Anti-Nuclear Social Movements from the Perspective of Citizen Groups

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Seven years have passed since the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident. Though the swing-back to the nuclear energy is still expected, Japan has witnessed a wide change in energy policy. As of July 2018, nine power plants are working, 22 plants (including the six reactors at Fukushima) are to be decommissioned, and the remaining 27 plants are not operating.[1] The amount of renewable energy (including hydropower) accounted for 14.5% of the total energy generation in 2015, which indicates a 4.5% increase within a four-year period after the Fukushima accident (ISEP 2017: 74).

Although it is difficult to explain this rapid change through a small number of factors, one of the important aspects is the developed and persistent anti-nuclear public opinion among the citizens in Japan. In 2017, almost two-thirds of the population still supported the idea of decreasing the number of nuclear power plants. This stable public opinion since 2011 coincided with the upsurge of the anti-nuclear social movements, which contextualized the problem and strengthened the anti-nuclear sentiment among the citizens.

Nevertheless, there are still only a few studies about the anti-nuclear social movements after the Fukushima accident, as compared to the wide range of publications on the impact of the accident to society.

This does not necessarily mean there is a shortage of scholars who study the anti-antinuclear social movements. Quite the contrary, there were several important studies even before the Fukushima accident, such as the work by Koichi Hasegawa (2011; 2003) and Hiroshi Honda (2005), to name a few.

However, these scholars who had studied the anti-nuclear social movements even before the accident were rather pessimistic and skeptical on the impact of the social movements after the Fukushima accident. This skepticism is legitimate given their repeated experience of the ineffectiveness of anti-nuclear movements.

Not many environmental sociologists were involved in the studies on anti-nuclear social movements after the Fukushima accident—at least, not on a large scale. It is partly because most of them focused on the evacuees forced from the contaminated area by the radiation. For those who focused on evacuees, it was difficult to study the anti-nuclear social movements simultaneously because many of these evacuees or their relatives had worked in or had jobs related to power plants. Therefore, evacuees had an ambivalent attitude to the growing anti-social movements, especially to those which grew in the large cities (Yamamoto 2012; Kainuma 2012)

It was mostly "newcomers" to this topic who actively reported the social movements after the Fukushima accident. Among them, Yuko Hirabayashi (2013) conducted a survey among the participants in the demonstrations held three months after the

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Fukushima accident. Eiji Oguma (2013) edited the voice of the activists and published his own analysis of the process of the movement's progress (2013, 2016). He also produced a movie on the anti-nuclear movements (Oguma 2017). David Slater and his team (2014) conducted interviews with the people living in Tohoku region to reveal the micro-politics of the movements. Chigaya Kinoshita (2017), who attended demonstrations as "legal" (the role of negotiating with police and safely guiding the demonstration on the street), published his analysis of the process of anti-social movements from an insider point of view. Naoto Higuchi and his teams (Satoh et al. 2018) conducted a large-scale survey with the citizens in the metropolitan areas of Tokyo, asking about their experience of the movements. Anna Wiemann (2018) studied the organizational networks "e-shift", a social movement groups' coalition for nuclear phase-out and the promotion of renewable energy. Alexander Brown (2018) wrote a monograph on anti-nuclear protest in Tokyo based on his intensive fieldwork connecting the case with other global social movements.

Our research team "Study group on Infrastructure" (SGIS) can also be listed among the other newcomers. The main characteristic of our approach is that we focus particularly on the group or organization level, not the individual level. Even though, in contemporary social movements, many individual activists/activists are connected through the social network service and participate in the movement more "individually," we believe that the organizations still matter. Most of the demonstrations were still organized by organizations. People are sharing their information by creating groups. How were these groups formed? What kind of people participate in these organizations? How were social movements contextualized through these group dynamics? Moreover, people can sustain their activities through cooperation with other people, often through their members in the group. In short, organizations are the infrastructure for social movements.

In this special issue, we report our studies on the social movement organizations after the Fukushima accident.

The first paper provides the summary of our recently published book (Machimura & Satoh eds. 2016) based on our nationwide survey conducted in 2013.

The second paper provides a brief context to the ongoing nuclear power plant construction in Oma.

The third paper summarizes the interviews with the citizen activists in Hakodate through the lawsuit demanding a stop to the construction of the Oma power plant.

The fourth paper analyzes the evaluation of the anti-nuclear movements from the viewpoint of the groups which had long engaged in the anti-nuclear issues.

The fifth paper, Alexander Brown provides the summary of his aforementioned recently published book.

Last, but not least, SGIS conducted the second-round survey in February 2018 of citizen groups. This time we examined not only anti-nuclear groups, but also those engaged in the other issues, that is, peace issues and welfare issues. After the Fukushima accident the upsurge of social movements is now observable in these issues. (David Chiavacci and Julia Obinger (2018) describe this as a "new-protest cycle" in Japanese civil society). The focus of our second-round survey is therefore to reveal the connection of different social movements' organizations after the Fukushima accident. The original questionnaire and descriptive statistics of the responses are now available in the website of SIGIS (https://sgis.soc.hit-u.ac.jp/smos2018/). We will post regular updates to the analysis on the website for information.

Notes

1 “Japan’s Nuclear Power Plants” (nippon.com, published on July 19, 2018. https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00238/)

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