



**University of
Zurich** ^{UZH}

**Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies
University Research Priority Program (URPP) Asia and Europe**



Activism in Contemporary Japan

New Ideas, Players and Arenas?

International Conference, Zurich, November 5–7, 2015

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Protester at an anti-nuclear power demonstration in Shinjuku, Tokyo, June 11, 2011.

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Conference Outline and Background

Social movements and organized activism have played an integral part in the post-war history of Japanese civil society, including the emergence of workers' movements after World War II, the huge Anti-ANPO movement, the mobilization of students, union members and intellectuals in the late 1950s and 1960s, and the engagement of "regular" citizens like housewives and teachers in the 1970s.

In comparison to civil society in other industrialized nations, the scope of the Japanese movements since the 1970s was however largely limited by restrictive opportunity structures, and they consequently seemed to lack significant political leverage. In the case of open political conflicts, like for example with environmental issues, these struggles were confined to local arenas, as the movements were not able to develop influence on the policy making on national level. Moreover, since Japanese activists oftentimes pursue their goals through tactical cooperation with government institutions, the absence of large-scale confrontative public demonstrations and citizen protest has led to the impression of an "invisible" civil society in Japan.

Nevertheless, the voluntary sector in Japan is multifaceted and dynamic, entailing a large number of very active (yet small-scale) organizations, like neighborhood associations, Parent-Teacher-Associations (PTAs) or housewives' associations, who tackle a variety of communal tasks. Non-profit Organizations in fact saw a boom after 1998, when a new law easing previous restrictions on NPOs came into effect, and the majority of civic activism continues to focus on delivering (voluntary) *social* services, without pursuing a larger *political* agenda. Outside of these conventional associations, some young Japanese have established small niches of subcultural activism, enriching Japan's protest culture with new tactics. Thus, Japanese civil society might have been invisible, but it has by no means been absent in recent decades.

The triple catastrophe of 3/11 came as a turning point in terms of activism, as a wave of support swept through Japan, new citizen groups formed and large-scale anti-nuclear demonstrations emerged. Moreover, in reaction to recent controversial legislation and motions pushed by the Abe government, i.e. like the 'State Secrecy Act' as well as the planned "reinterpretation" of Article 9, new movements, like the

student movement SEALDS, are emerging as a new generation of activists. In this light, renewed attention must be paid to the scope and relevance of civic engagement in contemporary Japan. This conference brings together scholars and Japanese activists to critically discuss the latest developments, theoretical aspects and emerging issues.

Prof. Dr. David Chiavacci, Dr. Julia Obinger

Program

Thursday, November 5

15:00–16:00 Keynote Speech

Prof. Dr. Patricia Steinhoff (University of Hawai'i)

Theorizing about Activism with Japanese Research: Does It Challenge or Clarify European and American Perspectives?

16:00–16:30 Coffee break

16:30–18:00 Panel 1: Established Forms of Activism

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Key questions: What is the status quo of established forms of activism in Japan? Who are the players? How do they perceive the relationship between state, economy, and society and the role of civil society? In what way are they adopting emergent activists' tactics and techniques for their own causes?

Prof. Dr. Gesine Foljanty-Jost (Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg)

The Citizen as a Partner of State: Local Activism for a Better Community

Dr. Christian Dimmer (University of Tokyo)

Connecting Old and New Activism: (Re)assembling Japan's "First Collective House" Kankanmori, Tokyo

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Vogt (University of Hamburg)

Images, Frames and Norms in Times of Nation Building: Lessons to be Learned from the Emergence and Failure of the Okinawa Reversion Movement

Friday, November 6

9:30–11:00 Panel 2: Theoretical Perspectives on Activism in Japan

Key questions: How can we conceptually grasp the field of activism in Japan? What lenses can we use to understand the changes (and continuities) of Japanese civic engagement? How can we make existing theories from other contexts useful in the study of the Japanese case?

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Prof. Dr. Simon Avenell (Australian National University)

A Transnational Perspective on Japanese Environmental Activism

Prof. Dr. Fabian Schäfer (Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg)

Antagonisms and Algorithms: Social Non-Movements and the Semi-Public Sphere in Post-3/11 Japan

Prof. Dr. Yutaka Tsujinaka (University of Tsukuba)

Civic Activism, Community Service and For-profit Organization-Government Collaboration in Japan: Political Regime and Civil Society in Comparative Perspective

11:00–11:30 Coffee break

11:30–13:00 Panel 3: Emergent Forms of Activism

Key questions: How can we explain the low participation rate amongst young Japanese and what possible other avenues are they currently using for political and social participation? How do they position themselves vis-à-vis state actors and established civic orga-

nizations? How sustainable are these recently emerging new forms of activism?

Prof. Dr. Carl Cassegård (University of Gothenburg)

Public Space, Counter-space and No-man's-land: The Role of Space in Homeless Activism in Contemporary Japan

Dr. Julia Obinger (University of Zurich / SOAS London)

Political Consumerism in Japan – Actors, Aims and Outcomes

Prof. Dr. Apichai Shipper (Georgetown University)

Immigrants' Rights Activism and Xenophobic Activism in Japan

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13:00–14:30 Lunch break

14:30–16:30 Panel 4: Voices of Japanese Activists

Key issue: We aim to bring the theoretical questions to a more tangible level by inviting activists to join a discussion panel, where the attendees will have the opportunity to get insider views on current chances and problems of Japanese activists.

Discussant: Prof. Dr. Yoshitaka Mōri (Tokyo University of the Arts)

Shiraishi Hajime (Journalist and Activist, Tokyo)

Sakurada Kazuya (Media Activist and Lecturer, Osaka)

Narita Keisuke (Activist 'Irregular Rhythm Asylum,' Tokyo)

Discussion will be in Japanese

Saturday, November 7

9:00–10:30 Panel 5: Post-Fukushima Activism (Anti-nuclear Protests and Reconstruction Efforts)

Key questions: How has the triple disaster fostered and shaped activism? Who has been active in what way and which conclusions can we draw nearly five years after the catastrophe? Did 3/11 induce a shift in the arenas of activism from a primarily local to an increasingly national level?

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Prof. Dr. Koichi Hasegawa (Tohoku University, Sendai)

The Effects of ‘Social Expectation’ on the Development of Civil Society in Japan

Ayaka Löschke, M.A. (University of Zurich)

The Social Activism of Mothers Against Radiation after the Disaster of Fukushima

Prof. Dr. David Slater (Sophia University, Japan)

Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy

10:30–11:00 Coffee break

11:00–12:00 Final discussion

Abstracts of Papers

Thursday, 5 November 2015

15:00–16:00 Keynote Speech

Prof. Dr. Patricia Steinhoff (University of Hawai'i)

Theorizing about Activism with Japanese Research: Does It Challenge or Clarify European and American Perspectives?

In the second half of the 20th century, European and American scholars developed two parallel but distinct lines of theorizing about social movements and activism, which reflected their respective historical and institutional contexts. Japanese scholars tended to follow one or the other of these lines, and little of their work was available in western languages where it might engage or challenge their western counterparts. Two things have happened since the early 1990s to change that situation. First, European and American social movement scholars began to engage with one another and find points of convergence in their thinking, even if they often had different names for similar concepts. This talk will briefly outline these two lines of research and their points of convergence and divergence. Second, more European and American students and scholars, as well as younger Japanese scholars, became interested in social movements and activism in Japan. There is a great deal more research about Japanese social movements and activism today, produced by a much more transnational group of scholars who interact with one another all around the world. We tend to bring our received theoretical frameworks and assumptions to research on Japanese social movements, but that is only half of our job.

As part of a transnational community of scholars studying Japanese social movements, we also have a special responsibility as transnational communicators. Wherever we came from, and whatever theoretical ideas we have brought to our Japanese research, we need to use our understanding of Japanese social movements to think critically about the theoretical concepts we are using. If we are using a body of theory developed in western contexts, we must continually ask how our findings

confirm, clarify, extend, or challenge those ideas. We must not be content with simply applying those ideas, but must use our research on Japan to extend the collective understanding that those theories embody. What does the Japanese experience add to our conceptual understanding of how social movements work? What puzzles do we find in our Japanese research? We must bring our research on Japan to wider audiences, especially if things do not quite fit. If we have found interesting new perspectives through our interactions with Japanese colleagues, we need to share those with western scholars. At the same time, we need to share our research with Japanese audiences, especially when it brings new, comparative perspectives on activism in Japan.

16:30–18:00 Panel 1: Established Forms of Activism

Prof. Dr. Gesine Foljanty-Jost (Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg)

The Citizen as a Partner of State: Local Activism for a Better Community

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Research on political activities in Japan suggests a somewhat weak position of activists in front of state institutions. What may be the case on the national level should be reconsidered for the local level of activism. Since more than 20 years we can observe a paradigm shift from a vertical policy-making approach towards a partnership approach between citizen and local governments which has been accompanied by new opportunities for participation. By referring to results of civil society research this paper will explore the potential of citizens' activism in terms of conventional and non-conventional forms of participation for contributing to political change. By using case studies from Japanese local communities the paper will argue that beyond traditional forms of neighborhood activities, supportive as well as critical approaches towards local policies nowadays have stimulated citizens to employ a broad diversity of activities in response to local affairs. By analysing motivation, opportunity structures, and resources the paper comes to the conclusion that local activism provides activists with information, experience and expertise, qualifying them as self-conscious citizens. However lack of resources and restricted political opportunities create limitations in realizing political innovations in a short run.

Dr. Christian Dimmer (University of Tokyo)

Connecting Old and New Activism: (Re)assembling Japan's "First Collective House" Kankanmori, Tokyo

In recent years, the gloomy narratives of Japan's inevitable decline have partly given way to alternative, more positive portrayals: Further catalysed by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, encouraging stories of a nascent post-growth society are spreading in popular media. Its seeds are being seen in a new breed of social entrepreneurialism, or in quickly multiplying new urban commons. These are stories of empowerment, more careful treatment of natural resources, of a newly awaking do-it-yourself spirit, of creative problem solving, and the sharing of precious time, space, or goods.

Often unaware of the political implications of providing new social models, the producers of these community projects nevertheless engage in a different form prefigurative politics. Where people experiment with new forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that lie beyond the state and the logic of the market, they prefigure a more inclusive, just, and sustainable future society.

While the old, growth-obsessed Japan of the 1980s had become synonymous with an insatiable hunger for individualised consumerism and commodification of ever wider aspects of life, the recent social transformations have given rise to a broad re-appreciation of community, sociability, and the cultivation of practical skills. However, what is frequently depicted as a response to sudden crises such as 3.11, or the profound socio-economic transformations of two 'Lost Decades', appears in many cases as being build on past activism and carefully cultivated actor-networks that activists had kept on assembling since the failure of the New Left, in the early 1970s.

The paper exemplifies this by looking at one prominent community project that the producers themselves refer to as "Japan's first true collective house", and that can be traced back to the women's liberation movement of the 1960s, the anti-Vietnam War protests of the 1970s, and Machizukuri community activism of the 1980s and 90s. Furthermore, the paper examines how the collective house Kankanmori was collectively planned, designed and managed as an urban common. It will show that its success, other than frequently presented in TV programs and numerous books, is not naturally given but requiring constant organisational adaptation and a perpetual renewal of social relations between (activist) residents.

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Vogt (University of Hamburg)

Images, Frames and Norms in Times of Nation Building: Lessons to be Learned from the Emergence and Failure of the Okinawa Reversion Movement

Two decades after the main islands of Japan regained full sovereignty, Okinawa was added as a new prefecture to the Japanese state. Yet, the ecological, economic and social consequences of the persistent U.S. military presence on the islands to this day have a significant impact on the everyday life of Okinawans. Also, at many points in Okinawa's post-war history they sparked sweeping citizens' protests. This paper studies the citizens' movement ahead of the reversion of 1972, which became known under its telling name of "Convention to Reverse Okinawa Prefecture to the Fatherland" (*Okinawa-ken sokoku fukki kyōgikai*, short: *fukkikyō*). While marginal in terms of resources, the movement spread and prevailed through innovative strategies of contentious action and based on its strong movement identity, which was framed along a joint historical consciousness of the activists. Taking an Okinawan perspective, this paper discusses why a reversion movement emerged in the first place. Furthermore, which images of this new nation "Japan with Okinawa" were created and represented, and why were they appealing to the people? The milestones of the reversion movement will be examined against the backdrop of an – as will be argued – ultimately failed process of nation building that continues to haunt Okinawa-Japan and Japan-US relations to this day. This study draws on a qualitative content analysis of scholarly works on the issue, historic and recent media coverage, as well as writings by contemporary witnesses in autobiographical and literary genres. In addition to Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities Sidney Tarrow's take on social movement activism and Peter Katzenstein's model of norm building in politics provide the analytical basis for this paper.

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Friday, 6 November 2015

9:30–11:00 Panel 2: Theoretical Perspectives on Activism in Japan

Prof. Dr. Simon Avenell (Australian National University)

A Transnational Perspective on Japanese Environmental Activism

This paper examines the development and significance of transnational solidarity networks forged by Japanese environmental groups from the 1970s onwards. In the face of devastating industrial pollution and environmental degradation, from the 1970s Japanese activists began to build ties with counterpart movements in East Asia and beyond. Apart from supporting specific struggles, these transnational networks served numerous other functions such as alerting overseas activists to the dangers of Japanese-style high-speed economic growth, pressuring governments and industry, and awakening Japanese activists to pressing regional and global environmental issues. The paper looks closely at the role of local experience, knowledge, and struggle as important sources of motivation for the Japanese activists who became involved in transnational solidarity networks. It also discusses the central role of intermediaries, so-called rooted cosmopolitans, who relayed information to local Japanese groups about movements abroad and helped to connect activists across borders into transnational mobilizations.

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Prof. Dr. Fabian Schäfer (Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg)

Antagonisms and Algorithms: Social Non-Movements and the Semi-Public Sphere in Post-3/11 Japan

The rise of digital media and the trend towards more privatized forms of communication and user-generated content have long challenged the traditional idea of a mass-media-based public sphere. More recently, discussions about privacy and surveillance epitomize the ongoing process of reconfiguration and negotiation between private and public, as well as local and global, prompting us to reconsider the quality of the public sphere or spheres, and its significance and function in contemporary society. At the same time, the development of digital technologies itself contributed to new, technologically based, “semi-public” spaces on Twitter, Facebook and other Web 2.0 platforms. These are new media

forms which escape any simplifying categorization into the private or the public. Given the rise of the “connective sociality” (tsunagari no shakai-sei) (Kitada Akihiro) generated by the users of these new media forms, emphasizing the act of communication more than its content (i.e. social associations through “re-tweets” and “I-likes” of “memes”, instead of verbalized discourse), it has become necessary to come to terms with the political status of such semi-public spheres, along with their relation to and interdependence with the traditional public sphere. I propose to define this new form of an informal or semi-public sphere as “algorithmic public sphere”, because this emphasizes that with the shift from the Web 1.0 to the Web 2.0., almost any piece of information or data to be found on the Internet nowadays is structured, organized, interconnected and hierarchized by algorithmic mechanisms (such as Google’s page rank or Facebook’s Edge Rank), namely by actor-like mathematical calculations, and not by real persons such as editors (in the case of news or information) or opinion leaders (in the case of political attitudes). Digital technology and its algorithms therefore not only represent content but rather shape the possibilities and limitations of discourse itself. Nevertheless, one shouldn’t consider this development as something to be merely criticized, but see it as a possibility for the emergence of alternative political spheres as well. In my talk, I will discuss multifarious examples of novel algorithmic political expressions based on technology, such as the project “denkimeter” by Inoue Akito or the many successful attempts at mapping radioactivity made by volunteers, which might be considered as new sites of digitally enhanced civic participation or social non-movements.

Prof. Dr. Yutaka Tsujinaka (University of Tsukuba)

Civic Activism, Community Service and For-profit Organization-Government Collaboration in Japan: Political Regime and Civil Society in Comparative Perspective

Japanese civil society has triple facets: firstly, civic activism, like anti-nuclear power reactor movements after 3.11, which occurs intermittently by civic groups; secondly, the weakening but robust community service bore by neighborhood organizations and related associations, and thirdly weakening but still existing steady collaboration between economic-social organizations and public administration. These should be examined both from a national and local level, because they show rather different scenes. In order to understand these varied facets and faces of Japanese society, I would like to compare civil society in Japan with 14 other countries utiliz-

ing the JIGS data base, collected by myself between 1997–2014 period, accumulating 65000 associational data. As a theoretical perspective, I refer to civil society, interest groups and political regimes under the one party dominant party system. There, the role of opposition parties is also very important theoretically to explain this complicated situation in Japan.

11:30–13:00 Panel 3: Emergent Forms of Activism

Prof. Dr. Carl Cassegård (University of Gothenburg)

Public Space, Counter-space and No-man's-land: The Role of Space in Homeless Activism in Contemporary Japan

How do activists use space in combating gentrification and to what notions of publicness are these usages related? Using the struggles over the homeless encampments in Osaka's Nagai Park in 2007 and Tokyo's Miyashita Park in 2010 as main examples, I argue that there have been three notions of space that have been particularly important in guiding activism: no-man's-land, counter-space and mainstream public space. No-man's-lands allow for behaviour considered contrary to mainstream norms since they are neglected or ignored. Counter-spaces are spaces where such behaviour is intentionally visiblised in order to provoke and gain public attention. Mainstream public space is space for officially sanctioned dialogue. In contrast to the previous two forms of space, mainstream public space tends to impose limits on the radicalness of demands and conduct, but nevertheless helps political challengers to project messages to a wider public. I argue that each of these conceptions of space is needed to understand the development and the dynamics of homeless activism. In particular, I argue that access to alternative arenas such as counter-spaces or no-man's-lands has been important in processes of empowerment—the strengthening of people's self-confidence as political actors.

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Dr. Julia Obinger (University of Zurich / SOAS London)

Political Consumerism in Japan—Actors, Aims and Outcomes

More and more young people in industrialized nations like the U.S., Sweden or Canada claim to take part in some form of political consumerism, i.e. activities where individual purchasing choices are utilized to express or achieve political ob-

jectives. Although consumer boycotts and buycotts are by no means novel phenomena, political consumerism has only recently received widespread academic attention in the context of emergent forms of activism, in particular in Western Europe and the US. In contrast, there hardly is any journalistic reporting—let alone systematic research—concerning political consumerism, boycotting or buycotting campaigns in Japan.

Despite little media and academic coverage, my preliminary findings however indicate that political consumerism does occur in Japan and spans a disparate field of activists with diverging interests. In particular after Fukushima, ethical and sustainable consumption has gained meaning and importance, as nationwide boycotting campaigns in favor of produce from the Fukushima region show. At the same time, non-institutional forms of political and social participation have become an emerging field of research.

Since the framework to grapple with political consumerism within the specific Japanese social and institutional context is largely lacking, I will address empirical and theoretical gap by firstly assessing the historical development and current state of political consumerism in Japan, while secondly investigating case studies of ongoing campaigns in order to assess the institutional background and inhibiting/promoting factors of this phenomenon. My aim therefore is to clarify the changing roles and expressions of Japanese consumer citizens and provide new insights into the emergent field of unconventional forms of civic engagement.

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Prof. Dr. Apichai Shipper (Georgetown University)

Immigrants' Rights Activism and Xenophobic Activism in Japan

The paper explores immigrants' rights activism by non-state actors in assisting immigrants and xenophobic activism by ultra-nationalist groups at the local and national level. It argues that the type of electoral system explains the presence/absence of certain political groups on immigration issues. Therefore, a specific type of non-state organizations predominates in one country over others. Political opportunity structure helps identify specific political conditions and associational strategies under which a political and/or social group emerges to mobilize public opinion and influence policymakers. Through several years of fieldwork in Japan, I have found that immigrant advocacy NGOs work with local government officials to target the national bureaucracy and the Supreme Court to influence policy outcomes on immigration. Surprisingly, pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant activists emerged from the same socio-economic class. I explain the differences of their views and activism

on immigration issues based on their different interpretation of the country's myth and public philosophy of citizenship.

14:30–16:30 Panel 4: Voices of Japanese activists

Discussant: Prof. Dr. Yoshitaka Mōri (Tokyo University of the Arts)

Shiraishi Hajime (Journalist and Activist, Tokyo)

Sakurada Kazuya (Media Activist and Lecturer, Osaka)

Narita Keisuke (Activist 'Irregular Rhythm Asylum,' Tokyo)

Discussion will be in Japanese

Saturday, 7 November 2015

9:00–10:30 Panel 5: Post-Fukushima Activism (Anti-nuclear Protests and Reconstruction Efforts)

Prof. Dr. Koichi Hasegawa (Tohoku University, Sendai)

The Effects of ‘Social Expectation’ on the Development of Civil Society in Japan

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This paper proposes a theoretical explanation for the impact of ‘social expectation’ on the growth of civil society in Japan. Why has civil society developed as it has in Japan? Contrary to the image of Japan as a ‘strong and controlling’ nation-state, we find that private citizens—the non-governmental organization (NGO) leaders, scholars on community planning, and younger liberal politicians—set the conditions towards the growth of civil society, responding to global influences during the 1990s. I argue that the successful implementation of ‘social expectation’ played a central role for creating a social flow towards non-profit organizational activities and for the passage of the Non-Profit Organization Law (NPO Law) in Japan. Social expectation is an internalized social norm for individuals and organizations, thus for society as a whole, about what people should do. It operates on two different levels—first on particular elite groups and then on the general public—driving the dramatic growth of associational activities in Japan. It is a general societal climate where people’s imagined reference groups or communities affect their behaviours. ‘Social expectation’ is a future vision leading Japan towards a citizen-based society through dynamic collaborations among activists, NPOs, and media. We suggest in incorporating a ‘social expectation’ perspective in the study Japanese civil society development.

Ayaka Lösckke, M.A. (University of Zurich)

The Social Activism of Mothers Against Radiation after the Disaster of Fukushima

Immediately after 3/11, many Japanese people, especially mothers, tried to get information about the health risk from radiation from the Internet, while the Japanese government introduced the “temporary” exposure limit (20 mSv/year) and the Japanese mass media reported about the nuclear “accident”, playing down the

health risk from radiation. This led to mothers connecting with each other over the Internet, especially through SNS, and starting to do lobbying at the local level in order to protect children—e.g. for measuring radioactivity in school lunches. Moreover, mothers who had already been interested in food safety, natural mothering, and the health damage caused by the nuclear accident of Chernobyl before 3.11 realized the need of an act for supporting the so-called “self-evacuees” (jishuhinansha) who moved from irradiated regions, including hot spots (exposed between 1 and 20 mSv/year), to other regions of Japan without compensation. They established a national network which consists of more than 350 local groups (National Parents Network to Protect Children from Radiation), which by now is already registered as a NPO. Partly due to such mothers’ activism, the “act for supporting children and other victims affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster” passed on June 21, 2012. However, the lobbying at the national level came to a deadlock when the LDP came into power again and proposed together with the ministerial bureaucracy new policy with the goal of making residents in the Fukushima prefecture return more quickly to the irradiated areas using personal dosimeters. While the Japanese government is going to push this new policy, the national network is now forced to shift the arena from the national back to the local level. My presentation shows such a transformation of the mothers’ activism and its contexts during 4 years.

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Prof. Dr. David Slater (Sophia University, Japan)

Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy

Over the past year, a new activist group has been making headlines and revitalizing the street demonstration near Kasumigaseki Station. They draw both energy and strategy from the anti-nuke groups that have been organizing in front of the Prime Minister’s Residences for the past 4 years, but their membership is primarily university students and their grievances focus on Abe’s “reinterpretation” of Article 9 of the Constitution and the Security Treaties. Both of these proposals are highly contested by Japanese citizens but there have been few effective voices that have reached as far as SEALDs’ has. Just as significant, with the emergence of this group, we see levels of engagement among youth, and particularly university students, unusual in the post-war period. This is a field report based on our interviews and ethnography by Voices of Protest Japan of this new and still evolving group.

General Information

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