

Who has the right to speak? The role of social media in spreading dissent among anti-nuclear groups in post 3-11 Japan

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Abstract

Although much previous research (for example regarding the “Arab Spring” of 2010) has stressed the galvanizing role played by social media in the development of social activism, in this paper we show how the use of social media in Japan has actually led to a fracturing of the anti-nuclear movement following the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accidents in Japan in March 2011. We argue that awareness of a specifically Japanese concept prioritizing the voices of those directly affected by an accident or condition, the *tōjisha*, has been heightened by exchanges on social media such as Twitter. We suggest that arguments among the anti-nuclear protestors over who has the most right to speak in these debates has had a debilitating effect on the anti-nuclear movement as a whole. We call for further work in Japan on the way in which social media have promoted disunity and dissent among protest groups.

Keywords

Japan, internet, identity, activism, anti-nuclear

Following the crisis at the Fukushima nuclear power plants in northern Japan after the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 (3:11), many groups and activities protesting nuclear power plants have appeared. These include small groups protesting in rural prefectures as well as a national Diet members’ coalition for anti-nuclear power in the nation’s capital. However, these diverse groups have experienced difficulty in forming a unified front against pro-nuclear groups because some anti-nuke groups have attacked the legitimacy of other anti-nuke groups to speak about these issues.

One reason for this lack of unity is the contention around “who has legitimacy to assert opinions about the matter” (in Japanese, *tōjisha*). According to Mark McLelland, since the 1970s, the *tōjisha-sei* (the sense of being a *tōjisha*) has emerged as a major rhetorical strategy in arguments about self-determination for “parties concerned” facing discrimination or difficulties and has now become a central concept for all self-advocacy groups in Japan. *Tōjisha* is a culturally specific concept for which finding an appropriate English equivalent phrase is difficult (McLelland 2009:193).

According to McLelland (2009), the term “*tōjisha*” originated in the fields of law, politics, and administrative studies. Prior to World War II, in particular, the term *tōjisha* was most closely associated with legal studies; it referred to the people or parties directly involved in the matter, often the matter of a litigation/lawsuit. The early 1970s saw a shift in the application of the term *tōjisha*, beginning in the context of the women’s liberation movement and gradually expanding to the fields of social welfare and social work. The early 1980s saw a range of coalitions across different social movements representing the “socially weak,” in what can be termed a broad *tōjisha undō* or movement with the aim of strengthening their bargaining power vis-a-vis national and local governments. However, the premise of solidarity was shown to be somewhat fragile as conflict began to arise not only between *tōjisha* and *hi-tōjisha* (non-*tōjisha*) but also among *tōjisha* themselves. Indeed, the emphasis on the degree of personal involvement has always been a fundamental tension underlying the concept of the *tōjisha*. Accordingly, the trend since the 1990s has been to pay increased attention to the question of who exactly constitutes a *tōjisha*, thus questioning the *tōjisha sei* or “*tōjisha*-ness” of participants involved in advocate activities (McLelland 2009:195-7). The concept of *tōjisha* divides

tōjisha and *non-tōjisha* and at the same time causes a struggle among *tōjisha* for legitimacy. Japanese sociologists have also pointed out this disadvantage of basing advocacy on the identity of the *tōjisha* (Kawasaka 2010, Hirano 2012).

In this paper we focus on how debates about “*tōjisha*-ness” have had a debilitating effect on attempts at galvanizing mass protest against the nuclear power industry in Japan. Preceding studies have focused on the galvanizing effects of social media on protest groups. These include the so-called “Arab Spring” of 2010 (Eltantawy&Wiest 2011; Khondker 2011; Tufekci &Wilson 2012) and Japanese social movements using Twitter and SNS (Gonoi 2012). However, our case study involves the disagreements that have emerged between the most influential civilian protest group, the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes (MCAN, hereafter), and anti-MCAN groups. MCAN has been conducting major, long-lasting anti-nuke protest gatherings in front of the prime minister’s residence. Much of the debate among conflicting anti-nuke groups is carried out via social media such as Twitter.

Hence our methodology involves a close reading and text mining of Twitter debates around the issue of *tōjisha* from March 17, 2011 to Feb 7, 2013. We chose 453 tweets through search results from <http://topsy.com/> with key words “radiation exposure” and “MCAN.” We coded the text with the software, KH CODER, with a coding rule that consisted of words related to the concepts, “*tōjisha*,” “radiation exposure,” “MCAN,” “censure” and “solidarity.” For example, “* *Tōjisha*” coding rule includes a word for Fukushima, mother and children. The asterisk mark means a name of a code here in after. One Twitter message can be coded under plural codes.

Table 1 shows the matrix of co-occurring ratio of codes calculated by Jaccard Coefficient. It indicates high co-occurring of *Radiation Exposure and both *MCAN (0.371) and *Censure (0.338), **Tōjisha* and both *Radiation Exposure (0.323) and *MCAN (0.246), *MCAN and *Censure (0.331). This matrix is visualized on Figure 1.

	* <i>Tōjisha</i>	* Radiation Exposure	* M CAN	* Censure	* Solidarity
* <i>Tōjisha</i>	1	0.323	0.246	0.18	0.025
* Radiation Exposure		1	0.371	0.338	0.101
* M CAN			1	0.331	0.032
* Censure				1	0.09

Table 1: Co-occurring ratio of codes in Twitter text on “radiation exposure” and “MCAN.” Numbers are Jaccard Coefficient.

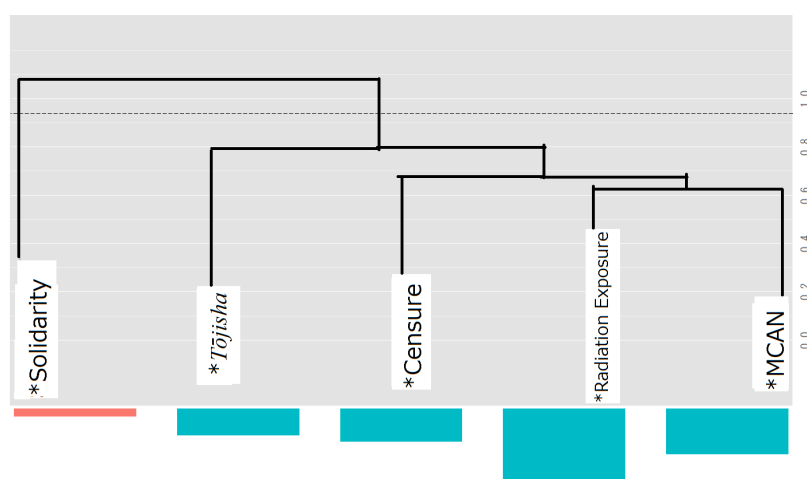


Figure 1: Cluster analysis for Twitter text on “radiation exposure” and “MCAN.” Bars under the code names represent sum of messages coded (* *Tōjisha* 126, * Radiation Exposure 366, * MCAN 218, * Censure 156, * Solidarity 38, No code 19, n= 453).

We focus our analysis on Twitter in particular because of its archive of discussion among groups. We discovered that Twitter plays an essential role as arena for debates around *tōjisha-ness*. Twitter has amplified controversies over the concept of *tōjisha-ness* and who has the right to speak in the anti-nuclear movement.

Via this text mining we discovered that in the case of anti-nuclear activism, the “people of Fukushima” are considered by some to be the real *tōjisha* and thus have legitimate privilege to assert their opinions on anti-nuclear issues because they or their families have directly experienced the consequences of the accident. Those speaking as *tōjisha* or groups for *tōjisha* claim that MCAN neglects the voices of Fukushima victims, for example by not sufficiently emphasizing the fear of radiation.

Through these Twitter debates we show that the concept of *tōjisha* is reflexive in that it relies on a binary between *tōjisha* and *hi-tōjisha*. *Tōjisha* identity requires the *hi-tōjisha* as its opposite. Harsh denial of *hi-tōjisha-ness* is necessary in order to assert strong *tōjisha-ness*. We contend that *tōjisha-ness* as a concept is a style of self-identification and as such, it incorporates a narrative of experiences according to the sociology of the self (Gergen 1984:175). Experiential narratives cannot be presented as logical arguments in the public sphere easily. Hence, although the voices of victims are important to motivate action, arguments around the *tōjisha-sei* of different interest groups leads to disagreement and disunity.

Through our analysis we show that MCAN has so far focused on a “single issue policy” that emphasizes only an anti-nuclear stance and requires no other affiliation or commitment from its participants. This broad-based platform is one reason why MCAN has seen the protesters numbering in the thousands. However the fact that MCAN is open to all comers based only on their anti-nuclear stance, has led to the movement’s organizers being criticized by those positioning themselves as *tōjisha* – those who assume the most authority to speak on the issue because of their personal involvement in the disaster. Hence we show that debates over *tōjisha-ness* have emerged as an impediment to developing a united front against the pro-nuclear campaigners in Japan. Our analysis further shows that the use of social media such as Twitter has heightened awareness of debates over *tōjisha-ness* among Japanese in general. We conclude by arguing that further research is needed into the role of social media in promoting *disunity* among marginalized groups due to the culturally specific dynamics of the *tōjisha* discourse in Japan.

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