

# A New Wave Against the Rock: New social movements in Japan since the Fukushima nuclear meltdown

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## Abstract

In the summer of 2012, following an accident at the Fukushima power plant in March 2011, 200,000 people filled the streets outside the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo. This new movement had much in common with contemporaneous movements around the world, such as Occupy Wall Street. These included its use of the internet and the central role played by a highly educated precariat. In this essay, I analyze the results of the research I conducted on this movement, including the characteristics displayed by its main actors and participants, the structure of the organizing group and its methods of mobilization. Furthermore, I analyze Japan's political structure to show why the movement has not directly affected electoral outcomes. While this article analyzes Japanese society, it also contributes to understanding a more universal problem: What is the relationship between twenty-first century social movements and political systems that took shape during the twentieth century?



**Demonstration towards prime minister's residence against nuclear power, 22 June 2012**

## Introduction

After the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disasters of March 2011, people across Japan took action in a variety of ways. They organized relief efforts in disaster-affected areas, conducted radiation monitoring, lobbied the government and organized demonstrations.<sup>1</sup>

Between 2011 and the summer of 2012, in the midst of this general upsurge, some of the largest rallies attracted hundreds of thousands of people. Demonstrations on this scale last occurred in Japan half a century ago, during the 1960 struggle against the US-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo). This time, however, the rallies and demonstrations that took place all over Japan were organized by small groups of

concerned individuals with no connection to existing political parties, in sharp contrast to the tightly organized anti-Anpo movement half a century earlier. (For an overview of the anti-nuclear demonstrations, see the [Appendix](#)).

The protests outside the prime minister's official residence (referred to hereafter as the prime minister's residence) that began in March 2012, reached a peak of 200,000 people during the largest rallies held in the summer of that year.<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, more than five years after the Fukushima nuclear accident in June 2016, protests of about 1000 people still take place outside the prime minister's residence every Friday. They celebrated their 200th protest on June 24 2016.

Nevertheless, despite the spectacular growth of the antinuclear movement, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was victorious in the December 2012 elections and it has continued to win elections ever since. In this essay, I analyze the antinuclear movement of 2012 and these election results. I address the following three research questions. Who was responsible for the movement outside the prime minister's residence? Why has such a successful movement had no discernible impact on election results? What might the future hold for nuclear power in Japan and for the social movements that challenge it?

These questions are not limited to Japan or to the issue of nuclear power. Since 2011, large popular movements have taken place throughout the world in cities such as Cairo, New York, Madrid, Taipei and Hong Kong. The large antinuclear rallies that took place in Tokyo in 2011 occurred between April and September, just after the Tahrir Square occupation in Cairo and prior to the umbrella movement in Hong Kong. The protests coincided almost exactly with Occupy Wall Street in New York and the Puerta del Sol occupation in Madrid. None of these large-scale movements have been adequately reflected in

election results.



## Tell the Prime Minister

This article seeks to grasp the character of the new social movements that appeared around the world in the decade beginning in 2010, using the antinuclear movement in Japan after the Fukushima disaster as a case study. It examines why these movements have not had a direct effect on elections. Using the antinuclear movement as a case study makes it possible to explore these broader questions, which are the real subject of this essay. For this reason, I do not closely examine the type of antinuclear movement that existed in Japan from the twentieth century. Nor do I focus on Japanese nuclear policy. Instead, I analyze the relationship between elections and social movements. I therefore refer not only to the antinuclear movement but to other new social movements that do not focus on the nuclear issue, such as the student group SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy) that garnered attention as part of the movement against security treaty

legislation in the summer of 2015.

Research published in English on the post-Fukushima antinuclear movement in Japan has focused on its cultural aspects.<sup>3</sup> This article takes a different approach. Since March 2011, I have taken part in the antinuclear movement in Tokyo and spent time with activists. My analysis of the antinuclear movement in Japan based on the questions outlined above is unique in both the English and Japanese language literature.

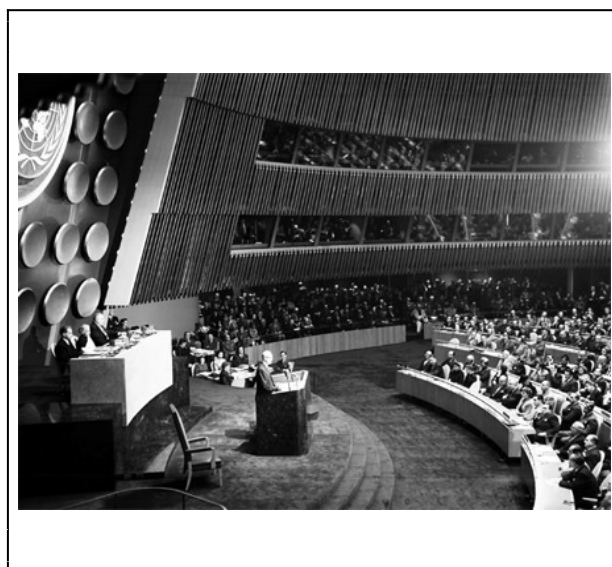
This article is structured as follows. *From Hiroshima to Fukushima* outlines the history of the antinuclear movement in Japan from the end of the Second World War up to and including the Fukushima accident. *Who Were the Actors in the Antinuclear Movement?* analyzes the actors in the antinuclear movement in Tokyo after Fukushima based on survey data. In *Movement Groups and Forms of Mobilization*, I analyze the organizational characteristics of the antinuclear movement in Tokyo after Fukushima and its methods of mobilization, with particular attention to the role of the internet. The section on *Political Structure* analyzes why this large-scale movement has not been reflected in election results. Finally, I conclude with a reflect on the future of Japan's nuclear energy policy and social movements.

### ***From Hiroshima to Fukushima***

#### **A Brief History of the Antinuclear Power Movement in Japan**

Having experienced the effects of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan has long had a powerful and sustained anti-nuclear weapons movement. As in much of the world, however, the issue of nuclear power has been considered separately from that of nuclear weapons and until the 1960s, there was no significant anti-nuclear power movement in Japan. There are a number of reasons for this. As Ran Zwigenberg points out, the demand for

the “peaceful use of nuclear energy” arose precisely because of the terrible losses to human life, the built environment, and industry caused by nuclear weapons and the firebombing of 64 Japanese cities.<sup>4</sup> There were, however, two other major factors. The first was that the dangers of nuclear power were not widely recognized prior to the late 1960s, either in Japan or internationally. The second was that the Japan Communist Party (JCP), a leading force in the anti-nuclear weapons movement, adopted a stance in favor of nuclear power.



In 1953, US President Dwight Eisenhower made his famous “Atoms for Peace” speech, encouraging the development of civilian nuclear power. The Japanese government introduced the Atomic Energy Basic Act in 1955 and Japan's first experimental nuclear reactor commenced operation in 1958. The Atomic Energy Damage Compensation Law (*genshiryoku songai baishō hō*) was enacted in 1961. The Japanese government based the law on America's Price Anderson Act, which regulated the provision of compensation for damages due to nuclear reactors and on simulations of a serious nuclear accident. Guidelines for siting nuclear reactors were established in 1964 and it was decided that nuclear reactors would only be built in



depopulated areas.<sup>5</sup> These decisions suggest that the Japanese government had at least some idea of the potential consequences of a serious accident. Otherwise, however, there was little general understanding of the dangers associated with nuclear power. The first commercial nuclear reactor began operations in 1970.

Despite the Japanese government's firm support for nuclear power, and the financial rewards that were showered on those localities that accepted nuclear power plants, a 1969 survey by the prime minister's office revealed that only 18% of respondents were in favor of a nuclear reactor being built in their neighborhood while 41% were opposed.<sup>6</sup> At that time, no serious nuclear power accident had occurred anywhere in the world. Japan was, however, experiencing rapid economic growth leading to widespread water and air pollution problems. These issues spurred the development of an antipollution movement. Growing local opposition to nuclear power occurred in this context. In 1973, the government was forced to introduce the first system of subsidies to host municipalities in order to promote the construction of nuclear power plants.<sup>7</sup>

The second reason for the lack of a significant antinuclear power movement in Japan prior to the 1960s was that the Japan Communist Party (JCP), which exercised a powerful influence on Japan's social movements up until the 1970s, was in favor of nuclear power. One reason for JCP support for nuclear power was that, according to the general Marxist wisdom of the time, the development of the productive forces was a precondition for the transition to socialism.<sup>8</sup> This understanding may be summarized in Lenin's aphorism, "socialism is the electrification of the state". In international affairs, the JCP also supported the right of the socialist camp to possess nuclear weapons and opposed that of the capitalist camp. The JCP's policy split the movement to ban nuclear

weapons into communist and non-communist blocs associated respectively with Gensuikyo (dominated by the JCP) and Gensuikin (Japan Socialist Party and independents). In this context, support for the "peaceful use" of nuclear power did not pose a contradiction for the JCP. The Japan Socialist Party (JSP), on the other hand, adopted a policy of opposition to nuclear power in 1969, when pollution was starting to become a major concern.<sup>9</sup> Many people regarded nuclear reactors as yet another large-scale industrial facility that might cause environmental damage.



**First World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, 6 August 1955**

By the late 1960s, a growing number of citizens' movements (*shimin undō*) and student movements began to appear that were free from JCP influence. These movements arose in reaction to the problems caused by high economic growth. The student movement grew in the context of a decline in the social position of students. An increasing number of high school graduates were entering university. As a consequence of this, the quality of education declined as lecturers struggled to deal with the influx and university facilities groaned under the increased demand. In the rapidly growing cities, discontent over environmental degradation was also increasing. Japan's "1968" was the product of the coming together

of these spontaneous movements with the New Left. They were all opposed to JCP policies, the Vietnam War and the US-Japan Security Treaty.<sup>10</sup>



**Protest against US-Japan security treaty, from *Ikari to kanashimi no kiroku* (Days of Rage and Grief), Hamaya Hiroshi, 1960**

Growing environmental consciousness and the waning influence of the JCP in the 1960s formed the background to the later formation of an antinuclear power movement. The actors in the antinuclear movement in Japan at this time came mainly from three social layers.<sup>11</sup> The first was made up of residents in areas designated for nuclear power plant construction. Farmers and fisher folk were particularly strong supporters of the antinuclear movement. The second layer included students, workers and urban intellectuals. Up until the 1980s, antinuclear activism generally took the form of these urban layers providing support to residents in areas designated for nuclear power plant construction. Labor unions and intellectuals also served to tie the movement to the JSP and to other political parties. From the late 1960s, housewives based in the cities formed the core of the citizens' environmental movements. After the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident, middle-class housewives turned their attention to the antinuclear movement when reports emerged of imported foodstuffs being contaminated with

radioactive materials. In the 1990s, this third layer joined forces with the intellectuals and tried to promote renewable energy through social investment.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the growth of the environmental movement, social movements did not flourish in Japan in the 30 year period from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s. One reason for this was the negative public reaction to incidents of left-wing terrorism and infighting among New Left factions in the early 1970s. Even more important, however, was the stabilizing influence on Japanese society of the postwar recovery, sustained economic growth and rising incomes. The labor movement had emerged in Japan in the 1950s in response to problems of poverty and inequality. Other social movements, such as the peace movement, arose out of memories of war. In the 1960s, the tensions associated with rapid economic growth gave rise to new social movements. From the late 1970s, however, poverty and inequality were no longer conspicuous social problems in Japan and measures were taken to deal with pollution and to improve the urban environment.

By the 1970s, farmers and fisher folk had become a minority in Japanese society. LDP subsidies and public works spending in their communities turned them into LDP supporters. Labor unions tended to cooperate with management and lost their fighting spirit. Students were generally able to get steady jobs after graduation and many lost interest in politics. Some middle-class housewives took part in social movements. Indeed, they formed the bulwark of both the anti-nuclear weapons and anti-Vietnam War citizens' movements. The majority of people, however, enjoyed the fruits of economic prosperity, much as people in the US did during the 1950s or in China in the 2000s.

### **Changes in Japanese Society and Social Movements After the Fukushima Disaster**



**Koizumi Junichirō on televised vote for privatization of postal service**

From 1990, following the end of the Cold War, the Japanese economy stagnated. Attempts to stimulate the economy via public works spending provided a degree of economic stability. This resulted, however, in a national account deficit that became impossible to ignore. From 2001 to 2006, the government of Koizumi Jun'ichirō cut government spending, privatized the national postal service, and liberalized labor regulations, weakening the unions and labor generally. Cuts in public works spending weakened regional economies and the liberalization of labor regulations led to an increase in part-time and temporary employment. Since 2006, when Koizumi resigned the prime ministership, poverty and inequality have come to be recognized as serious social problems. An independent workers' movement appeared made up of irregular workers that used the term "precariat" to describe their precarious position in the labor market. These movements were led by different layers than the three that made up the core of the social movements of the 1960s and 1990s as discussed above.

After Koizumi, successive LDP administrations have faced a dilemma. If they cut public works

spending, regional economies suffer. If they increase it, the budget deficit grows and they face criticism from urban residents. Liberalizing labor regulations leads to a reduction in average wages and household incomes and contributes further to the declining fertility rate and the aging of the population. If the government tries to increase women's participation in the workforce or to increase migration, it risks a backlash from its conservative base.

After Koizumi resigned in 2006, successive LDP prime ministers traded places every year. In 2009, the LDP suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of the DPJ in the House of Representatives elections. The DPJ was expected to initiate significant reform, but there was no consensus, either within the party or in public opinion as to what direction reform should take. Everybody recognized that the LDP's politics of distributing favors had reached its limit. There was no consensus, however, as to whether reform should be carried out on neo-liberal or social-democratic premises.

The 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident occurred in this context. The large antinuclear movement that emerged in the wake of the accident included actors drawn from all the social strata discussed above. These included farmers and fisher folk confronting radioactive contamination, housewives alert to the radioactive contamination of foodstuffs and the special risk to infants and children, intellectuals critical of nuclear power in an earthquake-prone nation, and other social groups that engaged in anti-nuclear movements.





**Antinuclear demonstration, Kōenji, 10 April 2011**

The group that organized the street demonstrations in Tokyo, however, centered on the new social groups that had first emerged in the 2000s. One month after the nuclear accident on April 10, 2011, an antinuclear demonstration of 15,000 people took place in Kōenji in Tokyo's inner-west. The demonstration was called over the internet by a group of workers in their 20s and 30s who were involved in the precariat movement. Drawing on the style of earlier precariat movements, the demonstrations and rallies organized by this group had a "free" style and made effective use of music and design.<sup>13</sup> In June 2011, 30,000 people occupied a plaza outside Shinjuku station in the middle of Tokyo's entertainment district. The action, which was inspired by the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt in February 2011, took place three months prior to Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in New York.

The Kōenji group was only one of a number of small groups in Tokyo that began to organize demonstrations after Fukushima. In October 2011, 13 such groups came together to form the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes (MCAN). From March 2012, they began to organize weekly protests on Friday evenings outside the prime minister's residence.

Although these demonstrations started with only a handful of participants, they grew rapidly into the tens of thousands.

In Japan, nuclear reactors are shut down for routine checks after every 13 months of continuous operation. After the Fukushima disaster, Japan's nuclear reactors were shut down one after another for these checks. Strong public opposition and the need for more stringent safety standards made it impossible to restart them. By May 2012, all of Japan's nuclear reactors had been shut down for safety checks and Japan was without any source of nuclear power. This did not result in any major electricity shortages, in part due to a growing public consciousness of the need to save electricity. The government nevertheless decided to restart two reactors at the Ōi nuclear power plant in western Japan's Fukui prefecture on June 8th. There was a huge backlash against this decision. Organizers estimated that 200,000 people took part in an MCAN protest outside the prime minister's residence on June 29. By August, the weekly Friday protests had spread to 87 cities across Japan. On August 22, a number of MCAN activists met with then prime minister Noda Yoshihiko and demanded that the government shut down the Ōi nuclear power plant and abandon nuclear power.



**Ōi nuclear power plant**

In September 2012, the DPJ administration adopted a policy of eliminating Japan's dependence on nuclear power by 2040. Facing criticism for its handling of the nuclear accident, however, the DPJ lost the December 2012 House of Representatives elections to the LDP, which promptly scrapped the DPJ's policy of eliminating nuclear power.

### ***Who Were the Actors in the Antinuclear Movement?***

Who were the actors in the antinuclear movement after the Fukushima accident? I consider this question by looking at both the main actors, those who organized the demonstrations, and the ordinary participants. As explained further below, those whom I refer to here as the "main actors" here do not necessarily think of themselves as activists and may not be affiliated with any particular organization.

### **The Main Actors**

According to Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, "a large portion of the activists" in the 2011 movements such as Occupy Wall Street were "students, intellectual workers, and those working in urban service jobs, [in other words], the cognitive precariat."<sup>14</sup> In post-industrial societies, where the majority of industrial jobs have been exported to developing countries, it is hardly surprising that many of the actors in movements such as OWS would be made up of such workers. But does Hardt and Negri's characterization of the 2011 movements apply to the situation in Japan? In the autumn of 2013, I surveyed 55 of the main actors in the antinuclear movement after the Fukushima nuclear accident. By "main actors" I refer to people who are regularly involved in activism. I distinguish them from "ordinary participants" on this point. Activists were individually selected for this survey based on information from leading MCAN activists. Most of those I surveyed became active around this issue after the nuclear accident. 38 were from the Tokyo

area and 17 were from other cities. I provided activists with a list of the topics and asked them to write a short essay on their life history and their experiences in the movement. I asked them to write freely about their social attributes, their home environment, their use of the internet and how they came to be involved in their current activism after the nuclear accident. Respondents did not necessarily address all of the topics suggested.<sup>15</sup>

The survey revealed the following characteristics of the 55 individuals. Some participants appear under more than one point (see Table 1 for a summary).

- ***The Cognitive Precariat.*** A large number of respondents (19) were employed in artistic or cognitive jobs such as music, IT, design, architecture, editing and translation. Other precarious workers were two administrators and one shopkeeper.
- Five respondents were healthcare workers such as hospital workers, pharmacists, nurses and medical graduates. A further two respondents indicated that their own or a family member's experience of receiving radiation therapy had made them aware of the risks posed by radiation. One respondent indicated that he knew about the problem of radiation and its effects on child health because he ran a company that sold baby products.
- ***International*** Many respondents had connections or experiences overseas. Ten had been exchange students, had a non-Japanese partner, or had non-Japanese nationality. Three were working in foreign-owned companies in Japan or had done so previously.
- There were two contract university lecturers, two graduate students and one university student.
- ***Full Time Workers.*** There were six full-time employees with strict work



schedules and little free time. Three of them worked for major corporations. Of these, two worked for foreign-owned companies and one was a pharmacist.

- **Time-Rich.** Many respondents had occupations or situations that gave them a significant degree of control over their spare time. Seven were self-employed, seven were full-time housewives, three were musicians and entertainers, and one was a pensioner. Of those who were self-employed, three were in the architecture, translation and design industries and four others were in food services, electrical goods retail, accessories retail and farming.
- **Local Leaders.** One respondent was the head of a local shopkeepers association and two were involved in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at their child's school as president and class officer respectively.

The sample included 28 men and 27 women. Six respondents were in their 20s, 17 in their 30s, 24 in their 40s, two in their 50s and six in their 60s.<sup>16</sup> MCAN's spokesperson, Misao Redwolf, is an illustrator in her 40s.

Let us compare the 2011 movement in Japan with that in other countries. The 19 respondents who worked in fields such as the arts, publishing and translation indicate that in Japan, too, many activists were part of the "cognitive precariat". This illustrates the fact that the antinuclear movement in Japan was a post-industrial social movement, like movements that occurred around the world at that time. There were far fewer full-time housewives among the main actors than was the case in urban middle-class movements in Japan in the 1980s. This, too, is probably due to deindustrialization. In Japan, the number of people employed in manufacturing reached a peak in 1991. This coincided with the peak of the antinuclear movement after the Chernobyl nuclear accident, in which housewives were the

main actors. By contrast, research on the labour force undertaken by the Japanese government indicates that the number of manufacturing employees in 2013 was just two thirds of what it had been in 1991. Manufacturing had long provided stable employment to male workers and the strength of this industry in Japan made it possible for many women to be full-time housewives. Since the 1990s, as male industrial employment declined and became more precarious with the increase in part-time and temporary work, the number of full-time housewives decreased. The relative decline in the number of housewife activists and the fact that so many of the main actors were part of the "cognitive precariat" are both manifestations of deindustrialization and the growth of the precariat.

### Table 1: Attributes of Activists

- Point 1 Cognitive Precariat
- Point 2 Healthcare Work
- Point 3 International Relationship
- Point 4 University
- Point 5 Full Time Work
- Point 6 Time Resource
- Point 7 Local Leaders

The Japanese mass media has long focused on the role of housewives in antinuclear movements. These women are typically represented as "mothers protecting their children". While mothers have long been an important source of opposition to nuclear energy, they were not the main actors in the demonstrations in 2011 and 2012. As I discuss below, the Japanese mass media failed to respond to the changing nature of the antinuclear movement after Fukushima and has tended to stick to the old framework that was established in the 1980s when housewives were the main actors in antinuclear power movements. This reflects a more general failure on the part of the Japanese mass media to

adapt to structural change in society. It also reflects an environment where major media outlets have been losing younger readers and relying on older subscribers over the age of 50.

Japanese society differs in fundamental ways, however, from American and European society and movements opposed to nuclear power differ from those based on issues such as the abuse of power in the financial sector or rampant income inequality. While all of these movements took place against the backdrop of a post-industrial society, points 2) through 7) of the survey data demonstrate these important differences.

The significance of healthcare as demonstrated in point 2) illustrates a difference that stems from the fact that opposition to nuclear power was the dominant theme in Japan's "2011". Healthcare workers typically have some knowledge of the effects of radiation. This led them to distrust government statements about, and responses to, the nuclear accident. The importance of international connections in point 3) highlights a characteristic feature in countries where sources of information are limited. In underdeveloped countries ruled by dictatorships, where only limited information can be obtained from outlets such as the national media, international links may facilitate access to alternative information. Such connections can also help to foment criticism of the government. While the Japanese government is not a dictatorship, only limited information about the consequences of the nuclear meltdown was provided in the mainstream media immediately after the nuclear accident. One respondent to my survey had a friend whose partner was a French national. She therefore knew that the French embassy had issued an emergency evacuation warning following the nuclear accident and became suspicious of the Japanese government's pronouncements on safety. Many other people who were not respondents to this survey have spoken about how they obtained

information from outside Japan after the nuclear accident, such as via foreign language broadcasts or the internet. Having a connection with a foreign country can provide a different perspective on the dominant framework in one's own society. One respondent linked her lack of confidence in the government with her experience as an exchange student in Ecuador. Another said that working for a foreign-owned company in Japan had made him face up to the culture of suppressing one's own opinion in Japanese society.

The small number of participants with a university connection detailed in point 4) also provides a point of difference with the 2011 movements in other countries. While many activists in Japan were part of the "cognitive precariat", students were not a noticeable presence among the main actors in 2012. This can be seen in the large number of respondents to my survey who were in their 30s and 40s. Some of the students with whom I came into contact in the movement told me that, on the whole, students were unable to take part in the movement because they are busy with part-time jobs due to the worsening economic situation. But economic pressures also affect students in other developed countries. Indeed, rather than preventing students from participating in social movements, economic pressures are generally thought to be among the reasons that many do take part.

It is important to consider the absence of students in the movement in relation to the next two groups: the full-time workers included in point 5) and the time-rich actors in point 6). These points illustrate the fact that, with the exception of people who work in foreign-owned companies or in technical professions, full-time employees in large Japanese corporations—the stereotypical "Japanese salarymen"—were absent from the movement. Why, then, given the fact that the participants came from such a broad spectrum of Japanese society, were students and salarymen largely absent?

Full-time employees in Japan's large corporations have little reason to participate in classical labor movements because they earn a high income and many enjoy employment security. There were some sole proprietors and managers in foreign-owned companies, however, among the central activists in MCAN. As Ulrich Beck has pointed out, poverty is class-based but radiation affects everyone, regardless of class. Earning a high income is not necessarily the decisive factor behind the lack of participation by regular employees in large corporations. Aside from income, it is possible that lack of time might explain the low level of participation in the movement by salarymen who work long hours. It is true that for the time-rich actors listed in point 6, having some control over their own time is something many activists have in common. But some salarymen who do not work for large Japanese corporations, such as employees of foreign-owned companies, did become activists in the movement. These workers certainly still have to work long hours, as do many contractors and retail workers. What was it that led these workers to participate where salarymen in Japan's large corporation did not?

Here we see the constraints imposed by a political culture. While cracks began to appear in the "Japanese-style management" mode of corporate governance typical of Japan's large corporations in the 1990s, it remains dominant. Salarymen are bound to spend long hours at work and have few opportunities to change jobs. This affords them little individual freedom to express their political views or to choose how to spend their time outside of formal work hours. By comparison, many of the high-income earners who did become activists were proprietors, technical specialists and employees of foreign-owned companies. Technical specialists and employees of foreign-owned companies have greater career mobility and are not bound by the cultural constraints of Japan's large corporations. They seem, therefore, to have greater freedom to express

their political views.

The lack of participation by students in the Japanese antinuclear movement needs to be considered alongside the absence of salarymen. Students may have a lot of free time, but they have little freedom to express their political views. Students in Japan graduate in March each year and large corporations recruit new graduates in a single cohort in April. Companies undertake scrupulous checks on their potential employees' temperament and opinions. While political activism is not explicitly banned, many students avoid it out of a concern that it might affect their employability. In the 1960s, when the student movement in Japan was at its height, the economy was booming and students were in a strong position to find jobs. Companies were less worried about employing people with a history of political activism. This was partly due to the tight labor market conditions of the economic boom that restricted companies' ability to pick and choose their employees. From the latter half of the 1970s, and particularly since 1990, however, the rate of economic growth slowed and companies began to screen student applicants more carefully.

Large corporations that use "Japanese-style management" and the students who want to join them are believed to make up the core of Japanese society. Few antinuclear activists came from this "core". This is an issue not of income but of political culture and social integration. In the movement against the security legislation in the summer of 2015, however, activists from the student group SEALDs stood out. While only a small proportion of the total students population took part in the movements, their presence nevertheless suggests that the form of social integration that was constructed in Japan after the 1970s is weakening. Furthermore, as is shown by the presence of Local Leaders (point 8) in the survey group, some activists in the antinuclear movement also play leading roles in



local communities, such as the head of a local shopkeepers association and the president of a PTA. Alongside the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren), the governing body for large corporations, these local community organizations once formed the support base for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The participation of people from these layers suggests that in local community organizations, too, there are definite rumblings against the existing system. Below I discuss some of the background to this change in terms of economic stagnation and the decline in the LDP's base.

In summary, the main actors in the new antinuclear movement that appeared in Japan from 2011-2012 came from the following layers.

- 1) The “cognitive precariat”, excluding university students.
- 2) Healthcare workers.
- 3) Workers in foreign-owned companies, participants in foreign exchange programs and people with a connection outside Japan.
- 4) Local leaders from shopkeepers' associations and PTAs.
- 5) Other diverse social layers, excluding salarymen.

The large number of activists from the “cognitive precariat” shows that the antinuclear movement shares some of the characteristic features of 2011 movements in other developed countries. The large number of healthcare workers reflects their sensitivity to a movement whose origins can be traced to a nuclear accident. The large number of people with a connection to a foreign country is characteristic of societies where there is limited access to information and may well be a characteristic of social movements in non-western countries. Finally, students and

salarymen, the supposed “core” of Japanese society did not have a significant presence among the main actors.

## Ordinary Participants

Having discussed the main actors, I will now discuss the ordinary participants in the protests outside the prime minister's residence. Who were they and how did they come to take part? The Japanese newspaper *Tōkyō Shimbun* published a series between June 23, 2012 and June 21, 2013 titled “Fixed Point Observations Outside the National Diet”.<sup>17</sup> Each column in the series featured an interview with a participant in the weekly Friday protests. Over the course of the series, 53 protesters were asked about their age, their occupation and their reasons for participating. While this is not a random sample, it provides a useful point of reference for analyzing the characteristics of ordinary participants.

There were 26 men and 27 women among the fifty-three interviewees. Two were in their teens, 13 in their 20s, ten in their 30s, nine in their 40s, three in their 50s, 11 in their 60s, four in their 70s and one in her 80s. There were two foreign nationals. The interviewees were more diverse in terms of age and occupation than the activists I surveyed. The male interviewees displayed a wide range of occupations and education levels: they were company employees, executives, engineers, musicians, designers, university lecturers, self-employed, construction workers, taxi drivers and old-age pensioners. Among the female interviewees, however, the most common occupations were six housewives and two childcare workers. Like healthcare workers, housewives and childcare workers tend to be particularly aware of the issue of radiation. Some of the women also had occupations like those of the activists I surveyed such as editors, writers, web designers and hospital staff. Others were teachers, office workers, company employees, dispatch workers, self-employed

and farmers.

There were quite a few students among interviewees who were under-25. Many of these had been exchange students abroad. This mirrors the trend witnessed among the main actors, many having a connection with a foreign country. One of the interviewees (26-year-old university student, interviewed August 31, 2012) had seen the news about the antinuclear movement in Japan while on exchange in Germany. Another (26-year-old university student, interviewed September 7, 2012) had studied journalism as an exchange student in Denmark.

Interviewees expressed different motivations for participating in the protests. A 41-year-old marriage counselor said that she had decided to take part because many of her clients were worried about getting married or having children due to fears surrounding the after-effects of radiation. An 18-year-old high school student (interviewed March 22, 2013) expressed concern about radiation because her mother was a childcare worker who was deeply concerned about environmental issues. A 22-year-old university student (interviewed 14 September, 2012), told the *Tōkyō Shimbun* reporter, “I didn’t think that much about it, I was just curious about whether there really were so many people there.”

The most common reason participants gave for joining the protests was having come from Fukushima or having had direct contact with someone from Fukushima. One interviewee (22-year-old university student, interviewed August 3, 2012) went to Fukushima University and spoke with students there. Another (28-year-old university student, interviewed December 14, 2012) said, “I came because some people from Iitate [a village in Fukushima prefecture that was completely evacuated] told me about what had happened to them.” A total of six people said they had decided to take part in the protests because they had a direct connection

to Fukushima. They had either heard from someone from Fukushima about what had happened, had a friend who had evacuated from Fukushima or had relatives or friends in Fukushima. More than ten percent of the 53 people interviewed reported such a connection. Among the activists analyzed in the previous section, two respondents also had relatives in Fukushima.

Some participants said they had started worrying about nuclear power because of their work and became motivated to take part in the protests. A 65-year-old self-employed man (interviewed July 16, 2012), said, “I make equipment that is used to clean nuclear facilities, you see. Once its been used, we cut it into pieces and store it in boxes. But there’s just nowhere to dispose of them. That’s why I started to think that nuclear power is no good.”<sup>18</sup> Considering the nuclear industry’s wide reach, probably many people have such a connection.

### ***Movement Groups and Forms of Mobilization***

How was the movement organized? In this section I will analyze this question in terms of both organizational forms and methods of mobilization.

#### **Characteristics of the Organizing Group**

MCAN, the group that organized the protests outside the prime minister’s residence, was an alliance of 13 smaller groups who were later joined by a number of “other sympathetic individuals”.<sup>19</sup> Of the original 13 groups, only two were active prior to the nuclear accident and only one had a physical office. During my participant observation I observed that small groups such as this, which lack a physical office, have a number of characteristics. First, there are a number of very active “core members” but none who draw a wage from their activism. Surrounding these core members are some tens of peripheral members

who serve as “event marshals” when the group holds an action. No clear line separates the core from the periphery. Most of the activists involved in these small groups were not active in the antinuclear movement prior to the Fukushima accident. About a third became active in a social movement for the first time after the disaster and another third had participated in some other movement prior to the accident. The final third had some experience with activities in the grey area between social activism and cultural production.

This distribution of background experiences was confirmed in my survey of 53 main actors in the movement discussed in the previous section. However, some activities are difficult to classify. Take for example a fan of a band that plays political music who shares information on Twitter about an upcoming concert. It would be difficult for such a person to answer “yes” or “no” to a question that asks something like, “have you ever participated in a social movement.” Yet it is much easier for someone with this kind of experience to share information about a rally, or be an event marshal, than it is for someone who has never done anything of the sort.

Most groups do not have a postal address and only publicize an official homepage or SNS (social networking service) address. In some groups, the electronic or residential address of one of the main members becomes the group’s address. Although none of the groups have an official representative, the main activists serve as spokespeople. These groups generally create a homepage and start uploading information. They might post information about relief activities in the disaster zone or about nuclear policy issues, for example. They might also organize their own demonstrations or rallies and apply for police permission to hold them in a park or in the street. After announcing the date of the event on their homepage or via SNS, they prepare banners and speakers and

recruit a number of event marshals from among their peripheral members. On the day of the event, they go to the rallying point in a park or other public place without knowing how many people will turn up.

These groups do not usually maintain a membership list or even a formal membership system. Mailing lists and SNS networks serve as substitutes for formal membership. They are best described not as organizations but as affinity groups. They do not have a fixed group of people whom they can mobilize for a rally. The number who turn out for their rallies can grow into the tens of thousands or shrink to the hundreds. This is similar to the way the number of hits on a website can increase dramatically and die away just as quickly.

Participants decide for themselves which group’s rally they will attend. A woman in her 30s, whom I surveyed as part of my study of 53 protest participants, attended rallies every week but was not affiliated with any group. When surveyed, she was working as a librarian, but she had previously worked as a comic book artist and in the planning division of a major corporation. She knew exactly which group’s rallies would be the liveliest at any given time. She knew many participants in the rallies and would attend after exchanging messages via SNS. When asked, she would sometimes act as an event marshal. This example shows that the line separating core members, peripheral members and regular participants is fluid. This is why I used the term “main actors” in section 2 rather than “activists”. Many of these people do not refer to themselves as “activists” because in Japan, the word “activist” tends to be used to describe people who are members of a formal organization that maintains a physical office.

MCAN, which was formed by bringing together several such groups, had essentially the same characteristics. It has a spokesperson but no delegated representative. MCAN organizes



protests outside the prime minister's residence every Friday, but its style of activism is basically like that of smaller groups. The only difference is that it has a larger number of participants and main actors. MCAN members were interviewed by the mass media, negotiated with political parties and labor unions, and invited university faculty and artists to speak at their events. But their basic operations did not differ significantly from those of smaller groups.



- 熊本での大地震にもかかわらず、稼働を止めない川内原発!
- 日本最大級の新断層・中央構造線からわずか8km、伊方原発再稼働はありえない!
- 「脱原発」を勝ち取るために、野党共闘の声を国会前でも!

4月16日以来、熊本地方とその周辺地域では今も地震が続いています。しかし、原子力規制委員会は避難中の市内区域について「安全上の問題は無い」とし、政府と鹿児島県知事もそれに同意しています。

まともな憲法解釈がなく、先例重軽視がない川内原発が稼働を続けているのは、国民の安全を最優先する政策ではありません。

また、今日の地盤を越えた日永久原藩は、武岡藩や伊方藩の近くを通る日本橋十銭の新藩系・山内藩の西側にあります。

2011年の東日本大震災、東京電力福島第一原発事故から学んだように、  
原発事故は、自然災害と事故の連鎖によるもので、原発事故は自然災害と事故の連鎖によるもので、

想定できない月間消費と事故の影響を考えれば、原付推進に賛成する姿勢や「原付雑誌は公式特典をベースに」というMHK会員の発言に納得できる人は

「地震と火山の害に原発は無罪」、この世論を無視して原発推進を突め込む

政府や政治家には、「NOI」を突きつけるしかありません。

原発のない未来へ。  
NO NUKLEAR ENERGY AUTONOMY

**NO NUKES! ENERGY AUTONOMY!**  
東洋電、経産、環境の3省が2012年度策定を目指す。環境省も参加する。

※万が一の事故に備えての備えは、前回の14時までTwitterやブログで公開いたします。



※「首相官邸のセキュリティ」

トクシェア上成を御覧し  
<http://www.usp-link>

被禁国际医院联合会

Metropolitan Coalition Against Nuclear Power  
http://www.metcoal.org/ [info@metcoal.org](mailto:info@metcoal.org)

100%

<https://www.cambridge.org/core>. 08 May 2025 at 17:05



**MCAN banner and flyers for demonstrations, June 2016**

The fluid nature of MCAN means that the number of people in the group is unclear. In December 2015, around 20 marshals were still getting together each week to prepare for the Friday protests. For the larger protests, which take place every few months, 50-100 people serve as marshals. MCAN's main activists have thousands and even tens of thousands of followers on SNS.<sup>20</sup> MCAN does not have a physical office space. The group rents a room in a building in the government district where it stores the megaphones and portable stages for the weekly Friday protests. Ironically, the space they rent is right next door to the headquarters of the Liberal Democratic Party. Their main source of income is donations that are collected at the weekly Friday protests and at the larger protests they organize every few months. One member keeps the accounts and they manage their finances carefully. They

borrow a PA system for speeches during the protests from a live music venue where one of the core members works.

MCAN holds its meetings in a cafe near the government district. Meetings take place after the weekly Friday protests, once the PA and other equipment have been put away. There they discuss correspondence and upcoming events. People who cannot attend meetings for a period of time ask one of the other members what was discussed. Members who stop coming for a long time cease to be core members. Some members formally announce that they are withdrawing from the group while others simply stop coming without explanation. They share much in common with similar groups in other developed countries. It seems that all over the world, the internet and SNS facilitate such activism.

Some people in the media or in political parties find such groups incomprehensible. Despite the fact that MCAN and some of its component groups organized street demonstrations attended by hundreds of thousands of people, they were not well reported in the mass media. The Japanese media did not know how to report on the activities of such groups. In August 2015, a newspaper reporter explained the reasons for this.<sup>21</sup>

Political parties, labor unions and other formal organizations have well defined organizers. When they organize a demonstration, it is easier to obtain a clear statement from the group as a whole. It is also easy to work out beforehand how many people they will mobilize which makes it simpler to investigate the story. Reporters who rely on these old methods are perplexed by MCAN's style. There is no clear organization in charge. Rather, ordinary people put the word out and gather participants

for the demonstrations over Twitter and the internet and via word of mouth. While these reporters were still coming to grips with this new style of demonstration, the number of participants increased dramatically. While they stood around asking each other "What? Why so many people?" they missed the chance to get the story.

Japan's mass media is an oligopoly made up of the major newspaper and television companies. They get most of their information from some 800 Kisha Clubs (press clubs) across the country that cover governmental institutions, political parties, the police, municipal governments and the Japan Business Federation. These institutions provide space to the Kisha Clubs where they arrange official interviews and make announcements. Only reporters from the major media companies can join the Kisha Clubs. They differ from press clubs in which individual reporters can participate freely and have been criticized for being a kind of licensed reporters' cartel. Japan's major media outlets gather information from these "kisha clubs." Therefore, the voices of people who are not organized into a political party or a union rarely appear in the mass media, even when their numbers become quite large. Until recently, even when the media did report on protest movements, they got their information mainly from political parties and labor unions.

Some people think that another reason for the lack of reporting on the antinuclear movement in Japan is the amount of money Japan's electric power utilities invest in the mass media. Yet if this was the only reason, why was there hardly any coverage of the antinuclear movement even in those newspapers and television stations that did report on the severity of the nuclear accident and the

contradictions of nuclear policy? The issue here is that Japan's twentieth century media system is not suited to reporting on a twenty-first century social movement.

Examples of this kind of loosely organized movement do exist in Japan. The anti-Vietnam war group "Citizens' League for Peace in Vietnam (Beheiren)" that was active in the late 1960s and 1970s is one such example. At its peak, Beheiren was able to attract 70,000 participants to its rallies. It was said to possess nearly 400 local groups throughout Japan and its organizational structure was almost identical to that of MCAN.<sup>22</sup> In 2011, however, Japan's newspaper reporters had not reported on this kind of movement since the late 1970s. For 40 years they had only reported on rallies called by political parties and labor groups. The quotation cited above should be seen in this context.

While this new kind of movement did exist in the late 1960s, by some measures it had less mobilizing potential than did the antinuclear movement in 2012. The largest student rally in the 1960s took place outside Tokyo University's Yasuda Auditorium in November 1968 with 20,000 participants. Even the largest rally ever organized by Beheiren, which took place in June 1969, had only 70,000. Most of the participants were students, intellectuals and housewives because at the time it was mostly people in these sectors who were not members of a formal organization such as a labor union or political party. In the late 1960s, unions and similar organizations could mobilize much larger numbers of people. In 2012, however, formal organizations such as unions were in decline, and the number of people who are not part of a formal organization has greatly increased. Small groups like MCAN that have significant mobilizing power reflect the broader society in which fewer and fewer people are members of a formal organization.

## Methods of Mobilization and the Internet

A research group conducting a study of the dissemination of information via SNS surveyed participants in the June 6, 2012 protest outside the prime minister's residence using a questionnaire. Organizers estimated that this rally was attended by 100,000 people. The survey found that participants learned about the protest from the following sources: Twitter 39.6%, word of mouth 17.3%, web 11.6%, Facebook 6.7%, television 6.5%, newspaper 6.3%, notification from an organized group 6.1%, and other 6.1%.<sup>23</sup> Activists from MCAN, however, said that the maximum number of people they could mobilize via Twitter was 2000.<sup>24</sup> They believed that the main reason the demonstrations exceeded this number was due to reports in the mass media and word of mouth about the protests disseminated through places like child care centers and workplaces.

The apparent contradiction between the survey results and the opinion of rally organizers can be understood by examining the idiosyncrasies of SNS. Basically, SNS are very particular and selective. They have broad geographic reach but are actually quite narrow in terms of the number of people they reach. Participants in online social networks all have something in common, such as a particular intention, taste, or area of interest. In 2012, one MCAN activist said, "the weak point of disseminating and sharing information over the internet is that it only reaches those who have an active interest in the nuclear issue."<sup>25</sup>

In the *Tōkyō Shimbun's* series of interviews discussed above, most people said they came with friends from work or with family members rather than by themselves. Examples include a 35-year-old university lecturer (interviewed June 20, 2012) who said, "I came with a friend;" a 64-year-old former child care worker (interviewed October 26, 2012) who said, "I came with an old friend from university;" a 25-year-old university student (interviewed 31 August, 2012) who said "I came because a friend asked me to come;" and a 21-year-old



company employee (interviewed October 12, 2012) who said “my lover asked me to come.” An invitation from someone with whom the participants had a close relationship was a major motivator for joining the protests.

The interviews also suggest, however, that an invitation from a friend or family member often coincided with information obtained from the internet. A 31-year-old music writer (interviewed January 13, 2013), for example, told a *Tōkyō Shimbun* reporter that he heard about the protest from a musician friend who put a call out through SNS. He said that he came with a friend because he “hadn’t been to the protests on my own yet.” This example highlights some of the characteristics of the movement I have discussed so far, including cognitive work, the use of SNS and the importance of direct relationships. Another participant, a 25-year-old university student (interviewed August 31, 2012), told the *Tōkyō Shimbun* that having already seen antinuclear protests while on exchange in Germany, he “learned via Facebook that some friends from high school were coming and so the three of us came together.” He also planned “to invite a friend” next time. In this example an exchange experience, the use of SNS and participation with a friend all played a part in motivating the student to participate in the demonstration.

As mentioned above, up to ten percent of ordinary participants interviewed by the *Tōkyō Shimbun* said that their motivation for participating in the protests was that they had relatives in Fukushima or had spoken with someone who had evacuated from Fukushima. In the following examples, this motivation is combined with use of SNS and direct relationships. A 22-year-old company employee (interviewed August 24, 2011), told the newspaper that he went to the demonstration because, “a colleague who joined my company at the same time I did previously lived in Fukushima and had moved to Tokyo with his family because of the accident at the

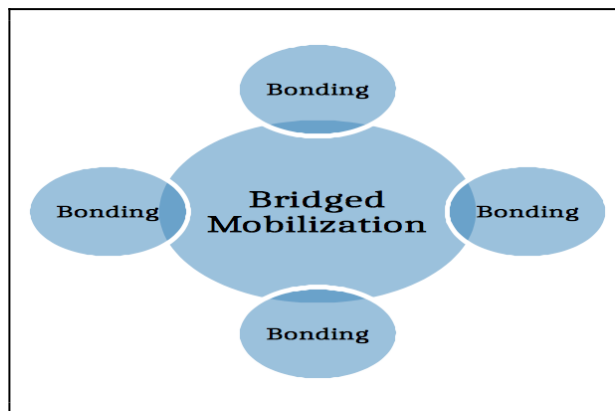
Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. He complained about ‘not being able to meet up with [his] friends from home anymore.’ I was really shocked when I heard that.” Later, he said, he began looking into nuclear power and radiation on the internet and “started talking with friends and co-workers about what I learned.” On the day of the interview he attended the protest “along with nine co-workers from my company.”

It seems that SNS alone was not enough to mobilize significant numbers, but that it came into its own as a mobilizing tool when combined with other methods. SNS creates networks with wide geographical reach between people who have a particular interest in a specific issue but are in a minority in their community or workplace. In my survey, many respondents said they had connected with like-minded people via SNS despite feeling isolated in their workplace or community. A limited number of people who have these kinds of connections end up going to the protests by themselves. If, however, they are invited by a friend or relative, they are more likely to attend. One activist writes that while the “value of disseminating information via Twitter” goes without saying, the “the real social networks that are made by the people who come to the demonstrations” are of greater significance.<sup>26</sup>

This shows that SNS has significant mobilizing potential when combined with direct relationships. It has the effect of bonding people with a particular interest across a wide area. By itself it can only bring a limited number of participants. When SNS builds bridges between primary groups located in different regions, however, it can help bring about a major mobilization (see Table 2). When TV broadcasts increase and each audience member mobilizes friends via SNS or through direct relationships, the number of participants increases. Nevertheless, if they are asked in a survey what brought them to the protests, they may well say, “I heard about it on Twitter”. The

relationship between SNS, the mass media and people's direct connections with one another are not mutually exclusive. In the survey on SNS I introduced at the beginning of this section, however, respondents had to choose between one or another of these three. In reality, however, these different means of mobilization usually overlapped. An example would be someone who was invited along by a relative who had learned about the protests on TV, who connected with friends via Twitter and went together with them.

**Table 2: Relationship between bonding and bridging**



Groups that bond via SNS may be quite homogeneous. For this reason, their reach may be limited to people who share the same interests. One activist I know calls the timeline feature on Twitter an “echo chamber.” Because people with similar interests and similar opinions huddle together on Twitter, there is a tendency for one’s own opinion to come back in a magnified form like an echo. The wide geographic reach and minor differences of opinion within these networks makes them feel that they have reach and diversity, but they are actually very small worlds. This activist maintains two Twitter accounts for purposes of comparison. In order to assess the voices that come back through the activist account, in her other account she amuses herself with everyday matters. She says that by doing so,

she is able to grasp the mood among people with completely different interests.

These examples demonstrate that assessing the efficacy of the internet as a mobilizing tool requires a nuanced approach. Social movement researchers outside Japan, too, ought to pay close attention to this when examining the role of the internet in social movement mobilizing strategies.

### **Political Structure**

The large-scale movement of 2011 and 2012 was based on widespread popular support for getting rid of nuclear power. In May 2012, when all of Japan’s nuclear reactors were idle and it became clear that this was not endangering the electricity supply, a number of public opinion surveys found that support for the “immediate abolition of nuclear power” stood at 20% and support for “phasing out nuclear power in the near future” was at 50–60%. More than 50% of people also opposed restarting nuclear reactors. These figures remained stable in 2015.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, opposition to restarting Japan’s existing reactors was greater than support for the “immediate abolition of nuclear power.” This suggests that many people were willing to countenance a temporary resumption of nuclear power, but were unhappy with the way decisions about reactor restarts were being made by the government and the nuclear industry. Nevertheless, the ruling LDP has won all three of the national elections that have been held since 2012. What explains the LDPs continuing electoral success?

First, it must be noted that despite its history of encouraging the introduction and development of nuclear power, the LDP did not make an issue of its support for the technology in these elections. Considering the public mood, any open display of support for nuclear power would clearly be disadvantageous electorally. Since 2012, the LDP has promised to “reduce

Japan's reliance on nuclear power as much as possible." Other political parties have promised to immediately abolish the country's nuclear reactors, or to abolish them in 20–30 years. It has become practically impossible for a political party to support nuclear power openly. Be that as it may, when the LDP returned to power in December 2012, it scrapped the DPJ's September 2012 commitment to abolish nuclear power by 2040. Since then, torn between considerations of public opinion and pressure from the nuclear power industry, the party has continually postponed announcing a decision on nuclear policy.

In June 2015, however, the Japanese government set targets for Japan's energy mix in 2030. This was necessary so that the government could submit its CO2 reduction targets to the Conference of the Parties meeting in December 2015 (COP21). Were it not for this international political context, the government may well have continued to delay making a decision on an energy mix policy. In this plan, which I will discuss further below, nuclear power is projected to occupy 20–22%.

The LDP seems to be trying to signal its support for nuclear power while also showing due consideration to public opinion. I discuss three major reasons for the LDP's continued electoral victories. 1) The LDP base is in decline but it still remains relatively dominant. 2) The combination of a decline in other political parties and an overall low voter turnout have led to victory for the LDP. 3) Nuclear policy does not have a significant influence on voter behavior.

### The Decline and Relative Dominance of the LDP

In 1991, the LDP had 5.47 million members. By 2013, however, in the context of globalization, neoliberal reforms and the aging of Japanese society, its membership had decreased sharply to 790,000. Let us take the Federation of Aichi Prefecture LDP Branches as an example.

Between 1998 and 2007, the membership of the Federation decreased from 135,957 to 45,307. Some branches have shrunk dramatically. Membership in the Taiju branch, representing special postmasters and their families, has declined by 98%. Membership in the real estate branch, representing people in the construction and real estate industries, has declined by 92%, and in the medical branch, representing people in the medical field, by 48%.<sup>28</sup> The LDP's base has been eroded by globalization and neoliberal reforms. The postal service was privatized during the era of the Koizumi cabinet in the 2000s. Cuts to spending on public works during the Koizumi era contributed to a decrease in total investment in construction from ¥83 trillion in 1996 to ¥42 trillion in 2010. The deregulation of healthcare that has accompanied globalisation has also producing a growing rebellion against the LDP.

Another issue is the dramatic aging of Japan's rural and regional communities. The LDP's support in rural and regional Japan was long based in government-recognized self-governing associations such as *jichikai* (neighborhood self-governing associations), *chōnaikai* (urban neighborhood self-governing associations) and *shōtenkai* (shopkeepers associations). These organizations have all become less active due to aging and depopulation in rural and regional Japan leaving few people who are willing to assume organizational responsibility. Globalization and neoliberal reforms have also accelerated the decline of such organizations. In 2014, a former LDP member of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly turned political commentator suggested that the rapid aging of Japanese society means that, "in ten years time, 90% of LDP members will have passed away."<sup>29</sup> While he did not provide any basis for the "90%" figure, there can be no doubt that the aging of the party membership in rural and regional areas coinciding with continued migration to Tokyo and other major cities continues.



The decline in the party's base is also manifested in low voter turnout. The LDP received 16.62 million votes in proportionally represented constituencies in the 2012 House of Representatives elections, 18.46 million in the 2013 House of Councillors elections and 17.66 million in the 2014 House of Representatives elections. In all of these elections, the LDP gained less than the 18.81 million votes it received in the 2009 lower house elections when it suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the DPJ. By comparison, in the 2005 House of Representatives election during the Koizumi period, the LDP obtained 25.89 million votes in proportionally represented constituencies.



Liberal Democratic Party  
Kōmeitō





## Democratic Party of Japan Minna no Tō Isshin no Kai

Despite winning fewer votes, the LDP is winning elections at a time of low voter turnout, declining LDP membership, and division among the other parties. I suggest that the LDP, and its coalition partner Kōmeitō (Clean Government Party, supported by the Buddhist religious group Soka Gakkai), can turn out 30% of the vote using their party organization. If overall voter turnout is less than 60%, then candidates who have the backing of the LDP and the Kōmeitō will win. A divided opposition has almost no chance of winning. The single-seat constituency system introduced after 1996 makes it possible to win elections with a relatively small organized vote, and has also given the LDP an institutional advantage because of the strength of its organizational vote in local constituencies. Japan has a parliamentary cabinet system of

government. There are no presidential elections or national proportional constituencies. Without some kind of proportional constituency system, smaller parties such as Green parties have generally been unable to gain significant representation in national parliaments anywhere in the world. In Japan, candidates in sparsely populated single-seat constituencies can be elected with one-half to one-third of the number of votes that are needed to gain election in urban constituencies. Under this electoral system, it is very difficult for Tokyo-based movements to have an effect on the results of national elections.

When the LDP lost the 2009 House of Representatives election to the DPJ, voter turnout was 69%. During that election, the DPJ and other opposition parties entered into a cooperation agreement.<sup>30</sup> The DPJ obtained 29.48 million votes in proportionally-represented constituencies in 2009. If voter turnout increases, as it did in 2009, and if the opposition parties form a coalition, then the LDP will lose. In the 2012 House of Representatives elections, however, voter turnout was 59%. In the 2013 House of Councillors elections it fell to 53% and in the 2014 House of Representatives elections it was also 53%. In addition to the split in the DPJ in 2012, a number of new political parties (such as Minna no Tō (Your Party) and Nihon Isshin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) appeared, swamping the field of opposition parties. A survey of the House of Representatives elections in 2009 and 2012 found that few people had switched their vote from the DPJ to the LDP. It also found that a large number of people who had voted for the DPJ in 2009 abstained from voting in 2012.<sup>31</sup>

During the Koizumi period, the LDP tried to gain the support of social layers outside their traditional support base through neoliberal reforms and an image strategy. After regaining government in 2012, however, they firmed up

their existing support base and revived their traditional electoral tactics. An article on the April 2015 Hokkaido gubernatorial election explains how in the previous Hokkaido gubernatorial election in 2007, the LDP “were more conscious about appealing to non-aligned voters than about getting endorsements from corporations and organizations. They even spent a great deal of energy worrying about the color of their posters.”<sup>32</sup> In the 2015 gubernatorial election, however, the party “pursued its usual ‘organizational battle,’ rather than trying to win over non-aligned voters ... and many National Diet members made the rounds of corporations and organizations.” The article goes on to say that, “this reflected the sense of crisis felt by the LDP. ... Since Koizumi Jun’ichirō promised to ‘smash the LDP’ and raised the slogan ‘reform sparing no sacred cows’ their organization has weakened and their membership is in decline. Even now, many industry groups have distanced themselves from the LDP. ... The party has secured large victories in two House of Representatives elections but the leadership’s analysis is that ‘we rode on the coat tails of the DPJ’s mistakes’.”

In other words, the LDP-Kōmeitō coalition did not win by gaining new supporters but because of abstentions and divisions among opposition voters. It is as if the tide had gone out and revealed a submerged boulder. The boulder itself has not gotten bigger. If anything, it is getting smaller and smaller. Nevertheless, the organized vote of the LDP and Kōmeitō is larger than that of the other parties. Globalization and neoliberal reforms have reduced the capacity of all political parties. While the DPJ had the support of some labor unions, union representation had sunk to 17.5% by 2015. Kōmeitō’s presence among urban low-income voters is also a factor as it complements LDP strength among rural and regional voters.

Under these circumstances, as voter turnout decreases, it becomes proportionally easier for

the LDP to win elections. Voter turnout in the January 2014 Tokyo gubernatorial elections, for example, was 46%, in part due to heavy snow on election day. The candidate backed by the LDP and Kōmeitō gained 2.11 million votes. Another candidate, who campaigned on opposition to nuclear power and had the support of the Japan Communist Party, gained 982,594 votes. A DPJ-supported candidate who likewise proclaimed his opposition to nuclear power gained 956,062 votes while a far-right former Japan Self Defense Forces Air Force general gained 610,865 votes. This means that the candidate supported by the LDP and Kōmeitō won the election with the support of just 19% of the 10.69 million eligible voters in the Tokyo Metropolitan area. In this election, the LDP/Kōmeitō-backed candidate had also promised to end reliance on nuclear power in the medium to long term.

### Voting Behavior in Japan

Thus far I have explained 1) the decline of the LDP base and 2) low voter turnout and the divisions among the other parties. Next I will explain why 3) the nuclear issue does not significantly influence voter behavior. I demonstrate this using the results of an exit poll conducted during the December 2012 election for the House of Representatives (See Table 3).<sup>33</sup>

In this exit poll, voters who had just cast their ballot were asked whom they had voted for in the proportionally represented constituencies. They were also asked whether they favored “scrapping nuclear power immediately,” “gradually phasing out nuclear power altogether” or “not pursuing zero nuclear power.” 14% said they were in favor of “scrapping nuclear power immediately,” 64% favored “gradually phasing out nuclear power altogether” and 15% favored “not pursuing zero nuclear power”. The remaining 7% responded “other” or did not provide an answer. These results are almost identical to

those of the polls discussed above.

### Table 3: Voting Behavior and Opinion on Nuclear Power

(Based on nationwide exit polling in the proportionally represented constituencies in the House of Representative election December 2012)



### Opinion on Nuclear Power

Maintain: Do Not Pursue Zero Nuclear Power (15%)

Phase Out: Gradually Phase Out Nuclear Power (64%)

Immediately: Scrap Nuclear Power Immediately (14%)

Other/No Answer (7%)

### Political Parties

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

Komeito

Japan Restoration Party (JRP)

Your Party (YP)

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)

Tomorrow Party of Japan (TPJ)

Japan Communist Party (JCP)

Social Democratic Party (SDP)

Source: “Distribution of Votes By Attitude to Nuclear Power” (Asahi Shimbun, December 17, Evening Edition)



Among LDP voters, 16% favored “scrapping nuclear power immediately,” 28% favored “gradually phasing out nuclear power altogether” and 43% favored “not pursuing zero nuclear power.” A larger number of those who voted for the JCP, the SDP or TPJ (the Tomorrow Party of Japan, a party that split from DPJ and advocated abandoning nuclear power), favored “scrapping nuclear power immediately” more than did LDP voters, but still only 34% wanted to scrap nuclear power immediately. In summary, while there seems to be a relationship between voters’ opinions about nuclear power and the party they voted for, the association is not particularly strong.

There are three main reasons for this. First, as discussed above, the LDP did not make its support for nuclear power an election issue. Second, voters tend to place less emphasis on the nuclear issue when deciding how to vote compared with the economy and social security. Third, the majority of voters, particularly older voters, voted based on local community or family networks in their hometown. They tend not to place much importance on electoral promises made by the party to which the candidate is affiliated. This third reason is probably the most important. Voters tend to place little importance on a party’s electoral promises with regard to nuclear power or any other issue when casting their vote. The first and second factors probably derive from this. The fundamental weakness of Japan’s political culture and the lack of any notion that voters ought to cast their vote based on a party’s campaign policies is one important reason that the LDP made such vague statements on nuclear power during the election. Voters simply do not place much importance on this kind of campaign promise.

In 2014, a political commentator who was previously an LDP Diet member in a regional

constituency described the voting behavior of LDP supporters as follows.<sup>34</sup>

Party politics in Japan is an extension of the politics of the traditional village, that is, of the local community. The LDP has a party organization at the prefectural level and below that at the municipal level, and below that at the level of the neighborhood organizations. Many people who have been officials in their neighborhood councils or wardens of their local shrine are members of the LDP’s neighborhood-level organizations. As a consequence, the LDP maintains very strong and intimate connections to the community. It also has occupational branches in each industry association.

In elections, people usually vote at their own discretion. The LDP is not organized like that. In regional elections in particular, the local party leadership decides how to apportion the vote. It issues an official notification instructing its members to, “support this candidate in this area.” They are therefore able to effectively divide up the vote and elect a certain number of candidates.

It might seem strange but questions such as what the member did in the Diet during his term of office or what his achievements were, whether he worked on child-support, social welfare, administrative reform or educational policy—issues you might think a Diet member should be concerned with—seem to be of little interest to people in the local

community. To put it simply, it has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not the Diet member will win the next election.

So what is important? Whether or not he turns up for local events and important ceremonial occasions such as wedding and funerals. Whether in the middle of the city or in the regional areas he is “the local representative” and that is what he is evaluated upon. He is asked to be not a politician but “a master of ceremonies.” Political ideals, policy and the like have almost no influence on how people vote.

This pattern of voter behavior and these electoral tactics are almost identical to those described by Gerald L. Curtis in his classic text on the electoral campaign in Ōita prefecture in 1967.<sup>35</sup> While the number of supporters who can be relied upon using these tactics is slowly ebbing, they are still a potent means of securing a certain number of votes. In the Koizumi era, the LDP tried to move away from these tactics and this led to their losing government. Having returned to power they have once again sought to prioritize their support base in the local and industry associations and revived their traditional tactics.

Even with public opinion largely against nuclear power and a large antinuclear movement, the LDP continues to win elections for the reasons outlined above. 1) The LDPs base is in decline, but 2), low voter turnout and the splits among already weak opposition parties works in their favor and 3) there is a deeply rooted pattern of voting behavior where voters tend not to place much importance on the promises made by political parties. In these circumstances, the LDP continues to win elections.

## The Increasing Cost of Nuclear Power

In the developed world, the nuclear power industry has already passed its peak. Nuclear power becomes more costly as people’s awareness of human rights and the level of democracy in a society increases. So long as it is possible not to pay too much attention to safety, nuclear power remains very inexpensive. In societies where there is greater awareness of human rights, freedom of information and democracy, however, its cost increases. Building nuclear reactors also requires significant up-front investment. The initial investment in building the reactors cannot be recouped unless they can be operated steadily for 20–30 years. Robust and growing demand for electricity is also a prerequisite for building cost-effective nuclear reactors. It is relatively easy to build nuclear reactors in countries where there is little human rights consciousness, an authoritarian government and where demand for electricity is growing but these conditions do not hold in the developed countries today.

In Japan, the economic and political costs of nuclear power are increasing for the following reasons. First, total electricity demand in Japan peaked in 2007. It decreased by 7% between 2007 and 2009 due to economic stagnation. Since 2011, electricity demand has decreased by 13% in the short summer peak demand period. This is because of 1), a change in people’s consciousness due to the nuclear accident, 2) the government asking industry to use less electricity in order to deal with the shortage of electric power and 3) the shutting down of nuclear reactors resulted in increased cost of coal and oil, and hence of electricity resulting in a growing awareness of the need to cut costs. Another factor is that after the nuclear accident, the Kan Naoto government introduced a feed-in tariff. This requires electric power utilities to purchase electricity produced using sustainable technology at a fixed price. In March 2011, Japan’s solar power

generating capacity was 3.6 GW. By the end of 2014, this figure had risen to 23.4 GW. Solar electricity contributed 7% to total supply during the peak demand period in the summer of 2015. By the end of 2015, solar generating capacity had increased again to 34.4 GW and it continues to grow.<sup>36</sup> The supply of solar electricity is increasing, particularly during the summer when demand is highest.



### Tell the Prime Minister

Neoliberal reforms have also had an influence on Japan's nuclear industry. The electricity market in Japan is divided into ten geographical regions that cover the entire country. The government grants a monopoly on both the generation and supply of electricity to one electric power utility in each region. This system was originally created in 1939 in order to stabilize the electricity supply for military purposes. It formed the basis of the current system that was established in 1951.<sup>37</sup> As the electricity market in the United States and other Western countries is being liberalized, so is the market in Japan. The first such reform was proposed in 2000 but opposition from the utilities blocked it. In 2015, however, with the waning political influence of the utilities after Fukushima, the government decided to proceed with liberalization of the electricity market, implementing the reform in April 2016. Liberalization will make it even more difficult to build nuclear reactors because of the significant initial investment required to build them and the length of time it takes to see a

return on investment.

In the first part of 2015 alone, the cost to the nine electric power utilities who own nuclear reactors of maintaining their existing capacity reached ¥1.4 trillion. In 2010, Japan's nuclear reactors generated ¥4 trillion worth of electricity revenues at a cost of ¥1.7 trillion in uranium fuel and other inputs. By 2014, the reactors were ¥4 trillion in the red.<sup>38</sup> The utilities are covering this shortfall by raising prices. The market for large industrial consumers has already been liberalized. These customers are beginning to break from the reactor-owning utilities that are increasing their prices. Since March 2012, tens of thousands of large customers have rescinded their contracts with nuclear-reactor-owning utilities. Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) has lost 8.8 million kilowatts worth of sales, Chubu Electric Power has lost 1.67 million kilowatts and the Kansai Electric Power Company (KEPCO) has lost 2.65 million kilowatts.<sup>39</sup> Indicative of the seriousness of these losses, TEPCO's total sales in the summer peak demand period in 2013 was 50 million kilowatts and KEPCOs was 28 million kilowatts.

Moreover, in 2012 a new Nuclear Regulation Authority was established in response to the Fukushima accident and the regulations and safety standards governing the industry have been revised. The electric utilities cannot restart their nuclear reactors unless they are able to pass inspection under these new standards. A survey of the electric power utilities conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry estimated the additional cost of implementing these safety measures at ¥100 billion per reactor.<sup>40</sup> In May 2015, it was reported that the electric power utilities who own nuclear reactors would need to come up with ¥2.37 trillion to pay for the additional safety measures.<sup>41</sup>

There were 54 functioning nuclear reactors in Japan prior to the Fukushima accident. The

decommissioning of the six reactors housed at the Fukushima Daiichi plant has already been decided. In March 2015, another five aging reactors were slated for decommissioning after they were deemed not to be worth further investment. Of the remaining 43 reactors, by August 2015 the electric power utilities had made applications to the NRA for reactor safety inspections for 25 of the remaining 43 reactors with the intention of restarting them. A Reuters investigation of the electric power utilities that included interviews with experts and electricity market players found that an estimated 14 reactors have a strong possibility of passing.<sup>42</sup> In March 2016, when another aging reactor in Shikoku was slated for decommissioning, Shikoku electricity company estimated that 36 million dollars would be required for decommissioning while 1.6 billion dollars would be required for safety measures to pass new regulations.<sup>43</sup>



**Ikata nuclear power plant (Shikoku): reactor 1 to be decommissioned, center bottom**

## Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant

It has also yet to be decided what will be done with the spent fuel. The cost of constructing the as-yet-incomplete Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Aomori prefecture has already tripled initial estimates and now stands at ¥2.3 trillion. The opening of the facility has been postponed 22 times since 2009. The spent fuel is currently being stored in pools at each nuclear power plant. If the reprocessing facility does not work smoothly, the pools at some plants will reach capacity in just three more years of operation.<sup>44</sup>

The government has provided enormous subsidies to the municipalities which host nuclear power plants. Subsidies have continued to flow to host municipalities after Fukushima, even while the reactors remain idle. The government estimated budget for these subsidies at ¥91.2 billion for 2016.<sup>45</sup>

The cost of dealing with the Fukushima accident also keeps rising. As of August 2015, approximately 110,000 people had been evacuated. The cost of decontamination in the fallout zone is estimated at approximately ¥28 trillion. TEPCO cannot cover this cost so the government is providing up to ¥9 trillion to finance TEPCO. As LDP Diet member Kawano Tarō has observed, even if TEPCO's remaining nuclear reactors could be restarted, it would take the company 280 years to repay ¥28 trillion.<sup>46</sup> In reality, the loan is a fiction that conceals the bankruptcy of Japan's nuclear energy policy.

The government announced targets for the 2030 energy mix in June 2015 in the midst of all these problems. According to the figures announced, the proportion of the energy mix that will be provided by nuclear power will rise from its current 0% to 20-22%. The renewable energy target is set at about 20% (including 9% for hydroelectricity). If we think about the increasing cost of maintaining nuclear power, however, this plan clearly has no long-term



vision. One report quoted someone “close to the Cabinet Secretariat” as saying that “these figures can always be altered. We just have to give a show of support for nuclear power. The figures are otherwise meaningless.”<sup>47</sup> In the absence of change in Japan’s nuclear policy, the burden on the Japanese economy and on the public purse will only grow.

## Conclusion

### The Future of Nuclear Energy Policy in Japan

Support for the abolition of nuclear power is now firmly established among the Japanese public. The movement I have discussed in this essay is one manifestation of this. Yet this widely held feeling has not been reflected in recent elections. One reason for this is common to similar movements around the world in 2011 and 2012: the opponents of nuclear power lack formal organizations that are capable of winning elections. A second reason is peculiar to the Japanese situation: voters do not carefully examine the electoral commitments political parties make when they decide how to cast their vote. Japan’s political culture may eventually come to have quite the opposite effect on the nuclear issue. Based on data from the survey conducted during the December 2012 House of Representatives election cited above, I calculated that 8% of LDP voters favored “scrapping nuclear power immediately” and 63% favored “gradually phasing out nuclear power altogether.”<sup>48</sup> The LDP is afraid of losing these people’s votes. That is why it has continued to maintain an ambiguous nuclear policy.

Most people who vote for the LDP do not do so because they agree with the party’s electoral promises. In this kind of political culture a ruling party cannot easily adopt policies that fly in the face of public opinion even if it wins an election. As a result, so-called “consensus politics” has long been practiced in Japan. Consensus politics means that even when a

party wins an election, it still has to take account of public opinion and obtain the agreement of the opposition parties and various pressure groups in order to pursue its policy agenda. In contemporary Japan, some say this consensus politics is in decline. The current Abe administration’s stance that it has an electoral mandate to decide on policy is an example of this trend. Nevertheless, the disappearance of “consensus politics” may not be a sign of the LDP’s strength, but of its weakness. The decline in the party’s base in the industry and community groups that previously supported it means that the government faces less internal pressure to forge a consensus.



### Tell the Prime Minister

This decline has also led to a decline in the fundraising capacity of individual Diet members and their increasing dependence on party headquarters for financial support and political endorsement. These factors strengthen the relative dominance of the administration over individual Diet members. When the Abe administration was formed after the 2012 House of Representatives election, more than half of LDP members of the House of Representatives had stood in no more than two elections. Two thirds had stood in no more than four. Because of the decline in the LDP’s base, consecutive reelection has become more difficult. Members with a weak support base in their own electorate are afraid of losing the backing of the party and cannot oppose the agenda set by the prime minister’s office. Their lack of an independent base also means they do

not have the power to form factions and so there are fewer factional struggles. Only the few Diet members who have a firm support base are able to air their differences with the leadership. As a result, as the party becomes weaker, the power of the prime ministership appears to be getting stronger.<sup>49</sup>

These factors are causing a shift from consensus politics to leadership politics. But leadership politics depends on the support of public opinion. When Koizumi Jun'ichirō, Japan's representative leadership-style prime minister, antagonised various industry groups that constituted the LDP's base and pushed forward with his reforms, he had to rely on the support of public opinion. Ever sensitive to trends in public opinion, Koizumi adopted an antinuclear stance after Fukushima. In the end, whether consensus politics or leadership politics prevail, it will be difficult to continue with a politics that goes against public opinion when it has become as solid as it has on the nuclear issue. Even under Abe, who tends to disregard public opinion, the government has not been able to support nuclear power openly. When setting the targets for the energy mix in 2015, METI wanted to include the construction of new nuclear reactors in the plan but, wary of a public backlash, the prime minister's office refused.<sup>50</sup>

These facts suggest the following possibilities for the future of nuclear power. Supporters of nuclear power will continue to agitate in favor of continuing with the technology for some time. Some nuclear reactors will likely be restarted, but in the medium to long term nuclear power in Japan will wane. This will not, however, be a smooth process and it will depend on the strength of the antinuclear movement.

As discussed above, the primary actors in the antinuclear movement after the Fukushima nuclear accident come from a part of Japanese society that is not organized formally, either in

terms of voting behavior, or as a pressure group or political party. Such voices are well adapted to the internet, but cannot easily influence a twentieth-century-style representative democracy. In Japan, these amorphous voices are rarely heard in the mass media. Nevertheless, in the developed countries today, unlike in the 1960s, they are now in the majority. This is symbolized by the OWS slogan, "we are the 99%." In 1968, only a minority of people were not organized formally. Their existence was symbolized by the students and artists who voiced their objections to the corporate system. This is the big difference between 1968, which was a rebellion by a minority and 2011, which was a protest by the 99%.

Even when the unorganized have become a majority, however, it is hard to see this recasting a political system that was built in the twentieth century. In 2011, there were frequent demonstrations for direct democracy not only in Japan but around the world. At the same time, however, despite the upsurge in such movements, they have had little direct effect on electoral outcomes. Bringing these kinds of voices together will therefore be a major issue for the future, not only in Japan but around the world. If they can come together, they may be able to bring about policy changes through the weight of public opinion or through other means even without majority representation in parliament.

As an example of what this might look like, consider the meeting between MCAN representatives and then prime minister Noda Yoshihiko in the summer of 2012 and the subsequent decision by the DPJ that "nuclear power be phased out completely by 2040." In this case, a small group inside the DPJ, including former prime minister Kan Naoto, started working with MCAN. At that time, former chief party secretary Ozawa Ichirō's group was agitating against the party leadership. The DPJ was preparing for a

September leadership ballot and Noda needed the support of Kan's group in order to remain in office. Protests involving tens of thousands of people were taking place outside the prime minister's residence every week and Friday protests had commenced in 87 cities around the country. In this context, a group of nameless activists from the cognitive precariat met with the prime minister and the government decided to abolish nuclear power. This was only possible due to the intersection of a growing movement with a favorable political opportunity structure. Nuclear power is already an expensive industry to maintain and only a small section of society benefits from it. On an issue like this, even a movement without a formal organization can be politically effective.

### The Future of Social Movements in Japan

In the five years since 2011, a change has taken place in Japanese society. The rallies against the security legislation in the summer of 2015 were much more widely reported in the mass media than the antinuclear movement was in 2012. Furthermore, the student group SEALDs (Students Environmental Action for Liberal Democracy) that was struggling against the security legislation in the summer of 2015 was gaining momentum. The group was begun by a number of people who were ordinary participants in the protests outside the prime minister's residence during the antinuclear movement in 2012. Okuda Aki, one of the central members of SEALDs, used Twitter to gather about 300 students to the protest outside the prime minister's residence in summer 2012. Later, the group organized debates about the state of Japanese society.<sup>51</sup> This was the origin of SEALDs.



Protest against militarism of Abe administration

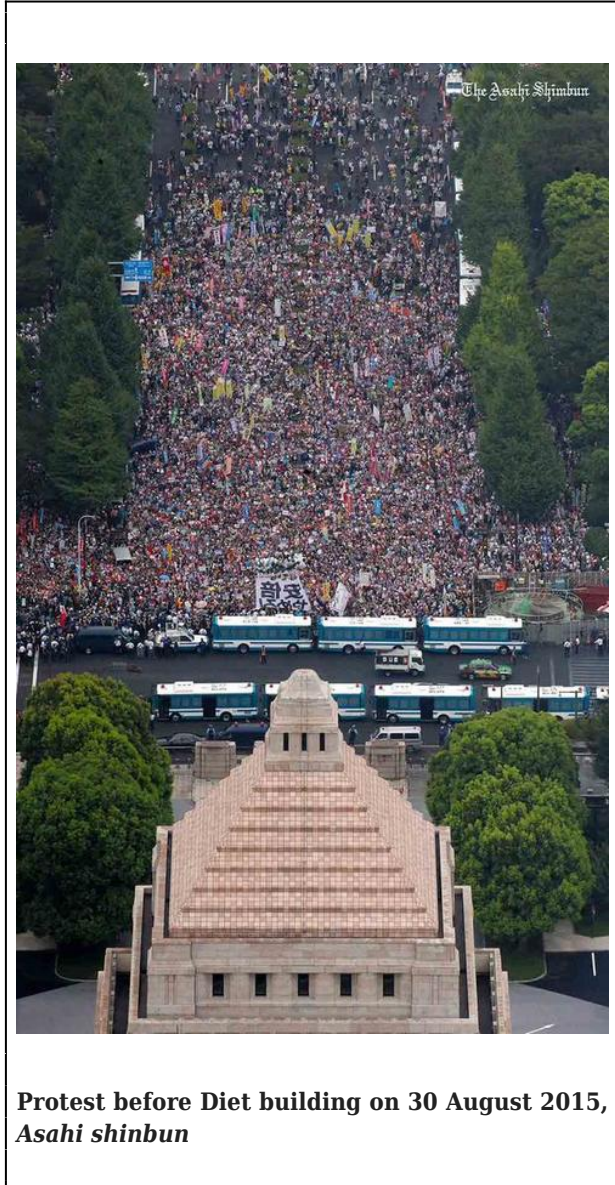
Whereas salarymen and students did not figure prominently among the activists in 2012, the appearance of SEALDs demonstrates a change in Japanese society. Behind this change is the continuing stagnation of the economy and the accompanying increase in precariousness. In an August 2015 interview, Okuda said that, "after doing this for a year we realized that about half our membership were having trouble finding housing or had accumulated debt from student loans of up to ¥6 million (US\$50,000). Some of them are struggling day to day and do not have the money to pay for transport to our meetings. They don't even have a spare few hundred yen".<sup>52</sup> In 2012, students did not seem to have been a significant part of the "cognitive precariat." This has started to change.

The composition of SEALDs is almost identical to that of the antinuclear groups discussed in this essay. There are 20–30 central members and about 150 peripheral members. SEALDs does not have a physical office and the group disseminates information through its homepage and via SNS. They use music and design effectively to communicate their message. On the day of a protest they set up a public address system and a stage outside the National Diet but they do not know how many people will turn up on the day. Women and men of all ages come to their events. While the mass



media have likened the group to a return to the 1960s, the age-distribution of the participants in 2015 is completely different. Only students took part in mobilizations by the student self-governing bodies mobilized in the 1960s. In 2015, however, the forms of mobilization changed and students were not the only ones who turn out. Although the organizers of SEALDs are students, people from all walks of life come to their events. It would be more accurate to refer to the group not as a “student movement” but as a “social movement with student organizers.” I overheard one Japanese reporter who watched a SEALDs rally in summer 2015 comment that, “although I heard that this was a revival of the student movement, I was a bit disappointed because most of the participants do not seem to be students.” This comment demonstrates the continued inability of some in the mainstream media to understand the new organizing style.

Since 2012, a culture of gathering outside the prime minister’s residence to protest has put down strong roots. Since the movement against the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty in 1960, there have been restrictions on political demonstrations near the National Diet and the prime minister’s residence. When MCAN began holding protests on the sidewalk outside the prime minister’s residence in 2012, the police tolerated them because of the small number of participants and because public opinion opposed nuclear power. The expansion of these protests in the summer of that year established the area around the prime minister’s residence and the National Diet as a place of protest. Since the summer of 2012, MCAN activists have held protests in this zone every Friday. The December 16, 2015 protest was the 176<sup>th</sup> such event. The protests have continued in 2016, for example, with 6,000 demonstrators on March 12.<sup>1</sup> The demonstrators have negotiated effectively with police in order to maintain this zone as a place where protest can take place since 2012.



**Protest before Diet building on 30 August 2015, Asahi shinbun**

After becoming a space of protest during antinuclear protests in 2012, the area in front of the National Diet has witnessed the movement against the Designated Secrets Protection Bill (*tokutei himitsu hogo hōan*) in 2013 and the movement opposing cabinet decisions on national security in 2014. In 2013, SEALDs members organized as SASPL (Students Against the Secret Protection Law) to oppose the Designated Secrets Protection Bill and also protested outside the Diet. Since the summer of 2015, SEALDs has held protests adjacent to the Diet every Friday between 6 and 8 o’clock in the evening to coincide with



MCAN's protests. The protests during the 2015 movement against the security legislation were an extension of SEALDs' earlier activities. The rally of 120,000 that took place outside the National Diet on August 30, 2015, did not appear out of nowhere. It was the product of the political context that has been developing since 2011.<sup>53</sup> As someone who has been researching these movements since 2011, I can say that the nature of the movement has remained consistent. The biggest change has been the attention SEALDs has gained from the mass media and the new common sense in Japan and abroad that this kind of movement exists in Japan.

Flexible and in tune with precarity, MCAN and SEALDs symbolize twenty-first century society. They do not have a formal organization but connect via the internet. They are not made up of people from a specific generation or with other fixed characteristics. They have an entirely different character to the twentieth century economic and political system symbolized by the nuclear industry and the LDP. As a result, they cannot exert much influence within the political system that retains many of its twentieth century features. Like similar movements in New York, Hong Kong and around the world, the peak of the movements in Tokyo in 2012 and 2015 lasted for approximately two months. But the nuclear industry and the LDP are like a boulder that is growing smaller and the new wave represented by these movements is getting stronger. A movement that lacks formal organizations will inevitably experience peaks and troughs. But the twentieth century political system is out of harmony with twenty-first century society. Its disutility has become widely recognized and the discontent that is accumulating within it cannot be easily resolved. As long as this state of affairs continues, twenty-first century style movements will appear again and again in response to different issues.



This problem is not limited to Japan or to the issue of nuclear power. It involves people all over the world who are searching for the conditions for a functional democracy in contemporary societies characterized by ever-deepening processes of globalization, informationalization and precarity. Since Cairo, New York, Madrid and Tokyo, similar movements have occurred in Taiwan and Hong Kong. International comparative research is needed in order to grasp the character of these movements.

In an interview in September 2015, SEALDs activist Okuda commented on the protests outside the prime minister's residence. "I am protesting outside the National Diet every week because I saw the demonstrations that took place in 2012. Now the next generation is watching our movement. Perhaps they will start something that will take us to the next stage."<sup>54</sup> Forty years after the stable and prosperous era of "Japan as Number One," Japanese society is entering a new phase.

*This is an expanded and updated version of the data and analysis I published in Japanese in 2013.<sup>55</sup> Images of the movement and interviews with some of the main actors can be viewed in*

the film I directed, *Tell the Prime Minister* (2015).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Protesters rally in front of PM office, Diet calling for an end to nuclear power," *Mainichi Shimbun*, March 12, 2016. For a useful overview of the various movements, see Machimura Takashi et al., "3.11 ikō ni okeru 'datsu genpatsu undō' no tayōsei to jūyōsei," *Hitotsubashi daigaku shakaigaku* 7 (2015). As I will discuss below, MCAN, the object of the research in this essay, and other new movement groups, did not respond to Machimura's survey.

<sup>2</sup> This figure was given by the organizers. In Japan, the attendance figures released by rally organizers and those released by the police differ significantly. This difference has been particularly striking since 2011. One reason for the discrepancy is that there was a lot of coming and going from the regular protests that took place in the vicinity of the prime minister's residence and the National Diet from 2012. In a protest that lasted from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m., one person might arrive at 7:30 while another might come at 6 and be gone by 7. The organizing group emphasized the fact that someone had participated and counted this example as two participants. The police, however, looked at things from a traffic control perspective. As only one person was in the street at any one time they counted this example as one. Some people believe that, for political reasons, the organizers tend to inflate the numbers while the police announce smaller numbers but this has not been substantiated.

<sup>3</sup> Noriko Manabe, "Music in Japanese Antinuclear Demonstrations: The Evolution of a Contentious Performance Model," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 11, no. 42.3 (October 2013); Alexander Brown and Vera Mackie, "Introduction: Art and Activism in Post-Disaster Japan," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, 6.1 (February 2015); Noriko Manabe, *The Revolution will not Be Televised: Protest Music After Fukushima* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Ran Zwigenberg, "The Coming of a Second Sun": The 1956 Atoms for Peace Exhibit in Hiroshima and Japan's Embrace of Nuclear Power," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 10, iss. 6, no. 1 (February 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Takeda Tōru, *Watashitachi wa kō shite "genpatsu taikoku" o eranda* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron

shinsho rakure, 2011), 159–166.

<sup>6</sup> Takeda, *Watashitachi*, 142.

<sup>7</sup> The so-called “Three Power Source Development Laws” (*dengen sampō*) institutionalized the provision of subsidies derived from electric power profits to host municipalities. This led to a remarkable weakening of the antinuclear movement in host municipalities.

<sup>8</sup> The experience of war ought to be considered as part of the background to the JCP’s stance. There was a widespread sense at the time that Japan had lost the war to the US because of a lack of scientific and productive capacity.

<sup>9</sup> Even so, the JSP still did not make the antinuclear movement a major policy issue. Furthermore, in 1995, when the LDP and the JSP entered into a coalition government, the JSP dropped its opposition to nuclear power.

<sup>10</sup> Oguma Eiji, “Japan’s 1968: A Collective Reaction to Rapid Economic Growth in an Age of Turmoil,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 13, iss. 11, no. 1 (April 2015), <http://japanfocus.org/-Oguma-Eiji/4300/article.html>.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed account see, Oguma Eiji, “[Japan’s Nuclear Power and Anti-Nuclear Movement: From a Socio-Historical Perspective](#),” (Paper presented at the conference on Towards Long-term Sustainability: In Response to the 3/11 Earthquake and the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster, Center for Japanese Studies, University of California, Berkeley, April 20–21, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Young women with children in particular, formed the core of these movements. One reason for this was the obstacles to the social advancement of highly educated women in Japan in the 1970s and the 1980s. In 1985, Japan signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and enacted the Equal Employment Act. Until that time, women were openly discriminated against in employment. Highly educated women who could not find suitable work were forced to become full-time housewives. Some of these women had been involved in the student movement in 1968. These women had abundant free time, a thirst for knowledge and ample economic reserves. Such women played leading roles in the feminist movement, the environmental protection movement, the natural food movement and the antinuclear movement in the 1980s. These women led the antinuclear movement that appeared in Japan after the Chernobyl nuclear accident. At the time, these movements were referred to as “new social movements” or as the “antinuclear new wave.” In this essay, however, I do not refer to the urban middle class movements represented by these women as “new social movements.” As a result of changes in the economic structure brought about by deindustrialization, the number of full-time housewives in contemporary Japan has decreased. In the research conducted for this essay, housewives did not make up a large proportion of activists. What I refer to as “new social movements” in this essay are those that have appeared as Japan has become a post-industrial society. As I will explain, these movements began with the precariat movement. This kind of movement appeared on a large scale with the antinuclear movement after the Fukushima nuclear accident. In 1980s Japan, the urban movements in which housewives played a central role were referred to as “new social movements.” The background to these movements differed, however, from those in the US and in Europe. In the US and in Europe, manufacturing reached a peak in the 1960s. In Japan, however, the number of people employed in manufacturing peaked in 1991. That means that in the 1980s, the US and Europe had already become post-industrial societies but Japan was still an industrial society. The abundance of full-time housewives who would marry

workers with stable jobs was a product of industrial society. The “new social movements” centered on housewives in Japan belonged to the period when Japan was an industrial society. They were the result of a different social context than that in the US and Europe. One reason that social movements in Japan in the 1980s were referred to as “new social movements” in spite of these differences was due to the influence of contemporary social movement research in the US and Europe. In reality, however, the conditions in Japan actually differed from those in the US and Europe.

<sup>13</sup> Video footage from these demonstration can be viewed in Noriko Manabe, “Music in Japanese Antinuclear Demonstrations.”

<sup>14</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration* (Argo Navis Author Services, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> It must be borne in mind that respondents were not selected via random sampling. If, however, we look at the survey conducted at the same time by Machimura cited in note i, it is clear that it is very difficult to use random sampling with a movement of this kind. Machimura’s research group conducted their survey of “antinuclear movement” groups across Japan as follows. 1) They conducted a keyword search of articles in the *Asahi Shimbun* and the *Mainichi Shimbun* containing any of the keyword pairs “nuclear & citizen”, “nuclear & group”, “energy & citizen” or “energy & group” in articles between March 12, 2011 and March 31, 2012. They then compiled a list of groups mentioned in the articles. 2) They obtained the contact details of the 1600 groups thus extracted using the web and other public sources. 3) They posted a questionnaire to each group. Because it was clear that they could not gain a representative sample through newspaper articles alone, they 4) added all of the groups that exhibited at “The Global Conference for a Nuclear Power Free World” held in Yokohama on January 14, 2012. Of the 904 groups whose contact details were obtained and who were sent a copy of the questionnaire by post, the response rate was only 36.1%. I am not aware of any small groups such as MCAN that organized protest activities from 2011–2012 that responded to Machimura’s survey. The reasons for this are 1) these groups were not covered in the newspapers, 2) they do not maintain a physical office and so they can only be contacted via the web and 3) they were busy with pressing activities and did not respond to such surveys. As a result, the survey conducted by Machimura’s group is limited to those groups which have a physical office and were able to receive a questionnaire in the mail. Therefore, the survey found that 1) the number of groups who were active prior to the Fukushima nuclear accident was as high as 66% and 2) 42% of them were incorporated bodies. I do not mean to downplay the significance of this kind of survey. Regardless of the procedures used, however, such an orthodox survey is not actually a random sample. This method is not well suited to conducting research on extremely fluid contemporary social movements. As a result, the survey conducted by Machimura’s group, while it aimed for a random sample, was actually only able to capture the older, fixed part of Japan’s social movements. My survey can be considered as complementing that carried about Machimura’s group. For further details of my survey, including the complete responses see Oguma Eiji, ed., *Genpatsu o tomeru hitobito* (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Some respondents did not clearly specify their age but I was able to estimate it based on the life history they provided in their essays.

<sup>17</sup> All subsequent references to this series are from, *Koko kara-teiten kansoku•kokkai mae* <sup>Fixed</sup> Point Observations: Outside the National Diet], *Tōkyō Shimbun*, Morning edition. The columns appeared the day after the interviewee had taken part in the protests.

<sup>18</sup> This example is taken from “Friday night, outside the prime minister’s official residence”,



*Asahi Shimbun*, July 19, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> According to [an announcement on the group's homepage](#), the composition of MCAN changed in February 2014 from the original 13 groups that founded the organization on October 2012, to 11 groups and "other sympathetic individuals". See.

<sup>20</sup> MCAN spokesperson Misao Redwolf has 7,142 followers on Twitter. The official MCAN Twitter account has 23,664 followers. These figures are both current as at September 9, 2015. On September 19, 2015, an official Twitter account in the name of SEALDs had 59,261 followers and leading SEALDs member Okuda Aki had 24,384 followers.

<sup>21</sup> Email message to the author, August 24, 2015. I obtained permission to cite this source as it accurately reflects the attitudes of Japan's newspaper reporters.

<sup>22</sup> On Beheiren see, Oguma Eiji, *1968* (Tokyo: Shinyōsha, 2009), vol. 2, chap. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Noma Yasumichi, *Kinyō kantei mae kōgi* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 2012), 163.

<sup>24</sup> Taken from a comment made by Misao Redwolf in a roundtable discussion. See Oguma (ed), *Genpatsu o tomeru hitobito*, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Noma, *Kinyō kantei mae kōgi*, 36.

<sup>26</sup> Oguma, *Genpatsu o tomeru hitobito*, p. 145. From the response of an activist from Osaka.

<sup>27</sup> When asked about the future of Japan's nuclear power plants in a public opinion poll conducted by the *Asahi* newspaper group from August 22–23, 2015, 16% of respondents said "reduce them to zero immediately," 58% said "reduce them to zero in the near future" and 22% said "don't reduce them to zero." 28% were in favor of restarting existing nuclear reactors while 55% were opposed. *Asahi Shimbun*, August 8, 2015, Morning edition.

<sup>28</sup> "Jimintō soshiki, 'hōkai genshō' Aichi kenren tōinsū 3 bun no 1 ni gekihen," (*Nihon Kyōsantō Aichi ken iinkai* homepage, September 21, 2008), accessed August 25, 2015, <http://www.jcp-aichi.jp/minpou/080918-134937.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Noda Kazusa, "[Shōgeki no dēta 'ato 10 nen de jimintō no 9 wari ga takai suru'](#)," *President Online*, September 23, 2014, accessed August 25, 2015. After the LDP returned to power in December 2012, Diet members were assigned a quota and tried to increase party membership. This is said to have produced an increase in party membership from 730,000 in 2012 to 780,000 in 2013 and 890,000 in 2014. Noda claims, however, that regional LDP Diet members who were assigned a quota simply paid the membership fees themselves and that local residents were registered as party members in name only. They did so because they were afraid that if they could not achieve their quota they would not be re-endorsed by party headquarters. If they could maintain their endorsement then they could pay the membership fees out of the money they received from the party.

<sup>30</sup> On the effects of this electoral cooperation see the analysis in Sugawara Taku, *Yoron no kyokkai* (Kōbunsha shinsho 2009), chap. 2. The JSP and the People's New Party engaged in electoral cooperation with the DPJ. The JCP put forward a limited number of candidates in electoral districts where the competition was tight, thereby indirectly supporting the DPJ.

<sup>31</sup> Sugawara Taku, "Naze Jimintō wa sōsenkyo ni shōri shi, Abe naikaku wa shiji o atsumeteiru no ka," *Sight*, Spring, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> "Yoyatō taiketsu, jiriki no sa", *Asahi Shimbun*, April 3, 2015, Morning edition.

<sup>33</sup> "Datsu genpatsu shikō no hyō, bunsan", *Asahi Shimbun*, December 17, 2012, Morning edition.

<sup>34</sup> Noda, "Shokugeki no dēta."

<sup>35</sup> Gerald L. Curtis, *Election Campaigning, Japanese Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

<sup>36</sup> “*Dōnyū ga kasoku suru taiyō denchi, Nihon de wa 2030 nen ni 100GW made kakudai*,” *Smart Japan*, April 9, 2015, accessed August 27, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> The system had only nine regions in 1951. The tenth region was added in 1972, following the return of Okinawa to Japanese control.

<sup>38</sup> □Okada Hiroyuki, “Neage tanomi no denryoku kessan, hajimatta shinkoku na kyakubanare,” *Shūkan tōyō keizai*, November 21, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Okada, “Neage tanomi no denryoku kessan.”

<sup>40</sup> “Genpatsu no anzen kosuto minaoshi, jiko kakuritsu hangen o zentei,” *Asahi Shimbun*, April 16, 2015, Morning edition.

<sup>41</sup> “Genpatsu anzen hi, 2-3 chō en,” *Tōkyō Shimbun*, May 17, 2015, Morning edition.

<sup>42</sup> “*Nihon no genpatsu, saikadō tenbō wa 3 bun no 1 ika, 17 ki wa konnan ka*,” *Reuters*, April 2, 2014, accessed August 27, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> “Ikata 1 gōki hairō,” *Tōkyō Shinbun*, May 10, 2016, Morning edition.

<sup>44</sup> “Owatta ‘genpatsu zero’,” *Asahi Shimbun*, September 5, 2015, Evening edition.

<sup>45</sup> “Saikadō ni kōfukin 15 oku en,” *Asahi Shimbun*, January 1, 2015, Morning edition.

<sup>46</sup> Kawano Tarō, “Kokuhi tōnyū wa kokumin e no sekinin tenka,” *Shūkan ekonomisuto*, September 24, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Hiyoshino Wataru, “Dare mo, honki de kangaenai ‘genpatsu no mirai’,” *Shinchō*, vol. 45, June 2015, 51.

<sup>48</sup> I calculated this figure as follows. For each of the percentages for “scrapping nuclear power immediately,” “gradually phasing out nuclear power altogether” “not pursuing zero nuclear power” I multiplied the percentage of respondents who said they had voted for the LDP in each, giving a total of 26.61%. The LDP received 27.62% of the vote in proportionally represented constituencies in the 2012 House of Representatives elections, giving a gap of 1.01%. The number of informal votes in this House of Representatives election was 2.4% so I subtracted this from the “other, no reply” category of 7% giving 5.6%. If we assume that the number of LDP votes contained in this 5.6% is the remaining 1.01% then 18% of this group voted for the LDP. There is not much difference between this figure and the 16% of people who favored “scrapping nuclear power immediately” and voted for the LDP so it is probably too low. I then made a provisional calculation of the total percentage of votes obtained by the LDP of 27.62% at the slightly higher rate of 30%. If we assume that four tenths of those who replied “other, no reply” were LDP voters then the LDP’s reliance on the antinuclear vote is 68.5% (of whom, 7.6% favor scrapping nuclear power immediately) and if we assume seven tenths voted for the LDP then the party’s reliance on the antinuclear vote is 64.0% (of whom 7.1% favor scrapping nuclear power immediately). If we assume that 30% of the “other, no reply” category were LDP voters then the LDP’s reliance on the antinuclear vote is 70.9% (of whom 7.8% favor scrapping nuclear power immediately). Whichever figure we choose, these are merely estimates based on an exit poll, so no effort was made to achieve strict consistency.

<sup>49</sup> Oguma Eiji, “Weakened LDP power base allows Abe to run roughshod over, opposition,” *Asahi Shinbun*, July 7, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Hiyoshino, “Dare mo, honki de kangaenai ‘genpatsu no mira’,” 48.

<sup>51</sup> Okuda Aki, “Yūki, arui wa kake to shite,” special supplementary issue, *Gendai shisō*, October 2015, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Okuda, Yūki, interview, 59.

<sup>53</sup> The organizers claimed 120,000 people attended this rally while the police claimed 33,000. One possible reason for this discrepancy in the figures is discussed in footnote ii.

<sup>54</sup> “Kantei mae demo ‘seiji bunka o tsukuridashita,’” *Asahi Shimbun*. September 7, 2015, Evening edition.

<sup>55</sup> Oguma Eiji, “Mōten o saguriateta shikō”, in *Genpatsu o tomeru hitobito*, ed. Oguma Eiji (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū sha, 2013).