

The Post-Fukushima Protest Cycle and Its Historical Context

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Abstract:

The first five chapters of Chiavacci and Obinger's 2018 edited volume study the historical context of the post-Fukushima protest wave. Chapters six to nine examine the 2011-5 protest cycle. Other than two anthropological outliers, the publication relies on historical political sociology and its established branches of social movement theory, civil society studies, and the concept of citizenship. Overall, the book indicates that a new cycle of protest has emerged since 2011, which has tapped into abeyant, older activist networks and an invisible but active civil society.

Der Post-Fukushima Protest-Zyklus und sein historischer Kontext

German Abstract:

Die ersten fünf Kapitel des 2018 von Chiavacci und Obinger veröffentlichten Sammelbandes untersuchen die Geschichte japanischer Proteste. Kapitel sechs bis neun begutachten den post-2011 Protest-Zyklus nach der japanischen Dreifachkatastrophe von Erdbeben, Tsunami und Nuklearunfall. Neben zwei anthropologischen Beiträgen verlässt sich die Veröffentlichung auf Konzepte der politischen Soziologie, z.B. *Social Movement Theory*. Laut Buch hat sich post-2011 eine neue Protest-Welle gebildet, welche ältere zivilgesellschaftliche und aktivistische Netzwerke stützten.

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The Post-Fukushima Protest Cycle and Its Historical Context

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On March 3, 2011 Japan was shaken by an earthquake, tsunami, and a nuclear meltdown that is commonly referred to as 3.11. This event left a big impact on Japan, including its civil society. The edited volume by David Chiavacci and Julia Obinger primarily contributes empirical insights into the effect of 3.11 on Japanese social movements. It has been published as a part of Routledge's Mobilization Series, which is edited by Hank Johnston and released in cooperation with the Mobilization Journal. In the introduction, Chiavacci and Obinger compellingly argue that with 3.11 a new wave of protest has emerged, succeeding the post-1970 "decades-long invisibility" (p. 1) of public contention in Japan after the decline of the New Left. After the Abe administration (Shinzo Abe, prime minister and President of the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party from 2012-2020) passed its security legislation in 2015, despite the opposing pro-constitutional demonstrations, the nature of the post-3.11 protest cycle and how it might continue poses an interesting question.

The first part of the volume illuminates the historical prelude of the post-3.11 protests. In the second chapter, Patricia Steinhoff shows how the history of social contention in Japan, on the one hand, confirms established political-sociological social-movement theories, however, on the other hand, cannot be compared with Western civil society because the crackdown on the radical New Left in 1968 fostered an "invisible civil society" (p. 42). Building on this, Simon Avenell's third chapter deals with the involvement of 1970s activists in "an emergent transnational civil society" (p. 52). This transition from a public confrontation with the Japanese government to transnational capacity-building was fueled by the growing awareness of the 1970s activists of the intersection of past Japanese imperial violence in Asia with the post-war, post-colonial Japanese economic exploitation of the region. Gabriele Vogt's subsequent chapter on the struggle of Okinawan protests against U.S. occupation and Japanese marginalization also

fits a postcolonial lens. Okinawa is a group of islands distant from Japan that only became part of Japan in the late 19th century. Accordingly, Okinawan protests have increasingly relied on transnational frames, activist networks, and the use of transnational norms in order to mobilize. Continuing with the topic of marginalization, Apichai W. Shipper posits that both immigrant rights and xenophobic groups frame their respective activism around the concept of societal harmony, since it supplies the notion of equality that can similarly legitimize anti-immigration or immigrant rights proposals.

Part two investigates the intricacies of different post-3.11 protests. According to Koichi Hasegawa's application of social movement theory to Japanese protests before and after 3.11 in the sixth chapter, the diversification of the background of protest participants, the increase of the size and number of protests, an extension of the repertoire of protest, and effective new frames aimed at the Japanese political and economic system could not deter the Abe government from restarting nuclear plants. Contrastingly, in a case-study of the Nuclear Disaster Victims' Support Law in 2012, Ayaka Löschke attests that, despite the Abe government's ignorance of mass protests regarding nuclear safety, the State Safety Law, and the foreign security legislation, after 3.11, civil society could increase its impact on policy-making in a limited fashion. In contrast, Carl Cassegård, in his examination of the relations between the government-critical denuclearization movement and the coopted environmental movement, points out how different degrees of institutionalization can discourage cooperation between civil society actors. In the closing chapter, the anthropological team of Robin O'Day, David H. Slater, and Satsuki Uno reconceptualize the relation between social media and mass media for protests: "SEALDs [a pacifist student group active from 2015 until 2016; P.K.] used social media in a more complicated way to insinuate themselves into the mass media flow through social media" (p. 193). While SEALDs successfully did so, the mass media partially reframed them as an entertainment product. This resulted in a dilution of their message and a "loss of control over their public image" (p. 179).

The volume excels in deconstructing the myth of the absence of activism after the decline of the New Left and a government-run, powerless civil society through the presentation of novel and empirically rich material on the historical and contemporary (transnational) civil society and its activities beneath the surface of Japanese institutional politics. The more heterodox chapters—for example, the discourse analysis by Cassegård and the ethnographically informed

study by O'Day et al.—combine dense description with theoretical contributions beyond the confines of Japan and mainstream social movement, citizenship, and civil society literature. That the publication resulted from a conference in Zurich in 2015 justifies the partial lack of narrative, methodological, and theoretical balance, as well as a certain unevenness of theoretical and empirical contributions. However, the book serves well as an entry point to post-war protests in Japan and the most important English-language scholars of political contention in Japan. Moreover, it should be considered a key source for understanding the impact of 3.11 on social movements in Japan.

The book covers a lot of historical ground and scholarly debate in very concise writing, which makes it an accessible introduction for students and researchers new to the field. It provides new material on recent phenomena with unique cases, such as transnationalism, Okinawa, the relation between immigrant rights and xenophobic activism, and invisible civil society. The book could have benefited from a conclusion that connects the chapters and relates their empirical results to the introduction's hypothesis of a new protest cycle in Japan, making the argument even stronger. Since only Koichi Hasegawa commented on his activism in a side note, it would be interesting to know which of the chapters can be regarded as activist research and how this informs them. An examination of the development of the post-3.11 protest cycle after 2016 certainly warrants a follow-up edition.