Communication Experiences of Taipower's Fourth NPS

— The Lungman Project

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Background of Taiwan Power Company (Taipower)

In 1993, Taipower sold 92.1 TWh of electricity, which represented 42.5% of the total energy demanded in Taiwan. Since Taipower is a state-owned enterprise and the only electricity utility, it shares a major part of the responsibility of nation's energy supply. It is also because that Taipower is a state-owned utility, all kinds of its development projects and annual budget have to be approved by the Government (the Executive Yuan) first and then sent to the Legislative Yuan (the Congress) for review. In 1993, Taiwan imported more than 95% of the total energy needed. As a major energy supplier in Taiwan, Taipower has to follow the state energy policy to diversify its fuel varieties to secure the stability of power supply.

In late 60's, Taipower decided to build a number of nuclear power stations in order to diversify the energy resources and supply enough electricity. Due to the ruling party (KMT) had absolutely influence in the country, and whole nation believed that the major constructions were symbols of progress, the construction of nuclear power stations were proceeded smoothly. Three nuclear power stations, two units each, were then built one by one during the decade of 70's without much effort regarding communication to the general public. Under such circumstances, the first reactor unit commercialized by the end of 1978. While the sixth unit was turned on in May, 1985, the total nuclear capacity was 5144 MW.

Yet, the seventh and eighth units (the fourth NPS, also the Lungman Project) faced changing era. Not only the general public became more conservative to nuclear issues due to the TMI and Chernobyl accidents, also the nation political structure was changed. A major opposition party — Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) — was formed in 1987. And its party platform indicates that they aim to create a nuclear-free homeland. The society of Taiwan was more liberal and diversified than ever before. Although the ruling party is still being able to dominate more than half seats in the Legislative Yuan, the diversity of whole society makes the work of some major constructions harder and harder. Obviously, Taipower has to do extra work on the communication to the public.

The Fourth Nuclear Power Station

The first discussion of the fourth NPS was in 1980. At that moment, the construction of Taiwan's 2nd nuclear power station was almost finished and the
3rd one was about half done. In order to build up enough base-load capacity and to use those construction facilities more efficiently, Taipower submitted the application for the fourth NPS in 1980. In that year, Taipower submitted the Site Selection Report of the 4th NPS to apply for the permission of locating the power station at Yenliao area of Taipei County. The Yenliao site, which locates at the northeast tip of Taiwan, was selected as the preferred site of the Lungman Project after careful evaluation.

Yet, in 1982, this project was suspended due to the worldwide economic recession and the slowdown of domestic power demand. In 1984, the economic turned out prosperous. Taipower applied for the permission of the project again. But, in 1985, the Government (the Executive Yuan) instructed that the public's concerns over nuclear power should be clarified before the commencement of the project. In 1987, the Congress decided to freeze the initial budget for the project.

Since the domestic power demand recovered gradually and the reserved margin of whole power system decreased year by year, Taipower reapplied for the construction of 4th NPS in 1991. In 1992, the Executive Yuan permitted the project and the Congress agreed to unfreeze the budget. On Feb. 1, 1993, Taipower sent out the invitation for nuclear island bit, and it was due on Jan. 7, 1994.

© The Opposition Groups

In Taiwan, the antinuclear movement is part of the against ruling party movements. In 1985, the voice of ceasing the 4th NPS was first appeared in the public. Yet, it was not until the foundation of the major environmental group — Taiwan Environmental Protection Union (TEPU) — in 1987, the movement became better organized. Since then, TEPU plays the leading role in the antinuclear movement and has close relationship with the opposition party (DPP). Although TEPU covers most of the nation environmental issues, it puts most of its resource on antinuclear campaign. Actually, the image of TEPU almost equals to antinuclear to the public. TEPU organized most of the environmental groups, female groups, religious groups, local groups, and consumer organizations, etc., and held a series of protest activities annually. The anniversary of Chernobyl accident is the issue which TEPU favors. Besides, the annual state-owned enterprises budget review at the Congress is also a favorite occasion for the antinuclear movement.
Perhaps it is due to the high population density in Taiwan, anything regarding NPS is easily become a nationwide issue. Also, there are too many incorrect or exaggerated information make public feel more negative about nuclear. Due to lack of communication in the past, there are many people project their negative feeling about reality to Taipower's 4th NPS. The opposition party and TEPU utilize this characteristic to agitate the antinuclear campaign. In recent, the opposition is trying to turn down the 4th NPS by holding plebiscite. Their slogan is "Cease the 4th by Plebiscite". And they collected about 1020 college teachers' signatures to support the antinuclear campaign (there are more than 37,000 college teachers in Taiwan) and make an image that the academies are all against nuclear. Due to college teachers have quite high social status in Taiwan, the so called "one-thousand professors" do influence a lot to the public.

Although the antinuclear groups failed to block the budget for Lungman Project at the Congress, they didn't give up at all. They switched the main battle field to Taipei County -- where the project site located. In June, 1994, the antinuclear groups initiated an activity to recall four pronuclear Legislators in Taipei County. They submitted the citizen name list of required amount to the Taipei County Election Commission and the Central Election Commission. After a series of heat discussions, the Central Election Commission approved the pro & con recall vote and decided that it will be held on November 27. And the Taipei County Government, which is governed by DPP, announced that the county plebiscite for the 4th NPS will be held on the same day right after the Central Election Commission's decision.

© Taipower's Communication History

Taipower's nuclear communication system has been experienced three different stages since 1990. The first stage of Taipower's nuclear communication system was started from early 1990. A task force — "Strategic Planning Task Force for Nuclear Projects (SPTF)" — was formed to put effort on the unfreezing of the initial budget for 4th NPS, which was frozen by the Congress in 1987. The major targets in this stage were the news media, government officers and the legislators. In June, 1992, the Congress voted for unfreezing the budget of 4th NPS. And the SPTF was then dismissed.
In March, 1993, some legislators of opposition party launched a proposal which demanded that the budget for 4th NPS should be reviewed again and opened for discussion. Consequently, Taipower recalled the members of SPTF and added some more members to form the 2nd stage task force — "Nuclear Communication Group". The major task in this stage was to prevent the budget from freezing again by the legislators. On July 9, 1993, the Congress voted 76 to 57 against the opposition party's proposal.

After experienced the annual fight for budget of the 4th NPS, Taipower realized that it is necessary to perform public communication constantly. On March 14, 1994, a formal organization, Nuclear Communication Center (NCC), was established and the third stage of the communication history for the 4th NPS commenced. The communication objects were then expanded to aim at local residents of the project site, news media, legislators, social parties, scholars and experts. The NCC's short term target is to keep 4th NPS undergoing smoothly, while the long term target is to make most of the public have correct knowledge of nuclear power and accept nuclear power as an indispensable energy source in Taiwan.

What we have done

(1) Opinion Polls

In the past, several nationwide opinion polls had been done. The results showed that about 60% of interviewees were in favor of nuclear power steadily. Yet, the latest poll showed that around 60% of interviewees had ranked themselves as less knowing about nuclear energy. This is a very serious warning sign to a company like Taipower which has nuclear power for almost 20 years. In order to overcome this phenomenon, Taipower began to invite extensively the public to visit NPS. We bring visitors to our nuclear exhibition center and the refueling level of a full powered BWR (which is inside the containment) whenever it is possible. The largest benefit yielded by this visiting program is not to earn the trust from visitors, but to bring pressures to our NPSs -- the housekeeping in NPSs is performing better than ever before.

(2) Operation Performance Improvement

Transparency is always the fundamental of communication. Besides of onsite tours, we setup several toll free hotlines to answer all kinds of questions related to Taipower. Of course, we have to polish ourselves before opening to
the public. The operation performance indicators of Taipower's six nuclear units have been significantly enhanced after the completion of the first five-year improvement program (1988 to 1993), and the second five-year improvement program are being executed.

(3) Modern Energy Workshops

Since 1982, Taipower offered modern energy workshops to high school and elementary school teachers twice a year. The courses for the workshops are designed not only to introduce the peaceful use of nuclear energy, but also to promote public acceptance through the education systems. There have been 28 workshops sponsored for high school teachers, with a total participants of about 3100. Fourteen workshops have held for elementary school teachers with a total participants of about 1900.

(4) Scholars and Experts

Since the antinuclear campaign has been simply moralized and highly politicized by some of the antinuclear groups, most of the public choose to keep silent. As a matter of fact, we have worked on finding some scholars and experts who are willing to speak out pronuclear opinion in public occasions for long. Eventually, the efforts came out with few rewards. Besides of these efforts, we invite not only those who are willing to accept nuclear, but also those so-called "one-thousand professors" to visit our facilities, and allow them to see whatever they name. We hope that the negative feeling regarding nuclear can be easy somehow through the visiting program.

(5) Lobbying

Since Taipower is one of the state-owned enterprises, budget for all kinds of power development projects should be approved by the Congress, therefore, Lobbying is an important part of our job. Our targets in the Congress are not only the Legislators, but also their assistants. In addition to supporting any kind of information regarding electric power, we offer them services in connection with electricity supply to solve the problems at their precincts as possible as we can.

(6) Feedback Program at Site Vicinities
According to current feedback program, one-hundredth of construction cost and five-thousandths of generation income will be withdrawn to subsidize the development of sites' vicinities. Currently, we are working on doubling the percentage of generation income withdrawn. Besides, we are trying to help the Yenliao area to form a cooperation in order to make the localized procurement possible. Also, we are organizing supervision committees at all NPS vicinities to perform the interface function between the NPS and local residents. The committee will include the personnel from local government, public representatives and NPS.

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Taipower realizes that with limited indigenous energy, nuclear power is an indispensable energy source to Taiwan, and public acceptance is the vital factor for the sustainable development of nuclear power. Consequently, Taipower will endeavor in communicating with the public for our 4th NPS. The door of communication won't close after the construction of 4th NPS. Instead, we set our goal to be an eternal part of sites' vicinities. We understand that there is still a long way to go and no one can tell when will we reach the goal. Yet, there are words in Chinese: "no matter how far you have to go, it all begins from the first step". Now, we already stepped out. And the goal will be reached someday.