

It's not widely known, but Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO), built an eight storey tribute to itself, Denryokukan, The Hall of Electric Power, The Shibuya area of Tokyo in 1984. There, TEPCO has a two "image characters": Pluto-kun (as in *plutonium*) and TEPCO's generic mascot Denko-chan...both explaining why nuclear power "is good for you."

Denko-chan, whose name comes from the "den" of electric power (denryoku), the "ko" (child) in which female names so often end, trapping their bearers in a state of eternal childhood, and the generally female diminutive suffix "chan", can be found everywhere in TEPCO propaganda. Here she is, with finger characteristically a-wagging, admonishing us to "Take care of electricity!"



And here, exhorting us to "Make friends with electricity!"



She features on a bewildering variety of character goods, as they are called in Japan, from pen tops to mobile phone straps, bento lunchboxes to T-shirts. Here she graces a pair of oven mitts:



She has, inevitably, attracted her own fan art, some of it, inevitably, made to sooth salarymen on trains with a look of soft-core porn.



But the undisputed star of the galaxy of TEPCO image characters must be Plutonium-kun. Once upon a time there was Yu-chan, the cartoon mascot of the battered former coal town of Yubari. Japan of course has a massive talent for making anything cute: if you can make coal mining cute, then perhaps you can make anything cute. But never in the darkest visions of creating acceptance for nuclear power could one imagine the odious image of Plutonium-kun. Here, below, we show him and his message. The text is aimed at the very young since their mothers are the largest single group of nuclear power opponents:

プルト君	
	<p>燃えないウラン (ウラン238) が原子炉の中で中性子を取り込んでできたもので、プルトニウムに変身するとウランと同じように原子力発電の燃料として使うことができます。プルトニウムを使うということはウラン資源を無駄なく使うということです。プルト君は燃えないウランの変身ぶりをイメージしています。</p>
	<p>"Plutonium is made by having unburnable uranium (uranium 238) soak up neutrons in a nuclear reactor, and when it turns into plutonium it can be used as a fuel in nuclear power generation, just like uranium.</p> <p>By using plutonium, uranium resources can be used more economically. Plutonium-kun is a visualization of unburnable uranium being transformed into plutonium."</p>



Plutonium kun also appeared in a 10-minute *anime* made about a decade ago by the Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation (PNC) (now the Japan Atomic Energy Agency), an industry body specializing in the development of fast-breeder and advanced-thermal reactors, an *anime* that was swiftly withdrawn in part because of a scene in which Pluto-kun gets his boy pal to drink a glass of liquid plutonium while he sweetly intones that “I’m hardly absorbed by your stomach or intestines and I’m expelled by your body, so in fact I can’t kill people at all”, or when terrorists steal plutonium, “If bad guys dropped plutonium into the ocean, it actually won’t dissolve into the water well and will just fall to the bottom.”

You can view the anime available in its entirety: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJlul0ITroY>,

And for those who don’t speak Japanese, here is a 30-second clip of Pluto-kun asking his little friend to have a glass of good, cool plutonium and a hot day:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRvVrYg-XBQ>.

As a side note, the above mentioned PNC changed its name to the Japan Atomic Power Company after its inept management caused the MOX fuel accident at the Monju Fast Breeder Reactor in Tsuruga in 1995. The PNC covered up the extent of the sodium fire by editing videos of the fire from 15 minutes to 5 minutes and excluding the serious damage and footage of the thermometer on the leaking sodium pipes. The incident was obfuscated in reporting to the local government. Of course, they had their little cute promotional character, also: Natriumko.



What the Japanese regulators need now is a new mascot to win back public trust. Suggestions?