

## Mobilizing Mothers: The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Catastrophe and Environmental Activism in Japan

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**Abstract:** The citizens' and environmental movements of the 1960s and 70s had great political success in Japan, culminating in the Special Session of the Diet in 1970 that enacted 14 anti-pollution laws. These activist groups fought denials of responsibility on the part of industry and unresponsiveness on the part of local governments. Women were at the forefront of this type of activism during the 1960s and 70s, and led many of the citizens' environmental movements during this time. More recently, during the environmental catastrophe caused by the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, women and mothers have been vocal protesters. Environmental movements have particular political salience because of the success women have achieved in this area both in policy change and also roles in formal politics. Women have consistently achieved these successes at the same time as they performed their roles as mothers and home managers; these roles have been used strategically to mobilize women with great effect, and also were central to the values with which the citizens' movements defined themselves politically.

**Keywords** Asia; Japan; Environment; Women; Nationalism; Confucianism photography; pictorial style

The citizens' and environmental movements of the 1960s and 70s had great political success in Japan, culminating in the Special Session of the Diet in 1970 that enacted 14 anti-pollution laws. These activist groups fought denials of responsibility on the part of industry and unresponsiveness on the part of local governments. Women were at the forefront of this type of activism during the 1960s and 70s, and led many of the citizens' environmental movements during this time. More recently, during the environmental catastrophe caused by the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, women and mothers have been vocal protesters. Environmental movements have particular political salience because of the success women have achieved in this area both in policy change and also roles in formal politics. Women have consistently achieved these successes at the same time as they performed their roles as mothers and home managers; these roles have been used strategically to mobilize women with great effect, and also were central to the values with which the citizens' movements defined themselves politically.

This paper examines recent political activism by women during the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster against the backdrop of environmental activism by women in Japan and the political opportunities for social protest in Japan. To begin, an analysis of the Japanese state from the perspective of political access is examined. Furthermore, the background of citizens' environmental movements from the 1960s and 70s are presented for comparison with the mothers' groups protesting the government response to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Catastrophe. Interviews were conducted in Japan with blog authors and social activists who have created an online community to network with citizens who have been affected by the nuclear catastrophe and are critical of the government's response. Themes of these

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interviews are presented to illustrate the way in which the new blog movement reflects the re-negotiation of the mother role in Japan. The recent protest activity and online critique directly address the government's lack of response, while acknowledging a weak citizenship dynamic that prevents political movements from being able to alter policy.

#### **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Any discussion of social movements and the political implications of their activity must include the nature of the state that citizens seek to influence. Nordlinger (1987) argues that there are strong states and weak states:

(A) strong state – an autonomous one – is able to negate societal demands; the greater the private resources standing behind the demands and the greater the resistance the state is able to overcome, the greater its autonomy (364).

The key to this thesis is the issue of societal support and the degree to which the state enjoys or overcomes pressures from society, whatever its preferences might be; in other words, the ability of the state to engage in autonomous action is at issue.

Strong states are those that enjoy high autonomy and support. They are doubly strong in that they regularly act on their preferences and have societal support, for doing so (1987, 369).

Weak states have relatively low autonomy and weak societal support, while independent states enjoy high autonomy but low societal support and responsive states are characterized by low autonomy and high societal support. Within the framework outlined by Nordlinger, the absence of societal cohesion necessarily contributes to a weaker state. Supposedly, fragmented societies are unable to provide the coherent societal support that characterizes a strong state. In accordance with these variables, given the homogenous nature of the population and the construction of citizenship, Japan can be characterized as a strong state.

Related to the strength or weakness of the state, there is also a question of what kinds of states present the best opportunities for social movements to form and sustain themselves. The literature on social movements dubs this “political opportunity structure.” Political opportunity structure can be analyzed across four dimensions, as explained by Doug McAdam (1996). These are:

1. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system;
2. The stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically under-gird a polity;
3. The presence or absence of elite allies;
4. The state's capacity and propensity for repression.

Social movements are more likely to form in a political system that is open or where there is the opportunity for political access. Division among the elite power structure and the support of influential allies under a state whose propensity for repression is low are also useful for social movements. Japan is characterized as a closed political system because it is unitary and parliamentary. Moreover, the strength of the Liberal Democratic Party and bureaucracy, which are explained in more detail later in the paper, are very stable elite alignments. Japan is also state that has a low propensity for repression toward its citizens. However, the dominance of social pressure to conform makes overt repression unnecessary.

Accordingly, given these dimensions, there is little opportunity for social movements to gain traction in altering the political process in Japan unless they are able to form alignments with elites. McAdam's four dimensions focus on formal politics whereas Sidney Tarrow fills in the notion of political opportunity by referencing informal politics as well. His definition views political opportunity structure as

consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements. My concept of political opportunity emphasizes not only formal structures like state institutions, but the conflict and alliances structures which provide resources and oppose constraints external to the group (1998, 54).

Tarrow's recognition of relationships across both formal and informal politics would include interactions between movements and government officials or agencies and linkages to international actors and movements, as well as formal spaces for networking and informal spaces for people to organize. Once social movements form and pressure the state, they are also able to change the political opportunity structure of the system and provide subsequent movements with greater possibilities for success. Tarrow emphasizes this aspect when he notes, "(M)ovements arise as the result of newly expanded opportunities; they signal the vulnerability of the state to collective action, thereby opening up opportunities for others; the process leads to state responses which, in one way or another, produce a new opportunity structure" (1998, 61).

These ideas concerning the opportunities for social movements (and women's groups as a category of such movements) in the political system are related to and supportive of Nordlinger's presentation of the properties of strong states and weak states. In the framework of political opportunity structure, a state receptive to societal pressure, which is also unable to free itself from societal opposition, would be most conducive to social movements. In other words, a weak state which does not exhibit a great degree of autonomy from society, and which does not have societal support, would allow the greatest opportunity for social movements. The strong state/weak state typology and the literature on political opportunity structure point to similar institutional barriers that may explain the success or failure of political action by social groups.

Given the concepts of strong/weak states and political opportunity structure, Japan is a state that would present fewer opportunities for social movements except in cases where the movements have strong societal support, relationships with government elites, or government agencies. In addition, linkages to international actors and institutions may assist groups in putting pressure on the government to act. These variables help one to understand the force of the Japanese government in structuring its relationships with a variety of civil society actors, including women's groups. The history of the Japanese government's interactions with women's groups demonstrates that it is a state with a high ability to intervene in social protest and rights movements. These interventions may benefit women's groups as they allow the groups political access. The role of the state in managing and directing the women's movement is thoroughly presented by authors such as Garon, Tokuzo, and LeBlanc.

The Japanese state is usually characterized as strong because of its centralism and focus on policy directives at the national government level. In July 1999, the Law Concerning the Provision of Related Laws amended the Local Autonomy Law for the Promotion of the Decentralization of Power (Omnibus Decentralization Act). This law altered and clarified

the relationship between central and local levels of government. Where previously Japan had an agency delegation system, which used local authorities as agents of the central government, the functions of local government under the new law were reorganized into statutory entrusted functions. Statutory entrusted functions are those functions legally delegated to local authorities that were originally the responsibility of the central government. These functions are stipulated in the Local Autonomy Law and include such things as the issuance of passports, management of national roads, and compilation of statistics for the central government or prefectures (CLAIR 2002). These changes give more power to the prefectures to perform certain tasks, although the relative real gains in terms of self-governance are debatable. As the Local Autonomy Law illustrates, lower levels of government in Japan are policy-implementing bodies rather than policy initiators. This is in contrast to many industrial democracies where lower levels of government do have the power to initiate policy.

Despite their seeming powerlessness, local governments have played an important role in Japanese democracy. Ishida (1989) notes that local governments “provide a buffer against bureaucratic arbitrariness, creating additional points of access and influence for groups poorly represented nationally, and serving as an arena for more fully realizing certain rights such as healthful and cultured living...” (165). Innovation at the local level in Japan initiated the creation of social programs, which have in turn pressured the national government to develop similar systems and national policies, thereby creating a channel of advocacy for citizens.

Along with arguments concerning the impact which decentralization or federalism may have in achieving a more open political system, the nature of political parties and responsiveness of cabinet ministries may also influence the ability of social protest movements, to affect policy. While this understanding of what constitutes politics illustrates the narrow avenues for political access, making the Japanese state more closed than open to political engagement with social groups, some authors argue that this very structure has led to protest groups playing a significant role in politics. In some ways, the nature of the Japanese bureaucracy has forced citizens to develop other means of impacting their government. For example, Ishida argues that

Japan’s peculiar combination of strong protection of civil liberties, an election system which seriously distorts legislative accountability, and a powerful professional government bureaucracy, greatly increases the probability that citizens will engage in extra-institutional protest (176).

A number of groups have used protest activity as a way of having their interests represented formally, including the environmental movement, the antiwar group *Beheiren* べへいれん, student movements and feminist groups (Ishida 1989). The changes taking place in Japanese politics as a result of the 2005 election will also likely affect the way citizens, including women, attempt to impact government. As the Liberal Democratic Party’s dominance returns once again, Japan may be characterized as a single-party-dominant system in which reform and leftist parties are marginalized and “the problems for the revolutionary left in Japan are to take up the possibilities of growing mass opposition ... and to facilitate the process of re-groupment of the fragmented left group” (Hirai 2004).

As we have already pointed out, given its history of interactions with citizens’ groups, the nature of political parties and bureaucracy, as well as the division of power between national and lower levels of government, the Japanese state can be characterized as strong. Because of this, there is limited opportunity for social movements to form, sustain themselves, and

alter future avenues for political access. Applying the literature on political opportunity structure highlights that in the case of Japan societal pressure, the existence of relationships between social movements and elite allies will enhance the success of social movements. In the case of environmental movements, as the following section illustrates, the government has responded to social pressure by acting as a mediator between environmental groups and the corporations responsible for the pollution being protested. This mediating function has allowed the Japanese government to maintain stability and the political power of its elite alignments, and to broker resources and political justice for citizens seeking compensation.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM AND CITIZEN PROTEST

During the post-WWII period, an infusion of American aid allowed Japan to pursue industrialization with substantial vigor. In the 1960s, Japan experienced extreme economic growth as the gross national product increased eightfold (Hayes 1992). Despite the devastating damage to Japan's infrastructure at the end of World War II, the country achieved amazing economic growth during the postwar period. Although economists cite many reasons for Japan's success, the industrial policy formulated and implemented by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and the Ministry of Finance was integral for much of Japan's economic development from 1955 to 1975, when economic growth was at its top speed.

Despite its promise, however, the process of accelerated industrialization also had devastating environmental consequences. These consequences included major pollution events such as the *Itai* (1972) outbreak, the Minamata (1960-1974) outbreak, and asthma outbreak in Yokkaichi city from 1970-1974 (Murota 1985). Each of the diseases associated with these events resulted from toxic substances traced to industries. The *Itai* ("it hurts") outbreak was caused by ingestion of cadmium traced to a metal refining company; Minamata disease was caused by poisoning from methyl mercury waste produced by a fertilizer company; and citizens in Yokkaichi city suffered from asthma induced by air pollution generated by the city's industrial complex (Patrick 1976).

Many small, locally focused citizens' groups began to protest industrial pollution because of the severe health problems caused by such pollution in the 1960s. These groups fought denials of responsibility on the part of industry and unresponsiveness on the part of local governments. Although Schreurs (2002) notes the presence of advocates within the bureaucracy, the majority party generally prevented environmental progress.

An early example was in 1953 when the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MoHW) conducted a national survey of pollution that found that many Japanese were suffering from air, water, and noise pollution. On the basis of this survey and similar debates that were going on in the US, the UK and Germany, the MoHW formulated a bill to prevent contamination of the living environment. Other ministries, industry, and the LDP, however, opposed the bill (38).

The presence of diverse, sometimes opposed interests and the LDP's strength to oppose the MOHW illustrate the difficulty that citizens faced in achieving change. In detailing the Minamata pollution case, George points to the importance of fishing cooperatives that pressured the company responsible for the pollution for damages. They garnered publicity by staging sometimes violent demonstrations against the factory and eventually brought their grievances directly to the government through formal channels. When the formal channels were unsuccessful, each of the groups involved (the Minamata Fishing Cooperative, Kumamoto Prefectural Alliance of Fishing Cooperatives and the Minamata disease

Patients Mutual Aid Society) resorted to extra-institutional methods, including violence and sit-ins. With dispute resolution in the Minamata case being informally controlled by the government and business, the key characteristic (according to Upham) was the use of a solatium agreement, instead of the more formal legal damage compensation payment. As Upham notes, “The agreement re-established social harmony in the Minamata area and bought several years of acquiescence for Chisso and its government supporters” (Upham, 27). A decade later, however, the victims brought their battle to the central government in Tokyo and, George argues, “changed the rules of the game and more permanently than Upham suggests. If citizenship is defined by behavior and consciousness, not just by results, then many of the Minamata victims were already acting and thinking much like democratic citizens in 1959 well before the explosion of local citizens’ groups in the 1960s” (George, 121). The extent to which the rules of the political game involving citizens’ retribution actually work is arguable in the Minamata case; the lawsuits filed were finally settled out of court in 1995, with Chisso corporation obliged to pay compensation to victims in the form of *mimaikin*<sup>1</sup> (also called solatium) without admitting that they were legally culpable. The use of solatium payments underscores the role played by the central government in negotiating a settlement for citizens that, while granting compensation, did not improve the future abilities of citizens’ groups to seek redress from corporate polluters.

The unresponsiveness of both industry and government forced citizens to consider litigation, a political move that had been largely unused previously and was uncharacteristic of Japanese culture. The citizens’ movement’s use of the court system illustrates the seriousness of the government’s unwillingness to protect its population from polluting industries.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the tension between industrialization and environmental protection was being played out in the bureaucracy as the two ministries responsible for these areas (the MoHW and MITI) vied with each other to protect their interests. Four large pollution cases brought to court by victims forced major changes in a political system that had been closed: mercury poisoning in Kumamoto and Niigata prefectures, *itai-itai* disease in Toyama prefecture, and asthma in Yokkaichi city. These court cases focused media attention on environmental problems, and it is widely acknowledged that the media helped turn national attention to the plight of victims of pollution diseases in the 1960s and 1970s (Schreurs 2002, 42).

Japanese women played a vital role in these citizens’ movements, which attacked the problem of increasingly destructive practices toward the environment. So called “housewives’ movements,” organized and led by women, developed as a type of citizens’ movement during this time period. Many housewives’ movements became part of larger citizens’ movements, but the housewives’ activism is also distinct from the larger set of more formal, politically minded citizens’ groups that were led by men. Housewives participated in movements to correct pollution problems that affected the home and family locally, whereas citizens’ movements tended to fight for large-scale change at the national level and for legislation to reform polluting industries.

(I)n the late 1960’s and early 70’s, public resentment about worsening pollution burst into a full-fledged environmental movement. Women’s groups, including affiliates of the Housewives Association and the National Federation of Regional Women’s Organizations, furnished much of the dynamism behind these citizens’ movements. Anti-pollution protests meshed well with the organized women’s long-standing identification with daily life. (Women’s groups) and other associations attacked the government and business community for having pursued high-growth

economic strategies with little commitment to conserving and recycling resources (Garon 1997, 194).

The logic of development was pervasive in Japan immediately following World War II, and its effects upon the home and family motivated women's political action. The effect of pollution on the home and family hastened women's involvement in environmental activism. The linkage between women and political participation on environmental issues is very strong in Japan, where women are more likely to be involved in citizens' movements that have environmental issues as their primary concern. Women's groups became a symbol of the sectors of Japanese life most affected by pollution, and in that capacity served as an important counterpart and legitimization for the environmental movement and its efforts to urge the government to change their lenient environmental policies. The citizens' movements during this time period (unlike the Minimata case) were able to articulate their demands to the Japanese government. Because of coinciding high media attention from the late 1960s through the early 1970s, public sympathy was at a high point and the government response was dramatic, resulting in some of the strongest environmental protection laws in the world and changing the political opportunity structure and rules of the political game.

The Japanese government responded to high societal pressure, as shown by the manner in which the environmental/citizens' movements of the 1960s and 70s achieved their success. The Environmental Diet of 1970 resulted from these movements, which had the broad support of Japanese society. The movement also created relationships with government officials, who attempted to mediate between corporations responsible for pollution and social protest groups before they used the court system to pressure government agencies to act. These outcomes confirm that the concepts of political opportunity structure apply to the environmental movement in Japan.

The explanations for women's participation in these movements are embedded in notions of Japanese citizenship and the perceived responsibilities of mothers. Hasegawa offers a convincing argument based on the traditional notions of mother and parent in Japanese culture (2004). These roles have been used strategically and with great effect to mobilize women, and were also central values to the way in which the citizens' movements defined themselves politically. The usefulness in employing this strategy is especially important in the context of Japanese politics,

where the normative value of 'citizen' and 'civil society' is rather weak, the iconic 'mother/parent' can signify the universality and solidarity of the movement. It has come to symbolize a 'post-political' responsibility for others beyond the particular parent/child relationship, and can thereby position a social movement as above or outside of ideology, political parties and self-interests (Hasegawa 2004, 141).

Broadbent echoes this argument, noting that, "because women are defined as outside the realm of politics and power, they are freed from a degree of social control, giving them greater freedom to mobilize" (1998, 163). In a culture where the norm is to undervalue women's knowledge, the role of mother stands out as a position from which women's knowledge is socially valued. The "mother's word" represents a "devoted, self-sacrificing, and altruistic position" which is highly valued (Hasegawa 2004, 141).

In Japan, women's groups started by housewives and mothers have provided most of the focus for the emergent consumer interest in activism. Kirkpatrick (1975) notes that this activism reflected the "special responsibility for the home and home management and family well-being associated with the women's role in Japanese society" (236). Women in

consumer movements used informal methods of organizing such as protests, boycotts and publicity campaigns. In the postwar period, Japanese society changed as women moved into the workforce and access to education offered them admittance to public roles closed to them prior to the war. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, new forms of political protest appeared; coupled with an increase in leisure time, this trend contributed to women's participation in grassroots movements to counter the effects of environmental degradation, long work days, and the need for child care facilities (Nuita et al 1994). By the late 1960s, a growing consumer movement had expanded into a national campaign dominated by housewives. "They tackled homemaking problems that had immediate relevance to them, such as the high cost of living, food additives, and false advertising. Their activities directly contributed to democratization at the community level" and raised awareness about public issues. However, this awareness and organizational skill were not used in a broad-based campaign to advance the status of women (Nuita et al 1994, 402).

The lack of broad-based campaigning can be understood from Robin Leblanc's perspective (1999). Leblanc argues that the traditional methods of political science inquiry, including mass studies of voting behavior or party membership, neglect participation by housewives because our theoretical categories are male-driven. Japanese women do not participate in the same way Japanese men do. "(W)omen are less likely than men to report supporting a particular political party, participating in a campaign, joining a political support group, or meeting an elected official or powerful political activist" (Leblanc 1999, 67). When conducting interviews with housewives, Leblanc found that women who described apathetic feelings toward politics did so because of their dissatisfaction about the choices available to them in political society (1999). Steel (2004) also notes that norms for Japanese women still emphasize their "primary role within the household as wife and mother. Women are concerned with public policy issues that affect their household, but they do not see them as 'political'..." (228).

The idea that women's social role may empower or disempower their ability to politically act is a cultural variable which is not included in the literature on social movements. However, the role of cultural norms and the perceived responsibilities of citizens and government may influence women's likelihood to participate and the degree to which movements are able to garner societal support. In the case of the environmental movements presented above, women utilized their role as mothers to draw public attention in striking ways, sometimes even underlining their own vulnerability as a tool for public shaming.

#### **THE FUKUSHIMA DAIICHI PROTEST MOVEMENT**

The protest movement by mothers against the Japanese government's response to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Catastrophe is similar to earlier environmental activism by women during the 1960s and 70s. The grassroots political activity led by mothers in response to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Crisis has been noted by the international press in several prominent outlets and is beginning to be researched by academics as well. A *Guardian* article highlights activities of the women's movement, noting that "(I)ndeed, groups of women braving a cold winter, have been setting up tents since last week preparing for a new sit-in campaign in front of the Ministry of Economic Affairs affairs (Kakuchi 2011, 2)". Motivated by their role as caretakers of the home, the women that comprise these movements are pressuring the government to end the use of nuclear power and evacuate children and families living in areas with high radioactive contamination.

The protest demonstrations against nuclear radiation have been based in Tokyo, utilizing a network of women activists "who have provided the digital framework for organiza-



tion that has brought together an older generation of anti-nuclear activists, young families, hip urbanites, office workers and union protesters” (Slater, 1). The women’s movement has utilized a wide array of new media sources to garner support including websites, YouTube videos, Twitter, personal blogs, Facebook groups, and Yahoo user groups. The use of new media has allowed the women’s groups to make connections with mothers’ groups across the world, garnering support and gathering information for their cause. For example, the Connecting Mother’s Blog (お母さんたちをつなぐブログ), presented in Figure 1.1, offers women a space for information sharing and networking.



Figure 1.1: Connecting Mother’s Blog

Source: National Network of Parents to Protect Children from Radiation (子どもたちを放射能から守る全国ネットワーク). 2013. papamama-zenkokusawakai.blogspot.com

This blog is one of many started in response to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear meltdown and ensuing catastrophe. The text in this picture explains the reasons for the creation of the blog:

It’s difficult to talk to people about radioactivity, even though there’s worry and anxiety especially regarding children and work. There isn’t any time to follow detailed explanations. We set up this blog for these kinds of mothers.

All over the country, mothers and everyone in these organizations are doing tea conversations and events offering to give radioactivity information. There were 1000 meetings held of tea conversation to open people’s eyes.

From 3.11 mothers who have lifted their voices are making connections and sharing information that they find with each other. From now on, this is the kind of blog we are doing, bridging people who want to make connections, those whose children are gone and people from various positions and various places.

We encourage this one-time opportunity for broad consciousness-raising on the radioactivity problem; this is the most important thing for children nation-wide (National Network of Parents to Protect Children from Radiation (子どもたちを放射能から守る全国ネットワーク). 2013. papamama-zenkokusawakai.blogspot.com, my translation and emphasis).

The mission statement above establishes the concern for home and family as the primary dominion of mothers, and that the focus for these efforts is on children. The words above also convey the idea that though these are individual concerns for moms, they impact a more abstract and universal concern for children nationwide. The position of mothers to impact broad consciousness raising is mentioned as well, showing that the concerns and special responsibilities of mothers are uniquely positioned to elevate and impact the national discussion on radioactivity and Fukushima-Daiichi. The Connecting Mother’s blog focuses on providing information and opportunities for networking among mothers and organizations assisting in the recovery efforts. It is also linked to a magazine publication for mothers called “Mother’s Revolution” ママレボ.

The use of new media has distinguished the new mothers' protest activity from earlier protests, allowing for the dispersion of information and mobilizing a broader base of women and mothers. Other examples include the use of Facebook and Yahoo user groups such as the Fukushima Network for Saving Children from Radiation (子供たちを放射能から守る福島ネットワーク). The use of these online communities is widespread and continuing. The table below notes the most prominent blog groups responding to the concerns of mothers, families, and local survivors of the tsunami and nuclear meltdown.

Table 1.1: List of Blogs

BLOG NAME	AUTHOR/ADMIN.	PURPOSE	URL
<b>Connecting Mother's</b> お母さんたちをつなぐブログ	<b>National Network of Parents to Protect Children from Radiation</b>	<b>Provides online space for families to share knowledge and take action to protect the children. The blog is connected to the Fukushima Network that is active on the ground.</b>	<b>papamama-zenkoku-sawakai.blogspot.jp</b>
<b>Save Child</b>	<b>info@savechild.net</b>	<b>Information site for mothers to prevent radiation sickness</b>	<b>savechild.net</b>
<b>Carrying my iPhone and books to town</b>	<b>Ikasumi0</b>	<b>Share thoughts regarding the earthquake and radiation</b>	<b>d.hatena.ne.jp/ikasumi0</b>
<b>Misato Yugi's blog</b>	<b>Misaki Yugi</b>	<b>Information regarding causes and effects of radiation sickness with drawings for children</b>	<b>mikanblog.com</b>
<b>Helping (たすけあい) Japan</b>	<b>Nao Sato</b>	<b>Host of local projects in Fukushima, includes updates on missing people and blog about local people and their lives. Updates news on government activities in Fukushima area.</b>	<b>tasukeaijapan.jp</b>

Two of the most prominent leaders of the grassroots mothers' initiative are Sachiko Sato and Aileen Miyoko Smith. Smith is the head of Green Action Japan, an NGO that advocates for renewable energy. Sato created the National Network to Protect Children from Radiation. Together, Smith and Sato organized a protest to occupy the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) in Tokyo, to call for a permanent shutdown of Japan's nuclear industry. The idea for the protest came out of a delegation that discussed the plight of Fukushima children with the UN High Commission on Human Rights, to bring attention to the plight of children and to protect them from contamination. The three-day sit-in began on October 27th and included over 700 people, including 100 women from Fukushima. The women pledged to continue their demonstrations for 10 months and 10 days, the span of a full term of pregnancy according to traditional Japanese culture, in order to achieve a rebirth in Japanese society. While this particular protest ended, other protests are ongoing as the radiation effects spread outward from Japan, increasingly affecting ocean environments as well.

The issue of radioactive contamination continues to be strongly protested by Japanese mothers in the blogging community. Activists, environmental groups, scientists and doctors argue that the government is not doing enough to protect children who may still be exposed to radioactivity in and around Fukushima. Some of these activists and mothers have taken it upon themselves to do radioactive testing. For example, one woman living in the Saitama

Prefecture arranged to have her daughter's urine tested; the test indicated that there was .4Bq of Cesium 137 present per kilogram of urine<sup>3</sup>. In order to protect her daughter, this mother took strong measures, including tracking down fresh produce from Kyushu (Japan's southernmost island – the furthest from Fukushima), using bottled water exclusively and buying eggs from a mail order company. (Penny 2011) Stories like this are common and fill the blog pages as mothers relate their stories and seek advice. These blogs and online networks are part of a vast and deep relationship emerging among mothers in web space. As Penny notes, "After announcing her daughter's test results on Twitter, the mothers' number of followers jumped from a number of close acquaintances to 700 people asking for details and advice about how to have their own children tested" (2011, 1). Many of these women are simply trying to keep their children safe; they are united in their status as mothers. In Sachiko Sato's appeal to activists in the USA, she says

My own children evacuated to Yamagata on the 13th of March, but in Fukushima, 300,000 children were left behind. I wanted to help every one of those children and hence, started measuring radiation levels in schools. The results showed that 75% of schools in Fukushima Prefecture were in radiation-controlled areas. I submitted the report to the prefecture, hoping that the children would be evacuated immediately. But on the day that I submitted the report, the country set the safety standard for children's exposure to radiation at 20 mili-sievert<sup>4</sup> of radiation per year. This standard was set so that Fukushima city and Koriyama city would not be compulsory evacuation zones (Sato 2011, 1).

Sato's appeal is indicative of the calls being made by other mothers who are members of the new protest groups. Their focus is on the children, utilizing their special responsibility as housewives and mothers to advocate for protection of the home and family, which have been accorded special status by the Japanese government. Women's positions in the home at the center of Japanese society have such political power because of their link with the construction of national identity in Japan. This role is made even stronger because of the low birthrate problem, which has helped to idealize the role of housewife and mother as she who can save the population from a social security crisis. As Slater notes, "(M)others protesting nuclear contamination (and thus the nuclear power industry) critique politics from within, at the core of public perceptions of Japanese society and culture, and indeed, from the perspective of the 'natural' obligation of reproduction and nurturing another generation" (2012, 2).

The interviews I conducted with mothers, blog authors and environmental activists show that women acknowledge their position in the family and larger Japanese society as one that is special; however, the use of this role to articulate political concerns is characterized as being weak by social movement literature. Unlike statements made by women participants in the 1960s and 70s environment movement, the criticism of the Japanese government in the case of Fukushima Daiichi is direct and emerges from the notion that the government is responsible for protecting citizens, especially those that are defenseless. While the use of a call to this state role is not new, the direct language used by activists is, and it acknowledges the citizenship dynamic in Japan in an outright manner.

#### **THE SPECIAL ROLE OF MOTHERS**

Japanese women acknowledge that their position brings with it a special responsibility for protecting the home, and that when the home is threatened their voice carries particular importance and meaning.

Women have a special role because of their concerns as mothers. Women's position in the home is weak, however, especially if living with extended family, so it is difficult for them to express their voice.

My first impression in regards to the incident was that the male population seems to be more negligent about radiation and its consequences. It is said that people who believe strongly in reason or logos tend to be more resistant to facing the radiation issue.

Mothers tend to be more careful and sensitive to the effect of radiation for their child and themselves, while fathers are more worried about their job and occupations (Interviews 2013).

There were also statements of outright criticism against the central government, implying that authorities are lying to people and that the state is failing in its duty to protect the most vulnerable citizens because they are less likely to raise their voices in protest. Moreover, the media is not supporting the current movement and government critique, unlike the protests of the 60s and 70s. In fact, some even noted that the media is doing the government's work by failing to report on the radioactivity.

The children who are living in Fukushima as of now have no particular physical disorders that are present, but we must avoid them getting cancer ten and twenty years from now on. At least that is the most we could do for them.

I think the radiation issue is hard to discuss in politics because the government can only act in terms of political policies, besides they have not officially acknowledged radioactive contamination on the soil of Fukushima and that is the biggest reason why they are yet unable to tackle the problem. They want to enact projects to resolve the contamination, but if they were to admit its existence, it would also have to admit the fact that Japan has become the second Chernobyl.

The people of Fukushima will have to protect themselves by their own hands. The radiation problem is very difficult to solve. I believe there are three ways in which people are exposed to radiation and its impact: radiation from food, radiation from the air and exposure from the explosion. One cannot recover from the radiation from the explosion no matter what, some people think if you are careful with food selection you will be fine. Another person may say radiation from the air is more harmful than that of food, opinions vary depending on the sort of information you get from different sources. It is inevitable [that there is no consensus or official statement regarding the danger] since the government is not acting at all to protect people; the country is almost anarchical. On top of that, the government had stopped accepting refugees to the public housing [near Fukushima] so really people are left with few choices.

Two years has passed since the incident and the Japanese government remains status quo, there is a lot that can be done as a volunteer to spread the word about the danger that we exist in.

The local media is focused on promoting reconciliation so they also refuse to have an advertisement about alerting danger to the community. (Interviews 2013)

Some of those interviewed also referenced the citizenship dynamic in Japan, the limitations of which imply that citizens' voices are limited and weak when compared to the strength of the central government and the social relationships that condition both. The focus on community in Japan may hamper movements fighting for what are perceived as individual rights that are currently being heavily criticized by the leadership of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and Prime Minister Abe.

I believe the new government will be focused more on external problems with China and Korea, and will leave the internal problems aside because those problems are more 'urgent' than what is going on inside. To follow the nature of the Japanese culture, if anyone started to raise their objection to their policy, those people will be labeled as a traitor or un-patriotic person.

This is partially because of Japan being one of the prominent developed countries in the world; the lifestyle standard is too high for any of us to start a completely new life in a new location without a stable job. If something similar were to happen in a place like Egypt, where there is little trust in government, people would run from the situation no matter what the government said. In comparison, Japanese people have high trust in their government and low media literacy, which has led to two years of virtually no change or improvement here.

The individual separation from the community is critical in a culture such as Japan where collectivism is virtually enforced by the society.

I personally never thought that such a huge nuclear plant accident would happen in a safe place like Japan, but was even more surprised about the fact that nothing had really changed after the accident. The people of this country are paralyzed to the point that no one remembers an explosion that happened only two years ago. (Interviews 2013)

The above statements imply that the women of Japan recognize the strength of collectivism in their society, which may hamper people's willingness to criticize in order to be accepted or supported by the larger society. This support is critical in Japan, where the social movements of the past were able to make changes because of vocal media criticism, which moved Japanese society to support victim's rights in the large pollution cases outlined earlier in the paper. Moreover, several of these women note the inaction by government and paralysis of the larger population. Within this perceived context, it is unlikely for actors in social movements to be taken seriously.

The environmental movements of the past were successful in achieving legislative change (despite Japan's closed political system) because of their alliances with government elites, broad societal support and media coverage that supported the movements' goals and criticized the government. In contrast, current women's groups have not been able to draw the same kind of media attention. The online groups and new media outlets have a powerful ability to connect women and provide a space to share information, but as yet these online communities have not been directed toward formal political change. Women understand the potential weight their voices can have because of their role as women and mothers;

however, this author was unable to establish that the online mothers' groups and other protesters had links to elite allies that would strengthen their ability to make political changes.

The citizenship dynamic between women, women's groups and the Japanese government has directed political activism by women. The special roles accorded to women in the home means that women have a primary duty to protect the home and family. This role motivated women to act on matters affecting the home in both the citizens' environmental movements of the 1960s and 70s and the continuing protest and online critique directed against the government regarding the recent Fukushima-Daiichi Nuclear catastrophe. While these two social movements share similarities, the citizens' movements were ultimately successful at pressuring the government to enact laws to protect citizens. It is too early to establish the long-term effects of the current mothers' movement, but the theory of political opportunity suggests that there is a low potential for the current groups to impact formal politics. More research is necessary in order to understand the role of new media in maintaining political activism by women and encouraging continued protests. As the interactions between women's groups and the government continue to play out, it will be necessary to investigate the effects on Japanese environmental policy and the protection of citizens from radioactivity and the toxic effects on health related to the nuclear meltdown and fallout.

#### NOTES

1. Mimaikin or solatium payments are considered sympathy or blood money payments given as an expression of sympathy for another's misfortune, and does not imply responsibility. A hoshokin 帆資金 or compensation payment is given when responsibility for causation is legally established or admitted to in writing.
2. The use of the court system in Japan is outstanding because Japan is not a litigious society.
3. "The acceptable amount of radioactive cesium in human urine is zero." Cesium 134 and 137 are substances that do not exist in nature, moreover they cause damage to the human body at any level.(fukuleaks.org, accessed 12/23/13)
4. 20 millisieverts is equivalent to 2000 millirems. The average annual radiation dose per person in the United States is 620 millirems (CDC 2003).

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