

## **Situating Japanese Youth Protest in the Global Sixties: From an Asian Perspective**

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### **1. Introduction: the Japanese Student Activism and the Global “1968”**

In the late 1960s, in the United States, West Germany, France, Mexico, Poland, Japan, and several other countries, a great number of youth mobilized their power to call for change on various issues—from reform of university policies and their governments’ foreign policies to increased civil rights and democratization. In all these protests, university students took leading roles and their campuses became focal points of radical activism during the 1960s. The 1960s as an era of the global youth revolt has been abbreviated as “1968,” the year of the climax. The wave of youth rebellion gradually ceased from the end of the 1960s to the early 1970s, but it led to the birth of new kinds of social movements whose issues had rarely been dealt with before: the women’s liberation and ethnic minority movements in the United States (Evans 1979; Muñoz 1989), ecology and organic farming movements in Japan (Usui 2010), and the Greens political party movement in Germany (Nishida 2010). Through these legacies, the student movements of the 1960s have affected social movements, mobilization, and civil engagement in each country through the present day.

This paper addresses a new perspective on the upsurge of youth activism beyond national borders in the late 1960s by examining the Japanese student activism at the time. As one of the subfields of global history, a new approach to the history of the world that emphasizes transnational connections and interrelations between local events, the Global Sixties studies explain “1968” from three transnational factors: cold war diplomacy; transnational circulation of discourses and symbols; and the interaction of young activists across borders and the resulting exchange of ideas (e.g., Geary 2008; Kosugi 2016; Suri 2003). An example of the findings of the Global Sixties studies is the interaction between West German student activists and those of the US, which started as early as the beginning of the 1960s (Klimke 2010). One of student activists from West Germany stayed in the US by Fulbright Program and he joined a local chapter of Students for a Democratic Society, which was the major organization of the American New Left at that time. He started an exchange of newsletters and members between the American SDS and the German New Left organization. He also participated in drafting the Port Huron Statement of the American SDS in 1962 and he succeeded in adding an critical perspective on Cold War to the statement. As to the reverse direction, because of the exchange

of the newsletters and members as well as media coverage, the West German student movement imported the Civil Right Movement's direct action tactics such as sit-ins from the US.

Furthermore, explaining the youth activism in Northern Europe, Latin America, and the Eastern bloc in the 1960s, which used to be regarded as less related to "1968," from these transnational factors, the Global Sixties studies made an important contribution to expanding the geographical boundary of "1968," which was previously recognized as a primarily Western phenomenon. For example, the West German student movement were affected by only the American counterpart but also those of the African and Asian countries, and its ideology and issues were established through direct interaction between the West German student leaders and the international students who came from those areas to study in German universities (Slobodian 2012).

As for Japan's "1968," scholars and intellectuals inside and outside Japan have examined it only by comparing it, and sometimes even equating it, to that of the Western countries. (e.g. Oguma 2009; Otake 2007). Subsequently, they have been not able to adequately explain the drastic differences between Japanese '60s youth activism and that of Western countries in terms of strategy, tactics, issues, and theories, which I will touch on shortly. The Global Sixties studies, however, indicate that we should now look at the Japanese experience of "1968" from a new geographical perspective.

Against this background, this paper discusses where the 1960s Japanese youth movements fit in relation to other contemporary youth movements around the world. The data I use here is mainly from my interviews of participants of a campus protest at the University of Tokyo between 1968 and 1969. For the UT had been the center of the student activism of Japan since the prewar era, the campus protest attracted intensive national attention and played a leading role in the whole student movements at that time. The life history interviews with 44 participants, faculty members, and influential student activists from different universities were conducted from June 2013 to October 2014<sup>1</sup>. Personal contacts and reference by other interviewees were used to recruit interviewees, and interviews lasted from one to eight hours. They were all recorded and transcribed. Primary and secondary sources will be referred if necessary as well.

This paper consists of two main sections. In the first section, I briefly explain the Japanese student movement of the 1960s and its characteristics. In the second section, analyzing the interview data and second and primary sources, I will look into the locality of the Japanese

<sup>1</sup> One interview was conducted in July 2011 as a part of preliminary survey for this study.

student activism and point out that its activists' special focus their attention toward Japan's former colonies in Asia rather than the youth uprisings in the Western world.

## **2. Brief Overview of the Student Movements in the 60s Japan**

Before showing the analysis of the data from the transnational perspective, let's review the history of postwar campus activism in Japan briefly. The "New Left" led the student movement and campus struggles throughout the 1960s in Japan as well as in the United States and West Germany, and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), which had enjoyed a prestigious position in postwar Japan, served as a midwife to its formation<sup>2</sup>. The Japanese "New Left" came into existence in the late 1950s. In 1956, pivotal incidents took place in the international communism movements, such as the denunciation of Stalin by Khrushchev, the Hungarian Revolution, et cetera. Student members of JCP, stimulated by these incidents and also disillusioned by JCP's parliamentarism and "the peaceful coexistence of the Soviet Union and U.S." line, left the party and organized *Kyosan Shugisha Domei* (the Communist League), also as known as Bund, in 1958. Bund tried to follow the October Revolution and the early Comintern, and it advocated "Japan's proletariat revolution as a part of the world revolution" (Totsuka 1973: 61-64). Bund soon took over the leadership of *Zengakuren* (abbreviation of *Zen Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sorengo*, the All Japan Federation of Student Self-Governing Bodies) (Otake 2007: 26-61). However, after the 1959-60 movement against the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, in which Bund and Bund-led *Zengakuren* were seriously damaged by the arrests of their powerful leaders during a series of direct actions, they broke apart, and the Japanese "New Left" started to divide into several factions.

It was not until 1968 that the "New Left" and the student movement became vigorous again. From 1968 to the early 1970s, campus struggles occurred all over Japan, involving both "New Left" students and radical non-"New Left" students. Among issues raised by students during these campus struggles were campus reform, studies conducted to meet the needs of the economic and industrial sector, and the Vietnam War. The struggles climaxed in 1968 and 1969, and of all the universities in Japan, 127 (33.7%) experienced student strikes and building occupations in 1968, and 153 (40.6%) experienced the same in 1969 (Ono 1990: 28).

Sociologist Kazuko Tsurumi investigated the 1968-69 campus protests at the University of Tokyo and pointed out that the students put much emphasis on the search for new selfhood (Tsurumi 1970). For example, a phrase circulated among the students: "*Uchi Naru Todai*" (The

<sup>2</sup> However, the "New Left" in Japan and those in the United States and Western Europe cannot be considered a very similar or same phenomenon. Details and the reason will be addressed in the next section.

University of Tokyo within ourselves). This meant that the target of their attack existed externally but also within themselves—future elites who were the students of the most privileged university in Japan. Another slogan, “*Jiko Hitei*” (Self Negation), stood for the Japanese students’ existential tendencies. Invented by the students at the University of Tokyo, “Self Negation” became one of the most popular slogans among students at the time.

Moreover, by the late 1960s numerous “New Left” factions sprang up, and the “New Left” affiliated students were immersed in violent intra-faction and inter-faction disputes. Between 1968 and 1975, 1,776 New Left factional disputes came to police attention because of their violence. They involved 4,848 injuries, 44 deaths, and 3,438 arrests (Steinhoff 1984: 182). The United Red Army Incidents in 1972 were the ultimate result of the violence, putting a stop to the Japanese student movements and the New Left as a whole<sup>3</sup>.

Based on the summary above, I would like to point out four peculiarities of the Japanese student movement in the 1960s. First, the influence of Marxism in Japan was much stronger than in other countries. A second characteristic was caused by the first: the proliferation of sects among the “New Left”. Students abandoned factions when their own interpretation of what the coming revolution would bring about and who would play the central role (proletariat or intelligentsia?) began to contradict their faction’s formal interpretation, and they formed their own new factions. Third, the presence of countless factions radicalized students’ violence against rivals, and factional disputes became a central concern of the student activists. Fourth, as “Self Negation,” the slogan popular among students, indicated, subjective or internal change and existential questions were among the students’ main concerns.

### **3. The Locality of the Japanese Student Activism and Asia**

#### **3-1. Gaining and Sharing the Discourse of “World Revolution”**

The four characteristics of the Japanese student activism stated above are rarely found in the student movements of the 1960s in the United States and Europe. However, in spite of these peculiarities, the Japanese student movements shared the vision of “world revolution” with their counterparts overseas and even inspired them with this vision. I’d like to shed a light on this imaginational and even ideological side of the transnationality in the Japanese student activism in the 1960s before discussing its locality and more direct transnational interactions it

<sup>3</sup> The United Red Army was formed through a combination of two of the most extreme factions of the New Left in 1971. It aimed to foment a communist revolution through armed struggle, and following Mao Zedong’s theories of guerilla warfare, the army built mountainous bases. From 1971 to 1972, at their bases, the members of the United Red Army murdered twelve fellow members by lynching, and these lynchings were conducted in the name of revolutionary actions; that is, as a part of self-criticism. Moreover, driven in to a corner by these lynchings, the surviving members occupied a mountain lodge, taking a hostage, from February 18-28, 1972. These two episodes attracted nationwide attention.

had.

Internationalism and this vision had been deeply embedded in the Japanese “New Left” since the very beginning of its history in the late 1950s. The Japanese “New Left” was formed under the direct influence of the Japanese Communist Party and Marxism, as stated above. Marxism had been a traditional ideology for student movements in Japan since the prewar era, and world revolution as a strategy was a critical component of the international communism movements led by the Soviets. In fact, when the Japanese students formed the New Left they did so because they saw the JCP sabotage the world revolution; this principal idea did not disappear until the late 1960s.

In 1968, sociologist Akira Takahashi analyzed the major “New Left” factions and concluded that every faction was grounded on “the world historical outlook” (Takahashi 1968: 266). According to Takahashi, the structure of the “New Left” factions’ viewpoints was as follows: Their strategic analysis was based on the international political scene. They critiqued domestic politics by locating them within international politics. Finally, they situated their campus struggles within the overall picture. For example, a faction called *Kakumarū* (short for *Nihon Kakumei Teki Marukusu Shugisha Domei Kakumei Teki Marukusu Shugi Ha*, Japan Revolutionary Marxist League Revolutionary Marxist Faction) viewed the postwar world as mutually dominated by the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union, and asserted that the world proletariat revolution had been obstructed by these three imperialistic countries. However, there were symptoms of a collapse of this imperialistic dominance—for example, the Vietnam War and the Cuban Revolution. Then, looking at Japan, they concluded that in spite of these objective conditions of a coming world revolution, this country lacked a powerful vanguard party, making it necessary for students to lead the revolution in Japan as a part of the world revolution, which would start from their campus (Takahashi 1968). Subjective and internal change, which was symbolized in slogans like “Self Negation,” became vital at this point because the accepted Marxian framework prescribed that revolutions would be led by the appropriate social subject. Thus, students’ enthusiasm toward internal change was actually a part of revolutionary process.

Although this vision and analysis of “world revolution” seems very ideological, the Japanese students were not isolated from the rest of the world. Students overseas had similar ideas, and they inspired each other, as we will see through an example of communication between the American and Japanese New Lefts.

The American New Left and student movement had kept a more “isolationist” stance, compared to that of Japan, but their interest in “world revolution” increased in the late 1960s.

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the central organization of the American New Left, had been formed in the early 1960s, strongly inspired by the civil rights movements and its student organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In the first half of the 1960s, the SDS's central concern was civil rights. Thus, unlike the Japanese "New Left", the American New Left started with a very domestic concern. However, in the latter half of 1960s, the war in Vietnam, the American government's involvement in which the American students thought was immoral, also entered their sphere of concern, but their antiwar protests were not powerful enough to stop the U.S. involvement in the war. At the same time, the civil rights movements radicalized to the Black Power movement. In this situation, seeking new chances, SDS became interested in building fraternal relationships with their counterparts in foreign countries, pursuing "world revolution" with their comrades and toppling the American government as a part of it, and bringing Marxism into their activism (Gitlin 1987; Klimke 2010). In this process, direct and indirect communication was carried out between Japanese and the American New Lefts, with the Japanese "New Left" even perceived as a militant model by the American New Left.

Interaction between the American New Left and that of Japan started as early as 1965. Carl Oglesby, the national president of SDS who was oriented toward the antiwar movement rather than civil rights, visited Japan twice that year. In his first visit, he was a guest of *Zengakuren* (the All Japan Federation of Student Self-Governing Bodies) (Oglesby 2008: 60-85). Although he kept a distance from Marxism and the revolution-oriented attitude (Oglesby 2008: 178, 251), he at least came to consider the SDS and the antiwar activism in the U.S. within the framework of the global protest:

This period [the spring of 1968] was the high tide of the student movement. ... We [the SDS] were present everywhere.

And in Paris and Nanterre in May and June, behind the leadership of Danny "the Red" Cohn-Bendit, the French student movement was threatening to reach critical mass.

West German's Rudi Deutschke was leading an equally militant student demand to "tear down the wall."

Masses of students were on the move in Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Brazil, and Mexico. I made speaking trips to England, Scotland, Wales, Italy, and Japan. The New Left had gone global, ever more confident of its power and certain of its cause.

Furthermore, in *New Left Notes*, an SDS newsletter, other SDS members also took note of the Japanese "New Left" and its militant and ideological orientation. For example, in 1966, Allon Green proposed that the SDS establish fraternal relations with *Zengakuren*. Green felt *Zengakuren* should be appreciated because, like the SDS, it was grasping for the roots of its

actions through examining Marx's earlier writings, and it started to translate this radical thought to action. He concludes that *Zengakuren's* ideological struggle and militancy made it vitally necessary for SDS, SNCC, and *Zengakuren* to be able to share ideas and interact<sup>4</sup>. His proposal exemplifies the Marxist and communist leanings of a segment of the SDS in the late 1960s.

Japanese students also contributed to the newsletter in 1967. After some members of *Zengakuren* visited the national office of SDS in Chicago, a letter from *Zengakuren* to the SDS was published in *New Left Notes*. In the letter, the Japanese New Left expressed its solidarity with the SDS and called for closer relations: "We are firmly determined to strengthen our rank arm in arm with the workers and people, and also develop international solidarity with friends overseas who are fighting in the common cause, especially the U.S.A. against the most powerful suppressor in today's world."<sup>5</sup>

It is hard to assume that the American students fully supported the Japanese "New Left"'s vision of "world revolution" based on Marxism, and there were still big differences between the Japanese student movement, characterized by a highly ideological and violent orientation, existential concerns, and factional infighting, and the American student movement, which started from the civil rights movement and was more remote from ideologies and intense violence than its Japanese counterpart. Even so, two different movements across the Pacific Ocean interacted with each other and shared the perception that they were in the same single movement, and this perception undoubtedly energized their activity.

### **3-2. Locality of the Japanese Student Activism**

Whereas the Japanese student movement of the 1960s came to hold the vision of "world revolution," we have to pay special attention to the fact that in the 1960s globalization process of Japan still had a "gap" between that of information and that of human mobility (Nakagawa 2010). This means that student activists could have an access to the information about the international situation, for example French May or the American Civil Right Movement, and could share discourses such as Herbert Marcuse and Jean Paul Sartre with their counterparts in the West and develop an idea of "world revolution", but rarely had a chance to go to overseas, communicate with foreign student activists, and import their actual movement strategies and tactics to Japan. Among my 44 interviewees, 40 of whom were students in the late 1960s, there

<sup>4</sup> Allon Green, "SDS and the Japanese New Left: Position Paper for the SDS Convention with a Resolution on Our Relations with Japanese New Left," *New Left Notes* vol. 1 no. 31 (August 19, 1966), p. 4. New York University Tamiment Library.

<sup>5</sup> "Zengakuren Action," *New Left Notes* vol. 2 no. 23 (June 12, 1967), p.1. New York University Tamiment Library.

were only 2 students who had been to overseas as of 1969 and their destination were confined to Asia because of high prices of air tickets and the limit of amount of the foreign currency they could take out for international trip.

In contrast to such a Japanese situation, the middle-class youth of Western European countries established a quite distinguished travel culture because traveling had been strongly promoted by the nation-states of Western Europe after the Second World War as through intergovernmental cooperation they sought to promote international understanding among the younger generations as a means of postwar reconciliation. The student activists in those countries literally joined Paris May or the Spring of Prague and then went back to their home countries and spread the word (Jobs 2009).

Moreover, what's called as "New Left" in Japan and the New Left in Western Europe and the US cannot be described as a single phenomenon. The so-called "New Left" movements formed in Japan, the US, and some European countries from the mid-50s to late 60s have been considered as one transnational phenomenon. In fact the factors which contributed to the establishment of each country's "New Left" were similar, for example the collapse of the Soviet-led international communist movement and national communist party's inability to adapt to developed economy. However, it doesn't mean that there were direct connections and interrelations between the "New Left" movement in Japan and those in the US and Europe. For example, Shuhei Kosaka, one of the student leaders of the campus protest at UT, remembers that as of 1967, the term "New Left" or Shin-Sayoku in its Japanese translation were not widespread among Japanese politically active youth and that British "New Left" was introduced as "new and non-Stalinist leftist project" at that time. Kosaka didn't recognize the word "New Left" as something which stood for himself or the Japanese student activism (Kosaka 2006). It's also worth noting that in the leaflets and handouts made by student activists at UT, there rarely appears the word "New Left" or its Japanese expression "*Shin-Sayoku*" in those handbills and the word to indicate student's new-born leftist factions was just "anti-JCP" or Han-Yoyogi in Japanese. This fact also suggests that in the 1960s most of the Japanese leftist student activists didn't consider themselves as a part of an international phenomenon called New Left and find no direct connection with their counterpart in West.

The interview data also show that while some of them said that they were interested in their counterparts in France or Mexico, most of them, however, stated that they were quite concerned about the domestic situation or what was going on on their campus. One interviewee even said that he had only superficial knowledge about the international situation of the late 1960s. Other activist simply admitted that he were not interested in youth activism in Europe and the US at



all. All of these points demonstrate that the contemporary youth activism in the US and European countries didn't affect the wide-spread campus activism in Japan in a very crucial way.

### **3-3. UT Students' Attention towards Asia**

That leads us to the question: whether the Japanese student activism was totally domestic phenomenon or not. Some of the Global Sixties studies which focus on bidirectional relationship between student movements in West European countries and democratization and independence movements in their former colonies suggest tht we should look at the transnational process of the 60s youth activism within Asian countries ( e.g., Hendrickson 2012).

According to the interview data, a part of very active participants of the UT campus protest paid special attention to the Japan's former colonies. This indicates that the Japanese student movement of the 1960s was also formed through interaction and interrelations within Asia and that this transnational aspect should be more emphasized when we discuss the Japanese 1960s. Below is an excerpt from an interview with one of the movement leaders. He was already assistant professor at the point of 1968 but as an experienced former student activist at UT who had taken part in the 1959-60 movement against the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and other important on-campus and off-campus protest through the 1960s, he played an influential role during the campus protest at UT between 1968 and 1969 in terms of agenda-setting and the movement philosophy.

At the time [1965], there was a series of Japan-Korea conferences and we started to look at the Pacific War. [We discussed] how we can compensate for the loss of South East Asia, Korea, China during the war. It was 1965. Since around then we had been aware of the war responsibility issue. And, BUND [showed] organizational flaws of socialist movements. The organization issue and the [war] responsibility issue, we thought these two were the theme of our Anti-War in Vietnam Association. Our feeling is that this Association was a center of active students without any party affiliation during the protest at UT [from 1968 to 1969]. (Interview June 6, 2013)

This participant locates the war responsibility as one of issues at the campus protest at UT. Another more inexperienced participant joined a support group of a Taiwanese student immediately after the campus protest. In 1969, she and other participants got involved in this

support group advocating for a Taiwanese student who studied astronomy at the University of Tokyo and got married with a Japanese graduate student but was denied a residence permit.

We, Japan, was on the side of assailant during that war. PRC and Taiwan were on the side of victim and we discussed how her [the Taiwanese student's] right for self-determination could be admitted. .... At that time, I also came to know a lot about the Ethnic Koreans' residence permit issue and the discrimination against them in terms of social status. (interview October 7, 2014)

As these experts show, student activists at UT paid special attention to Japan's former colonies and focused on Japan's war guilt as one of the issues at campus protests and rallies against the Vietnam War. All this proves that as to the Japanese student activism in the 1960s the transnational came not from Europe and the US but from the former colonies, Okinawa and inside Japan in the form of Ethnic Koreans. The Japanese student movement of the 1960s can be more precisely and adequately understood when we locate it within interaction and interrelations within Asia rather than those with the West.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper attempted to analyze the Japanese student activism in the late 1960s from an transnational and global perspective, which is informed by the Global History studies, a part of scholarly trend in history called global history. Mainly based on an analysis of 44 interviews of participants in a campus protest at the University of Tokyo during 1968–1969, this paper found that the Japanese student activism in the 1960s were marked by the Japan's globalization process in 1960s which exhibited gaps between the dissemination of information and human mobility. Although student activists had access to information about events in other parts of the world and even promoted an vision of “world revolution”, they rarely had opportunities to visit Western countries and communicate with foreign student activists. Consequently, contemporary youth activism in the United States and European countries did not affect Japanese youth protests in 1968 in a fundamental way. Implications of those circumstances were discussed in light of transnational processes of 1960s youth activism in Asia, and this paper also found that the Japanese student movement of the 1960s was formed through interaction and interrelations within Asia rather than those with the West. Student leaders paid special attention to Japan's former colonies and focused on Japan's war guilt as one of the issues at campus protests and rallies against the Vietnam War. These two findings indicate that we need to turn to the transnational process of the '60s youth activism within Asian countries to more accurately understand Asian experiences in the 1960s and subsequent social

movements in the region.

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