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Revival of the Deep-rooted Anti-Nuclear Power Social Movement in Kansai Region: Green Action

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Outline of the research

Date: September 22, 2012

Place: Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

Interviewee: Aileen Mioko Smith (アイリーン・美緒子・スミス), Director of Green Action (グリーン・アクション)

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to the reactor, or the “Plutonium-ThermalProject”, promoted by the Japanese government. One of Green Action’s successful campaigns, in collaboration with Mihama Group (美浜の会) was, for instance, to put the plan of using MOX fuel at the Takahama Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture in 1999 on hold for 10 years. This project exemplifies the fact that Green Action has been keenly following the development of the Japanese Plutonium-Thermal Project and providing information to both domestic and international citizen’s groups to establish active networks with other organizations.

Green Action has played a major role in the anti-nuclear power movements in Kansai region. After the serious nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima, Green Action once again has drawn considerable attention from the media.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

After the Fukushima accident, various “newcomer” organizations have begun to act on this energy-related issue. As they emerged, social movements focusing on the issue of nuclear power have become active. However, in our research, we find that the key factor affecting the activity of these social movements varies by locality. In fact, in Kansai region, long-established organizations became more active on the issue than they had been. To understand the nature of the movements in Kansai region after the accident, we interviewed the key person who has played a major role in the anti-nuclear power movements in Kyoto.

SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEW WITH GREEN ACTION

We had an opportunity to interview Ms. Aileen Mioko Smith, the founder of Green Action on September 22, 2012 at her office in Kyoto. In this article, I focus on the four points from the topics discussed in the interview.

The four points are about 1)the trend of financial aid policy to the anti-nuclear citizen’s groups, 2) the positive effect on the aging problem in Japanese social activism, 3)the rising of new associations in Kansai region, and 4)the creation of the emergency network.

PROFILE OF GREEN ACTION

Green Action was founded in 1991. Based in Kyoto, Green Action has been campaigning to stop the introduction of MOX (Mixed oxide) fuel

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Then I would like to focus on following two points in the interview. It is interesting to consider the potential of these associations in Kansai region and the emergency network, which Ms. Smith pointed to in the interview.



Photo 1 Ms. Aileen Mioko Smith
Note: photograph by Green Action

First, with respect to financial support, Green Action is supported mainly by foreign organizations. This support has become more firmly established after the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident. For example, an American founder which had financially supported Green Action for many years changed its financial aid policy for them. Prior to the accident, support was provided on a yearly basis; however, now it has been extended to every two years, thus expressing a commitment to longer term financial aid. While there are several funds which support anti-nuclear citizen's groups like Green Action in foreign countries, no significant funder exists in Japan except for The Takagi Fund for Citizen Science, even after the March 11th accident. However, the amount of money to Green Action from fund raising campaigns was doubled or even tripled after March 11, according

to Ms. Smith.

The second point is that the explosion of social movements triggered by the nuclear power plant accident can become the seeds for activism in the next generation. Green Action hopes some of these seeds will eventually blossom. One of the problems social activism in Japan faces is the aging of the key players who lead social movements. The majority of them are in their 60's or 70's now. Nevertheless, the accident in March inspired a number of younger leaders. For example, in Fukui Prefecture (福井県), a reggae singer, Sing J Roy, has started a campaign to stop Japanese plutonium programs as a part of his musical activities.

Thirdly, there were some new associations which were formed in Kansai region after the March 11th accident. Characteristic of these associations is that their members are mostly relatively young married parents whom Ms. Smith calls "Papa and Mamma groups". (パパ・ママグループ). Ms. Smith observed that these associations appear to be concerned with the issues as far as their everyday living environments are concerned (e.g. food safety in school meals, disposal methods of rubbles and debris from the earthquake-stricken area). Though they are interested in radioactivity issues, Ms. Smith is concerned that their goal does not seem to be termination of the nationwide plutonium programs. In fact, they are not always collaborating with Green Action.

Finally, organizations, which had never been in close collaboration with each other prior to the accident, functioned as one effective agent to provide emergency aid for Fukushima after March 11. Despite the fact that they had not had a close relationship previously, a number of various action groups called for cooperation with each other as if there was a "chain-reaction of coordination," and thus, establishing an emergency network.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The first is that it will be worth watching how these new associations which were formed in Kansai region will campaign in the wake of the March 11 accident. Will the actions that started from the concerns limited only to immediate living environments become independently based in a certain region or will they ever become nationwide political movements? If these actions became the former, in a positive or negative way, the factor of these actions could potentially create the infrastructure connected to the issue of political decentralization, which has been discussed in Japanese society. The decentralization also seems to be “orders from above”. These actions can become essentially the institution, which provide the alternative services in the region to bloated and rigid governmental public sector and profit motivated private sector.

Secondly, the new way of implementing emergency aid that has emerged in the wake of March 11th, in which a number of different action groups who had little prior knowledge of each other organized and collaborated with each other, can be understood as “one way of organizing a network-type organization”. The relationships were not strong under normal circumstances when it was not necessary to cooperate with each other. Organization know each other by name but their interaction are negligible. These ties can be called “absent ties” rather than “weak ties”, according to Mark S Granovetter (1973).

However, he also said that in some contexts like disasters negligible ties might be usefully distinguished from the absence of ties.

In fact, when circumstances required, a number of different action groups who had had “absent ties” succeeded in functioning as an intermediary, a network operating as a system in a state of

emergency. In other words, the network system was generated by chance by combining these ties. It is true that the ways by which these organizations are connected is not the same as those organized through a bureaucratic system.

The emergency network also included some organizations at least temporary to achieve the goal. The network can be called “one of the network-type organizations”. We can see the characteristic of the network-type organization after organization completed. After achieving the goal, the relations of the network are dissolved. These organizations which constituted the network-type organization acted for their each own goals.

In this sense, the network which we saw after the March 11th accident through the interview is a creation generated by chance, urgency, and emergence and is not generated by a certain intention that follows a pre-defined process or system.

Further Information :

Green Action(グリーン・アクション)

Web <http://www.greenaction-japan.org/>

Reference:

Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. “The Strength of Weak Ties.” *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6) : 1360–1380.