

What Should the Public Know?: Japanese Media Coverage on the Antinuclear Movement in Tokyo between March 11 and November 30, 2011

Keiichi SATOH

THE REPUTATION OF THE *TOKYO SHIMBUN* AMONG ACTIVISTS

Among Tokyo's antinuclear activists, one local newspaper is gaining a wide reputation: the Tokyo Shimbun. Many activists who participated in the demonstration at the Economic Ministry building on November 11, 2011 told me that they switched their newspaper subscription to the Tokyo Shimbun because "it correctly reported the antinuclear activities."

Favorable attitude toward the Tokyo Shimbun among activists could also be seen at the press conference held by the citizens' group Minna de Kimeyo (Everybody Decides) on November 12. When a reporter from the Tokyo Shimbun introduced himself before asking a question at the press conference, he received a sudden outburst of applause by the audience.

This enthusiastic support among activists for the Tokyo Shimbun results from their frustration concerning the lack of active media coverage on antinuclear movements. As Tan Uichi wrote in the previous issue of this magazine, a series of large, nationwide antinuclear demonstrations took place in Japan just three months after the Fukushima accident. A group of shop owners in Tokyo's Koenji district, calling themselves "*Shiro-to no ran* (素人の乱)" or "Amateur Protesters," organized one of the main demonstrations in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Approximately 20,000 people demonstrated at the event. As Tan criticized, even though this was one of the largest demonstrations in recent years, most of the mass

media provided minimal coverage. Following the Tan's essay, I will handle here two questions: 1) how does the Japanese media generally cover antinuclear movements? 2) How should we think about media coverage from the perspective to raise public opinion in society, especially after a severe nuclear accident has occurred?

Let me first show the media's coverage of antinuclear movement in Tokyo.

MASS MEDIA REPORT ON ANTINUCLEAR DEMONSTRATIONS

Demonstration Organizer Types

Table 1 on the following page lists the major antinuclear demonstrations that occurred in Tokyo between March 11 (the day of the Fukushima nuclear accident) and November 30, 2011. The first column of the table displays the type of the organizer for each demonstration. Roughly three types of organizer groups can be seen in Tokyo. The first group (Type A) consists of traditional activist groups that have a long history of antinuclear activism well before the Fukushima accident occurred. These groups are the largest, and they have strong and effective mobilizing power. The second (Type B) is a newly organized group formed after the Fukushima accident, which primarily focuses on shifting energy sources away from nuclear power to alternative renewable energy sources such as wind power. This type especially targets those who have previously not participated in antinuclear movements, such as mothers who are afraid of the impact of radiation on their children. The

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Table 1: Major Demonstrations and its Report by Each Newspaper in Tokyo between March 11 and November 11, 2011

Demonstration's Date, Organizer's type, place, number of participants	Tokyo Shimbun	Mainichi	Asahi	Yomiuri	Nikkei
Mar.27,(A), Ginza, 1,000		Mar.28,p.23(Overall),278 words,(S)			
Apr.10,(A),Shiba-Park, 2500		Apr.11, p.17 (Overall),278 words, (S)			Apr.11, p.34,160 words, (S)
Apr.10,(C),Koenji,150,000	Apr.11, p.12,300 words, (S)				
Apr.24,(A), Tepco Headquater, 3,000		Apr.25, p.19 (Society),227 words, (S)			
Apr.24,(B), Shibuya, 5,000			Apr.25, p.19 (Society),341 words, (S)		
May.7,(C), Shibuya, 15,000		May. 8, p.23 (Overall),292 words, (S)	Apr.25, p.38 (Society),484 words, (S)		
Jun.11,(A), Minato Ward, 6,000					
Jun.11,(B), Shibuya, 1,500			Jun.12, p.35 (Tama district), 877 words, (S)		
Jun.11,(C), Shinjuku, 20,000		Jun. 15(E), p.2 (Overall),2706 words, (F)			
Jun.11, whole series of Demonstration,78,899	Jun.12, p.26 (Overall),403 words, (S)	Jun.12, p.30 (Society),317 words, (S)	Jun.12, p.1, 455 words, (S) / Jun. 12, p.38, 744 words, (S)	Jun.12, p.38 (Society), 230 words, (S)	Jun.12, p.34, 306 words, (S)
Sep.11,(A), METI Building, 2,000	Sep.12(E), p.8 (Society),277 words, (S)	Sep.12(E), p.10 (Society),272 words, (S)			
Sep.11,(B), Shibuya, 900	Sep.12(E), p.8 (Society),277 words, (S)	Sep.13, p.28 (Activities),426 words, (S)			
Sep.11,(C), Shinjuku, 11,000	Sep.13, p.37 (Feature A),1328 words, (F)/ Sep.16, p.26 (Feature), 1356 words, (F)	Sep.13, p.27 (Overall),213 words, (S)		Sep.12(E), p.13 (Society),215 words, (S)	
Sep.11, whole series of Demonstration	Sep.13, p.37 (Feature B),1342 words, (F)/ Sep.16, p.24 (Tama District), 365 words, (S)	Sep.11, p.28 (Activities),620 words, (F)	Sep.12(E), p.14 (Society),605 words, (S)		
Sep.19, (A), Meiji Park, 60,000	Sep.20, p.1,506 words, (S)/ Sep.20, p.26 (Feature A), 1245 words, (F)/ Sep.20, p.26 (Feature B), 1245 words, (F)/ Sep.20, p.29 (Society), 1557 words, (S)	Sep.20, p.24 (Society),1028 words, (S)/ Sep.22, p.19 (Family),2695 words, (F)	Sep.20, p.1, 253 words, (S)	Sep.20, p.38 (Society), 241 words, (S)	Sep.20, p.34, 204 words, (S)
Oct.27-, (A), METI, ave.200/day		Nov. 2, p.2 (Overall),2714 words, (F)	Nov. 3, p.34 (Life), 453 words (F)		
Nov. 6, (B), Kichijoji, 700	Nov. 7, p.22 (Society),488 words, (S)				
Nov.11,(A),METI,1300	Nov. 11, p.1, 266 words, (S)		Nov. 11, p.38, 305 words, (S)		
Total Number of words	11,955 words	12,066 words	4,517 words	686 words	670 words

Notes:

1. Organizer's type: (A) traditional (B) New organizer (moderate), (C) New organizer (radical)
2. Number of the participants according to the organizer
3. News type's description: () section of the news; (E)Evening edition ; (S) Straight news; (F) Feature article

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Table 2: Report by Each Newspaper about Demonstration in Germany on March 26

	Tokyo Shimbun	Mainichi	Asahi	Yomiuri	Nikkei
	March 27, p.5 (foreign), 514 words " 200,000 Demo in Germany, Tohoku Great Disaster , Silent Prayer for Victims: Fukushima Accident"	March 28, p.4 (overall), 1862 words, "Tohoku Great Disaster, Call for review on NP spread worldwide	March 27, p.9 (foreign),197 words, "250,000 Demonstration in Germany call for stop the NP, because of Fukushima accident in four cities"/ March 28, p.5 (Overall), 3136 words, "Adverse Wind for NP, 250,000 Demo in Germany, French Russia, US straighten the safety"	March 28, 5.(foreign), 304 words, "Anti NP Demo in four cities in Germany"	March 29, p.8, 1281 words, "Anti NP opinion in EU, Anti NP legislator got seats in Local Govt in Germany and French, NP Constitutes 30% of Total Energy, difficult to stop"
<i>Total number of words</i>	514 words	1,862 words	3,333 words	304 words	1,281 words

third (Type C) is a newly formed group mentioned earlier as "Amateur Protestors." Similar to the Type B organized demonstrations, most of the demonstrators of Type C are also newcomers mostly mobilized through social networking applications such as Twitter and Facebook. However, their demonstration style is generally much more radical than those of Type B organizers and includes noisy drums and loud music.

Demonstration on June 11, 2011

Until the day of June 11 or three months after the Fukushima accident, each group individually planned its demonstration. During this time, most newspapers provided minimal coverage based only on what each of the newspaper’s reporters just happened to know. On June 11, all nationwide activists (including those who lived in Tokyo) jointly organized a series of demonstrations known as a "National Action." Since that time, a series of joint demonstrations has occurred once every three months: on September 11-19 and December 11.

The demonstration on June 11 was also the first one to be covered simultaneously by all major newspapers. However, the volume of articles differed widely among the newspapers. Middle-progressive newspapers such as the Asahi and the Mainichi provided substantial coverage while the economic newspaper Nikkei and the middle-conservative

Yomiuri devoted very little space to it. Apparently, the length of the report was based strongly upon each newspaper’s stance on the importance of the nuclear energy dependence.

Interestingly, the Tokyo Shimbun too provided minimal coverage to the event at that time. Why, then, did the newspaper gain such favorable support by the activists? I will answer this question later.

Although the Mainichi and the Asahi reported comparatively as much about the June 11 demonstration where a total of 78,899 people participated in the series of nationwide demonstrations, the coverage volume for this event on the next day of the event (Mainichi 317 words; Asahi 1,621 words) was much smaller compared to that for a demonstration in Germany on March 27. As shown in Table 2, the Mainichi dedicated 1,862 words and the Asahi more than 3,000 for the event.

It is fair to mention that the Mainichi covered the June 11 demonstration after four days as featured news with 2706 words. But still we can observe that as an overall trend, Japanese newspapers report a national case and a foreign case very differently, if we compare each newspaper’s word count on a national case on June 11(Table 1) and on a foreign case (Table 2).

Demonstration from September 11 to 19

The second "National Action" demonstration had



Photo 1: Demonstrators listening to a speech at a park in front of the ALTA studio in Shinjuku, Tokyo on September 11

Note: Photograph by the author.



Photo 2: Demonstrators writing messages on the fences built to obstruct the gathering at the park in front of the ALTA studio in Shinjuku, Tokyo on September 11

Note: Photograph by the author.

become more heated compared to the first. This time, tension between activists and police increased. For example, at the demonstration in Shinjuku, 12 demonstrators were arrested for allegedly expanding their ranks across the other side of the road, which was against regulations. In addition, they reportedly resorted to violence against the police. The organizer's groups, however, denied these official statements and argued that police control was especially hard that day and pedestrians were strongly prohibited from entering the ranks of demonstrators midway through the march.

I witnessed another case of control at the same demonstration which was harder than the one on June 11: Following the demonstration, a planned gathering

was to be held at a park at Shinjuku station, but most of the trees were enclosed by a fence and minimal space remained for the participants.

TO REPORT IT AS “VALUABLE”, OR TO MAKE IT “VALUABLE”?

Division Points before Reporting

Textbooks about news reports often explain that the contents and lengths of the articles must be decided according to its overall value for society. Whether an article is written (or not) and how long the article will be is individually evaluated by each newspaper. Looking at the data presented in Table 1, how is an event concerning antinuclear movement evaluated by each newspaper? I will focus on two examples: a sit-in demonstration in front of the Economics Ministry by the “Women from Fukushima” on October 27 and a gathering held by the Minna de Kimeyo group on November 12.

Let us first examine whether an event is covered. In the case of the sit-in demonstration, according to the organizer, the Yomiuri and Nikkei did not show up at the event, whereas the Asahi and Mainichi did. This was also the case for the Minna de Kimeyo gathering, which received coverage by the Asahi, Mainichi, and Tokyo Shimbun. This situation suggests that newspapers with a somewhat antinuclear stance cover the demonstrations actively while papers that favor nuclear energy usually neglect the events.

If the decision is made to actually cover the event, then what factors determine the overall length of the article? It depends on whether a newspaper chooses a straight news or feature article. Most of the demonstrations were reported in a straight news style and an article of this style tends to be very short because the event itself did not have many elements to constitute the news. On the other hand, feature articles are normally longer than the first one because

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Keiichi SATOH

it casts an event into a much broader context in relation to society. Therefore, feature articles often require more readiness by the reporter, and editorial desks must effectively analyze the meanings to society.

In the event of the “Women of Fukushima,” the Mainichi adopted the feature style while the Asahi used a straight news style. It is worth mentioning that both these newspapers as well as the Nikkei also chose feature style articles in their report of the German demonstration on March 27. Seemingly, the Japanese media tends to report foreign social movements more actively than domestic events.

Media’s Role for the Active Discussion

As is often argued, a reciprocal process occurs when evaluating an event for society: the media covers an event that is considered worth reporting on, while an event is evaluated as being important because it is being covered by the media. In this case, both the media and the event are simultaneously producing and changing the event’s value in society. Therefore, the value of an event cannot be evaluated by itself. We cannot say what the proper treatment of an event is in general. We can only argue the better treatment of an event based on each specific context.

Based on this stance, I will argue here that it is important to cover the antinuclear social movement in order to rouse public discussion from the following two aspects: 1) Many congress members still remain unclear concerning their positions on nuclear energy issues and citizen cannot effectively judge their opinions on the subject. 2) Japanese nuclear policies have been promoted in a situation where no governmental agency actually exists that can break its promotion. Therefore, in the current situation voices questioning its promotion only can be rouse from the outside of the government.

In regard to these conditions, social movements

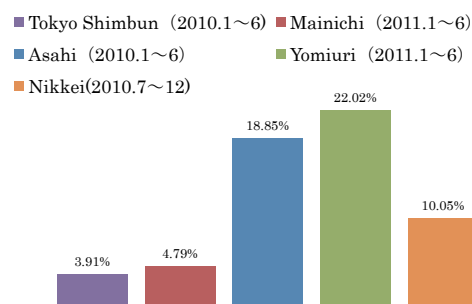


Figure 1: Circulation Rate of each newspaper in Tokyo
Note: Circulation Rate is calculated by the number of subscription in Tokyo divided by the total number of household in Tokyo.

can serve as a means to question future nuclear policies. Nuclear energy is now becoming an issue that representatives are unwilling to handle. As a result, the legislative and public spheres have become detached. The dangers of operating a nuclear power plant is often stated simply as a narrowly marginalized problem posed by local people who live near the plants, even though the Fukushima accident revealed a nationwide problem. As stated by Oe at the September 19 event, demonstrations were the only exercise of democratic action for antinuclear forces. However, as seen in Graph 1, the newspapers that actively reported on antinuclear demonstrations have fewer readers compared to others. Consequently, the majority of readers in Tokyo are less aware (or even unaware) of the existence of a nationwide objection to nuclear power.

It can be said that excessive reporting on antinuclear movements can actually harm the media’s neutral stance. However, a more positive way exists to guarantee such neutrality: report on the demonstrators’ arguments as well as people who are against such arguments within a single article.

After the accident, the use of social media has rapidly increased in Japan and people are becoming increasingly active, particularly in regard to acquiring information about the future of society in general. Why not, then, have the media commit to this society-wide project?