

How Anti-Nuclear Organizations View the Present Status and Future of the Anti-Nuclear Movement in Post-3.11 Japan

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INTRODUCTION

Though it seems to have lost the momentum it once had, activities by the anti-nuclear movement are still taking place throughout Japan. The organizations underpinning such activities are probably the citizen groups that have continuously operated since before the Great East Japan Earthquake in opposition to nuclear-power-related businesses. How do the organizations understand their current state of protests, especially after experiencing the spread of the large-scale protests in front of the office of the prime minister? By focusing on this question, I will examine the current state of the anti-nuclear movement as well as its future.

In this paper, I will use data obtained through interviews with members of multiple organizations that have led the anti-nuclear movement from the post-earthquake period to the present, focusing on what they think of the current state and future of the post-Great East Japan Earthquake anti-nuclear movement. In what follows, I will first describe the general development of the anti-nuclear movement. Then, after describing the interviews with the aforementioned organization members, I will conclude by presenting some points at issue related to the post-3.11 social changes that occurred through the anti-nuclear movement.

FROM THE ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENT IN 2011 TO PROTESTS IN FRONT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

The nuclear disaster at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, invigorated anti-nuclear movements throughout Japan. A review of the anti-nuclear movement of the past five years suggests there have been two trends.

The first is the fact that people who had not participated in social movements or citizen activities prior to the earthquake took part in this movement. For example, it has been noted that the number of people participating in the anti-nuclear movement for the first time increased thanks to a series of protests organized in Tokyo (e.g., Hirabayashi 2013). Certain circumstances must have led these first-timers to join in. A participant in the anti-nuclear demonstration organized in Shibuya on November 27, 2011, said, "I realized there is no place to express [opinions]" (November 27, 2011, interview with demonstration participants) and participated in the movement in search of places and spaces to express opinions on the situations and issues surrounding nuclear power generation. Or, as stated by Sono (2012: 122), "it makes no sense that the people become less interested when the situation is getting worse." People continued pleading for society to solve the nuclear power issue while keeping the conversation focused on nuclear power plants. In this way, immediately

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after the earthquake, the anti-nuclear movement had a space to protest against the social mood of self-restraint, or a space for expressing opinions and having discussions.

The second is the invigoration of citizen groups. For example, the Sayonara Nuclear Power Plants 10 Million People Action that has been held in Yoyogi Park on a regular basis since September 2011 is organized mainly by citizen groups such as the Japan Congress Against A- and H-Bombs (Gensuikin), Citizens' Nuclear Information Center (CNIC), and All Japan Anti-Nuclear Liaison Association. In short, the reason for the invigoration of these activities is the nuclear accident resulting from the earthquake. So, what changes do they want in Japanese society following the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident? I would like to take the flyer of the Sayonara Nuclear Power Plants 10 Million People Action as an example. Here, while aiming to realize a sustainable society and resolve energy problems, they make the following three demands: The first is a demand for the abandonment of nuclear power plants and planned decommissioning; the second is a demand for the disposal of nuclear fuel facilities; and the third is a demand for a reflection/review of the current energy policy.

Considering each proposal, we can see how anti-nuclear advocate groups perceive the problem; they are dissatisfied with the fact that the political situation has not changed despite the earthquake. Based on such a case, it is likely that nuclear-power-generation-related citizen groups were growing discontent with the unchanging political situation even after the nuclear power plant accident and invigorated the movement in an attempt to seek change. As described, we saw objections to the mood of self-restraint and dissatisfaction with the political situation being expressed in the post-disaster citizen activities that attempted to keep the issue alive. And we can say that the anti-nuclear movement formed a large wave

as a result of each group's and individual's concerns towards and awareness of the problem resonating.

In this way, the anti-nuclear movement, which was invigorated by various people and their awareness of the problem, later staged protests in front of the office of the prime minister, primarily led and organized by the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes after March 2012. Unlike previous anti-nuclear movements organized around multiple issues, these activities were characterized by being organized around a single issue; that is, "protests specifically against the office of the prime minister rather than criticisms of nuclear power in general" (Noma, 2013: 72). In terms of this development, it has been noted that while it aimed to "go beyond all ideologies to create a mass movement against nuclear power generation" (Hattori, 2016: 60), "loose arguments to abandon nuclear power generation would have been swallowed by the enormous power of the pro-nuclear groups" (Ibid.). Noma (2016: 80) also explains that "they just pleaded to change the policy." Oguma et al. (2016: 39) argue that many participants in these protests felt "anger about 'being treated with contempt,' which came from political alienation."

As described, the post-2012 anti-nuclear movement focused on the political situation surrounding nuclear power plants after the earthquake and, naturally, the people who gathered were angry about these issues. As a result, we can say that the post-2011 anti-nuclear movement reached its peak when it established "in front of the office of the prime minister" as a space to express people's anger (Hattori, 2016: 59-61). Moreover, this space continues to be a central place for protests in Japan.

In this way, since the summer of 2012, the anti-nuclear movement that reached its peak seems to have lost the heat it had immediately after the disaster. The topics of protests in front of the office of the prime minister have shifted to bills related to state secrecy and national security. If we were to look

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only at protests in front of the prime minister's office, issues relating to nuclear power generation may seem to be losing attention amid the other social problems in Japan.

Yet, there are still many organizations continuously operating today. How do these organizations look back at the period between 2011 and 2012 and plan to use the lessons learned? Going forward, this type of reflection will be necessary in exploring trends in the anti-nuclear movement and people's awareness of the problem.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF ANTI-NUCLEAR ADVOCATE GROUPS BASED ON THEIR SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

In what follows, I will describe, based on interviews with members of the various organizations involved in the anti-nuclear movement from 2011 to 2016, how each organization thinks about 1) how to understand the current state of the anti-nuclear movement and 2) future challenges for this movement. As for the organizations selected, I will discuss the CNIC and Gensuikin as central organizations involved in large-scale anti-nuclear events, such as the Sayonara Nuclear Power Plants 10 Million People Action described earlier and the Global Conference for a Nuclear Power Free World held in early 2012, and as organizations that began operating before the earthquake disaster and continue to operate today. In addition, I will discuss FoE Japan and elucidate a trend that can be seen in some of the new movements since the earthquake.

Understanding of the State of the Anti-Nuclear Movement from 2011 to 2016

The CNIC is an organization that collects, researches, and analyzes materials related to the dangers of

nuclear power from the standpoint of citizens who are independent from the industry. It disseminates that information with the aim of realizing a society that does not rely on nuclear power.

Regarding past strategies of anti-nuclear campaigns, a member of the CNIC noted that the problem was that they did not have any discussion at the campaign or Diet level in terms of how to change nuclear power policy and how society would be after abandoning nuclear power. In other words, it can be said that they could not become a forum to reflect people's anti-nuclear awareness in a political setting where political parties with anti-nuclear power views became divided, and that made the discussions such as how to stop the nuclear power plants and how to build a post-nuclear society unclear on multiple levels.

This member also said that "mobilizing (individuals) is difficult unless it's based on a large strategy" (CNIC interview, September 8, 2016) and also mentioned "the manpower has declined as the number of individuals involved in the organization decreased, making the same pattern (of mobilization) as before difficult" (same as above).

In this way, it is suggested that one of the challenges for the anti-nuclear movement after 2012 was the fact that advocate groups could not create a political impetus for the movement.

On the other hand, the protests in front of the office of the prime minister strongly advocated turning the nuclear power problem into a political task. Was this a unique move? How was it understood by the organizations?

What a member of Gensuikin said about this understanding makes it clear. Founded in 1965, Gensuikin is one of the largest anti-nuclear, peace advocate groups in Japan. They undertake all kinds of campaigns to oppose nuclear, including the "peaceful use" of nuclear power, in addition to their original tasks such as opposing nuclear experiments,

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eliminating nuclear weapons, and aiding atomic bomb survivors.

The Gensuikin member explained that the campaign could not lay out a concrete path for solving the issue because its criticism of nuclear power was focused solely on the political situation. The member stated:

“Neither the electric power company nor the government can be the first to say ‘let’s quit nuclear power generation.’ ...The industry is set up that way. It would be really nice to completely eliminate nuclear power generation right away, but just saying so does not make nuclear power generation go away. [...] No one can paint the picture as to how to persuade the industry and make a soft landing. Who draws the overall picture?”
(Gensuikin interview, September 15, 2016)

For example, my impression of the conference held in 2012 between Prime Minister Noda and the various organizations involved in the protest was that it was like a one-way dialogue in which the organizations only argued for the need to oppose nuclear power generation; the parties were expressing opinions at cross-purposes. Perhaps a path to explore each other’s compromise is also necessary.

The CNIC also indicated that they had not done this kind of concrete problem solving. The CNIC member stated likewise, “No concrete vision for after the elimination of nuclear power generation was presented in the movement in Tokyo. We just raised our voice to oppose nuclear power generation” (CNIC interview, September 8, 2016) and said “Why is it a good idea to gather here to raise our voice?” (same as above)—i.e., identified a problem where there is no longer a point in coming together for the movement and holding a large rally or making statements. In this way, turning the problems into one single issue

might have resulted in excluding proposals that considered the circumstances surrounding nuclear power generation. Furthermore, there is also a possibility that the state of the movement was one of the reasons why attention moved to other political issues unrelated to nuclear power generation.

Future Challenges as Perceived by Members of Anti-Nuclear Advocate Groups

Anti-nuclear advocate groups also showed some doubt about the “newness” of the movement and the danger of focusing only on that “newness.” For example, a Gensuikin member used the anti-nuclear movement after the Chernobyl accident as an example and spoke as follows:

“When a new movement emerged (like now) after the Chernobyl accident, they praised it as a new wave and gradually disregarded all old campaigns. Those people are not around anymore. Those who were disregarded for being “old wave” stuck around and kept at it steadily before and after 3.11. They might seem old-fashioned, but the groups always operate by thinking about the residents.”
(Gensuikin interview, September 15, 2016)

It is true that one of the factors that invigorated the movement after the earthquake was something considered as a new wave: participation at the individual level. However, we can say that these people are also the ones who rode a wave built on the movement created and maintained by the existing advocate groups. In other words, in order to unravel the modern anti-nuclear movement, it has to be regarded as an extension of the continuous anti-nuclear movement that began before the earthquake disaster. The effect of interactions between the existing advocate groups and newly participating individuals could become a point of discussion.

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Looking at the anti-nuclear movements of the past and present, the Saikado Soshi Zenkoku Network (National Network for Stopping the Restart of Nuclear Power Plants), which connects areas where nuclear power plants are located, can be named as an example we can use to think about the interaction between the existing advocacy organizations and individual newcomers.

According to the declaration at the inaugural rally held on November 10, 2012, this network was established on July 15 of the same year at a national networking meeting held by five organizations: Han Gempatsu Jichitai Giin/Shimin Renmei (Local Authority Representatives and Citizens' Federation for Anti-Nuclear), Saikadō Hantai! Zenkoku Akushon (Stop Resumption of Operation! National Action), Tentohiroba, Sutoppu Ōi Saikadō Genchi Akushon (Local Action for Stopping Reactivation of Ōi Nuclear Power Plant), and Tanpoposya, in order to stop the reactivation of nuclear power plants.

They acknowledged the need to connect with each other's power nationwide and united to strive to become a national organization (= movement) based on one goal: to realize a society without nuclear power.

For example, according to an interview with a CNIC member, organizations such as citizen groups, political organizations, and peace forums in each area are beginning to operate while cooperating with each other through this network.

Furthermore, the CNIC member indicated that this network has a positive impact on legal disputes in local courts. Legal disputes over nuclear power plants had been only a local movement in each location up until the earthquake; he said that the opportunity to share information had been rare and there had been no actions based on nationwide cooperation in the past.

In contrast, he indicated, today's legal disputes can be rolled out in cooperation with neighboring

locations through the network, invigorating the contention in the courts. As described, it can be said that the anti-nuclear movement in recent years has shifted the stage of its main activities from inner-cities to the sites of nuclear power plants. Such a change cannot be picked up by an examination that focuses only on the newness of the movement. In other words, we can see that grasping the pulse of the organizations that have spread from urban areas to each nuclear power plant site through the network is difficult based on discussions that focus only on the protests in front of the prime minister's office.

How the New Anti-Nuclear Movement Operates

Finally, now that five years have passed since the earthquake, I would like to touch on one of the new movements that have emerged.

I will now talk about FoE Japan, the most active participant in the post-earthquake anti-nuclear movement.

FoE Japan is an international environmental NGO working on environmental problems on a global scale; it has been operating in Japan since 1980. "We will keep looking ahead of the times to challenge large trends that are creating environmental and social problems and take initiatives not for the sake of taking actions but to obtain results" is probably the part of their statement that draws the most attention.

We can see that this attitude probably became the driver for becoming deeply involved in the anti-nuclear movement after the earthquake. According to a member of this organization, now that five years have passed since the earthquake, they deemed it necessary to guarantee the rights of people who suffered from the earthquake and nuclear power plant problems and launched a cooperative center for evacuation. He said that behind these actions was the understanding that they must support people in difficult situations due to the problems with the right and policy to send people back after the earthquake.

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In other words, it seems they are beginning to reinterpret the issue by linking the anti-nuclear issue with issues such as human rights and poverty. That is, the major difference from the anti-nuclear movement that peaked between 2011 and 2012 is the fact that people are again beginning to understand that nuclear power generation is a broad issue, rather than merely a political one.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the challenges for the post-earthquake movement indicated by the existing anti-nuclear advocate groups—particularly the ones that participated in the protests in front of the office of the prime minister—included the problem that they could not put forward a clear vision for a society without nuclear power because they focused only on the immediate elimination of nuclear power as a political issue.

Also, the challenges included the experience the existing advocacy groups were accumulating while focusing on the newness in inner-cities, as well as the existence of networks that are difficult to see on the surface. For example, as a negative impact of turning the movement into a political issue, Yamamoto (2016) presents one interesting suggestion. He argues that interest in the nuclear power issue declined due to changes in people's interests as the political situation changed, as well as competition among multiple issues. In other words, we can see that merely shouting about stopping nuclear power generation and decommissioning reactors and not being able to present any concrete alternative led people to turn their attention to other social issues.

We can suppose that taking these circumstances into account led to practical activities such as launching an initiative to support victims widely linked to the nuclear power issue and preventing the

reactivation of nuclear power plants.

We can say that the series of social movement waves following the earthquake—from the anti-nuclear movement to the anti-national security legislation demonstration—have succeeded in sending messages to society. That said, can we definitely say based on these facts that society changed after the earthquake, as indicated by previous studies? We can at least say that protests in front of the office of the prime minister and gatherings in urban areas have changed.

However, it can also be said that these changes came about based on “the connection to regional movements that have been continuing as a result of the efforts of people who have been active since long time ago” (CNIC interview, September 8, 2016). In other words, it may be that the social movements that were developing before the earthquake became apparent because of the earthquake. Social movement researchers need to continue to closely monitor the new trends in inner-city areas, the course of local history in each area, the changes in individual perception and feeling, and how these changes are likely to interact with each other.

Further Information

Citizens' Nuclear Information Center (CNIC) (原子力資料情報室)

<http://www.cnic.jp>

Japan Congress Against A- and H-Bombs(Gensuikin) (原水禁)

<http://www.peace-forum.com/gensuikin/No Nukes>

Tokyo(Tanpoposya)(たんぽぽ舎)

<https://www.tanpoposya.com/>

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