

The Japanese Anti-Pollution Movement

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When considering the course of environmental pollution-related issues in Japanese society, the most crucial factor has been the pollution victim incorporating 'Jumin Undo' (Citizens' Movement) type grassroots organizations. These movements and organizations will most likely continue as crucial factors shaping social and political change. Japanese success with environmental pollution control has been noted internationally, especially in Western Europe, but the true motivating force behind these changes has been the grassroots movements, shaping public opinion, which in turn has forced administrative agencies to act. Due to the economic depression coming to the fore in the mid-1970s, these movements have also been exposed to difficulties, but there are now greater possibilities for political power emanating from them as they struggle with new issues related to the quality of life in its totality.

Japanese Society as Background for the Movements

Since the excessive development of rice paddy culture in the 18th century, a chronic shortage of irrigation water had been the basic common condition of Japanese farmers. They organized themselves into closed, exclusive agrarian communities, to provide stable supplies of scarce irrigation water in competition with neighbouring communities, thereby forming complicated tradition-bound systems of water use.¹ To maintain unity in these communities, conflicts were avoided as much as possible. The task of the community was to secure a water supply, sometimes even by force. A certain collectivism was created with individuals serving the group, along with a kind of Japanese rationalism aimed at developing individual capabilities to the maximum under given conditions for the sake of maximum crop yields. This strange combination of conflicting orientations became the basic norm of early Japanese society. This type of community informed by an agrarian mentality melded successfully

into modern Japanese society after the Meiji Restoration. Individuals in lower social strata were promised protection by the more powerful higher strata, in exchange for obedience. This stratified society was unified on a national scale under the authority of the Emperor system into a pseudo community. This was the nature of Japanese society before the second World War. The Great Asian Community was an expansion on this pseudo-community image projected onto the whole of Asia during the war.

After the defeat, Japanese militarism disintegrated, but the basic agrarian community concepts remained intact within corporate organizations, being greatly strengthened by formal education. The combination of collectivism and Japanese rationalism was well suited to the modern capitalist mass-production industrial system, and as such supported the Japanese economic miracle. On the other hand, the development of individuality and personality was greatly retarded. The Japanese post-war political system relied too heavily on large organizations and administration. Under such conditions, there were very limited possibilities for voluntary local grassroots movements developing until the 1960s when industrial pollution exploded on the scene.

2. Why Industrial Pollution Broke Out So Severely in Japan

In spite of favourable geographical conditions such as being an island country surrounded by the sea, why was Japan to become the most industrially polluted country in the world, to the extent of having produced many victim deaths over the last several years? The answer comes from a detailed analysis of modern history as seen in the process of modernization and industrialization. There are many conditions that are different from those of Western European industrialization. The most important of those will be discussed briefly.

2.1. The Attitudes of Industry

Industrial capitalism in Japan was bred and grown from the very beginning under a strong national policy of "rich nation, strong army". There has been no history of resistance and revolution to imperialistic powers or to the feudal system in the process of capital formation, so industrial capitalism in Japan has not been forced to seriously consider the welfare of the people. There were few chances to argue for industrial social responsibility as separated from the national interest. Industrial capitalism in Japan has always pursued maximum profits from specific capital under the support of a dominant nationalism protected by national power. Investment productivity was maximized by sparing even minimum pollution control facilities such as dust collectors and waste water treatment plants which were common sense necessities on the international level. This negligence was one of the three most important factors leading to rapid economic growth for Japanese industries, along with low wages and trade protectionism.²

The post-war modernization of the steel industry through the introduc-

tion of the converter without the dust collector, a total lack of water treatment in the paper and pulp industry, and a plating industry which greatly supported the automobile and home-appliance industries: these are typical examples of early industrial pollution negligence, leading to rapid expansion of the particular sector. The attitude of industry toward pollution victims' movements was quite arrogant. Industry in the past freely used tactics including denying the existence of pollution damage, under-evaluating the damage done, blaming the victims for the problems as if they were out-laws, and bribing and scaring the victims' movement. It was quite common to deny cause-and-effect relationships by mobilizing industry-supported scientists. This attitude did not change even after World War II in spite of the democratization of Japanese society. More than 20 years of concerted public opinion were necessary to criticise such an attitude in the 1970s. Facing the chronic depression of the late 70s, Japanese industrial capitalism again started attempting to control workers, stressing collectivism and international competitiveness. This tendency is also visible in attitudes toward society as a whole stressing the national interest in the extreme.

2.2. The Role of National Policies and the Administration

The "rich nation, strong army" policy of the Meiji period survived even after World War II in the guise of industrial protectionism and a high economic growth policy. The intimate relationship between governmental administration and large industry has been cemented strongly during the past three decades. The "Lockheed Scandal", which has become the symbol of this system, is only a tip of the iceberg. Special tax exemptions for large industry, high priorities on the preparation of an industrial infrastructure through public finance, land speculation by monopolizing information, monopolizing public investments through secret negotiations among the leading construction firms, maintenance of cartels through licence systems, expansion of bilateral aid for developing countries, these are now well known protection policies for Japanese industry, and have become international issues. When high ranking administration officers retire early, some become managers in leading industries, some become politicians in the ruling conservative party, and as such they help each other in maintaining the present political system. The trinitarian structure of industry, administration and politics has been the basis for the stability of Japanese conservative power in the national government, and resembles military regimes in many developing countries. Industrial protectionism is so prevalent in Japanese politics that even in pollution control laws prepared in response to public pressure, there are clearly written clauses which describe the extent to which pollution control should be limited so as not to harm the profitability of industry.³ Probably there are few such cases in the world.

This national policy of protectionism controls local governments through laws, subsidies, and exchange of officials. Also, as is seen in recent public education issues, by controlling education in such a way as to produce a mass

supply of obedient, capable workers for industry, this policy is out to control the future of Japan also. Japanese national policy is exactly this, aimed at achieving the world's largest corporation, namely the giant industrial country Japan. It was quite natural that under this policy the government has always supported industry and oppressed the people relative to issues of pollution when those issues have come into conflict.

2.3 The Character of Science and Technology

From the very beginning of Japanese industrial modernization, Japan has introduced the newest Western science and technology, and expended much effort in adapting it to Japanese conditions. Production technology was selectively introduced according to productivity levels. Pure science, being considered non-productive or harmful to ruling power systems, was carefully rejected. Many engineering technologies were examples of the former, social science was a typical example of the latter. Among engineering technologies, non-productive technology such as sanitary engineering had lower priority, so its introduction was much delayed. But some productive elements of hygiene, such as medical bacteriology for epidemic intestinal diseases, tuberculosis, and nutrition for beri-beri (all being difficulties in the early stages of industrialization and urbanization in Japan) were earnestly introduced very early, and developed with much support from the national budget. This selective introduction skewed the picture of science and technology in Japan.

But the most basic factor in Japanese science and technology has been skirting the stages of endogenous development with the newest forms introduced into Japan separately and selectively. The word "science" in Japanese, has a meaning which implies fragmented studies or sectionalized studies. Rational thinking and a spirit skeptical of science were forgotten, with science and technology being considered tools for a "rich nation, strong army" type nation policy. People were motivated to become scientists or engineers, out of a desire for an elite position garnering great prestige, rather than out of humanistic orientations. There was no consideration of professional ethics, as science leaders were among the fastest social climbers to reach into the upper echelons of high society. In pollution issues, there were always many scientists to support industry and getting more research funds from it. They used social science to depress peoples' movements, by regarding such movements as problems of social disorganization. These scientists were always in leading positions in scientific societies, and controlled the distribution of research funds. This description of the situation fits the environmental sciences of the 1970s where departments were widely formed in many national universities. Almost all of them were collections of different sections of science and technology, all claiming relationships to the environment, and mostly expansions on old sections. There was little consideration of the synergistic, interdisciplinary character of the problem. Such limitless

expansion of sectionalism in science, without the benefit of ethics, is perhaps one of the reasons why Japanese scientists lack originality. Adaptations and explanations of introduced theory are the mainstream of Japanese scientific activity, rather than investigations of actual problems. Loyalty to the supplier of research funds and dependency on ideology are common characteristics of Japanese scientists regardless of whether conservative or progressive.

Under these circumstances, there are still a minority of scientists who are trying to grasp industrial pollution as a large social problem. Due to great pressure from the government they are receiving unfavourable treatment in funding. There are many such cases in Japan. As an example, the University of Tokyo, representing the highest of higher education in Japan, once in 1890 spoke out about cause and effect relationships in the Ashio Copper Mine Case, naming the mine as the polluter. This was not repeated again until the 1970s with the Minamata Disease.

2.4 Weakness in Human Rights Concepts and Untrained Experience in Politics

Japan did not experience any bourgeois revolution in its history. This is the reason for its weaknesses in the human rights area.⁴ Since the Meiji era there have been few peaks in people's movements on human rights. The first one was in the 1880s as a free democratic movement, but it was suppressed completely by the young Meiji government. Taisho democracy in the 1920s was flushed away by militarism in the 1930s. Democratization in the post-war era was not complete enough, as is seen in the Minamata Disease and Itai-itai Disease processes, and it has not penetrated into the real life of farmers and fisherman.⁵

On the other hand, the feudal character of the agrarian community was emphasized and expanded to national dimensions under the Meiji government. Even after the Second World War, feudalism was emphasized in public education as collectivism in the support of high economic growth for industry. The development of individualism was avoided in favour of maintaining national unity for collective goals. The value of a soldier's life was very light in successive wars since the end of the 19th century. Thus, even the loss of human life to industrial pollution was considered negligible compared to national high economic growth goals. More than two decades were needed to escape from this neglect of human rights.

This exclusive, closed, and stagnant agrarian society was stabilized by the existence of an imperative authority and complicated multilayer systems of discrimination. The spirit of discrimination was supported sometimes by traditional oriental KARMA concepts and sometimes by meritocracy. To maintain the unity of the community, claims of rights were avoided as much as possible. In Japan a human relations technology for maintaining stratified society was developed to an extreme as evidenced by many personal pronouns involved in Japanese conversation. But there were few chances of training political skills for adjustments of conflicting interests among various parties.

Conflicts between communities were frequently solved by physical power, instead of through cooperation and balancing different concepts. With a short history in modern political training it is difficult to have a federation of movements. Small groups fight each other as their interests collide, competing for ideological orthodoxy. This process is seen typically in the history of the Japanese left, which is also an expression of the emperor system.

Another element of the mental baggage which settled into Japanese society during the process of market economy growth after the war, is strong reliance on large, gigantic technology. During the past two decades, the economies of size have been very visible in many sectors of industry. Such concepts as "large is great" and "difficulties can be solved by money and technology if anything" became prevalent, specifically among the intellectuals. Faced now with a long, low economic growth period, anxiety for the future is spreading, and there is danger that military power will return to Japan along with narrow-minded nationalism. The choice of this road will lead again to the neglect of human rights.

The differences in background conditions between Japan and Western Europe have been argued for a long time and in many places, but it is sufficient for the movement to note the above points. Under these conditions Japanese industrial pollution occurred, and went to the extremes of irreversible damage to human life.

3. Responses of the Movements to Governmental Policies

For the moment, the central government is in the hands of the very stable conservative party, which is under the control of industrial capital. Opponents are weak and divided, so the only way for local movements to impact policy is through the negative participation of resistance. There are several cases of considerable change wrought in development plans through such resistance, but the most dramatic case is located in the west of Honshu and the north of Kyushu islands, the so-called Suhonada project, where 50,400 hectares were pegged for a landfill industrial zone in an original plan prepared in the 1970s. However, a small minority movement of local people caused the plan to be delayed. It then faced changing economic conditions after the oil crisis, and the final result was only one oil fired power plant on 39 hectares of landfill, with the rest of the project being abandoned completely. If the total plan had been realized, the sea would be lost forever, and the excess industrial capacity would have been much greater than at present. Similar modifications or cancellations have been quite common in many places in Japan. The delay of siting plans for nuclear power stations avoided the construction of excess electricity supply capacity and associated increased production costs.

The failure of Chisso management relative to the Minamata Disease changed industrial policy in Japan. Even after the discovery of the disease, the company was regarded as one of the most successful cases of domestica-

tion of Western technology and expansion of production facilities. Now the company has greatly declined, and is barely surviving. This fact has become a strong warning to industrial management, not only in Japan, but also in the entire world, requiring attention to be paid to environmental pollution problems. Even if short term profits are promised by ignoring pollution, the company has proven a long term failure, due to its inability to deal with problems of the environment. Likewise, anti-pollution movements have caused stalemates in the polluting materials industries in Japan, and investment shifts to other sectors having greater added value and less pollution generation. Some dozen pollution control laws were prepared and an institutional system was established in Japan as a result of victims' movements. These laws and institutional systems were prepared as a kind of pressure safety valve. Although their effectiveness is not sufficient, they still have some effect in controlling the behaviour of industry. But the effectiveness of these laws and institutions is always based upon grassroots movement support, and it is an important fact that a move to loosen control over industry has occurred in the late 1970s along with the decline of many of movements.

In recent years there have been more movement proposals for alternatives in resisting centrally determined projects.

In sewage projects, the Ministry of Construction, insists on huge, unreasonably centralized systems. Movement proposals for small or middle sized, decentralized systems support the policy of the Ministry of Finance, which has started to doubt the effectiveness of public investment in recent years, and this has caused some changes in government policy. But the true aim of Ministry of Construction Policy with respect to the large scale sewage plants is not technical feasibility for water pollution control, but political profit for the Tanaka faction which is trying to control Japanese politics through the distribution of public finance, and it is anticipated that change will not occur easily.

In local governments, especially at the village level, the power monopoly of the conservative party is not always stable, and sometimes there are power shifts. Thus, it could be said that there are more possibilities for realizing alternative policies proposed by local movements. Where political power is concentrated to excess in the central Government, and when the participation of the people is neglected as in Japan, there is greater chance for certain kinds of change. An example of this is the local government in Okinawa incorporating the anti-military base and anti-war movements. For the realization of this kind of change it is essential that local movements do not expect too much from left side political professionalism, and to prepare original and flexible policies on their own. Also it is necessary to accumulate more study and experience in real politics, to such a degree as to control political parties. Other essential study relates to the natural system and its ecologically synergistic structures. Probably we must also reevaluate the traditional value system, while at the same time avoiding an easy return to the exclusive and oppressive agrarian concepts as an escape.

4. Future Movement Directions

The grassroots movements are new political phenomena difficult to grasp within present political contexts. This is understood by the ruling classes in Japan, and recently movement knowledge was used successfully by a grassroots conservative group to topple a progressive local government in Musashino City in the local elections. There are rumors in the central government that a political party act is in the process of preparation, that will prevent the formation of non-partisan components such as local movements in order to limit political participation to within the present political system. If the political party act model is of the West German variety, surely it will be very difficult to form a new political party of the green coalition variety.

Whether Japanese grassroots movements can form political coalitions of the green federation or ecologist type, keeping local characteristics intact, and having a common target, is a very difficult question for the moment. The personal judgement of the author is that there is a fifty per cent chance of this happening within the next ten years. There are several national tasks for the political arena, such as decentralization of political decision making, increasing citizen participation, theoretical development of local autonomy, introduction of an organic concept of nature into real politics, review and reevaluation of the traditional value system, all of which are necessary for present day Japan. It is difficult to solve these problems with the existing combination of political parties, and there is widespread expectation that a new, fresh political force will achieve such tasks. A gradual decrease in the voting rate for present political parties is a clear sign of such expectations.

On the other hand, where narrow collectivism is widespread and reproduced in day-to-day formal education, the formation of a coalition of local movements will not be an easy task for Japan. All normal efforts to form such coalitions for the Upper House elections of 1977, 80 and 83 failed. Still the old concept of an exclusive and oppressive agrarian community remains in our daily lives, as is seen in the strong collectivism common to all Japanese. There is little experience with cooperation between different opinions and disciplines. Unfortunately, anarchism did not settle into the political ideology of Japanese backgrounds. There are some moves among Japanese ecology movements to form unifying pseudo-religious concepts to explain everything in excessively simple terms, hindering thereby coalitions between a wide variety of movements. There is also resistance common to the existing political parties with respect to the formation of political forces out of their own control.

If there is any possibility of an ecological political group of the Western European variety in Japan, the most probable route would be to have a few local elections with many candidates in local councils, then a coalition of movements working as support groups for such candidates. The necessary condition for such a coalition is the accumulation of political experience through actual movement in the 1980s. Over against the previous political

directions of high economic growth and the formation of national capitalism in industrial Japan, the grassroots movements must propose an alternative, a realistic political direction. Even if small, the formation of such alternative orientations in a clearly visible way will show other people that there is another key to success.

It is necessary for local Japanese movements to have an international sense, avoiding the self-complacency inherent in an island country, and to participate in a politics that is greatly interdependent and internationalized. Already Japan is a superpower in the politico-economic structure of Asia, and behaving as one center in the dependency relationships existing between centers and peripheries world wide. This relationship is part of the daily life of the common Japanese person, and we are strongly tied to the third world through imports and consumption. Japanese movements should see and realize this fact, that any movement actions influence the relationships between Japan and Asia. Most local movements start from daily life problems, but as the movements progress, there will be reflection on the wasteful lifestyles of Japan and a seeking after a more ecologically sound alternative for the future. Many anti-pollution movements, consumers movements and cooperative movements are showing increased interest in organic farming, recycling of resources, and other action-oriented programs. If this tendency continues, providing a change in consumption patterns for Japan, it will affect the dependency relationships between Japan and other Asian countries, thereby decreasing the dominance of Japan in the area. On the other hand, any independence efforts in other Asian countries will affect Japan. If present wasteful lifestyles continue and militarization increases, the corrupt structures presently instituted, with Japan supporting the ruling classes of Asia, will be fixed and strengthened, and the corruption in Japan and Asia will continue to grow together hand in hand. Just like the Japanese industrial pollution that went on in the countryside unnoticed in the 1960s, to an extent that created irreversible damage, so the progress of dependency and corruption in Asia will damage Japan seriously over the longterm, and political corruption, like the dominance of the Tanaka faction in Japanese politics, will continue. This inter-relationship between Japan and Asia, and the meaning of the modern Japanese lifestyle relative to conservation of world resources, should be understood by local Japanese grassroots movements. Surely more attention should be paid to the international relationships between grassroots movements in developing countries.

Even if the task of forming a coalition of local movements is not soon achieved, still local movements will occur in many places as endless expressions of the political contradictions inherent in Japan. The ruling classes of Japan have no effective prospectus for ending the contradictions. The local movements will provide political training for the common citizen, and diversify Japanese society. If complete destruction through nuclear war does not occur, then as anti-pollution movements worked as the only

force preventing the complete destruction of the Japanese environment, so will the grassroots movements work to prevent power from inducing political suicide as the militarization of Japan progresses.

Epilogue

As has been analyzed previously, the role of ideas for the anti-pollution movement is to provide a framework of theoretical concepts to support the grassroots movement and also to encourage it to move in a desirable direction. From this viewpoint the Japanese intellectuals potentially had a great role to play in these two decades in making a tight linkage between theoretical activities and dissident movements. However, leaders of the intellectuals have worked with dominant groups, influencing the anti-pollution movement by making it more difficult to voice dissent. □

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ALL RELIGIONS ARE EQUALLY IMPERFECT

FOR ME THE DIFFERENT RELIGIONS ARE BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS
FROM THE SAME GARDEN . . . THEREFORE THEY ARE EQUALLY
TRUE, THOUGH BEING RECEIVED AND INTERPRETED THROUGH
HUMAN INSTRUMENTS, EQUALLY IMPERFECT.

MAHATMA GANDHI