

Horie Takashi, Tanaka Hikaru, and Tanno Kiyoto, *Amorphous Dissent: Post-Fukushima Social Movements in Japan*

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Considering the context of “amorphous society,” *Amorphous Dissent: Post-Fukushima Social Movements in Japan* adopts a rich and vivid analysis of increasingly unstructured characteristics of social movements in Japan, considering three movements of the anti-nuclear power movement, the movement against the National Security Legislation, and the countermovement against racist movements. The book offers the lens of the “amorphization of Japanese society” (26–27) to explain the changing types and

characteristics of social movements, thus transcending the labor movement in the past. With the term “amorphization” the authors eloquently characterize the increasingly shapeless, unclassifiable, and unstructured state of society, as well as social movements themselves.

Since the bursting of the Japanese economic bubble in the early 1990s, the role of corporations and companies as an integral unit of social structure was thwarted along with the increasing numbers of employee layoffs and declining rates of unionization in Japan. A vivid portrayal of the socioeconomic backdrop of Japanese society made it easier for readers to understand why new social movements have occurred recently. Since the 1990s, a series of social phenomena including the declining membership of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), increasing irregular employment, declining birth rates, and burdensome childcare have followed. In the 2000s, Japanese society has witnessed other global events such as the Iraq War, neoliberal reforms, and the global financial crisis. This economic transition has made some groups, such as young students, no longer serve as the primary actors in social movements. The impoverishment of students with rising tuition fees and fluctuating labor markets made students turn away from social movements.

In addition to socioeconomic shifts, the rise of a hypermediated network society has expedited the individualization of young adults. Individual lifestyles and value systems were valorized among the young generation, in which young university students no longer serve as major actors in labor movements. The authors' attention does not only focus on the economic transformation of Japanese society but also looks at the cultural transformation accompanying economic changes. The dominant group identities of the late 1980s and early 1990s shared by workers of companies and students of universities faded away, and the increasing division of groups and communities by fierce competition led to the illusion of common interests and solidarity. Rising consumer culture and transforming urban spaces also contributed to the increasing sentiment of individualism that diluted group identity. The labor movement of postwar Japan pursued peace, democracy, and other communal values that promoted the public good. However, the collective values of the past have decreased, resulting in the loosening sense of “we-ness” or “one-ness.” The past words that are used to collectively designate people who participate in social movements have lost the power to represent them as a whole (30). The authors argue that the terms that represented former movements, such as “workers,” “citizens,” or “nationals,” no longer represent social movements today.

This collapse of collective identity is related to the declining notions of physical groups and communities in the hypermediated network society, where individuals established connections through online platforms. In former movements, “national movements” were established within the self-evident boundaries of “the Japanese,” and some were based upon the interpersonal links forged in workplaces, universities, or local communities. However, the new social movements have arisen in the context of an amorphous society, where the participants' actions appear and evolve in online communities. Burgeoning online platforms, such as Twitter, have risen as important players in dispersing information, recruiting new participants, and helping people develop similar emotions and identities, replacing the previous groups such as companies and student groups.

In this context, the authors' analysis of social movements in Japan asks several sociological questions about what it means to be actors of new social movements

and what some characteristics of new social movements include. First, the authors' approach to social movements in Japan highlighted a need to rethink the Marxist assumption that the working class made up an important group that would initiate and lead movements. Some of the young participants do not exactly fall into the traditional groups of the working class or university students who used to lead social movements. For instance, according to a survey of activists, the major occupational fields of core members organizing the movement against nuclear power included the music industry, information technology, design, construction design, editing, and translation, and these people in unstable employment are called "cognitive precariat" (23). While the rate of regular employees of major firms who participated in the movement was low, the rate of participation by the self-employed, freelancers, and the unemployed was high, suggesting that the participants of social movements today cannot be reduced to those of a particular class or stratum (23–24). This phenomenon also suggests that increasingly precarious lives in the flexible labor market may lead to a discrepancy in the subjective and objective interpretation of class positions, making it more difficult to argue and predict that a specific class is the main bearer of social movements.

Second, the authors' investigation of changing social movements makes us think about who will be the leading subjects of social movements in the future. News media on the anti-nuclear demonstrations reported that participants were "ordinary people," which diverged from the traditional "activist" image (22). The three groups of participants in demonstrations against nuclear power generation were seniors comprising people from the Japanese baby boomer generation (*dankai no sedai*), born between 1947 and 1949; free-spirited young people who are not salaried workers, the so-called "lost generation"; and housewives accompanied by their children (22). As such the authors nicely captured the emergence of the new subjects of social movements (i.e., the seniors, unemployed young people, and housewives), leading us to have a renewed understanding of movement participants. As an intriguing case, the authors discussed the highly educated housewives' participation in social movements. In the anti-nuclear movement following the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident, highly educated housewives, who could not enter the labor market due to gender discrimination, became the core subjects of the movement, and they initiated social movements on causes such as neighborhood issues and food security. The authors' analysis of observing newly emerging movement subjects is fascinating, but an in-depth look into how these groups came to mobilize themselves would be interesting. Social identities as mothers and older adults may allow these participants to develop similar experiences in ways that allow them to empathize with other minorities, bringing greater attention to minority rights issues.

Third, the book also leads readers to recognize the significance of online platforms in the recruitment and mobilization of participants. Many participants at the anti-nuclear demonstrations participated in a demonstration for the first time after the Fukushima accidents, and it resulted in the participants' continued interest and participation in other movements. The authors argue that groups such as university affiliates, labor unions, and other community groups no longer serve as the basis of formulating collective grievance or power, but rather individuals became the basic units of participation. For example, according to a survey of participants in the June 2011 anti-nuclear power demonstration, participants found out about the demonstrations via the internet, Twitter, and from acquaintances (29). These results offer evidence of the powerful influence of the internet in the dissemination of information about demonstrations. In hypermediated

societies, personal identities, interests, and commitments can be expressed, shared, and dispersed throughout online spaces, causing otherwise indifferent people to consider the reasons for participating in movements and igniting their motivation to join such movements. What we need to investigate further is how individuals' personal interests and commitments to social movements can be sustained for a long time.

Overall, *Amorphous Dissent* is a must-read for sociologists of social movements and collective behaviors, globalization, historians, and political sociologists interested in the shifting forms of social movements in increasingly interlocked global societies. It also offers various analytical and conceptual insights about the issue of structure versus agency, action versus emotion, and collective identity versus personal identity. By looking into rich descriptions and analyses of social movements in Japan, policymakers and government officials can also understand what the public aspires for and what types of social change they pursue in the increasingly complex Japanese society today.

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