

### Longing for the Right to Decide Nuclear Policy by Ourselves: Social Movements led by the Citizen Group Minna de Kimeyo in Tokyo Call for Referendums on Nuclear Policy

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#### INTRODUCTION

##### *Social Movements Calling for Many Local Referendums*

After the severe nuclear plant accident in Fukushima Daiichi, grassroots local social movements are calling for local governments to conduct local referendums on the appropriateness of restarting nuclear plants that are currently out of operation owing to periodic check-ups of the plants.

According to the Electricity Business Act, all nuclear power plants need to be checked every 400 days. After the Fukushima accident, nuclear power plants nationwide entered into this periodic check-up period one by one, but they could not be restarted. Consequently, by March 5, 2012, all nuclear power plants had stopped.

It is obvious that this unusual situation was brought about by growing public opinion against restarting the plants, questioning their safety.

Legally, an electric company may restart a plant after the periodic check-up only if the site city agrees and the prefectural governor approves doing so.

The site city and the prefecture have an incentive to restart, because they are often financially dependent on the subsidy for the operation of the plants given by the central government. This situation has been criticized, particularly following the Fukushima accident, on the basis that the current decision-making system sacrifices careful thought about safety.

Instead of the decision being made by the site governor and prefectural governor, the above-mentioned social movements demand that the decision be made by a referendum.

The social movements are led by the citizen group “Minna de Kimeyo (みんなで決めよう)” or “Let’s Decide Together.” The first two movements took place from winter 2011 to spring 2012 in Tokyo and Osaka, followed by two in Niigata and Shizuoka Prefectures this past summer.

As is well known, social movements calling for local referendums are not new in current Japan. According to Hajime Imai, there were over 400 local referendums on various issues in the past 15 years (Imai 2011:66). In terms of the nuclear energy issue, local residents who are opposed to invite nuclear plants to their city or town often organize a citizen group and call for a local referendum, especially after the well-known case of the Maki town in the Niigata Prefecture in 1996. Many scholars, such as Hasegawa (2003), Nakazawa (2005), and Ito et al. (2005), have reported on these local movements.

However, the movements led by Let’s Decide Together have different faces from those previous movements. The current movements took place not in the site city but in cities (the Osaka city’s case) and the metropolis (the Tokyo’s case) that do not have nuclear plants in their area. Although Niigata and Shizuoka Prefectures have nuclear power plants in their area, they have not so far questioned the

decision made by the subordinate site city. Therefore, the movements can now be regarded as an attempt to deprive the current decision makers of their up-to-now monopolization of decision rights, and change the scale of the decision-making sphere.

If these movements have different faces as explained above, we need to cast light on how they came to be this way. Namely, how did these movements occur away from the site cities? Social movements outside the site cities need to be supported by different people from the people who live near the plants feeling the risk of accident. What resources could the social movements use? How did the social movements frame their movements where they were not located at the actual sites?

To analyze this new political situation, I will focus on the Tokyo case in this study. In the next section, I will first describe how the movements progressed. Then, I will describe the context of the Tokyo movement. Finally, I will report the frame developed by the social movement and the difficulties caused by the setting of the frame that the participants faced.

## **PROGRESS OF THE TOKYO CASE**

### ***Until the Establishment***

The citizen group Let's Decide Together was established on June 25, 2011, three months after the Fukushima accident. The group leader, Hajime Imai, was a journalist and had written several books about referendums.

At the beginning, they intended to call for a referendum at the national level. However, because the referendum is not defined at the national level in Japanese law, the only thing the groups could do was to collect signatures and find a member of the Diet to submit the petition to the Diet.

In August, members of the groups decided that

they should first find a more concrete way to force referendums using the provision for referendums at the local government level. According to provision number 74 of the Local Autonomy Law, which applies at the metropolitan, prefecture, and city levels, citizens are entitled to call for the local governor to enact or abolish prefectural or municipal regulations if 1/50th of the residents sign an appropriate petition. The governor must hand in the bill drafted by the citizens to the assembly.

Using this provision of the Initiative, some social movements have succeeded in enacting a regulation to conduct a local referendum.

In October, members of the citizen group held a press interview and announced that they would collect signatures for such an initiative in Osaka and Tokyo.

According to the law, only residents who registered as "Juninsha (受任者)" or deputy at the local election administration commission can collect the signatures. Therefore, it was important for the citizen group to find as many deputies as possible before the actual signature collection period.

At the beginning of the collection period on December 11, 2011, the number of the deputies reached 9000 people.

### ***During the Signature Collection***

At the prefecture level, including the Tokyo metropolitan areas, the legal collection period lasts two month. Within this period, in the case of Tokyo, the citizen group had to collect signatures of 1/50th of the residents or 214,236 signatures.

However, this number is often not enough because for various reasons roughly 10% of the signatures are judged as invalid by the election administration commission. For example, a signature is unreadable; the date of the signature is not correct; and if one correction of the signature is not done correctly, all

the remaining signatures below it in the signature book can be judged invalid.

Aiming for a number far greater than the required 1/50th of the residents, deputies collected the signatures. During this period, deputies stood almost every day at public places such as the entrances of the Shinjuku, Shibuya, and Tachikawa stations, calling for signatures.

However, collecting signatures in this way had some problems. Every local election commission authorizes only at a municipal or a ward level. Accordingly, if one deputy lives in the Shinjuku ward for example, he/she must register at the commission in Shinjuku and may collect only signatures of Shinjuku ward residents. However, pedestrians came to Shinjuku station, from every other city in Tokyo. Therefore, deputies from various cities needed to stand there at the same spot.

Places for collecting signatures were also very restricted. Every public place, such as the entrance of a station, requires police permission for collection. It is prohibited to collect signatures in a workplace or in public buildings such as a city hall, community center, or university.

Surmounting these legal difficulties, the number of collected signatures reached 323,076. By the end of the period, there were 28,056 registered deputies.

### *Deliberation at the Assembly*

With more than 1/50th of residents' signatures were collected, the bill drafted by the citizen group was submitted to the metropolitan assembly in May 2012. However, the metropolitan governor Shintaro Ishihara made negative remarks about the bill, arguing that nuclear policy should be decided by the national government and that the subject was unsuitable for a local referendum.

At the committee for general affairs in the assembly, which discusses proposed laws before the plenary

session, the citizen group's bill was rejected. DPJ proposed an amendment that the right to vote on the bill be permitted only to Japanese residents above 20 years, as is usual in elections, not to those above 16 years and that resident aliens be included as specified in the citizen group's draft. Half of the members, or seven committee members, agreed with the proposal, while the remaining seven were against. Eventually, the chair of the committee voted against and the amendment was also rejected.

Because the amendment was rejected at the committee level, only the citizen group's original draft was handed in to the plenary session. Seikatsu sha Network, JCP, and some of the DPJ members voted for, but the other DPJ members and the ruling party Koumei and the LDP voted against. Ultimately, the draft was rejected, with 41 members approving against 82 members' opposition.

After the rejection, citizens who knew each other through the movement held a briefing session for participants in many cities. They invited members of the assembly to it. Some of them succeeded in networking the movement, and organized a new group with the intent of campaigning to prevent the reelection of assemblymen who voted against their bill in the next election in 2013.



Photo 1: A Citizen group collecting signatures in front of the Shibuya station exit, Tokyo on February 8, 2012.  
Note: Photograph by the author.

## CONTEXT OF THE TOKYO CASE

### *Origin of the Idea of Using Referendum*

In this section, I will review the historical background of the Tokyo case and examine the context of the movement.

In 1988, two years after the Chernobyl disaster, Japan had already witnessed a nationwide social movement calling for a referendum on whether Japan should continue to use nuclear energy. This action was inspired by the case of Sweden, which decided to abolish the use of nuclear energy on the basis of the results of a referendum.

The signatures reached over three million. However, the referendum did not take place. The signatures were brought to the Diet as a petition introduced by opposition party members. Although the movement got dozens of the members to sponsor the introduction, the then ruling party LDP and the nuclear-approval opposition party DSP rejected the draft in the committee of science and technology. After this defeat, anti-nuclear social movements severely declined. However, Hiroshi Honda considers this movement a forerunner of the success in Maki (Honda 2005: 222-224).

### *The Network and Experience of the Food Security Regulation Movement*

At that same time, there was another social movement taking place in Tokyo, also brought about by the Chernobyl disaster. Afraid of radioactive poisoning, in 1988, residents petitioned (without legal obligation) the metropolitan government with 11,000 signatures to enact a regulation that ensures food safety. In 1989, a consumer co-operative union, Seikatsu Club, led social movements as an initiative for food security regulation and succeeded in gathering 55,000 signatures (Ueno 2011:53).

Table 1 Number of signatures by each Ward, city, town, and village in Tokyo

	(A)Number of Signature	(B)1/50 residence	(A)/(B)	Existence of the Seikatsusha office
<b>Subtotal of Wards</b>	<b>198,286</b>	<b>146,356</b>	<b>135%</b>	
Setagaya	32,945	14,316	230%	○
Sibuya	5,248	3,518	149%	
Meguro	7,222	4,430	163%	○
Ota	16,321	11,537	141%	○
Minato	3,200	3,575	90%	
Shinagawa	9,342	6,131	152%	○
Koto	7,012	7,707	91%	○
Edogawa	13,758	10,636	129%	○
Chiyoda	1,117	831	134%	
Chuo	894	2,070	43%	
Suginami	19,324	9,200	210%	○
Nakano	9,456	5,310	178%	○
Sinjuku	6,615	5,056	131%	
Toshima	5,542	4,407	126%	○
Itabashi	12,066	8,833	137%	○
Kita	5,480	5,534	99%	
Nerima	21,974	11,566	190%	○
Adachi	3,496	10,748	33%	○
Katsushika	4,969	7,284	68%	
Arakawa	2,229	3,229	69%	
Taito	2,856	2,981	96%	
Sumida	2,039	4,142	49%	
Bunkyo	5,181	3,314	156%	
<b>Subtotal of Cities</b>	<b>145,627</b>	<b>66,437</b>	<b>219%</b>	
Nishitokyo	9,475	3,225	294%	○
Musashino	6,560	2,335	281%	○
Kodaira	6,394	2,950	217%	○
Koganei	5,066	1,906	266%	○
Kunitachi	4,770	1,232	387%	○
Kokubunji	6,265	1,930	325%	○
Higashikurume	3,940	1,890	208%	
Kiyose	1,908	1,208	158%	○
Higasimurayama	5,508	2,489	221%	○
Higashiyamato	2,366	1,360	174%	○
Tachikawa	4,703	2,908	162%	○
Akishima	3,957	1,846	214%	○
Ome	3,658	2,269	161%	○
Musashimurayama	991	1,125	88%	
Fussa	1,520	955	159%	○
Hamura	2,014	907	222%	
Akiruno	2,559	1,318	194%	
Machida	14,366	6,862	209%	○
Mitaka	7,246	2,960	245%	
Fuchu	7,846	4,046	194%	○
Chofu	10,590	3,654	290%	○
Komae	4,594	1,292	356%	○
Hachioji	15,902	9,112	175%	○
Hino	5,104	2,898	176%	○
Tama	5,385	2,416	223%	○
Inagi	2,940	1,343	219%	○
<b>Subtotal of Towns and Villages</b>	<b>2,907</b>	<b>1,398</b>	<b>208%</b>	
Mizuho	310	543	57%	
Hinode	680	276	246%	
Okutama	124	109	114%	
Hinohara	108	48	225%	
Hachijo	663	138	480%	
Oshima	422	142	297%	
Ogasawara	556	40	1390%	
Nijima	41	52	79%	
Miyake	3	50	6%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>346,820</b>	<b>214,235</b>	<b>162%</b>	

Note:

1. The number of the signature is before the confirmation by the election administration committee. Accordingly each number is slightly more than valid signatures.
2. Data by the Lets Decide Together HP(<http://kokumintohyo.com/branch/archives/934>), calculation by the author.

Although their bill was rejected by the municipal assembly, that experience succeeded in the current Tokyo case's movements for the initiative in 2012. The secretary general of Let's Decide Together was an office staff of the Seikatsusha Network, an affiliated political party of the Seikatsu Club. During the collection period, Seikatsusha opened its office to the deputies of the collection. Deputies in the cities where the offices were available could do their daily work much more easily (Table 1).

## FRAMINGS OF THE MOVEMENT

### *The Framings of Rights, Responsibility, and Democracy*

As written in the introduction, the movements could not directly advocate the fear of nuclear disaster which they could have if they had done social movements in the site city, because their location is far from the nuclear power plants.

Instead, they pushed their rights and responsibility for nuclear energy use based on their being consumers of the energy produced. The handbill that Let's Decide Together wrote for the collection deputies summarizes their stance well.

The accident at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear was caused by the Great Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster in East Japan. The nuclear plants of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) are located far from Tokyo. Until now, the energy produced there has been sent to Tokyo every day. Every resident who lives in the largest energy-consuming area should now think and decide about the future of nuclear energy.

The Tokyo metropolis, the largest consuming area, is the fifth largest stockholder of TEPCO. Accordingly, the residents of Tokyo are large

stockholders too.

This means that we have the right and responsibility to affect the business plan of TEPCO. To exercise this right and responsibility, we claim the right to enact a regulation for a local referendum.

(Translation by the author)

The other framing simultaneously used throughout the movement was the logic of democracy. As already mentioned, only the site city's governor and prefectural governor are included in the decision-making system. This caused the ability to question nuclear power promotion to be hampered institutionally. The movement criticized this situation.

Sociologist Shinji Miyadai, who committed to this movement and played a theorist role for it, repeatedly stated the following:

We don't intend to stop the use of nuclear energy.  
We intend to change the society that cannot (in its current form) stop using nuclear energy.

(Translation and words within clauses by the author)



Photo 2: A Citizen group collecting signatures in front of the Kunitachi station exit, Tokyo on February 9, 2012.  
Note: Photograph by the author.



### *Turmoil in the Street*

As these sentences show, this framing does not say anything about actual nuclear policy. However, most of the deputies in this movement actually favor decreasing or abolishing nuclear power plants. Accordingly, emotional turmoil can occur both between citizens and within individual citizens.

Occasionally, pedestrians hostile toward antinuclear movements would draw closer to a deputy and show disapproval, although the deputy claimed that people who favored nuclear energy but believed that the current decision-making system was problematic could also sign their signature book too.

On the other hand, some antinuclear activists, who the deputies anticipated would have friendlier attitudes toward the movement than those described above, were opposed to this movement and refused to sign, because they were not sure the results of the referendum would favor the antinuclear side.

The deputies' messages were not completely consistent. A man was confused after he heard one deputy's appeal. "You said," he asked, "this is not an antinuclear signature, but is just calling for a referendum. But they said to me, 'if you are antinuclear, please sign'. I would not sign if this signature is for that purpose."

I also witnessed that some deputy groups brought the flags of the movements to an antinuclear demonstration.

Some deputies can phrase their arguments in a way best suitable for the purpose of the movements. One deputy appealed to pedestrians saying, "If you still undecided about which side you should vote at the referendum, it's no problem. You have time to wrestle with the choices. What's important is the worrying itself. We should worry seriously about our energy's future."

Some deputy's appeals, on the other hand, seemed

to me to indicate inner emotional turmoil. One deputy wanted to state directly her stance that she was against nuclear energy, but she restrained herself so as to not deviate from the purpose of the social movements. She appealed, "I went to Fukushima and met children. We must think about our children's future. Therefore, we must decide the important things by ourselves."

### CONCLUSION

After the Fukushima accident, more and more people came to realize that they have been excluded from decision making, although the decision can bring hazardous consequences into their everyday life.

To penetrate into the decision-making sphere, citizens who were previously excluded from the system organized a social movement. Although this movement itself was new, the accumulation of experiences by previous movements on related issues, especially those following the Chernobyl disaster, made it easy to organize the movement. Nevertheless, to question the decision-making system and to question nuclear energy itself was a significant step. Consequently, participants of the movement experienced various turmoil.

Through the movement, participants came to know that nuclear promotion was protected by multiple institutional layers. Even if they want to widen the decision-making sphere, the law stipulating the initiative process in Japan functions to protect the current decision-making system, and eventually protects the current nuclear energy promotion system. Having experienced this, some citizens now continue the tug of the war of the politics of energy, using the network created during the movement.

## Notes

- 1 The Japanese government let the Kansai Electric Power Company restart the Oi nuclear power plants on July 1. On that day, the period of zero nuclear plant operation ended after two months.
- 2 According to the Electricity Business Act, the electric company may even restart nuclear plants without any approval of the others. However, most of the case electric companies conclude agreements with hosting cities and prefectures that the companies should have their approval when restarting.
- 3 Tokyo Shimbun, December 10, 2011 evening edition, p.1.
- 4 The number of votes by each party and faction were as follows. The members who approved the draft were DPJ(30), JCP(8), and Sekatsusha/Mirai(3). The members who opposed were LDP(37), Komei (23), DPJ(19), and independent member (3).
- 5 Some situations were different between the movements in 1989 and 2012. In 1989, Seikatsu Club was more active than in 2012 thanks to the availability of the full-time housewife with high education present in the society. And Unions such as Jichiro cooperated for the movements (Ueno 2011: 53). In 2012, Unions didn't declare cooperation.
- 6 Demonstration at the Kaikono Mori Park, Suginami, Tokyo, on February 19, 2012.
- 7 Appearance by a deputy at the exit of the Kunitachi Station, on January 26, 2012.
- 8 Appearance by a deputy at the exit of the Kunitachi Station, on January 26, 2012.

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