasters came from liberal arts backgrounds and had little to no scientific knowledge, let alone expertise in nuclear energy. As a result, their coverage of the accident was riddled with inaccuracies, including confusion between becquerels and sieverts. I will never forget how I was scolded by a senior from one of my university clubs—then an assistant in a nuclear research lab and later a professor—after watching the series of reports. He asked me, "What's up with the coverage of this nuclear power plant accident? What are you doing? If you're not making use of your scientific training, what was the point of graduating from Tokyo Tech to become a science-based announcer?"

At that time, though, I was just a new employee, spending my days on voice training, and my major in college wasn't even nuclear engineering, so even if they had asked me for advice, I probably wouldn't have been much help. But this experience became a turning point that led me to deeply reflect on the role that I should play in "science reporting," and the importance of scientific literacy in the media.

I started learning about nuclear energy, and then came 3/11

My career as an announcer began with this severe

As the first announcer at a private television station with a science background,
Matsui has aimed to deliver reporting based on scientific facts, covering numerous on-site locations

accident, and for nearly 25 years I continued to work on the frontlines as an announcer with an understanding of science. Later, when I became a manager in the announcer department, I began to question whether I was truly doing what I should be doing. After a period of deep reflection, I concluded that addressing the lack of nuclear energy knowledge within television stations—a point previously raised by my senior from my university days—was my responsibility.

As I mentioned earlier, unlike NHK and major newspapers, commercial broadcasters such as TV Asahi did not have dedicated science departments or specialist reporters. For this reason, even if a nuclear power plant accident were to occur, TV Asahi would not have reporters with specialist knowledge to provide detailed coverage, and no department for it either. I felt that this was a significant issue, and wrote a proposal to upper management expressing my desire to acquire specialist knowledge about nuclear power generation.

Fortunately, my proposal was approved, and in January 2011, I began visiting Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) for research. As many of you will be aware, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake — and consequently the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident—occurred two months later, on March 11.

On March 2 and 3, just before the disaster, I visited the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Station, and was given a tour of the interior of Unit 4 by a TEPCO representative. The next day, I visited the Monju, the prototype fast breeder reactor. The following week, on March 10, I was taken by the aforementioned senior from my university days to visit the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant. Upon completing the tour and exiting the building on March 11, we were struck by the massive magnitude 7 earthquake centered off the Sanriku coast.

Upon hurriedly returning to Tokyo, I remained on the news floor, becoming one of the key figures in the coverage of the nuclear accident. In July, I was transferred to the news department as part of a personnel reshuffle. After that, I worked as a reporter specializing in nuclear accidents, attending daily press conferences at the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), the Nuclear Regulation Authority, and TEPCO, reporting continuously on the content of those briefings. Through my studies on nuclear energy prior to the disaster, I had established a trusting relationship with TEPCO, and this background proved invaluable during my reporting, enabling me to provide valuable insights while maintaining an impartial stance. Since then, I have been involved in nuclear energy-related reporting for over a decade, which has led me to where I am today.

■ Reporting that leverages a background in science

Being a TV announcer had been my dream since elementary school. But I was not good at liberal arts subjects in school, and as a true science enthusiast, who loved physics, mathematics, and chemistry, I believed I was not suited for the role. I enrolled in an engineering department at university, and initially considered a career at a science and technology-related company. However, when I finally became a senior and began hunting for jobs, my desire to become an announcer resurfaced.

I don't want to fight a losing battle. I decided to take a year off from university and enroll in an announcer training school. Thanks to that decision, I passed the job interview. But at university, I was constantly asked by my peers, "Are you serious about being an announcer?" Even my professors scolded me, saying,

“Don’t make light of science!” At first, I felt that having a science background might be a disadvantage for an announcer position, but I gradually began to think that being a unique and unconventional candidate could be an advantage.

In my reporting on the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident, I have always emphasized scientific facts. This stems from my sense of responsibility as a science journalist and my keen understanding of the importance of scientific literacy in the media. Some people who saw my reporting at the time of the accident have said, “Matsui, you are against nuclear power generation, aren't you?” But rather than being for or against, I was convinced that accidents like this must never happen again, and that the truth must be told so that lessons can be learned for the future. I always maintained the mindset that the role of mass media is to facilitate communication and resolve misunderstandings.

Conveying technology accurately from the perspective of science communication

Discussions about energy tend to become biased, often tied to ideology or influenced by preconceptions. One reason for this may be that the media has struggled to convey accurate information and knowledge.

Looking at my peers, seniors, and juniors at university, I often feel that people in science and engineering tend to struggle with communication. Despite their dedication to research and achieving results, many find it challenging to communicate their work effectively. Hitachi Group may face similar challenges. Despite possessing outstanding technologies and engaging in remarkable activities, how well are these being communicated to society?

As a professional journalist, I have conducted countless interviews, drawing out the thoughts and ideas of those I have spoken with and communicating them to society. In this series, I would like to apply the skills I have developed over the years to help bridge the gap between researchers, engineers, and society. Through the voices of those involved in management, R&D, and engineering, I aim to contribute to accurately conveying the current state and future of Hitachi Group’s nuclear energy initiatives to readers even if only in a small way. I’m genuinely looking forward to hearing the stories they have to share.

Yasumasa Matsui

Freelance Announcer and Journalist

Born in Inami, Nanto City, Toyama Prefecture. Graduated from Toyama Prefectural Takaoka High School. Graduated from the Department of Chemical Engineering, School of Engineering, Tokyo Institute of Technology (now Institute of Science Tokyo). In 1986, he joined TV Asahi as an announcer. He co-hosted *Music Station* with Tamori, served as a sportscaster on *News Station*, and worked as a news and information anchor on programs such as *Station Eye*, *Wide Scramble*, and *Yajiuma Plus*.
In 2008, he became the principal of TV Asahi's announcer school, Ask. During his two years in this role, he trained over 100 announcers who went on to work nationwide. In March 2011, following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (and subsequent Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident), he transferred from the announcer department to the news department as a reporter covering the nuclear power plant accident. He later served as a reporter covering the Imperial Household Agency and weather-related disasters, and worked as a commentator. In 2023, after leaving TV Asahi, he established his own agency, OFFICE Yuzuki. He also serves as a plastic model history research advisor for Tamiya Inc., ambassador for Nanto City, Toyama Prefecture, and media advisor for sake company, DASSAI Inc.

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