Rejecting the Radical New Left: Transformations in Japanese Social Movements

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Abstract. After a disastrous period of New Left political violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, followed by two decades of abeyance, Japan has experienced a renewed era of social movement activity since the 1990s. These new movements explicitly seek to avoid contamination by the earlier period, even when their participants know little about it except for fear perpetuated by media portrayals of senseless violence. We analyze ethnographic accounts of contemporary groups engaged in collective action, ranging from small informal groups in Japan's invisible civil society; groups trying to mobilize laborers who fall outside Japan's traditional enterprise unions; and groups reviving and revitalizing older movement networks to deal with new threats; to new right-wing challengers and their counter-movements; and those making innovative use of cultural resources. They all seek alternatives to earlier social movements that engaged in political violence, by creating very different organizational structures and relations to ideology, relying on social media for communication, and developing new forms of collective action. They foreground cultural and expressive repertoires, and seek to establish the movement as a place of personal and social belonging. As was true of the New Left social movements in the mid-20th century, these new groups are closely attuned to movement developments around the world, even as they craft their responses to specific historical conditions in Japan.

Keywords: Japan, mobilizing non-regular woekers, right-wing challengers and counter-movements, cultural movements.

1. INTRODUCTION

After a period of New Left political violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, followed by two decades of abeyance, Japan has experienced a renewed era of social movement activity since the 1990s. These new movements explicitly seek to avoid what they see as contamination by the earlier period, even when their participants know nothing about it except for fear perpetuated by media portrayals of senseless violence. They range from small informal groups in Japan's invisible civil society; groups trying to mobilize laborers who fall outside Japan's traditional enterprise unions; and groups reviving and revitalizing older movement networks to deal with new threats; to new right-wing challengers and their counter-movements; and those making innovative use of cultural resources. These quite different groups

all actively seek alternatives to earlier movements in Japan that engaged in political violence. As was true of the New Left social movements in the mid-20th century, these new groups are closely attuned to movement developments around the world, even as they craft their responses to specific historical conditions in Japan.

This article analyzes a dozen ethnographic accounts of contemporary social movement groups engaged in collective action, based on our own research and that of younger scholars we have worked with (Slater and Steinhoff 2024). We examine the cases through the lens of current research on social movements and memory. Building on Halbwachs' seminal work on collective memory (1992 [1925; 1950]) social movement scholars have been examining the intersection between socially constructed memories of social movements and their impact on later social movements. Work by Olick and Levy (1997) and Olick and Robbins (1998) has examined how collective memories of cultural trauma impact the future, while Fine (2001) and Zamponi (2018) have emphasized how negative collective memories constrain the options available to contemporary movements. We ask two questions: why does this stigmatized period of activism half a century ago remain such a powerful negative reference for contemporary young activists in Japan? How do contemporary activists steer around the stigmatized past to find new ways to legitimize their protest activities?

2. HISTORICAL LEGACY OF VIOLENT PROTEST IN POSTWAR JAPAN

The historical frame of reference of violent Japanese student protests in the 1960s and 1970s survives as image and feeling for most activists and the general public in Japan. For both groups, this period is characterized by sectarian violence, despite the fact that only a small portion were ever actually violent. In a pattern of selective history that is not unique to Japan, the issues and larger historical context are often lost, while negative and frightening images are read today as anti-social, selfish and gratuitously violent. In an attempt to unpack this important history, we outline the two protest cycles between 1958 and 1972 that have left such deep scars on Japanese society.

2.1. The 1960 Anti-Security Treaty Protests: Crisis of Democracy

The 1960 Anti-Security treaty protests were the biggest test of Japan's fragile postwar democracy under the new postwar Constitution, which had been written under the postwar Allied Occupation of Japan and passed by the Japanese parliament (the Diet) in 1947. In addition to giving Japan the full range of civil liberties and protecting individual rights, labor rights, and political parties, Article 9 of the new constitution renounced Japan's right to «war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes» (Beer 1998). As a consequence, the United States undertook to provide for Japan's defense under the US-Japan Joint Security Treaty, (known as "Anpo", the contraction of its name in Japanese). The treaty came up for mandatory renewal in 1960, eight years after the end of the Occupation, and was deeply contentious precisely because it tied Japan to the United States and American foreign policy.

The Japanese government, led by Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) strongly supported the security treaty, while a broad coalition of leftist political parties plus labor unions, student organizations, and civil society groups organized a national People's Council for Preventing Revision of the Security Treaty with 134 member organizations. Protected by the new postwar constitution, the Council led massive nationwide protests against revision of the security treaty from 1959 to June 1960, including a series of successful general strikes in spring 1960 and many large protest marches around the parliament building, called the Diet.

The fight culminated the night of May 19, 1960, when the Prime Minister called an emergency meeting to extend the Diet session while the Socialist Party Diet members held a sit-in to block the entrance to the lower house chamber. As people watched live on television and several thousand protesters gathered outside, riot police dragged out the Socialist Diet members one by one. Then after midnight, with only LDP members present, the speaker called the meeting into session, passed the extension, and quickly called for a vote on the security treaty. TV cameras «captured the LDP Diet members raising their hands to vote their approval, and then swung dramatically to the right to show that all the seats in the other half of the chamber, where the opposition parties normally sat, were empty» (Kapur 2018: 23). That led to a final month of huge protest marches organized by the People's Council. Their ranks were swelled by new groups of ordinary citizens who feared that Japan's fragile democracy would fail. In wild protests on June 15, a female University of Tokyo student was trampled to death. The next day Kishi cancelled U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower's planned visit and promised to resign within a month. The new treaty automatically

went into effect after 30 days; the protests quietly ended and Kishi resigned.

Student governments at universities around Japan had been nurtured in the early postwar period by the newly legal Japan Communist Party (JCP), which built its hierarchical structure from local campus elected student government organizations through city and regional federations up to the All-Japan National Student Federation (Zengakuren). However, in 1958 a large block of those national Zengakuren leaders split with the JCP and formed an independent New Left organization called the Communist League, informally known as Bund, with affiliated student organizations. As national leaders of Zengakuren, Bund still held sway over the majority of student organizations, sat on the People's Council, and led the mainstream student component of the 1960 Anpo protests with other New Left groups, while student government organizations that remained loyal to the JCP formed a separate anti-mainstream faction that also participated. (Steinhoff 2012: 63-66). In the final phase of the 1960 Anpo protests, small citizens' groups also joined the protests, a harbinger of later civil society groups that proliferated from the mid-1960s through the 1970s and 1980s (Sasaki-Uemura 2001). After the 1960 Anpo protests ended, Bund dissolved into competing factions that could not agree on why the massive protests had failed and went into abeyance for a few years. Realizing that the Joint Security Treaty would come up for renewal again in 1970, the national student leadership soon began to mobilize a new generation of students to prepare for another period of protest that would become far more complex and violent than the 1960 Anpo protests.

2.2. The New Left Protest Cycle 1968-1972: An Unprocessed Cultural Trauma

The late 1960s–early 1970s protest cycle also involved opposition political parties, their affiliated labor unions, and an array of civil society organizations such as the anti-Vietnam war organization Beheiren (Havens 1987; Shiratori 2018; Oguma 2009). They were joined by a revitalized student movement that included both New Left and Old Left organizations. Although there was no longer one unified national student organization called Zengakuren, some of the independent New Left organizations created their own national student alliances, which they also called Zengakuren. The central aim was to mobilize for the 1970 security treaty revision, but they also participated in public demonstrations on an array of other national and local issues. These included environmental issues arising from Japan's era of high economic

growth, plus specific issues connected to the US-Japan Joint Security treaty that enabled Japan's supporting role in the Vietnam War (despite its renunciation of war in Article 9 of the Constitution).

On their campuses, students also organized non-hierarchical all-student joint struggle committees (Zenkyōtō), which issued demands at mass student meetings, occupied campus buildings, and carried out protracted student strikes that closed 162 university campuses for days or months. Thus, although the major protests of the era were organized by hierarchical national organizations, the Zenkyōtō movement and other citizens movements of the late 1960s also pioneered some of the flat organizational structures that characterize contemporary social movements. By 1969, students' street demonstrations had escalated into semi-violent confrontations between students and riot police, which led mainstream organizations to withdraw from demonstrating with the students and caused major student organizations to split over tactics. Thousands of students were arrested and tried for serious protest-related crimes, and the most radicalized students went underground or overseas in order to continue the fight with bombings, airplane hijackings, and other violent attacks (Steinhoff 2012).

Steinhoff (2013) analyzed the contention between public collective memory and students' memories of three key escalatory events in this protest cycle:

a) an early battle between police and students near Haneda Airport on October 8, 1967 in which a student was accidentally killed protesting the Prime Minister's departure to visit South Vietnam;

b) the climactic two-day battle between Zenkyōtō students and riot police on the University of Tokyo campus January 17–18, 1969 after several months of a student strike, which marked the turning point from state tolerance to strong repression of student protest; and

c) the Asama Sansō siege of early 1972, in which five wanted students from an underground group with a hostage held off 3,000 riot police for ten days at a mountain resort lodge.

The first event was front page news in major newspapers and featured on evening television news with little detail, but was covered in greater detail in the newspapers produced by the various New Left student organizations involved. The student's death appears in most student activists' narratives as the moment that led them to join the fight. The two events from the middle and end of the protest cycle featured many hours of live television coverage of riot police forcibly ending building occupation standoffs and arresting everyone inside. Hence the general public and the activists were both deeply exposed

to the same media presentations, although students also had additional sources of information from their own print media and viewed the events differently.

If the second event at the University of Tokyo was the climax of the protests, the third seemed to mark the nadir of the protest cycle. It also involved a curious time inversion. Twenty-nine members of two different underground organizations, including several wanted by the police, had come together to create a merged organization (the United Red Army or Rengō Sekigun). Hiding out in the mountains, they lived communally in cabins for several months. Police hot on their trail had already arrested a number of other members of the group as they came down from an overnight trek over the Japanese Alps into the mountain resort town of Karuizawa. The final five had escaped into a nearly impregnable lodge that spilled five stories down the mountainside and was accessible only from the road entrance on the top floor. Activist students all over Japan initially celebrated the nine day siege, because five students with rifles were holding off 3,000 heavily armed riot police, who wanted to avoid harming the hostage. On the tenth day, the police used a wrecking ball to demolish the front of the building. As 90 percent of the national television audience watched the live broadcast for 10 hours and 40 minutes, police swarmed inside and finally brought out the students and their hostage, unharmed, and arrested the students.

By this time, police had already been interrogating other members of the group. As a few began to tell strange stories that at first were not believed, the police began digging up bodies across three prefectures. Over the winter, the merged group had slid into a collective purge in which fourteen members were targeted, tortured, and brutally murdered; it was a distorted attempt to toughen up the weakest ones in preparation for an imagined battle with the police (Steinhoff 1991; 1992; 2003). As the evidence of the United Red Army purge dribbled out in the weeks after the Asama Sansō siege, both the general public that had been watching the siege on television, and the student activists who also watched on television cheering for their five warriors, were stunned to learn what had happened. This is the unprocessed cultural trauma from which neither the New Left student movement nor the Japanese public has been able to recover.

Notably, from 1969 on, both public collective memories and those of movement participants began retroactively to view earlier events negatively. Public collective memories also blurred unrelated events together. As small remnants of the Japanese New Left continued the fight from a safe haven in the Middle East, using international hostage-taking incidents and airplane hijack-

ings to try to get their associates out of Japanese jails, their overseas activities were added to the list of shocking events in Japanese public collective memory. Particularly since the 1980s Reagan era in the United States, when Japan was encouraged to participate in the American "war on terror", public media presentations on Japanese television have routinely presented unrelated violent incidents involving different people and groups, in Japan and internationally, into a pastiche of unexplained violent images. The dark and incomplete representation of this period of political movements has resulted in a general stigmatization of activism (Steinhoff 2012). Consequently, since the 1970's, activists in Japan have wrestled with their own historical legacy.

While that is not unfamiliar in other national contexts, it has been more debilitating in Japan. The Japanese New Left period has been systematically compared with parallel protest cycles in the United States, Germany, and Italy (Zwerman, Steinhoff and Della Porta 2000). All four countries experienced a similar period of violence that emerged out of the broader New Left protests of the late 1960s, with varying long-term impacts. Recent work by Zamponi (2018) on student movements and memory in Italy and Spain reveals some continuing relevant comparisons between the Italian and Japanese cases that are rooted in their common experience of radical New Left protest in the 1970s. In other recent work, Della Porta and her colleagues (2018) have studied the Italian case in comparison with other southern European countries, linking the legacies and memories of the Italian protests of the 1960s and 1970s to contemporary social movements.

How a movement's history is fashioned, remembered, and represented has a significant effect on the ability of a contemporary movement to frame its goals as legitimate, to have its identity recognized as viable, and thus to secure support from society as a whole (Hammock 2010; Zamponi 2018). One question that any movement faces is whether the past will become a resource mobilized to inform and legitimize contemporary efforts or if it will be a handicap that hinders the development of contemporary politics. At its extreme, association with an undesirable past can be used to silence social movements, damning them by association, and sometimes leading to a disavowal of the past by the activists themselves. This is the negative representation of student protest that contemporary Japanese society and most activists carry.

The demise of the movement in the 1970s not only signaled the loss of a particular set of protest strategies, but also cast doubt on the set of grievances for which that generation fought. Cassegård understands this not

only as a «collective trauma» suffered by the Left, but as a moment that discredited «an entire discourse – a way of speaking, acting and identifying oneself associated with the New Left – and thereby for a long time dampened activism in Japan» (Cassegard 2014: 34). While distance from the ideological foundation of its own history is understandable as a survival strategy, this historical legacy casts doubt on the motives for any contemporary activism, delegitimizing public expression through open and direct demonstrations.

The negative aftereffects go beyond compromising clearly leftist movements. Despite some scholarly attempts to recognize or at least not disavow the New Left protest period such as Oguma (2009), this history is unavailable to almost all activists and media today. Wiemann (2019) has examined the relationship between memories of 1960s-1970s protest and protest activity following the March, 3, 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima nuclear power plant accident (known as 3/11 in Japan) as a form of collective memory, noting that the earlier period is represented in such a negative light that activists seek primarily to distance themselves from it.

In part, this is the result of Japanese education and mass media. Unlike other countries where their own recent history and civil rights struggles are taught in most schools, Japanese postwar activism is not well known, not taught in schools, and only present schematically in media representations of the era. In response to the student strikes on Japanese campuses, many private colleges abolished their student government organizations to prevent future mobilization and student protest became a taboo subject. In effect, this painful period has been erased from the narrative of postwar Japanese history. Only environmental and labor movements have been able to sustain activism more or less continuously from the 1970s to the present.

Yet even though younger people today may be unaware of the actual history, activists as well as ordinary citizens retain the popular visual image of masked and helmeted young people, causing havoc armed with fighting poles and extreme ideologies (Steinhoff 1999). Most Japanese children grow up knowing nothing about the period except to recoil from it with fear and trepidation. Each new movement in Japan is forced to find some alternative way to explain its goals and activities, as it wrestles with the negative perception of past activism.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The array of groups we analyze spans the three decades from the 1990s through 2021 and all appear as chapters in Slater and Steinhoff (2024). The studies are all based on extensive ethnographic research by the co-editors and their younger colleagues. We use this body of empirical research both to examine the contours of contemporary social movements and to reflect on the powerful rejection of the earlier period of activism in Japan.

The ethnographic studies range from the many single issue groups in Japan's invisible civil society examined by Steinhoff (*Ibidem*); through the labor activism of community unions and their networks studied by Shinji Kojima (2024) and Robin O'Day (2024); Carl Cassegård's (2024) exploration of artists joining homeless activists in the early 1990s; the revitalized networks of antinuclear activists that initiated the community power movements Makoto Nishikido studied (2024); Yoko Iida's (2024) study of the rapid re-emergence after 3/11 of a large national network in defense of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution; and Rika Morioka's (2024) observations of how an older generation of anti-nuclear activist women in northern Japan guided young mothers to "gentle" protest activity after 3/11. Other studies include Yuki Asahina's (2024) examination of the new right-wing group Zaitokukai's aggressive anti-foreign protests; Vivian Shaw's (2024) comparison of the different tactics of four anti-hate speech counter-movements that responded to Zaitokukai; plus Vinicius Furuie's (2024) contrast of two generations of Chukaku-ha activists; Alexander Brown's (2024) analysis of musicians' protests in the immediate aftermath of 3/11; and Slater's (2024) examination of the rapid rise and self-imposed dissolution of SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy). In addition to their rich ethnographic accounts, each author includes a postscript summarizing what has happened to their groups and movements since the fieldwork was completed, which provides a longer-term perspective on the impact of the groups.

While ethnography is the premier method of conducting deep field research on local social movement groups, most of our younger research colleagues, as well as the groups they were studying, shared a generational absence of knowledge about the earlier movements that their subjects were trying so hard to avoid. As a result, most of their accounts describe negative sentiments and avoidance behavior, often with little detail. The few exceptions deal with movements that trace their own history to pre-1970s Japan. Furuie's study documents incidents of exclusion young 21st century activists experienced while unsuccessfully trying to modernize the 1960s New Left group Chūkaku-ha from within (2024). Similarly, Iida's study of the Article 9 Association (whose national leaders had previously led the anti-Vietnam war

group Beheiren half a century earlier) acknowledges the difficulty the group had in recruiting younger members outside of the continuing transmission channels connected to JCP affiliated organizations (2024).

Either implicitly or explicitly, all of these groups struggle to overcome the negative legacy of the earlier period of intense social movement activity in Japan.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY JAPAN ALTERNATIVE POLITICS

It is not uncommon for political activists everywhere to label themselves as "regular" citizens. In the case of most of the activism we have examined, this move is not only a claim of authenticity but also of distancing themselves from the extremism of the stigmatized past. In everyday usage, regular or normal is captured in Japanese by the term *futsū*, which has two distinct but related connotations: one is descriptive, pointing to actions that fall within some socially accepted norm or range of behavior; the other is more prescriptive, suggesting an evaluative standard of proper judgment or action. Activists use this term rhetorically in order to differentiate themselves from the radical extremes, and to re-situate themselves in the legitimate center of contemporary society. The Beheiren movement used this term to stake out a position against the Vietnam War in the 1960s, in distinction to the venal and self-interested party politics of the state, as well as the more fractious activists of their day.

Another way to find discursive space outside of an infected politics is to posit a sphere of the "everyday" with the transformation of the person as the primary target of political engagement, presuming that larger political shifts will follow (Ando 2014: 12). The rise of the term *shimin* (citizen) during the 1980's functions in similar ways – as an attempt to carve out some non-extreme and yet engaged position within the concept of civil society, even if this attempt proved to be more easily coopted (Avenell 2011). The problem faced by Japanese activists today is once again how to secure a position from which to speak out in opposition to the *status quo*, in a way that does not jeopardize one's membership or inclusion in that very society. Today, that means without compromising your position by too close an association with a discredited past. Thus, two things are going on at once: first, a questioning of existing politics and society, and second, an attempt to establish a legitimate position from which this critique can be made (Slater, Morioka and Danzuka 2014).

4.1. Creating New Codes and Updating Identities

When groups distance themselves from familiar positions and identities, the creation of coherent and persuasive identities becomes more difficult. The development of alternative politics during this period in Japan reveals how narrow a discursive space is available. The movements we have examined reveal activists who avoid the label of "activist" and shun any association with the "political" more generally. To similar effect, we also find many single-issue groups avoiding any claim to a wider political position (Slater *et al.* 2015). Thus, ironically, political activists distance themselves from politics. We are led to an unsettling observation: one must disavow "politics" as a precondition to be engaged in alternative politics! Logistically, such discursive distancing not only problematizes a movement's links to its own past, but also potentially jeopardizes the possibility of establishing horizontal ties among the many different contemporary single-issue movements that might otherwise be able to claim a political lineage.

Although we are discussing people and groups that are clearly social movement activists, our ethnographic research has revealed that most of them disavow this label completely. They reject the most common Japanese term for someone engaged in a political movement (*undōka*), the milder term for political activity (*katsudōka*), or even the foreign term "activist" that removes the label from the Japanese political context. The most neutral and thus least objectionable to many is the term "supporter", which implies that the individual supports a set of ideas outside of any movement structure, mobilization, or even identity.

The disavowal of politics also creates generational rifts among contemporary activists, with younger or less overtly engaged people distancing themselves from usually somewhat older, more overtly and unabashedly political players still lingering on the outskirts of today's scene. This interpersonal distancing has two results. First, the knowledge and experience of these older activists – always an important resource in any movement – is often lost or compromised. It also leads to distancing from the few higher profile personalities among the left, the sort of people who, due to their wider recognition, could potentially unify a range of efforts into some common cause. Instead, such recognizable figures are sometimes dismissed with the oxymoron 'professional civic activist' (*purō-shimin*), a term used to chide someone who is professionalizing something that should only be pursued at the civic or amateur level. We did find some instances of inter-generational continuity: Nishikido's (2024) study of community power movements traces

the movement's roots to earlier anti-nuclear activism; Morioka (2024) acknowledges the important mentoring role of older antinuclear activists in post-3/11 mothers' gentle protests; and Steinhoff describes three institutions developed during the 1969-1970s period that are still utilized widely by activists today. Nonetheless, among young contemporary activists the search for political alternatives that are considered "legitimate" narrows the path forward.

4.2. De-Institutionalization of Activist Politics

The discursive ambivalence about "political" engagement is both reflected and compounded in the institutional shifts of movement structures that we see in contemporary social movements. In early postwar Japan, most significant activism occurred within the context of institutionally bounded groups with formal membership status and stable internal hierarchies of roles and positions. These groups were often linked into larger national or even transnational federations around identifiable ideologies. The 1960 anti-Anpo protests and the student movements of the late 1960's and 1970's, as well as the labor movements that continued into the 1970's and 1980's, were usually organized through local cells or chapters linked to larger communist, socialist, or New Left movements. Activists at both universities and companies could benefit from durable institutional identity that facilitated recruitment of members, resources for internal leadership, financial support through membership dues, and institutional memory across years of uneven activity and changing personnel. On the other hand, these institutional contexts imposed certain limitations upon membership, by demanding a large investment of time and energy from members and limiting the issues and strategies used by each group. This vertical membership structure resulted in a lack of cooperation among otherwise quite similar groups and fostered factional conflict that could become violent. Nevertheless, the two different contexts of schools and companies provided ideological focus, institutional structure, and logistical support.

In most of the new social movements that have emerged in Japan over the past thirty years, institutionalization is more difficult to identify and less often considered desirable as either strategy or outcome. When young people are politically engaged today, they are rarely organized around university affiliation. This shift is not just among students; the retirement of an older leftist generation of scholars, once very active in teaching and supporting student activism, has left many universities politically unengaged. In fact, following the end of the late 1960s protest cycle, most private universities disbanded their student government organizations, eliminating the main vehicle for mobilizing students into protest activity, which also provided a reliable stream of income from student fees.

In companies there has been a similar denuding of political activism, albeit for different reasons. The Japanese system of enterprise unions that encompass both regular blue collar and lower level white collar workers in large companies but exclude non-regular workers, the formal restructuring of labor unions in the late 1980s (Carlile 2005). and the neoliberal decline of labor unions in general have led to decimated membership and a dramatic reduction in political influence. Moreover, the tenuous and often fractured relationship that non-regular workers have to a particular company or workplace has led to a deinstitutionalization of work and consequently, of workplace-based activism. Recent efforts to organize precarious workers into community unions (Kojima 2020; 2024; O'Day 2015; 2024) depend on a peculiarity of Japanese labor law, and provide even more evidence of this trend, since these unions organize outside of specific workplaces. The development of some alternative to these once-dominant enterprise union structures can be seen both in the relative deterioration of political ideologies, and in new organizational structures founded on less rigid hierarchies.

4.3. Unraveling of Political Ideologies

As the primary institutions that once supported political activism no longer play as prominent a role, there have been a number of shifts in social movements. First, today's activist groups make fewer demands of members and fewer efforts to create a single ideological position. This can lead to a greater ideological diversity within a single group, or sometimes even a lack of ideological engagement altogether. We see this dynamic at different levels of political activity. At the most macro-level, the geo-political re-positioning of Japan as a global economic power since the late 1970s has led to the almost unquestioned acceptance of the treaty outlining Japan's dependency on US security forces, which remains in effect today and was the ideological basis for the 1960 protests. Once seen as a threat to Japanese national sovereignty, and thus a possible unifying ideology across different movements, the issue is rarely a prominent platform in the contemporary movements we examined. With the fading of this issue, the emphasis on ideology as the focus of a group has also faded.

This diminution of ideology is particularly dramatic in the case of labor. The fragmentation of labor not only

breaks apart labor unions as institutional bases but renders the materialist underpinnings of class struggle that once supported these unions less rhetorically convincing. Ideas of socialist revolution are so remote for most as to render the underlying ideological positions anachronistic. If the revolutionary imperative of "workers unite" was always a hard sell to different segments of the Japanese labor market, with the dramatic rise in irregular labor and the blurring of lines between work and non-work, many today do not even identify as "workers" to begin with. After an initial embrace of a deregulated economy, workers are increasingly seeking stability rather than flexibility, having seen the debilitating effects of dispersed and predatory neoliberal capitalism (O'Day 2015). The irony here in Japan as elsewhere, is that just at the time when workers are losing stability and labor activism most urgently needs political representation, the ideological tools that have defined this effort in the past are no longer accessible or meaningful. The labor movements that have appeared recently do not exhibit any systematic effort to resuscitate the idea of social class.

Second, it is not just revolutionary ideology that is missing today. More generally, there is a lack of effort to promote any singular ideological position at all. Instead, we see a greater tolerance of ideological diversity within political groups. While periodic allusions to past ideologies show up in printed materials and on websites, they are rarely the primary focus of any group, and there are far fewer lectures or study sessions aimed at the articulation or development of a coherent, encompassing position. Sometimes, relinquishing a more complete ideological vision is accepted as the necessary cost of gaining sufficient participants to support a particular issue. As a result, contemporary groups demonstrate a thinned-out engagement with the ideologies that were once considered the foundation of Japanese social movements.

On the other hand, lack of ideological unity is sometimes represented as a positive feature, pointing to a group's acceptance of diversity as an inherent act of respect for the individuality of its members, in what Day (2006) has identified in the anti-globalization movement as embrace of an «anarchist logic of affinity». The acceptance of diversity is often offered as illustration, even proof, of the spontaneous emergence of the movement, reflecting the natural diversity of individual opinion. This reflects what Meyer and Tarrow (1998) call «an ideology of spontaneity», a pattern that has only increased over time. While in an earlier generation in Japan, legitimacy was often linked to solidarity built around a clear set of goals that many movements worked to achieve, today solidarity appears more as regimentation, a prioritization of collective will or even coercion

over individual or personal motives. In that construction it appears manufactured and false, casting doubt on the authenticity of the movement. In an age when social movements are often validated as the autonomous outpouring of individual sentiment, ideological unity has become a problematic concept and no longer a worthy goal. Spontaneity has predictable effects on both movement structure and repertoire in shaping the range of alternatives that have emerged.

4.4. New Ontologies: Open Networks and Flat Hierarchies

Deinstitutionalization and the loosening of ideological adherence have consequences, including new relationships between groups and individuals, and more fundamentally, the status of groups as political actors (Slater *et al.* 2015). Much of contemporary social movement theory has moved away from focusing on organizations to examining looser networks that come together occasionally. Within social movement theories in general, many scholars have shifted from organization-based models toward network models to analyze how social movements utilize the social ties that develop among individuals or small groups through their co-participation in events (Diani 2007; Diani and McAdam 2003). For the past thirty years in Japan and other places, instead of organized groups with members, we often now see events such as demonstrations and petition drives populated with participants who might join for that event but have little loyalty or identification to a group, even if they are strongly committed to the cause.

This shift does not necessarily suggest a lack of activity, nor does it suggest a failure to solidify activity, commitment, or sentiment. Rather, today the mobilization of people into groups, once symbolized in Japan by the creation of mailing lists, embodied in drinking parties, and financed by membership fees, often does not seem necessary or feasible for participation in activist politics. Rather than defining and attempting to institutionalize the outer boundary that defines membership, more often today we see the creation of a small core of devoted leaders and then radiating from this center, an open-ended and often personal network. This core is often less than a dozen people, maybe with a larger number who help with different events. The larger numbers reported in the media who come to demonstrations could be called participants but not "members", in the older sense of the term.

The unbounded perimeters of groups also affect the nature or quality of the relationships among activists. Lack of clear boundaries and more fluid membership make the social order within those boundaries more dif-

ficult to establish and maintain. Again, contemporary young activists in Japan do not understand such internal order as necessary or even desirable. In contrast to a bounded hierarchy, where new members can work their way up through a clearly defined set of positions and responsibilities, today's less clearly defined groups lack internal hierarchical divisions, stable status positions, or clearly defined lines of authority. Instead, there is some variant of deliberative democracy (Cohen 1989) or participatory democracy (Polletta 2002), characterized by more horizontal communication and direct decision-making. One term that is often mentioned in Japanese movements is "flat hierarchies", which not only points to a lack of vertical structure or responsibility, but also indicates an ideological commitment to create an activist group that embodies in its own structure and practices the principles it seeks to create in society at large. These features are not specific to Japan but are found throughout the developed world; however, Japan's shift is also strongly linked to rejection of past movements, and thus contrasts so sharply with the form of clearly bounded, hierarchical groups that was once so prevalent in activist and other organizations in Japan.

These new movement structures are rhetorically and self-consciously differentiated from the earlier periods of strong social movement activity. Many of these movements imagine themselves not only as a means to achieve social justice, but also as a performative space where the principles of equality and individuality are embodied in the practices of being part of the movement itself. These structures and practices find some rhetorical expression in what is often called "prefigurative" politics (Ando 2013; Raekstad and Gradin 2020) or some adherence to anarchist ideals. Overall, while there is a usually a desire to address and change some part of their world, many of these groups explicitly recognize that the aim of the group is mutual self-help, or the affective rewards of group participation.

4.5. Social Media

Today, the patterns of political mobilization of any form of political engagement revolve around social media (Kindstrand, Nishimura and Slater 2016). As in social movements and grassroots activism all over the world today, social media technology has transformed virtually every aspect of activity, from distribution of information to the framing of issues, from resource mobilization to the recruitment of new participants, from mediating the relationships individuals have to the movement and each other, to patterns of effective and legitimate leadership. Probably more than any other

single factor, social media in Japan allow dispersed and deinstitutionalized movements and less formal patterns of alternative engagement to emerge as relevant, even as they reject earlier patterns of solidarity and commitment. Japan's intensive involvement with social media means that the primary tools of most social movements are already intimately integrated into people's newsfeeds, friend groups, and the lists that they follow; in effect, the line that once separated the political from other parts of their lives is already erased. This means the formation of groups, and one's status as a member, is often rendered moot. Social media allows participation, access to information, and some sort of relationship with others without forcing a declaration of one's status as a member.

Social media have allowed activists to identify and exploit political opportunities more quickly and to reach new audiences with their message. The instrumental nature of social messaging allows many to participate in events without any commitment to or definition of members and groups. Social media provide the technological platform for the sort of unboundedness and flat hierarchies that are part of the philosophical commitment of many non-institutionalized activist movements. They allow information flow to occur in multiple directions, which renders a study group meeting to learn about an issue unnecessary, even cumbersome and outdated. In an age where "following" someone does not entail ideological commitment, it allows, even promotes, a plurality of beliefs and hybridity of positions. Flat hierarchy is often the assumed shape of a digital network. While not discounting the potential limitations of social media use, in politics and beyond, we also note that users rarely find their social media participation constricting. Digital experience that is simultaneously random, spontaneous, and anarchic feels familiar and even natural to many users. We do not attempt to disentangle social media from social movements today, even while acknowledging the distinct pre-social media origins of many of these tendencies.

4.6 Cultural Politics and Demo Enactment

Different movements create distinct cultures, and these cultures are themselves reasons to participate in or reject a certain movement, over and above the more structural or explicitly political issues that were once thought to define the goals of political engagement. In these days of dispersed sociality, social media have been important tools in the creation of movement identity and central platforms for the formation of movement cultures, but the contents of these identities come from a set of cultural resources that augment and even sup-

plant more recognizable political resources. Nearly all of the groups we have examined place strong emphasis on cultural resources. These take different forms, from the instrumental use of culture, as in the recognition by activists of the significance and efficacy of deployment of music and design for explicitly political ends (Brown 2024), to a focus on more cultural issues to define movement identity and the focus of political engagement (Cassegård 2024). This latter can include identity politics, where the goal of the movement is to challenge cultural norms or "cultural codes" as an end in itself (Melucci 1988; 1995), rather than as a means to enact other social change.

A culturalist approach is common in these groups, with little focus on overt political goals as criteria or metrics of movement evaluation. Instead, scholars often examine the nature of movement activity by focusing on how political activists fashion interpretations (Slater 2024) or hold and develop beliefs and values (Furuie 2024), as ways of acting upon the world. This cultural focus does not negate the demands for policy or legal changes, political representation, or institutional changes; it simply points to the importance of the alternative cultural terrains on which these struggles are fought, and the possibility of shaping this terrain by purposive individual or collective action. This approach recognizes the creativity and sophistication of digitally mediated cultural resources. Indeed, in the current movement environment, there is an expectation that successful movements must achieve a certain level of creative cultural production. Drawing on art, design, and popular culture, most movements today are prolific, clever "prosumers" (Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson 2012; Nakajima 2012) of cultural resources as a way to attract interest, link their efforts to other movements, and craft or stylize their own movement messages. Given the saturation of digital technology, it should not be a surprise that activists are also adept at creative digital media to craft tactical and innovative alternatives even within the increasingly crowded media-scapes of Japan.

The cultural approach calls attention to the patterns of demonstrations, direct action, and other forms of enactment and performance of political movements in public space. With the deinstitutionalization of social movements and the demise of ideological purity, the deployment of cultural forms into public ritual takes on increased importance in many aspects of a movement. Demonstrations and public protests have always been an important part of activist politics in Japan as elsewhere, but with fewer small face-to-face meetings, public demonstrations carry more political weight as key scenarios that mobilize members and articulate political positions.

Long gone are the days of the Anpo era's snake dance or labor unions' fist pumping response chants in unison – both now would be dismissed by many as overly confrontational and unimaginative. Nevertheless, snake-dances and chants are the functional predecessors of forms that might be called cultural production in today's argot.

Especially among younger activists, the practices and spaces selected for performance repertoires have shifted in ways that make demonstrations not just an expression of a group's position, but a ritualized, collaborative social event, carefully staged for subsequent reposting on social media. Any demonstration messaging conveys some meaning about the issues and the different groups participating, but rather than propositional content ("Protect Article 9"), what we see today is more provocative and creative ("I can't believe we are still protesting this shit"). The syncopated pop rhythms unify participants and create some transient collective experience. Most people come to events, rallies, and demonstrations as individuals, rather than participating in groups defined by other institutional connections such as school, work, or labor union groups. This extra-institutional nature of activism may be exactly what is appealing to participants; many do not want their political activity to be part of their "regular" life, known to their family and associates. They are not members in any sustained way, do not contribute resources, including money or labor, and they do not represent an identity. People come, dance, and chant (and maybe drop a few coins into a passed hat): politics as a street party. The emphasis on attractive and appealing styling is particularly important in Japan, as it further pushes contemporary social movements away from the dark associations of the past as well as providing transnational stylistic connection to similar movements in Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

4.7. Possibilities and Risks of Dispersed Social Action

In sum, contemporary Japanese social movements and social activism have attempted to move away from their discredited past. They are less ideological, less extreme, less institutionalized, less bounded, and have a flatter internal structure. They are more flexible, adaptive, and attractive. They have created alternative ways of connecting their audiences to political causes and to each other. They have moved from groups with members to networked participants staging events. They share information and sentiment through digital means, rather than organizing through meetings and study groups in communities, schools, or worksites. These new patterns of social movements have provided new spaces and

new ways of becoming involved. Contemporary young people concerned with what is going on in their own government and society have found that participating in demonstrations may offer their only chances to talk about it at all. This has been a hugely liberating fact for many individuals who feel excluded, constrained, limited, or silenced by pressure within standard institutional contexts not to express such views. For a long time, social movements have been providing a space to voice individual concerns in a supportive, collective context, and thus are an important way for individuals to learn how to speak up for themselves. In contemporary Japan, we see this function fulfilled in a combination of digital platforms and face-to-face demonstrations.

These ethnographic studies have documented some previously unexplored and even unimaginable connections among social movements, trade unions, civil society, and lifestyle activism. Community unions have had some success in assisting and recruiting nonregular workers, and also in connecting such workers to broader social movement networks that offer support and, in some cases, turn them into activists. Kojima (2024) in particular, notes that these groups have acted as social brokers to connect unions from different lineages into cooperative partnerships. Nishikido (2024) documents the surprising success that anti-nuclear activists in northern Japan have had in constructing and maintaining community windmills as an alternative power source, which has brought them into new relationships with their investors, power corporations that purchase power from them, and the communities that benefit from the income they generate to support local improvements.

Cassegård (2024) describes an alliance between homeless people and artists who joined their squatter communities as a lifestyle. Both Nishikido (2024) and Morioka (2024) point to the existence of older generations of lifestyle or everyday activists in their communities as innovators and leaders that facilitated newer movements, but we see less of this orientation in the millennial generation. Brown (2024) explores the different options and constraints faced by musicians who write and play topical protest songs, depending on whether they are under contract to large music corporations or independent. Iida (2024) and Slater (2024) offer quite different examples of how rapidly post-3/11 protest movements against specific government policies were able to expand to meet their moment effectively. The latter case of SEALDs also documents the group's unusual decision in advance to disband once that moment was over, the very opposite of lifestyle activism, even though they were able to convert their activist prosumer skills into real-world occupational credentials.

Finally, the trajectories of Asahina's (2024) aggressive New Right group Zaitokukai, the differential appeal of Shaw's (2024) antiracist countermovements, and Furuie's (2024) Nazen offshoot of the 1960s New Left group Chūkaku-ha demonstrate clearly how any association with the violence of 1970s activism remains doomed to failure. Zaitokukai was broken by lawsuits that crippled them economically and the most physically aggressive of Shaw's countermovement groups also did not fare well, even though many of the racist ideas of Zaitokukai have been incorporated into the more mainstream Japanese right. Nazen only survived by separating itself from Chūkaku-ha and continuing its more contemporary and non-violent style as a small independent group. Morioka's (2024) emphasis on «gentle protest» and other studies of women's activism in the post-3/11 period (Kimura 2016) also reinforce the continuing efforts of contemporary activists to avoid contamination with the discredited past. At the same time, these new studies offer ways for contemporary Japanese activists to escape the taint and protect their new movements.

These shifts also carry some limitations and risks. A loosely organized, digitally enabled space for the circulation of political and cultural information, networking, and engagement that is easy to join with relatively little personal or financial cost, provides an important alternative to the often-stifling institutional structure of earlier movements, but it is unclear how sustainable these new patterns will be over time. Participating in a one-off event is not the same as joining a group as a member. How does this translate into incremental social change or a raising of consciousness more broadly, let alone policy changes either locally or nationally? Cultural politics carries with it similar risks. On the one hand, the expression of political platforms through cultural resources is attractive to many, but the appeal may be primarily because the politics are obscured (or simply obscure). When cultural politics is more a matter of challenging codes at a micro-level or a personal politics of identity, it is not always evident where the "politics" might be. For example, today, the increasing fact of irregular work has been "naturalized" for many younger people. While this shift might restore some dignity to work that is both necessary and often the only work available, it has not translated into stable or regular support of a living wage, or insurance protections for irregular workers.

Sadly, much of the old stigma against social movement participation remains. People of all ages and geographic locations report that they have lost friends or job opportunities when it became known that they participated in demonstrations. The slogan "making protest

normal", might be fine on YouTube, but not so acceptable where one has to live, study, and work. While going to demonstrations and being politically engaged in general may have become more widely available, most people in Japan remain hesitant to share such political interest with others outside the context of a specific event of political engagement and its immediate participants.

5. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

In the first half of this article we have answered our question about why avoidance of the New Left protest period of the 1970s remains so potent half a century later. It really was a cultural trauma that remains unprocessed and therefore still fearsome and potent today. The second half of the article has shown both the promise and the limitations of contemporary activists' attempts to find new approaches to activism, which also correspond to similar trends in other countries.

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