

## The 6-11 “Amateurs’ Revolt” Demonstration against Nuclear Power: A New Movement Style?

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### INTRODUCTION

On June 11, 2011, three months after the Great East Japan Earthquake, demonstrations urging authorities to “Eliminate Nuclear Generation” took place across the nation. The author participated in the downtown Shinjuku demonstration, which was organized by the thrift shop “*Shiroto No Ran* (素人の乱)” (Amateurs’ Revolt), which in turn was part of the larger “June 11 One Million People No-Nuke Action.” The following are my observations on this “new movement style.”

### A MOVING EXPERIENCE, A SHOCK, AND SHAKING THINGS UP

When the 6th WTO (World Trade Organization) Ministerial Meeting was held in Hong Kong in December 2005, activists from around the world conducted protest activities using various methods. Among them, much of the world’s attention was drawn to the demonstration with “Three Steps One Bow,” a South Korean farm group, in which the marchers would bow once after every three steps. Hong Kong citizens, until then displaying a somewhat tepid reaction, were instantly moved by it; some gave them food and even joined the demonstration (Coolcloud Collective 2005; Hong Kong Apple Daily 2005). This became a turning point; it broadened the knowledge of the reality of farmers—not only French farmers but also East Asian farmers who had been driven to the wall by the WTO’s open market policy.

Looking a little back in history, in 1968 Vietnamese

Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc self-immolated in protest of oppressive government policies. That action, ultimately, led to the collapse of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. In 1989, when Taiwan was still ruled by a oneparty dictatorship, activist Tē<sup>n</sup> Lâm-iông (Cheng Nan-jung), aiming to achieve Taiwanese independence, protested the oppression of the Kuomintang (the Nationalist Party) government by committing selfimmolation. Shocked by this event, Taiwanese citizens who had long been politically silent began to voice their views in public; they worked hard toward democratization in broader areas such as politics, newspapers, culture and the arts<sup>1</sup>. As a result, a series of reforms have been carried out since 1990, and those events are believed to be major factors in heightening the social desire to become an independent state<sup>2</sup>. Against this background, I used to think that the best quality in demonstration was “fierceness.”

However, once turbulent times subsided and social revolt is absorbed by the system, the general public would distance themselves from such actions. Or some may find those fierce actions too “ideological.” Since Japan’s social movements have become “quiet” after the fierce post-war leftist movements and student protests of the 1960s, the public would still regard them in a similar manner.

After 3-11 (the Great East Japan Earthquake), numerous groups decided to stand up against nuclear power generation. What surprised the public most was that, among those groups, “*Shiroto No Ran*” (Amateurs’ Revolt)<sup>3</sup> managed to mobilize

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15,000 citizens via the internet for the April 11th demonstration in Koenji, Tokyo. Characteristically, those people were mostly young, and, unlike traditionally organized demonstrators, many of them showed up voluntarily. They seemed to be more effective in the size of mobilization, if compared to the existing antinuclear groups. I wondered why activities like “*Shiroto No Ran*” were drawing public attention, what kind of activities do they do, and what role can they play in changing energy policy. Therefore I decided to participate in the demonstration on June 11.

demonstration. The citizens who came “voluntarily” seemed to have left already; all I saw in the park were groups with assertive banners such as “--- Council,” “--- Labor Union,” and “The Sanrizuka Struggle.” When I was looking around and listening to what they spoke, a representative of a left-wing group, “Group Against Hate Speech,” went up the platform and urged the audience, “If you want to get rid of nuclear power plants, you must use words different from ‘the people’s movement.’” Why, all of a sudden, is he giving this kind of talk? I wondered. As seen in a YouTube video which shows this assembly

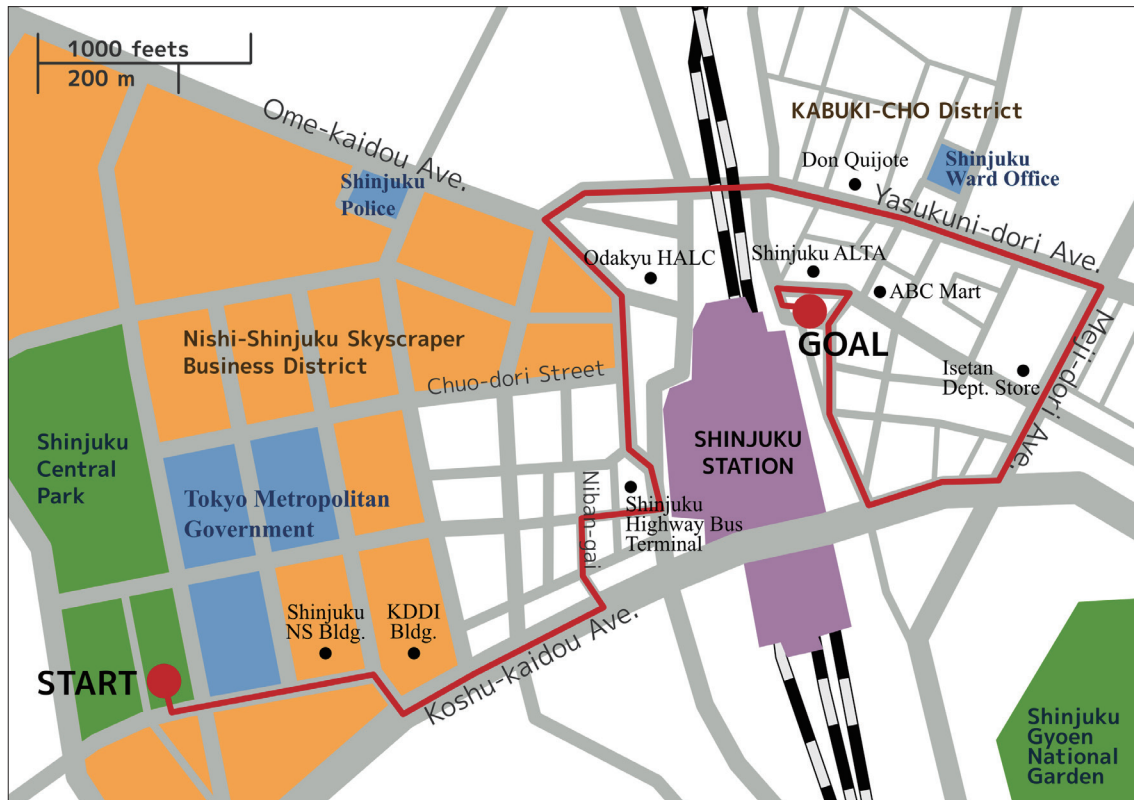


Figure 1 The Route Map of the June 11 Demonstration in Shinjuku

Note: The map is drafted by the editorial board, based on author's experience and the organizer's website, <http://611shinjuku.tumblr.com> (accessed on September 30, 2011).

## SPEECHES AT THE ASSEMBLY, DEMONSTRATION ROWS, AND THE REACTION OF LOCALS

I arrived at the assembly site, Shinjuku Central Park, at about 2:40 p.m., past the scheduled time to start the

and scuffles which happened there (Shimada 2011), it was actually a criticism against the assertion by the assembly's organizers that the demonstration should focus on just “anti-nuke,” then people will come. “The Group Against Hate Speech” was uneasy about any anti-nuclear movement that does not question

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the discriminatory structures, such as regional disparities or inequality in working conditions, behind the present state of nuclear power generation (Group Against Hate Speech 2011). Responding to such arguments, the organizer of this demonstration, earlier out of concern that ideological differences among participants may cause a conflict, finally cancelled the scheduled appearance of a leader of the



Photo 1 The head of demonstration  
Note: Photograph by author.

right-wing group, “United Front Volunteer Army.”

The protest march was divided into several rows. Standing at the head of each were police officers, prodding marchers to move forward or stay back. To me, that was a strange sight. Shot from a different angle, the picture would look as if the police were leading the demonstration. I cannot say if the police were protecting the peoples’ right to protest or just controlling the demonstration. While a Taiwanese group could use the whole area of the road, to my surprise, the march could use only one traffic lane. I had the feeling that its aim would be to downplay the demonstration and to limit the number of participants.

I joined the last row of the demonstration with hoisted banners such as those of the Tokyo Labor Union Exchange Center and the Federation of Cultural Clubs of Hosei University (Hosei Bun-ren). There, some placards read “Anti-Nuclear Power Generation, Anti-Unemployment” and “Nuclear Power Generation Is Too Costly.” At front, a young

woman was repeating the chants in a clear and cheerful voice, thus attracting much attention from local onlookers. Among them, I noticed a plain-clothes police officer busily taking notes.

Once on the Koshu-Kaido Avenue, I decided to join the row before us. The atmosphere of this group was quite different. They were more like an assembly of different individuals rather than a group, more like a festival than a demonstration. In place of cloth banners, they carried skateboards and cardboard placards; even though the atmosphere was as intense as that of the rearmost row, they were clearly having fun expressing themselves as opposed to striving to achieve their goal for their struggle. As I moved farther, a “sound car” came into sight. Many protestors around there were dancing to the rhythm of their music. As for the onlookers at the curb, while some were fascinated by what they saw, others had a quizzical look as if to say, “How come there are so many people here?” Gradually, the boundary between demonstrators and onlookers began to disappear; before I knew it, a great many spectators had joined the protestors. Still, I’m not really sure whether those people were in agreement with the protestors’ agenda or just wanted to walk behind them; I doubt that they even understood the reason for the protest.

Entering the narrow alley in Nishi Shinjuku 2-chome, onlookers’ reactions were slightly different, possibly because the protestors were interfering with business and blocking shoppers. Some of their expressions showed more of frustration such as, “What are they doing?” or “They are too loud.” Their reactions changed again around the Highway Bus Terminal in front of the station. Several passengers were waving their hands in support; I heard applause and saw thumbs up when we passed under an overpass in the direction of Odakyu Department Store. Increasingly, more people showed signs of support. However, by the time we were around Isetan Department

Store, before the Kabukicho district, onlookers with suspicious expressions emerged again. Some were even trying to pick a fight with demonstrators. My overall impression was that about half of the locals supported them while the rest were either opposed to them or felt uncomfortable.



Photo 2 Rally at the Square in front of Shinjuku ALTA  
Note: Photograph by author.

## LEFT WING? RIGHT WING? OPENING TO A THIRD WAY

At about 6 p.m., there was a huge crowd in front of Shinjuku ALTA, the end of the procession. According to the organizer, the number of participating protestors reached 20,000. Asked why they took part in the demonstration, most gave the same reply: they used to be indifferent to the issue of nuclear power safety, but in the wake of the Fukushima accidents, they felt compelled to take action. Also, many commented on the method of protest that day, "This type of demonstration is easier to leave and easier to join."

At the square in front of Shinjuku ALTA, I had

trouble catching speeches on election campaign pickup trucks along the streets. So, I decided to check on the surrounding areas. Members of the right-wing group "People's Group Against the Invasion of Japan" were gathered in front of the ABC Mart which was located diagonally across the street. They were yelling at the protesters on the other side of the street, "If you have so much time on your hands, go to Fukushima and clean up the debris there!" Furthermore, they were also telling the locals, "Folks, don't you think their behavior is strange? Today, they came here by electric train. Do you think they know what they are protesting?"

As mentioned in books on nuclear power generation and social movements such as *The Anti-Nuclear Power Movement and Politics* (Honda 2005), the anti-nuclear movement in postwar Japan has been beset by ups and downs. I had never really shared the "negative" images of protestors such as of "violent radicals" or "a gathering of ideological people" that the general public often had. But I began to gradually understand that from the following various events: when one of participants who is an actor made a comment, "We as the Japanese race must show more pride to the world; Japan should stand up ...," this expression was criticized by leftist groups; then it was followed by a leftist's argument that under the naive slogan such as "the people's movement" they cannot remove nuclear power plants; and there happened the clashes between the left and the right in front of Shinjuku ALTA. In that respect, the demonstration that the "*Shiroto No Ran*" tried to organize can be perceived as a new approach to go beyond the citizens' separation caused by ideological conflicts.

It is true that compared to conventional protest marches organized by groups long engaged in nuclear power plant issues, the "*Shiroto No Ran*" protestors are somewhat strange or seem to be "not serious enough." Yet, judging from what this group



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has done—specifically, trying to create “a fun place to stay” in Koenji, a place different from Japan’s “controlled society”—perhaps with this event as a turning point, they have established a place where they can freely express their views and then share them with other people. One difficult thing about social movements is that for every protest, they have to discover a method to express intensity to a degree befitting the event. One cannot solidify the structure of a protest movement with assertions only. On the other hand, if their arguments are too mild, they may lose the true purpose of their movement. Thus, in order to get closer to the appropriate “intensity,” they cannot obtain the expected results unless they catch the “tide of the times” to learn what society truly desires, and deliver a good “performance” by mobilizing as much power as possible.

We do not know how the Japanese government, electric corporations and the Keidanren (Japan Federation of Economic Organizations) will receive those voices of the citizens. Still, since the solution is up to those people on the receiving end, anti-nuclear movement groups have already done everything they could do. By contrast, the mass media, which has been controlled by the Federation of Electric Power Companies, has a major responsibility (Uchihashi 2011). The day after the 4-11 demonstration in which 15,000 people marched, only two newspapers, Mainichi and Tokyo, out of the major national papers reported the event. It could not have been more peculiar. This time, too, not much about the protest was reported in papers. I was so angry I wanted to say, “Aren’t you part of the mass media of a democratic nation?” This is not the issue of whether or not they agree. Not reporting the event means that the citizen’s right to have access to knowledge and right to think are violated. Unless we bring change to the status quo, including the situations described above, we will never see any change toward better

government policies, nuclear power or otherwise.

With the passage of time, how will the citizens’ social participation, which has gathered much momentum following the Fukushima nuclear accidents, progress? “*Shiroto No Ran*”, in its endeavor to create and regain “spaces” where the citizenry can freely express themselves, will certainly organize more events using new distinctive styles. And what kind of contributions and problems may emerge in relation to the highly specialized issue of anti-nuclear movement? Those will be questions worthy of continued attention.

## Notes

- 1 For more information on Tē<sup>n</sup> Lâm-iông (Cheng Nan-jung), refer to The Deng Liberty Foundation website (<http://www.nylon.org.tw/>).
- 2 To be independent from the Republic of China regime, end the dictatorship, and declare clearly that Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China have a coexisting nation-to-nation relationship.
- 3 “*Shiroto No Ran*” cannot quite be categorized as an activist group; it’s more of a loose network group. In 2005, its leader Hajime Matsumoto opened a thrift store in Koenji, Tokyo. While running the store, Matsumoto has organized protest activities using unconventional slogans and action methods that traditional protest groups do not use, e.g., the “Make the Rent Free!” and “Return My Bike!” demonstrations in protest against exorbitant rents and the removal of abandoned bicycles. At present, there are a variety of stores operating under the name of “*Shiroto No Ran*,” ranging from used goods and secondhand clothing stores to bars and cafeterias. The group even has its own Internet radio. For details, refer to publications including Matsumoto (2008).

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