The Nuclear Politics and the Anti-Nukes Protests in Post-Fukushima Japan

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1. Introduction
After the devastating accident in Fukushima in 2011, the question of how to deal with the nuclear power plants came to the fore in the Japanese political landscape. During half a century of process involved in the building of 54 nuclear power plants, the issue was relatively depoliticized except in the regions where power plants were built. Since the disaster, however, various kinds of protest movements against nuclear power have flourished. The most prominent is the rally held in front of the Prime Minister’s Official Residence and around the National Diet every Friday evening. It has lasted for 3 years now. The purpose of this paper is to present an outline of this movement and to think about the political meaning of it in wider perspective.

2. A Brief Outline of the Nuclear Politics after Fukushima
The party in power at the time of the Fukushima accident in March 2011 was the DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan). The DPJ had just taken power in 2009. The conservative LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) had been in power for most of the time since its establishment in 1955; therefore all of Japan’s 54 nuclear power plants were built under LDP rule. Not all, but a majority of MPs in the LDP are in favor of nuclear energy.

The attitude of the ruling DPJ at that time was much more ambiguous. The DPJ contains both members for and against nuclear energy. After taking power, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama declared his administration’s aim to achieve a drastic reduction of CO₂ emissions, which entails an increased proportion of nuclear energy. In 2010, the Hatoyama administration’s Strategy for Economic Growth contained the exportation of nuclear reactors.

After Fukushima however, Prime Minister Naoto Kan stepped toward denuclearization. He stopped the Hamaoka Nuclear Plant in Shizuoka Prefecture, which was thought to be the most vulnerable to tsunami. The Kan administration also made a law to promote renewable energy.

After Kan resigned, the new Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda tried to restore the relationship with business that both Hatoyama and Kan administrations had ruined (Asahi Shimbun, October 10th, 2012). Restarting the nuclear plants was one of the key elements for this.

The reactors in each plant need periodic inspection every 13 months and have to stop their operation temporarily. After Fukushima, the DPJ government became more prudent in deciding to restart the reactors after inspection. Therefore, the number of reactors in operation gradually decreased and, on May 5th 2012, the last reactor stopped operation. Zero Operation was attained.
However, Noda looked for a way to restart the plants, facing the prospect that a terrible shortage of electricity would occur in summer. Noda explained that the operation of the Oi Nuclear Plant in Fukui Prefecture was necessary in order to protect people’s lives. In June, Noda decided to restart the Oi Plant. That lit the fire of the protest movement.

In August 2012, after restarting the Oi Plant, Noda had a meeting with eleven members of the protest movement against nukes by an arrangement of Kan. Though Noda did not make any concession, it was quite unusual that the Prime Minister had a meeting with members of social movements. Not only the conservative press and the opposition LDP, but also some members in the DPJ government, including some ministers, criticized it. Noda is conservative and seen to be unsympathetic to social movements. One typical episode is that at its peak in July 2012, it was reported that Noda called the voices of the demonstrators outside of the Official Residence “a large noise”. Therefore, the meeting of Noda with them was unexpected. The meeting was broadcasted on an internet TV program. This was also quite unusual.

In September 2012, the Noda administration settled “The Innovative Energy and Environmental Strategy”. Three principles of the Strategy are (1) Nuclear reactors that were used 40 years should be decommissioned, (2) The confirmation of the Nuclear Regulation Authority is needed before the restart, (3) New nuclear power plants would never be constructed. And the Strategy declares to stop the operation of all the nuclear power plants in the 2030s. Conservative newspapers criticized this decision as “populism” to cater to mass sentiments, calculating for the next election (Sankei Shimbun, September 8th, 2012; Yomiuri Shimbun, September 8th, 2012).

This New Strategy is not satisfactory to many members of the movements, most of which criticized Noda’s decision to restart the Oi Plant and asked for immediate denuclearization. Nonetheless, it is obvious that even this plan would never have been realized under LDP rule.

Hiromasa Yonekura, the Chairman of Keidanren (the Japan Federation of Economic Organization) got furious with this strategy in a press interview and stated “We would never accept such a strategy. We strongly request the government to formulate a responsible strategy from scratch”. Finally, the strategy was situated as a reference material not a formal decision of the Cabinet. That means that the Noda administration had announced an unacceptable policy for Keidanren without a consultation to them (Noma 2012: 235-236; Kan and Oguma 2013: 186).

At the Lower House Election in December 2012, the issue of how to deal with the nuclear power plants was mentioned in manifestoes of all the major parties for the first
time in history (Honda 2014). The LDP got a landslide victory at this election and returned to power. New Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared that his administration would restart the plants and that the government would reexamine thoroughly the nuclear policy of the DPJ administration. Abe’s administration is quite eager to restart the nuclear plants. They settled a new Strategic Energy Plan, and nuclear power was situated as an “important base-load power source” there. Abe is even quite enthusiastic for exportation of nuclear reactors as a key element of his strategy for economic growth. It was as if the Fukushima accident had never happened. Abe’s LDP won the next two national elections. Detailed information of those elections will be examined later.

3. A Brief Outline of the Anti-nukes Movement

The very first demonstrations after Fukushima accident are said to be the ones held on March 27th 2011 in Tokyo and Nagoya, about two weeks after the earthquake. A coalition of some long-standing anti-nukes groups had had only about 20 participants in each demonstration before Fukushima. However, they gathered 1,200 people on March 27th (Hirabayashi 2012: 66). Since then, various groups have started to organize demonstrations against nukes all over Japan. One of the biggest in an early stage was a demonstration held on April 10th that gathered 15,000 people. That was far beyond the expectation of the staffers who had organized it. Their demand was quite modest in hindsight: “Do an immediate inspection of all the reactors!”

Though these demonstrations were basically independent, in September 2011, 13 groups (including both old and new ones) formed a loose network named Hangenren (Shutoken Han-genpatsu Rengo), or Metropolitan Coalition against Nukes. They defined themselves as a network, not an organization, and had no representatives or leaders.

Hangenren started to rally every Friday evening in March 2012. They named their activity as “Friday Protest in front of the Prime Minister’s Official Residence”. Actually, people gathered not only in front of the Prime Minister’s Residence, but also in some other areas around the National Diet. Among the largest is the so-called “Speech Area” right in front of the main gate of the National Diet, where a temporarily prepared rostrum is situated and anybody can make a speech there. Speeches at the rally are full of information, such as latest news on nuclear plants, reports of activities in other regions, how to read between the lines of governmental announcement, and so on. The rally functions as a kind of alternative media. The rally is quite punctual. It starts at 6:00 p.m. and ends at 8:00 p.m. (in winter, it starts at 6:30).
The first rally in March 2012 gathered about 300 people. Though the numbers were around 1000 in April and May, they swelled in June after Noda showed a positive attitude toward restarting the Oi Plant.

Table 1. The number of participants in the rally in front of the Prime Minister’s Official Residence on Friday evening (2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>March 29th</th>
<th>April-May</th>
<th>June 1st</th>
<th>June 8th</th>
<th>June 15th</th>
<th>June 22nd</th>
<th>June 29th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>700-1,600</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>July 6th-13th</th>
<th>July 20th</th>
<th>July 27th</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November-December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>2,500*</td>
<td>40,000-80,000</td>
<td>27,000-40,000</td>
<td>7,000-35,000</td>
<td>5,000-10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A large demonstration was scheduled on 29th.
(Source: Kinoshita 2013b)

On the first Friday after Noda’s official announcement to restart the Oi plant, the number of participants grew to 45,000, and at the end of June it peaked at 200,000. The number was far beyond the expectation of both Hangenren and the police. People overflowed from sidewalks into the roadway three times. One Sunday demonstration in July also gathered 200,000.

Demonstrations and other types of protest activities against nukes appeared not only in Tokyo. Table 2 shows how the movements spread all over Japan.

The number of participants decreased thereafter, but the rally is still being held every Friday. A survey in July 2013 (one year after its peak) reported that about 15% of the participants were new faces who joined the rally for the first time on that day (Oguma 2013: 246). And the number of places where the anti-nuclear rallies are held on Friday evening has increased to 73 places at the end of August and 146 places in mid October. Hangenren did not encourage activists to rally outside Tokyo. People in each region organized rallies voluntarily. Some visited the Prime Minister’s Official Residence and started rallies in their hometown (Noma 2012: 240).

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1 The number of participants hereafter is based on estimates by Hangenren. The estimates by police are usually much fewer than that. The method of determining these estimates was written in Noma (2012: 78).
Table 2. The number of places where protest activities were held

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2011</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2011</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2012</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday rally in August, 2012</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday rally in October, 2012</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2012</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 10\textsuperscript{th}, 2013</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday rally in March, 2015</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Noma 2012; Kinoshita 2013b; The Website of Hangenren (http://coalitionagainstnukes.jp/?page_id=1567), Final access March 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2015)

Average participant numbers in recent rallies on Friday evenings are in the hundreds. However, Hangenren and other groups have organized larger Sunday demonstrations every three months. The latest one on March 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2015 gathered about 23,000.

On top of that many more people watch the demonstration and other activities through YouTube, as there are always broadcasts whenever a demonstration is held (Kinoshita 2013b). For example, although the participants on June 15\textsuperscript{th} numbered 12,000, a video posted on YouTube was played more than 100,000 times (Noma 2012: 104).

One observer (also a participant) paid attention to the fact that a considerably large number of the participants were taking photos during the rally. He pointed out that, considering that they would show the pictures to other people, spillover effects to non-participants would be quite large (Washio 2012).

New Participants: “Ordinary People”

Mass media often highlighted the young participants and those with small children. Participation of these people is seen as something new and it has been said that they characterizes the movement. Hangenren soon established “the Family Area” for people with children near the National Diet.

TV news is especially fond of this aspect. Young people or participants with small children were often interviewed. They were treated as “ordinary people” who had been seen as detached from politics and inappropriate to join the demonstrations. This aspect of the participants was frequently mentioned in TV news in various stations (Hoso o Kataru-kai Monitor Group 2012). It is because of them that even some TV stations which are usually unsympathetic to social movements picked up some of the
demonstrations. “Ordinary citizens without flags of labor unions” were also focused on frequently by mass media (Noma 2012: 160-162).

Though the Japanese police has often been criticized for its excessive policing, they are now trying “soft policing” at the anti-nukes rally. An officer of the Metropolitan Police Department put it as their intention to avoid the schema of “Police vs. Citizens” (Asahi Shimbun, June 7th, 2013). It became more difficult for the police to marginalize the participants of the rallies and demonstrations as “extremists”, as they are now deemed as “ordinary people”.

According to a sociologist Yuko Hirabayashi, who did research on participants in June 2011, about 40% of the participants was in their 20s and 30s. More conspicuous is the fact that 48% of participants said it was their first participation in demonstrations in their lives (Hirabayashi 2012).

According to the survey of the participants of anti-Iraqi War Demonstration in 2003, in which much attention was paid to “the new participants”, the rate of first participation in these kinds of activities was 10.9% (Yamamoto et al. 2003). Though surveyed in different way, 48% of the first participation in the anti-nukes demonstration in 2011 was quite high. Later in 2012 when many more people joined than June 2011, when Hirabayashi did her research, there must be more new faces. The power to attract those who had been detached from political activities was quite huge in this anti-nukes movement.

However, it is fair to say that the yield rate is much higher among seniors after the number of new participants in their 20s decreased. People in their 60s tend to stick to the movements longer than other generations (my observation).

4. How the movement developed: Conditions for Attracting People

Commentators have tried to explain why this rally had succeeded in attracting many participants. This section explores some conditions that could make these historic demonstrations possible.

Impact of the Accident Itself

First of all, it should be emphasized that the number of persons concerned was quite large. Many inhabitants of Tokyo experienced planned blackouts in early spring 2011, as it was predicted that the supply of electricity by TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) would be quite unstable: contaminated water was found in a water purification plant in Tokyo: parents with small children, not only from Fukushima but also from Tokyo or other eastern parts of Japan, evacuated to the west. This accident
was really a national experience. Radioactivity was a direct and concrete fear and concern.

The Anti-nukes movement has often been mentioned as one typical example of “new social movements”. According to Ronald Inglehart, post-materialistic values which are at the bases of “new social movements”, tend to develop in affluent societies where people are freed from immediate fear of hunger or physical insecurity (Inglehart 1990). However, once an accident really happens, the fear that people have to face is quite materialistic, such as “Am I going to develop cancer?” or “Is it appropriate to give this vegetable to children?” “Hot spots” where radiation doses are high were found in many places in the Kanto region, including some in suburbs of Tokyo. Oguma estimates that those who gathered information beyond the official announcement of the government, by doing things such as measuring radioactivity, were more than 10 million (Oguma 2013: 250).

In this sense, the accident had a quite concrete impact not only upon the people who had to evacuate from Fukushima, but also upon much wider population of Japan, many of whom were inhabitants of Tokyo.

**Distrust of the Government and the Nuclear Promoting System**

After the Fukushima accident, the government was severely criticized by its mismanagement of the disaster, and distrust of government spread widely. What the Kan administration and other sections of government did in order to avoid panic and confusion was often understood as camouflage to hide something serious. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano stated repeatedly, “There is no immediate impact on health”, whenever he appeared on press interviews. Edano’s mantra has become a buzz-word of the time, but a survey by social psychologists revealed that people did not take it as it was stated and interpreted that the accident would cause something detrimental in the future (Kawamoto 2013).

Since the accident, the structure of “Nuclear Power Village (a tight-knit community of legislators, regulators, and manufacturers involved in the promotion of nuclear power)” has become visible. The executives of TEPCO and scientists who had promoted nuclear power repeatedly mentioned “Soteigai (Beyond expectation)”. That means they could not even imagine that an earthquake and tsunami with such a magnitude would happen. Of course, it was intended to avoid their responsibilities. People who gathered information through the internet had an impression that “the specialists” who appeared on TV programs tended to minimize the impact of the accident.

Therefore, the criticisms were also upon a quadrangular or a pentagonal structure
that consists not only of electric power companies, the politicians who were receiving political donations from them, and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, but also of the researchers who get research funding and newspapers and TV stations that receive advertisements. It resembles the well-known collusive ties between the LDP, bureaucracy, and big business (iron triangle).

In this sense, distrust against the government did not turn up suddenly after the Fukushima accident. The public distrust of politicians, bureaucrats, and politics as a whole have been long-standing characteristics in Japanese society for some decades. After the end of the Cold War, independent voters (voters without affiliation) increased and a dichotomic view prevailed that contrasts “ordinary people” and “professionals in politics” (Otake 2003). It existed at the base of the historic change of the government from the long-standing LDP regime to the DPJ government in 2009. Populist sentiment against “the establishment” or “the elite” was also on the rise. That was also the basis of the support for the Nihon-Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) headed by a proficient populist Toru Hashimoto, who became quite popular by his heavy criticism of public servants.

Some pointed out that the anti-nukes demonstration expressed not only the discontent against the restart of the nuclear plant itself, but also the discontent against the politics as a whole (Hoso o Kataru-kai Monitor Group 2012). Eiji Oguma, a sociologist and also a frequent participant himself, interpreted that what the demonstrators really opposed was not just the restart of the Oi Plant, but the restart of the Japan before Fukushima (Kan and Oguma 2013: 182). The unchangeability of the old political landscape stood out especially after a historic catastrophe.

In short, what brought the DPJ government to power a couple of years ago provided a suitable environment for the growth of these protests, which in turn attacked the DPJ government.

Though the Anti-nukes movement had been a “minority” for nearly half a century (Hirabayasi 2011), the situation has completely changed since Fukushima. Participants had the feeling of majority themselves (Oguma 2013). Collusive relationships of the nuclear promoting system and its vested interests helped to form a sense of a wider “we”. One placard that appeared in New York, stating “TEPCO is 1%, we are 99%” expressed this sense properly (Williams 2012).

**Style of the Movement: Single-issue Principle**
The style of this movement has been mentioned as something new and which helped the mobilization of many people.
Among other things, they are basically “single issue” movements. Their purpose is
denuclearization only. Their flyers contain notes such as, “Please refrain from bringing
flags, banners and placards of any political claim unrelated to denuclearization”. Member
staffers of Hangenren ask the speakers at the Speech Area not to pick up
something unrelated to denuclearization. Although they do not stop the speech for the
reason that it deviates to other topics, they reconfirm the rule after the speech ends.

The most common Sprechchor in these rallies are “Saikado-Hantai (We oppose the
restart)” when no plants are in operation, or “Oi o Tomero (Stop the Oi Plant)” when only
the Oi plant was in operation.

Some criticized that although the movement is gathering a lot of people by the single
issue of denuclearization, they would not try to use the power to change the world
(Sugimura and Ogura 2012: 17). Others point out that the very goal of denuclearization
would not be able to be attained without the total transformation of the society
(Kinoshita et al. 2012). However, it is quite effective in attracting a various types of
people. This is both a strong and weak point.

As there are varieties of ideological tendencies in the participants from leftist
activists to quite conservative people, a strict single-issue principle was needed to hold
the network together. At the very first stage, there were many participants with
banners and flags of labour unions or other organizations. However, people with them in
their hands became inconspicuous as more and more new participants without
organizational backgrounds joined. In recent Friday regular rallies, we can hardly see
the labor unions’ flags, although there are some on Sunday demonstrations.

5. Significant Characteristics of the Movement

The anti-nukes movement after Fukushima is remarkable phenomenon in several
respects.

Size

First of all, it is often depicted as the largest since the movement against the New
Security Treaty with the U.S. in 1960. Social movements in Japan have been recognized
as stagnated for decades. One typical example is that the number of participants in the
anti-Iraqi War demonstration in 2003 was quite small compared to other countries. At
the time of the anti-Iraqi War movement, one activist of a Peace Movement stated when
he was told that participants of anti-war demonstrations in New York and London were
in the hundred thousands, “The maximum mobilization power of Japanese civil
movement is 20,000- 30,000.” “Unfortunately, that is the current power of Japanese
citizens” (Asahi Shimbun, March 2nd, 2003). However, the anti-nukes rally gathered
200,000 at its peak.

**Duration**

Secondly, their duration deserves special mention.

Their unexpected expansion in summer 2012 was so huge that some newspapers denounced the movement for losing its enthusiasm and energy in 2013 (*Asahi Shimbun*, March 7th, 2013). However it is not fair to conclude this, considering the historically long duration of this movement.

Oguma put it in historical context. For example, the anti-New Treaty movement of 1960 lasted for 3 months, the May Revolution in France in 1968 lasted for about 2 months, Korean Democratization in 1987 for a month, and the Egyptian Democratization in 2011 for 20 days (Oguma 2013: 245). As the rally on Friday evening is only for 2 hours, the meaning of the “duration” is completely different. Nonetheless, 3 years is long enough to be paid more attention.

**Voluntary Participation**

Thirdly, most participants in anti-nukes movements were individuals without organizational background.

Japanese citizens have been denounced for their passive attitudes to politics. Social scientists in the postwar era tried to modernize Japanese political culture and praised citizens’ voluntary political participation. “Voluntary” is contrasted here to the conventional ways of participation. Social movements in post-war Japan have often been criticized as organizational mobilizations. The executives of those organizations decided and ordered the members to join, and participants did not necessarily have to think out the meaning of the activities by themselves. Therefore, the protest movement against the New Security Treaty with the US in 1960 was lauded by many intellectuals because it was composed not only of established organizations like labor unions or student councils but also of ordinary citizens independent from those organizations. Some lauded it as the evidence that the civil society had established itself firmly in Japan. However, established organizations were much more prominent in 1960 than the demonstrations after Fukushima.

Predominance of the internet and social media as the sources of information on demonstrations and rallies signifies that majority of the participants are not mobilized by established organizations. One survey on the participants of the demonstration done at the early stage found that the top three sources of information by which they knew the demonstration were 1. Internet, 2. Twitter, 3. Word-of-mouth information. These
three consist of 70% (Hirabayashi, 2011). According to a research by other group in July 2012, the sources of information of the rally were 1. Twitter (39.9%), 2. Word-of-mouth information (17.3%), 3. Web (11.6%), 4. Facebook (6.7%), 5. TV (6.5%), 6. Newspaper (6.3%), 7. Announcement by organizations (6.1%) (Noma 2012: 162-163). We could say that established organizations do not have power to mobilize their members to demonstrations any more.

6. Consequences
To conclude, let me examine some consequences of this movement.

Electoral Impacts of the Nuclear Issue
There were at least three times that the Japanese electorates could express their preferences in nuclear policy after Fukushima. The Lower House Election was held in 2012 and 2014, the Upper House Election was held in 2013. The most pro-nukes LDP won successive victories in these three elections. However, it is difficult to see these results as electorates’ approval of the LDP’s nuclear policy. Take the 2012 election, for example, as it was the first general election after Fukushima.

Electoral manifestoes of most parties at this election headed toward denuclearization, although there remain differences in timing. However, the manifesto of the LDP, which was regarded as returning to power after the election, was quite ambiguous. On the one hand it states that “We aim for the economic and social structure in which we do not have to depend on nuclear power”. On the other hand, it states, “As for the restart of nuclear power plants, we will judge one by one, and aim to reach conclusions for all the plants within 3 years. As for safety, judgments are entrusted to the Nuclear Regulation Authority”. Apparently, the LDP was the most unenthusiastic about denuclearization among all of the major parties. The electoral manifesto of LDP was intended to obscure the difference of nuclear policies between parties and depoliticize the issue.

According to an exit poll at the polling stations, 14% favored “immediate zero operation”, a majority 64% favored “reach zero operation gradually”, and 15% favored “zero operation should be avoided” (Asahi Shimbun, December 17th, evening, 2012). Nonetheless, the LDP had a landslide victory.

Upon this electoral result, Chief Secretary of the LDP, Shigeru Ishiba stated that the “attitude to decide how to deal with the nuclear plants on a longer term basis of 3 or 10 years was approved rather than denuclearization” (Asahi Shimbun, December 12th, 2012). On the other hand, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Yukio Edano of the DPJ concluded that “all the votes of parties of denuclearization altogether exceed a
majority of proportional representation districts” (Asahi Shimbun, December 19, 2012).

Basically, this election was understood as the punishment for the DPJ, which had been blamed for its mismanagement during its 3 years in power (Horie 2014b). The landslide victory of the LDP was brought about by some factors such as single-member election system, too many candidates in the same district, low turnout and so on. For example, the LDP’s votes in proportional representation districts were 2 million fewer than the 2009 election in which the LDP experienced disastrous defeat. If the DPJ and opposition parties except for the LDP, Komei Party, and JCP (the Japanese Communist Party), could collaborate in limiting candidates to one in each district, their total seats would have exceeded that of the LDP-Komei Party Coalition (Asahi Shimbun, November 20th, 2014).

Though a majority of Japanese are still against the restart of nuclear plants (Horie 2014a), their oppositions are not strong enough to prioritize the issue at the top of the list by which they decide for which party or candidate they vote. According to the opinion poll just after the election, the electorates’ interests in policies at the time of election were, “Economy and employment” (35%), “Consumption Tax and Social Security” (30%), “Energy Problems including Nuclear Power Plants” (17%), “Constitutional Revision, Diplomacy, Military Security” (12%) and so on (Asahi Shimbun, December 19th, 2012). Asked in multiple-response questionnaires, issues emphasized by voters at the election were “Economic Policies” (62.0%), “Pensions” (43.2%), “Health Care and Nursing Care for the Elderly” (41.3%), “Consumption Tax” (38.8%), “Restoration from the Earthquake” (35.6%), “Nuclear Power Plant, Natural Resources and Energy” (32.3%), “Employment Measures” (29.7%), “Diplomacy and Military Defense” (27.4%), “Childcare and Education” (27.4%), “Participation in TPP” (17.4%) and so on. “Nuclear Power Plant, Natural Resources and Energy” is about half of the “Economic Policies” (Akarui Senkyo Suishin Kyokai 2013).

Direct Impacts
Not only are there some anti-demonstration criticisms from the conservative camp, there are also some comments that denounce the movement, stating that hundreds of thousands of people gathering in front of the Prime Minister’s Residence could not change anything (e.g. Sugimura and Ogura 2012). Electoral results stated earlier certainly discouraged a lot of participants of the protest movements or non-participants who are in favor of denuclearization. At the end of this paper, this section explores whether the protest has not changed anything.

On the other hand, one could say that the demonstration had some impacts upon
political processes of nuclear policy (Noma 2012; Kinoshita 2013a; Oguma 2013). Former Prime Minister Naoto Kan, for example, asserted that the anti-nukes rally had influenced the Noda administration’s decision because the General Election was coming soon (Kan and Oguma 2013: 184). In 2014 the Project Team of the LDP to examine the countermeasures to racist hate-speeches attempted to regulate demonstrations around the National Diet, as well. That could be counted as evidences supporting the claim that demonstrations had some impact upon politicians.

It has become more and more difficult to restart the plants, even for the Abe administration, which has enjoyed relatively high Cabinet approval rates. The new regulation set under the DPJ’s rule has made it difficult to pass the inspection and the Nuclear Regulation Authority, which was also established under the DPJ’s rule, is much more prudent than its predecessor agency. Other than the formal rule, members of the Authority feel psychological pressure to be more cautious and prudent than before.

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s decision of denuclearization has been applauded in Japan, as her government decided to stop all the nuclear plants by 2022. It has often been contrasted to the attitudes of Japanese government. The DPJ government barely set the policy to attain denuclearization in the 2030s, and the Abe administration of the LDP threw it away.

However, Japan has already experienced the zero operation moment twice. From May to July 2012, and from September 2013 to the present, not a single nuclear power plant was in operation.

**Impacts upon People’s Attitudes of Political Participation**

Although it has often been pointed out that much more plants would have restarted were it not for the movement (Noma 2012: 246-247), it is not so easy to verify that the policy makers were really affected by the movements. We could at least conclude that movements may have brought more indirect rather than direct influences upon Japanese politics.

Rallies and demonstrations that have been held right in the middle of Tokyo and other cities around the country, and that also have been played on the internet, have kept reminding non-participants of the tragedy of Fukushima and the danger of the nuclear power.

The other consequence is an impact upon citizens’ attitudes on political participation. Some have highly valued the meaning of the demonstration itself. This is an argument that sees demonstration not as just an instrument but as a purpose itself. Among the notable examples of this argument is a speech done by a well-known literary critic Kojin
Karatani, in a rally held in 2011. He said, “Demonstrations can certainly change a society because a society will become a society in which people demonstrate” (Karatani 2012).

Though it may sound like a word game, we can think that we are heading toward a society in which people demonstrate. One survey of 1,600 civic organizations done in 2013 asked about the activities they engaged in after the earthquake. According to it, 47% committed demonstrations after Fukushima. This figure was high next to (1) Symposium/Study meeting (74%), and (2) Commodity or monetary donation to the disaster-stricken areas (50%). Furthermore, this 47% is more than quadruple the result of similar research done in 2006 (Oguma 2013: 193–194).

Some rallies on topics other than nuclear power plants are often held in front of the Prime Minister’s Residence (Oguma 2013: 294). This could be understood as an effect of the anti-nukes protest. Some large demonstrations were organized at the enactment (2013) and enforcement (2014) of the Act on the Protection of Specifically Designated Secrets, and at the Cabinet’s decision to allow the use of the right of collective self-defense in 2014. Not a small number of people have pointed out that there would not have been such huge demonstrations if the anti-nukes protest had not existed earlier.

It is expected that normalization of demonstrations would heighten a sense of political efficacy of citizens. However, contrary to my expectation, the sense of political efficacy of demonstration has decreased from 2011 to 2013. According to an opinion poll, those who think demonstration has a power to bring some political change dropped from 44% to 28% (Asahi Shimbun, December 26th, 2011; June 26th, 2013). Though I can only guess the reason for this, as anti-nukes demonstrations were rarely reported by mass media before June of 2012, the former judgment may be based on the demonstrations abroad that were quite impressive in 2011. The anti-nukes demonstration after 2012 that could not even stop the restart of the Oi Plant was compared to demonstrations abroad, some of which had brought regime changes in 2011. Nonetheless, we could say that 28% is still high enough (Kinoshita 2013a).

Lowering the hurdle of participation to direct actions may be the other effect. It had been exaggerated for decades that activities like demonstrations are quite dangerous and done by very “special” kinds of people. It is expected that new participants including many young people have changed the image of demonstration. An officer of the National Police Agency admits that the anti-nukes demonstration after Fukushima contains a lot of women and people with children, and thus the psychological hurdle of ordinary citizens to participate had been lowered (Kinoshita 2013a: 308). One of the
activists said later that they needed to renew the common knowledge that “demonstration is something fearful” or “demonstrators are strange people” (Noma 2012: 136).

The Anti-Nukes Protest thus lowered the threshold to the participation in direct actions, and ameliorated the image of the demonstration. On top of that, the number of citizens who have ever joined demonstration was increased. Though the movement has diminished, an activist calls it “embers” which still have a potential to keep existing and burn again in the future. (Noma 2012: 258).

These conclusions may contain my wishful thinking. It depends on how much public attention they would be able to gather when the Abe Administration decides to restart the first plant after the longest period of zero operation.

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