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**New Japanese Civil Society:
Kobe Earthquake of 1995 and Fukushima Accident of 2011 as Focal
Points in the Development of the Japanese Civil Society After WW II**

Abstract

On March 11 2011 an earthquake in Japan generated huge tremors and a series of tsunamis causing unprecedented nuclear crisis in this country. The death toll (with missing people) reached almost 20,000 and 340,000 people had to evacuate. The Fukushima accident showed to the Japanese people that the government was not prepared properly enough for such a crisis as it should have been especially having had learnt the lessons from Kobe earthquake of 1995. Since 2011 there have been in Japan growing manifestations of people's opinions on the matter and who even wish for the better future for their offspring with no atom. The Japanese society has been changing into a new civil society and is less alike to that one presented by the first Orientalists and the subsequent ones who disseminated knowledge based rather on stereotypes. The article aims to show the phenomenon of Japanese civil society with the new tendencies in voluntarism and demonstrations after 1995 along with the reasons for them and reactions of the state to the crises arose in 1995 and 2011. The work argues (state for the end of March 2017) that there is a new quality in the movement and also proves that even though Japan has been the only country in the world that has suffered hugely from the atom not once, the civil society was not strong enough to control the nuclear industry and the government and what is more, the ballots in 2012 and 2016 were surprisingly filled in with names of politicians who represent parties supporting development of nuclear energy stance.

Keywords: *Shimin shakai*, Japanese voluntarism and activism, new civil society, volunteer revolution, denuclearization, demonstrations, NPOs, NGOs, Kobe earthquake 1995, Sendai earthquake 2011, Fukushima accident, March 11, 'nuclear village', Japanese elections of 2012 and 2016

Japanese civil society

The question of civil society is becoming more and more important in Japan too. In spite of the strong tradition of social consensus, the country, in reaction to the growing distrust of the ruling circles, seems to be moving toward a new form of government where the voice of the people is growing stronger.

First of all, the definition of the term ‘civil society’ in general should be referred to. Worth emphasizing is the fact that the concept is not new, but its meaning in the ancient Rome and Greece was different: equating to the state. The modern notion of the phrase was developed in the second half of the 18th century during the Enlightenment and after some decades of oblivion it gained back its popularity after WWII to become even of mantric nature after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.¹ Civil society encompasses the domain of social activities which are of sustainable nature and organized in groups of non-state, non-family or non-market origins.² NGOs, NPOs, as well as unions and other organizations or even individuals with contradictory views can contribute to the civil society, however, even being robust they cannot ensure democracy. As Carothers citing Sheri Berman proves that in Germany of the 1920s and the 1930s lively civil society was only a stage for the Nazi Party which absorbed them in the end.³ Supposedly vivid civil society is a highly needed stage in the societal development even though it does not guarantee any rights, nevertheless it is highly recommended to have it.

The term ‘civil society’ in Japan must be analyzed from the specific cultural approach as the literal translation of it – *shimin shakai* is contemporarily considered by the Japanese scientists to have rather leftist, i.e. communist association and it was in use after 1945.⁴ It was not present in the academic and activist discussion of the subject in the 19th century probably due to absorption of the western ideas in Japan from the countries that showed the worldwide trend of strengthening the state at the expense of civil society.⁵ Since the 1990s the Japanized version of the very same English term *shibiru sosaeti* along with *borantia* (‘volunteer’) have spread widely in the discourse to distinguish the new wave and to emphasize new quality in civil society movement from the previous one.⁶

The first signs of civil society in Japan can be traced back to even Edo (Tokugawa) era 1603 (1600)–1868, when despite strict rules set for the society, in the middle of the period, some groups of people found their way for promoting reforms, like merchants’ academy in Osaka. Among those who were discussing the future of the society were also young samurai with knowledge disseminated in their domains. They met and debated on the issues important for them at that time.⁷

¹ Carothers, Barndt 1999–2000: 18–19.

² Anheier 2004: X.

³ Carothers, Barndt 1999–2000: 22–23.

⁴ Bochorodycz 2008: 18.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Ibidem; Sugimoto 2014: 306.

⁷ Garon 2003: 45.

The Constitution, promulgated in 1946 and introduced six months later in 1947 is the base for the civil society in Japan. Being a document (controversial at those times for the Japanese people and for some of them until now) created by foreigners occupying the Archipelago as allied forces represented by mainly American troops, it gave to the Japanese people the rights they did not have for many years due to harsh times of changes on the political scene and war of 1931–1945. This document was not even accepted at once by the Japanese parliament as some laws were too progressive. *The Constitution of Japan* grants to its citizens freedom of speech, gatherings, belief, the same rights to both men and women. It also guarantees among the others a just judiciary system.⁸ Article 11 says:

The people shall not be prevented from enjoying any of the fundamental human rights. These fundamental human rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be conferred upon the people of this and future generations as eternal and inviolate rights.⁹

The next article, the Article 12 of the Constitution is the guarantor of the aforementioned rights and also puts some limits on individuals when exercising their freedom:

The freedoms and rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be maintained by the constant endeavour of the people, who shall refrain from any abuse of these freedoms and rights and shall always be responsible for utilizing them for the public welfare.¹⁰

The Japanese have a modern constitution which should imply their independence and autonomy within the state as individuals. The phenomenon of the civil society ought to find nutritious soil in Japan. Article 21 even assures civil society activities:

Freedom of assembly and association as well as speech, press and all other forms of expression are guaranteed (...).¹¹

On the contrary to the freedom granted in the constitution, civil law (code) is not always so lenient and due from the perspective of some citizens of Japan and it comes from 1896.¹² Even though it is not the newest document it is still valid in contemporary Japan and also influences regulations concerning the civil society, which will be analyzed later in the article.

Despite some popular opinions about the Japanese people spread in the 70. and 80., who are perceived as those who are alike, polite and thus always follow the rules and

⁸ Kantei 1947.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² MOJ, 1896.

the law and do not rebel nor demonstrate their own opinions, the Japanese have had a quite long history of showing their strong discontent over, for example, political issues, international relations, or over such prosaic matters like rising prices of train tickets. The demonstrations that took place only in Tokyo in years 1905–1918 often changed into violent riots as many as nine times in the span of only these years.¹³ Despite the fact that the society at the end of Meiji period (1868–1912) and in the first years of Taishō period (1912–1926) differs from the contemporary one, still it is undeniable that the will of people of those times expressed on the streets was an important matter. *The Public Order Preservation Act* from 1925 forced the Japanese society to change its behavioural patterns and strengthened the Special Higher Police. The act was abrogated only in 1945.¹⁴ In the period of the American occupation of this country (1945–1952) the society after the years of war and indoctrination was in trauma which was increased by the suffering and pain caused by loss of many lives during the conflict and attained its apogee after the nuclear bomb attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6th and 9th August 1945. With San Francisco Peace Treaty from 1951, coming into the effect in 1952, Japan regained its sovereignty to some extent depending on the interpretation of the *Security Treaty Between the United States and Japan*.¹⁵ The spark for the demonstrations and also activities of civil society in Japan was given by the negotiations on prolongation of the very treaty in 1959, when the people rioted.¹⁶ What is more, the Japan's Prime Minister Kishi's felonious past as well as his behaviour in the parliament also contributed to the apprehension of return of militarism of war times. Nobusuke Kishi was co-responsible for signing the attack on Pearl Harbour, worked as a high-rank bureaucrat, vice-minister on some cabinets and he was released from the prison in 1948 during the amnesty of December.¹⁷ Shinzō Abe, Prime Minister in office, is his grandson.¹⁸ People went to the streets to manifest their outrage and their activity involved many. Kishi resigned and his successor promised that Japan would double its income in 10 years. These words prompted people to return to their daily activities. The next reason for the Japanese people to demonstrate long and persistently was the renewal of the Security Treaty with U.S. in 1970 and American involvement in the Vietnam War.¹⁹ Since 1945 Japan has had on its soil American troops which are to protect Japan and for them Japanese Archipelago is like a base to start any new mission fast and at ease.

¹³ Gordon 2010: 187.

¹⁴ Tsuzuki 2000: 258.

¹⁵ Avalon 1951.

¹⁶ Gatu 2015: 181.

¹⁷ Gatu 2015: 172.

¹⁸ Oros: 2017: 105.

¹⁹ Gatu 2015: 181.

Table 1. Biggest rallies and demonstrations against security treaties with US and the Vietnam War

Reason	Years	Duration (in months)	Participants in rallies and demonstrations (in mln)	Arrested	Wounded police officers
Japan-US Security Treaty 1960	1959–1960	19	4.6	886	2,236
1. Japan-US Security Treaty 1970 2. Vietnam War and rooted in Japan American forces	1970–1973	33	18.7	26,373	14,684

Source: Gatu 2015: 181.

Other movements in these times supported peace for Vietnam (Beheiren, 1965–1974), others tried to fight the pollution effects, having the media on their side.²⁰ These demonstrations were supported by organizations sometimes rooted in the government and therefore it is questionable if they are pure example of civil society's activities. The year of 1989 and its aftermath changed the world and also influenced the Japanese society. As Hasegawa explains, the new civil society was attempting to 'counter the country's conservative, authoritarian, and paternalistic politics'.²¹

The case of Kobe 1995 and its aftermath

The next step taken by Japan in its development of civil society was the new law introduced in 1998 due to the actions undertaken by the Japanese in 1995 after the Kobe earthquake (Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 17 January 1995). The death toll number reached about 6,430 people and evacuees number reached 310,000.²² The effects of the tremors found this port city unprepared the way it should have been. So the government was criticised for the lacking in crisis-management system what was by far visible and caused among the Japanese astonishment. The roads leading to Kobe were destroyed and subsequently the help was hindered. There was not enough doctors and also the decision about use of SDF (Self-Defense Forces) to help out in Kobe took too much time.²³ Red tape stopped doctors from abroad from coming to Kobe as they did not have licences to practice in Japan. The rescue dogs had to undergo a special procedure of quarantine

²⁰ Gatu 2015: 180, 182.

²¹ Hasegawa 2014: 285.

²² Schwartz 2003: 14.

²³ Johnston 2011.

on the airport slowing the rescue efforts down.²⁴ Despite all the mentioned setbacks, the Japanese civilians rushed with help to this destroyed and cut off city in number of 1,377,300 volunteers within a year.²⁵ The phenomenon was named ‘volunteer revolution’.²⁶ It is worth mentioning that the word ‘volunteer’ in Japanese may have sometimes slightly different meaning from European languages, as *borantia* could be understood also as a person who receives remuneration for their voluntary work.²⁷ By the year of 1995 the concept of ‘disaster-relief volunteers’ had not been widely known in Japan.²⁸ Until that time for the Japanese people volunteering was understood as donating money. Another meaning of the word was rather constrained to specific areas of activities, such as helping to the disabled people,²⁹ elderly people care and relief operations undertaken abroad.³⁰

For the purpose of the present paper it would be proper to analyze the meanings of terms such as nonprofits organisations (NPOs) and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). As Pekkanen says, “[c]onventionally in Japan, domestically active groups are called ‘NPOs’, while ‘NGOs’ is usually used to refer to groups involved in international activities”.³¹ NGOs can operate both in Japan and simultaneously in a foreign country.³² Pekkanen continues also that Japanese NPO term is rather more frequently used when evoking to all organizations of nonprofit character.³³

To Kobe in 1995 rushed many people who tried to offer their help. Interestingly, among the first who came to help were yakuza (Japanese mafia) members.³⁴ Though this organization has criminal character and definitely is not included in the definitions of NPOs or NGOs, it is also active on the area of disaster relief and that was the case in Kobe. Professional NGOs that made efforts to support people in the devastated area of Kobe was Japan Overseas Christian Medical Cooperative Service (JOCS).³⁵ JOCS was established in 1960 and was rooted in The Japan Christian Medical Association (JCMA).³⁶ Another professional NGO that came to the area was Japan Red Cross.³⁷ Local groups also took part in the effort and Peace Boat is one of those. They had been active abroad as well but as anti-establishment group and their actions for Asia reconciliation had been perceived as anti-Japanese.³⁸ Educational cruise ship Peace Boat was one of entities that

²⁴ Sakaki, Lukner, 2013: 164

²⁵ Avenell 2012: 55. In older publications the data is somewhat different: Schwartz gives a number of approximately 1,3 million (Schwartz 2003: 14), and Pekkanen gives a number of 1.2 million (Pekkanen 2000: 114).

²⁶ Imada 2010: 22.

²⁷ Bochorodycz 2008: 32.

²⁸ Arita 2013.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Avenell 2012: 55.

³¹ Pekkanen 2000: 116.

³² Leng, 2015.

³³ Pekkanen 2000: 116.

³⁴ Jones 2011.

³⁵ Leng, 2015.

³⁶ JOCS.

³⁷ Leng, 2015.

³⁸ Avenell 2012: 57.

started providing help for Kobe struck by the disaster. Having on board a lithographic printing machine, they published a free paper with the information that was needed by people in the area. The group was up-to-date with the state of affairs as they visited several evacuation places in Nagata Ward (Kobe) on daily basis and volunteered for three months in the region.³⁹

Other local groups are Osaka Voluntary Action Centre (OVAC), Rescue Stockyard,⁴⁰ and other NPOs such as Japan Youth Volunteer Association (JYVA), YMCA and YWCA also contributed as well as religious groups like Tenrikyō, Sōtō Zen Buddhism and Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA).⁴¹ Worth mentioning is prompt response of Foreigner's Earthquake Information Centre and Foreign Relief Network which both helped the foreigners caught up by the calamity who needed information or assistance while having difficulties in obtaining health care for overstaying their visas.⁴²

Kobe earthquake sparked strong interest among common people, however, in 1995 the volunteers were not public-interest legal persons. According to the Civil code "groups had to become legal persons in order to have legal standing."⁴³ Thus most of volunteers could not sign contracts, did not have any special insurance during performing relief works. Japanese participation in NPOs after Kobe earthquake of 1995 rose and in response to this finally the diet passed the new law in 1998. The "Law to Promote Specified Non-profit Activities" (NPO Law) changed the status of the non-profit organizations.⁴⁴ Consequently the times of operating of these groups until 1998 can be named 'for-profit', after that year – 'non-profit'. The Articles 33, 34 and 35 of the *Civil Code* from 1896 limited the definition of civil society groups to 'for-profit' organizations:⁴⁵

Article 33:

No juridical person can be formed unless it is formed pursuant to the applicable provisions of this Code or other laws.⁴⁶

Article 34:

Any association or foundation relating to any academic activities, art, charity, worship, religion, or other public interest which is not for profit may be established as a juridical person with the permission of the competent government agency.⁴⁷

³⁹ Arita 2013.

⁴⁰ Leng, 2015.

⁴¹ Avenell 2012: 57.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Pekkanen 2000: 113, 117.

⁴⁴ Pekkanen 2000: p. 114.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, pp. 116–117.

⁴⁶ MOJ, 1896: 15.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

Article 35:

Any person who is neither an incorporated association nor an incorporated foundation shall not use in its name the words “incorporated association” or “incorporated foundation”, or other words which is likely to be mistaken for those words.⁴⁸

The NPO Law introduced less supervision of bureaucracy and definitively less bureaucratic screening what helped the people to act and react.⁴⁹ Funds has been flowing into the organizations. The amount of money distributed in grants by private agencies and NGOs in Japan in the span of 15 years almost tripled.

Table 2. Statistics of grants by private agencies and NGOs 2000–2015⁵⁰

Year	Grants total (in million US dollars)	Year	Grants total (in million US dollars)
2000	202.605	2008	422.517
2001	235.465	2009	452.604
2002	164.799	2010	563.301
2003	330.453	2011	374.754
2004	395.891	2012	370.973
2005	245.592	2013	429.628
2006	324.327	2014	467.190
2007	468.769	2015	557.189

Source: OECD, *Grants by private agencies and NGOs Total*, <https://data.oecd.org/df/grants-by-private-agencies-and-ngos.htm> [2017.03.27].

The case of Fukushima 2011 and its aftermath

Japan is a country that is prone to natural disasters, such as typhoons, flash-rains, mud-slides and earthquakes along with tsunamis which often cause massive flooding and fires. Its history is studded with such catastrophic events that mark its vulnerability and its people. Unfortunately it is not a matter of “if”, but “when” these calamities happen and indisputably Japan must be prepared any time for them. Events from Kobe of 1995 proved that a lot had to be done to improve the crisis-management in Japan, but the worst was still to happen. March 11th 2011 marks the day of a huge earthquake

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Pekkanen 2000: 137–138.

⁵⁰ OECD 2017.

and tsunamis along with an unprecedented nuclear crisis in this country, named triple disaster. The location of the epicentre was near the East Coast of Honshu,⁵¹ thus the elevation of deadly “black waves” was surprisingly high. The number of deceased and missing people reached approximately 20,000.⁵² Due to destruction and contamination about 340,000 people had to be evacuated.⁵³ Approximately 470,00 were displaced.⁵⁴ This time volunteers also rushed with help. The Prime Minister Naoto Kan the very next day appointed his representatives responsible for management of disaster volunteers.⁵⁵ The response to Tōhoku disaster from the government thus was superior comparing to 1995 activities.⁵⁶

Quasi-governmental institutions: Zenshakyō and the Red Feather Community Chest Movement (RFCC) played a great role in coordination, liaison service and funding. The former one has been active in establishing volunteer centres throughout Japan since 1980s and coordinated registration.⁵⁷ Peace Boat again took part in relief efforts. The organization established Peace Boat Disaster Relief Volunteer Center, an NGO in Tokyo, in order to provide organized help in long term.⁵⁸ Since that time they managed to coordinate as many as over 13,000 volunteers from around the world and organized projects that provided psychological support for residents of temporary housings, finding jobs opportunities for unemployed fishermen in the area and others that raise awareness of the tragedy of Fukushima citizens.⁵⁹ The organisation operated in Ishinomaki and cooperated closely with Ishinomaki’s Mayor, Social Welfare Council, Japan Youth Chamber and Japan Self-Defence Forces (SDF).⁶⁰

Though it is highly questionable whether it is even possible to maintain readiness to react promptly and in a due manner when a top 4 magnitude (M 9,0) quake of the world’s earthquakes since year 1900 hits just like during Tohoku-oki of March 11th,⁶¹ Tokyo could have done much more. Notwithstanding Japan’s learning the lesson from Kobe earthquake, it was not enough. First and the most important issue was the flow of information on the situation in Fukushima reactors. The information dissemination was poor and the government of Prime Minister Naoto Kan was condemned for “amateurish crisis communication”⁶² amongst the main actors of the crisis as well as amid the citizens.⁶³ The state owned Japanese television NHK World broadcasted on the Internet the picture

⁵¹ USGS.

⁵² Sugimoto 2014: 318.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ PVB.

⁵⁵ Avenell 2012: 62.

⁵⁶ Leng 2015.

⁵⁷ Avenell 2012: 63–65.

⁵⁸ PVB.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Leng 2015.

⁶¹ USGS.

⁶² Sakaki, Lukner 2013: 163.

⁶³ Ibidem.

from the Fukushima area and it was clearly visible that there must have been an explosion along with highly probable leak of contaminated steam. Unfortunately, whilst French authorities after the second explosion expressed their misgivings about the radioactivity and issued a statement to leave the region of Kanto,⁶⁴ at the same time Tokyo advised to keep away from the Fukushima plant in the radius of only 20 kilometres.⁶⁵ For the French the distance between the metropolis and Fukushima of approximately 250 kilometres was not safe enough.⁶⁶ For lack in flow of information, the chief cabinet blamed TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Corporation, the Fukushima plant operator) and the Nuclear Industrial Safety Agency (NISA).⁶⁷ After the Prime Minister Kan had decided to send his close advisor to the TEPCO's headquarters, Kan's press conferences on the issue did not calm the public down and even made the people feel more unrest and willing to speculate especially when MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) in April changed the yearly limit for radiation exposure for children in Fukushima from 1 to 20 millisieverts it caused people to express their outrage with such new limitation.⁶⁸ People demonstrated and even put up a tent city on the premises of the government to put pressure on the politicians.

TEPCO and the Japanese government did not inform from the beginning on the situation in the nuclear plant openly assumedly due to problems with communications (problems with power in the region). It would be also logical to suppose that TEPCO did not know for sure what happened down there in Fukushima reactors and that Tokyo did not want to spark immense panic. Undeniable about the government policy is only the thing of not confirming the meltdown up to May 2011 (as long as two months after the disaster) and finally only a week before International Atomic Energy Agency arrived in Japan to investigate, the government and TEPCO at last had admitted the state of an issue.⁶⁹

The Fukushima accident was a kind of a test for the Japanese civil society. Unfortunately, it proved weakness of civil society in Japan as organizations were not able to control the government nor the industry though volunteers were managed better.⁷⁰ After year 2011 when nuclear deterrent gained even more supporters than earlier it had had and they expressed their indignation on the streets about the government policy and mistakes done during the Fukushima crisis. They even gathered in much bigger numbers in 2012 when Kansai Electric Power Co. restarted two reactors. After 3/11 all the nuclear facilities were cold shut down for maintenance.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Robinson 2011.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Google 2017. In straight line the distance is about 250 kilometres (IAEA 2015, p. 80).

⁶⁷ Sakaki, Lukner 2013: 163.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ Adelstein 2013.

⁷⁰ Hasegawa 2014: 286.

⁷¹ Batty 2012.

The issue of the use of energy produced from atom in Japan is complex due to historical background and the lack in gas, coal or crude oil that would give this country's economy energy. The trauma that was created by atomic bombs explosions is visible even today in Japan. A question arises, how so sceptical about the atom nation accepted nuclear plants on its territory. In May 1958 year the uranium deposits were discovered in Japan, and less than a year later enrichment of it started. The first reactor was started in 1967 year. Before the 11th March 2011 there were 18 nuclear plants in which 54 reactors were working and taking into consideration Japan's past this is really a surprising state of affairs.⁷² Society after Fukushima has been objecting to restarting of nuclear plants. Polls show that the steady majority society is for withdrawal of nuclear power from Japan since 2011.⁷³

In Japan there will always be an ongoing clash of views of inevitability of natural disasters versus 'nuclear village' that supports usage of nuclear energy. By Sugimoto 'nuclear village' means nuclear power promoters, that is nuclear power industry, national bureaucracy and political circles. Some individuals from the academe world also contribute to the "village" spreading the myth of safe nuclear energy.⁷⁴ Hasegawa adds the mass media to the aforementioned description.⁷⁵ All these actors are connected closely and support each other in insuring the society about this "clean" energy. Sugimoto points out the structural complicity as the main reason for malfunctioning in TEPCO. The controlling entity, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, a part of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry that promotes usage of nuclear energy, was to supervise the safety. The next problem in the Japanese bureaucracy is the *amakudari* practice. Literarily it means 'landing from heaven' and in reality it is landing by a retired official onto a highly lucrative position in a private company, very often the one that he had supervised while being employed as a bureaucrat.⁷⁶ Along with cases of specialists from universities who are not promoted when expressing doubts about safety of the nuclear energy and an old-fashioned management style from 1980s of TEPCO, internal cohesion, loyalty of its employees, decision-making done behind-closed-doors, no transparency (a record of concocted data on radioactivity leak in the past), and complicated flow of information within that company – all of them give a full scale of drawbacks of the system in Japan.⁷⁷

Unfortunately, due to these close relations and dependence there was no proper supervision before 2011 year in nuclear plants in Japan. Fukushima accident was caused by the nature nevertheless could have been prevented if the civil society had been much stronger.

⁷² JAEA.

⁷³ T.B. 2014.

⁷⁴ Sugimoto 2014: 318–319.

⁷⁵ Hasegawa 2014: 286.

⁷⁶ Stockwin 2003: XXIII, 9

⁷⁷ Ibidem, pp. 319–320.

Civil society, denuclearization and the elections in 2012 and 2016

The Japanese has always expressed their concerns over building of nuclear plants and uranium enrichment. Until Fukushima accident the time when they demonstrated can be divided into four periods with different aims. Until 1973 – the Yom Kippur War, demonstrators mostly wanted abolishing nuclear weapons, but with the oil crisis and peak in building new nuclear plants they wished for abolishing construction of nuclear power plants and expressed their views mainly on the building sites. In the year of Chernobyl disaster Japanese housewives in cities took the same aim and finally demonstrations from 1992 to 2011 mainly touched upon anti-plutonium movement.⁷⁸

Table 3. Anti-nuclear protests periods in Japan

Period of time	Aim
1954–1973	Abolishing nuclear weapons
1973–1986	Abolishing construction of nuclear power plants (at the spot)
1986–1992	Abolishing construction of nuclear power plants (organized mainly by housewives in cities)
1992–2011	Anti-plutonium movement

Source: Hasegawa 2011: 288.

Five years after the Fukushima calamity less and less people come to the every Friday gathering at the Primes Minister's office to protest. They started in March 2012 and that time even 200,000 protesters managed to come. In February 2016 they drew attention of only approximately 1,000 people each Friday. The protesting people express their doubts if anything can be changed as the government is not listening to their voices expressing will for denuclearization.⁷⁹ The movement seems to be slowing down not only due to politicians, but also the very structure of the movement. The advantage of the movement is that it represents people of all ages and many professions (not salary men who work long hours and do not have time to protest).⁸⁰ On the other hand, it is divided into groups and when it comes to elderly people involved in the activity they have problems with new communications styles like portals and social networks which have been mainly used by the new wave of protestors since 2011. Local groups do not feel at ease with letting outsiders into their groups as the already existing groups are parochial so there is no fresh blood coming.⁸¹ Even the flagship of the movement – Japan's Anti-Nuke Occupy Tent protest that started 11th September 2011 with putting up tents in front of METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) was finally removed by force from

⁷⁸ Hasegawa 2014: 288.

⁷⁹ Aoki 2016.

⁸⁰ Sugimoto 2014: 324.

⁸¹ T.B. 2014.

the site 21 August 2016 and as protestors did not have special permissions and they were also fined.⁸²

Being aware of the situation and the reasons for it thanks to media reports, since 2011 the Japanese should have tried to vote for only these political options that express popular view on nuclear plants and support denuclearization. Unfortunately, none of major parties put on the agenda denuclearization as the most important issue and thus the Japanese people who are against restarting reactors did not have anyone to vote for. Consequently in election in 2012 won opposition party to DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan) – LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) that supports using nuclear energy. The same results of elections were in 2016.

Table 4. List of Prime Ministers of Japan and their policy on nuclearization⁸³

Party	Prime Minister	Stance on the energy	Terms
DPJ	Naoto Kan	Till 11/3 nuclearization After 11/3 de-nuclearization	Jun. 2010–Sep. 2011
DPJ	Yoshihiko Noda	nuclearization	Sep. 2011–Dec. 2012
LDP	Shinzō Abe	safe nuclearization promoting other sources	Dec. 2012–on

Abbreviations: DPJ – Democratic Party of Japan; LDP – Liberal Democratic Party.

Sources: Shinoda, 2011; KANTEI; KANTEI 2016: 79.

Nuclearization means restarting the nuclear plants and putting aside people's opinions even though they are against this move. Regrettably, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe introduces a law that can be used against the civil society and anti-nuclear activists. The development of anti-nuclear energy activism from 2011 among Japanese citizens was a phenomenon that found the government unprepared to deal with. On December 10th 2014 a special law came into effect despite the fact that about 80 per cent of the public had opposed it in the previous year. Prime Minister Abe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Defence Ministry, the Japan Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren), and the police were the main supporters of establishing the rule that would “prevent domestic terrorism,” or “designated harmful activities.”⁸⁴ At activists fear this new law might be used against them and thus hurt the civil society development despite the fact that it was established to prevent such cases like leaking of secret information.⁸⁵

⁸² AS 2016.

⁸³ Shinoda, 2011; KANTEI; KANTEI 2016: 79.

⁸⁴ Johnston 2014.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

Conclusions

Japanese civil society has been a developing phenomenon which gained in its speed after WWII. The history of Japanese protests, and particularly these against the use of nuclear energy in their land, development of NPOs show that the Japanese have an account of expressing their thoughts on the streets. Unfortunately, despite of having much more propitious law, they are not able to find good representatives in the parliament to present their opinions on denuclearization. The article proves that civil society groups are rather ineffective in denuclearization field in Japan as the pragmatism of the government is prevailing. Moreover, the civil society when dealing with denuclearization issue is not well unified and also regionalism and age differences can pose a potential threat to the movement which is losing its momentum.

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