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**Between Memory and Mobilization: Political Trauma and
the Prospects of Student Activism in Contemporary Japan**

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Utsumi Hirofumi

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Centonze Katja

Graduand

Francesca Ciampa

903017

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要旨

学生運動は、近代日本社会の歴史において特異な位置を占めている。1960年代後半の学生運動は、戦後日本における最も異常な政治的動員の一つとして広く認識されている一方で、現代の学生はしばしば政治への関心が低く、集団的な政治活動から距離を置いていると描かれる。しかし、このような見方は、過去数十年にわたる学生運動の複雑な変容過程を十分に捉えているとは言い難い。

本論文は、日本の高等教育制度における学生運動の変化を考察し、政治参加、制度的変化、そして社会全体の変容との関係に着目するものである。本研究では、学生運動を新左翼運動の衰退とともに絶滅した現象として捉えるのではなく、歴史的状況の変化に応じて絶えず適応し続けてきた社会的実践として位置づける。全共闘運動の経験、連合赤軍の暴力的展開、そしてその後に生じた急進的運動への社会的非難は、政治参加に対する社会的認識に大きな影響を与えた。その結果、政治運動はしばしば暴力や社会的不安定と結び付けて理解されるようになった。しかし、こうした歴史的経験は学生の政治参加を消滅させたのではなく、過去の対立的、暴力的な実践から距離を置く新たな活動形態の出現を促したのである。

本研究において重要な分析対象となるのが、日本の大学制度の変容である。特に2004年の国立大学法人化は、市場原理や業績評価制度を導入することで、大学、学生、国家の関係を大きく再編した。この改革は、学生が政治活動に参加する条件そのものを変化させ、学内における活動を以前よりも可視化しにくく、時には抑制的なものへと変容させた。一方で、大学は依然として政治的意思表明や集団的アイデンティティの形成、市民的参加を実践する重要な空間であり続けている。

本論文では、全共闘運動や新左翼運動の衰退といった歴史的事例に加え、2015年に結成されたSEALDsや、2024年に日本の大学で展開された親パレスチナ連帯運動といった現代的事例を分析対象とする。これらの事例を通じて、学生運動は消滅したのではなく、歴史的記憶、制度改革、そしてデジタル技術の発展との相互作用の中で改装されてきたことを明らかにする。現代の学生運動は1960年代後半の運動と比較して対立性が弱く見えるかもしれないが、それでもなお学生が政治的、社会的課題について意見を表明し、大学や社会との関係を問い直す重要な機会を提供している。

最終的に、本研究は「学生運動が絶滅したのか」という問いではなく、「学生運動が
いかなる要因によって、どのように変化してきたのか」という問いこそが重要であると
主張する。さまざまな歴史的時期におけるその変化を追跡することにより、本論文は
若者の政治参加に関する理解を深めるとともに、大学が批判的思考と政治的自己の表
現の場として果たし続けている役割を再考するための一助となることを目指すものであ
る。

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates the transformation of student activism within Japanese higher education, framing contemporary student activism in relation to broader political issues, socio economic changes that have affected universities in the past decades. In particular, it examines how the reconstructing university system in relation to neo-liberal governance and the expansion of digital communication have reshaped both the conditions and the meaning of student activism.

Rather than treating student activism as an isolated phenomenon, this thesis approaches it as a practice that is embedded in historical and sociological changes and evolves closely in relation to the transformation of the institutional architecture of higher education. In this sense, university is understood not only as an educational space but also as a place where students have the opportunity to practice their governance and social reproduction. In this framework, activism's fluctuation is perceived as closely related to shifts in university administration, funding structures and evaluation systems. These topics are fundamental for the understanding of how student activism is redirected or constrained over time. However, in order to comprehend how student activism has transformed over time, it is essential to analyze how the outcome of certain movements have influenced the future approach of younger generations to activism.

To understand better the deep changes and alternation of contemporary student activism, the first chapter focuses on analyzing from a historical perspective two main phenomena that have shaped the future perspectives of how students and young people have approached activism in the future. The first phenomenon considered is the birth of the student activist group *Zengaku kyōtō kaigi* 全学共闘会議, formally known as 'All-Campus Joint Struggle Committees', born in the peak moments of tension at Tōkyō University between 1968 and 1969. During those years, the streets of Japan have been wrecked with heavy mobilization mainly in response to Japanese government's support for the United States in the war against Vietnam. Universities played a fundamental role in shaping the minds and ideological background of young people's minds, being a safe place to develop critical thinking, encouraging students to engage in political debating and examining critical issues concerning both domestic and international conflicts. As a result, students across the country decided to coordinate their efforts, challenging not only the government's position towards the conflict but also the role of university within political and social structures. In the specific case of Tōkyō University, students discontent initially emerged as a response to an issue that was altering the well-being of campus state. These included a proposed

increase in tuition fees and growing concerns regarding the treatment and working conditions of medical interns. What began as a protest against university administration gradually evolved into a broader critique of institutional authority, academic hierarchies and the perceived complicity of university in maintaining and flourishing the existing political and social order. In this framework, *Zenkyōtō* movement began to develop into one of the most influential expressions of student radicalism in post-war Japan, leaving a lasting impact on the way activism is perceived today. Moreover, this thesis will analyze the implement of the riot police during the occupation of the Yasuda Hall at the University of Tōkyō, exploring how the use of violence both by state authority, riot police and the students themselves shaped both the course and the outcome of the student movement. The second phenomenon analyzed will be the birth of the extremist group *Rengō-sekigun* 連合赤軍 or ‘United Red Army’; the focus will shift in particular to the group’s tragic and gruesome ending, a cycle of internal violence and homicides that shocked the entire nation, along with the people that once supported the group’s ideology. As their gruesome ending has been revealed to the eyes of the whole Japanese population, the faith and hope that the Japanese population slowly began to collapse.

The second chapter will follow along the lines of the violence that has emerged from these two events and analyzes the social, political and economic decline of the Japanese New Left, focusing on how political violence, state response and the analysis portrayed by media outlets has contributed to shaping the perception of post-war Japanese activism. The important element in this chapter will be investigating the close relationship between the formation of cultural trauma and political violence. In terms of cultural trauma, we can define it as something so deeply upsetting that it can cause a profound emotion of discomfort felt by the entire society, almost close to threat the well-being of an entire society¹. The defeat of the student movement and the consequent revelations of the violent *Rengō-sekigun* purge that occurred in the 1972 in Asama Sansō, revealed an enormous sense of discomfort among the population and began to symbolize a broader failure within the post-war Japanese activism. The analysis continues focusing on the criminalization of post-war activists, including mass arrests and juridical procedures directed towards students involved in the Tōdai struggle. In addition, the chapter focuses on persistent consequences of these events on collective memory and political participation. It argues how the constant association between political activism, political violence and social disorder has long contributed to the

¹ Jeffrey C. ALEXANDER, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma” in Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Szotompka (ed), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkley, University of California Press, 2004, p. 10.

stigmatization of political participation and the slow depoliticization of younger generations. Following the defeat of the Japanese new-left, younger generations of activists tried to engage in various forms of political participation with the intent of distancing themselves from the violence and distorted perception of the student activism. This chapter seeks to analyze how the memory of political violence for long time has shaped and influenced the perception of political participation in Japan; however, despite the image of the activist has been influenced by past actions and influences, still young people today seek to engage in political activism. Methods and paths chosen by young people today are different from the ones in the past, but activism has never disappeared in Japan; it can be argued that it has evolved in relation to the changes and transformations of the society. The third chapter expands on this topic, arguing that activism in Japan among young people has not disappeared; taking into consideration universities within the framework both of an educational place and an entity responsible for the critical thinking and formation of the students. On this matter, It will be analyzed how the 2004 corporation reform that establishes universities as semi-autonomous entities, can represent a critical turning point for both university administrations and student activism. The alternations brought by the national reform display how they have affected academic autonomy, freedom and the decision-making system, while also altering the relationship between the state and the university. Moreover, it will be analyzed student activism within the newly formed system of neoliberal universities, displaying how students experience university life as if they were living in a bubble and not facing real outside world issues². In this sense, the chapter shows how students have adapted their activism to the alteration of university system caused by the National Corporation reform.

Within this transformed landscape, the chapter further analyzes the emergence of new forms of student activism and their political expression; the case taken into consideration is the student movement SEALDs, formed in Japan in 2015. It examines how the combination of effective online communication strategies and offline political action have altered the concept of student activism, attracting people who have never been particularly interested in engaging with political activism.

The analysis further continues with the last and most important case study, which worldwide pro-Palestinian mobilizations in 2024 that subsequently extended to Japanese universities as well. The cases taken into consideration are the Tōkyō University and Kyōto University, being two of the most prestigious universities in Japan. Before analyzing how student activists at both

² Karter M. JUSTIN, Robbins D. BRENT and McInerney G. Robert, “Student Activism in the Neoliberal University”, A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis”, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 61, 6, 2021. p. 975.

universities have handled the mobilization, the chapter will focus on the examination of both universities' official regulations concerning extra-curricular activities; this analysis is not strictly correlated with activism but reveals how Tōkyō University and Kyōto University would engage in different forms of contemporary student activism. Furthermore, the analysis explains how students have been involved in different forms of activism, beginning with the encampments at Tōkyō University in support of the Palestinian cause moving on to petitions both online and offline. The research highlights how students sought to engage in different forms of activism that do not concern engaging in violent confrontations with universities, rather they sought to communicate actively with the university administration through the use of petitions directed to the university administration, issuing their demands concerning the Palestinian conflict and the position of the University towards the conflict. On this matter, on May 6th, 2024, one of the student organizations at Tōkyō University has presented a series of demands directed to the administration asking to clarify their position towards the conflict³. This last chapter shows how students still engage today in contemporary forms of political activism in a less violent and indulgent way compared to how students in the past used to confront university administration and the state.

This thesis argues how student activism has not disappeared through the years, rather it has evolved in relation to organic changes that have occurred in society. The spiral of violence and violent confrontations that have happened during the last decades within the framework of student activism, have yet influenced the perception of engaging in political activities and the position of the activist within the society, but at the same time students have sought to engage in different forms of resistance that would distance themselves from the negative perception of political activities. Rather than arguing that student activism has disappeared, it is possible to state that student activism has been reconfigured through a complex interconnection of institutional reconstructing, technological innovations and shifting political cultures. While student activism in Japan appears less confrontational that how was in the past, it continues to perform as an important connection through which students negotiate their political identities, ethical responsibilities and relationship with university authorities.

³ Suvendrini KAKUCHI, "Gaza War Sparks Unprecedented, Sustained Campus Protests", *University World News*, 21ST May, 2024, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20240521182242886> (11th of June 2026).

METHODOLOGY

The first chapter consists of a revision of historical events that occurred from 1969 to 1972 hence in this case the materials used to comprehend the different political conflicts that have involved student activists and the formation of the group *Zenkyōtō* are mostly historic academic papers. The most reliable academic scholar involved in the analysis of dynamics that have remarked the struggle at Tōkyō University is Christopher Perkins, who has deeply analyzed the complexity of the events that have led to the disruption and the criminalization of the student activists associated with the Tōdai struggle. Honorable mention is the scholar Kosugi Ryōko, who provided examinations of the multifaceted interconnections and relationship within both *Zenkyōtō* and the other student groups that have been involved in the clashes with Tōkyō University during 1968 and 1969. Concerning the examination of *Sekigun-ha* and *Rengō-sekigun*, the exhaustive academic works of the scholar Patricia G. Steinhoff have provided a detailed analysis of the birth and decline of the Japanese Red Army until their gruesome ending in 1972.

The second chapter continues the historical analysis allowing us to understand the creation of the cultural trauma spiraled from the disruptive violence following the failure and the criminalization of the student movement in 1968. Concerning this matter, the author who has granted a profound understanding of the connection between the failure of the Japanese New Left and the birth of the cultural trauma is Carl Cassegård, permitting us to understand how the two events are profoundly correlated. On the same topic of the criminalization of the New Left from the perspective of the Japanese state and the comprehension of terroristic attacks portrayed by the Japanese Red Army, the scholar Peter J. Katzenstein allowed us to understand the complexity of the aftermath of the terroristic attacks.

The third chapter shifts its perspective on contemporary Japanese activism and while it's still possible to track down recent academic works regarding this topic, covering the part concerning pro-Palestinian movements in Japan remains hostile. Therefore, the majority of resources implied in this chapter are newspaper articles both from Japanese and international media outlets. Moreover, since the two pro-Palestinian organizations at Tōkyō University and Kyōto University have been extremely present on social media outlets, both their social media profiles on Instagram have been analyzed to understand what kind of events they would promote to spread awareness concerning the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

To conclude, additional information and knowledge regarding how contemporary social movements work have been acquired with the kind support of Professor Hamanishi Eiji from Kwansei Gakuin University, who I am profoundly grateful to have been in contact with.

FIRST CHAPTER

The History of Student Uprising in Japan: Between Violence and Politics

1.1 Student Uprising at Tōkyō University

During the years between 1960 and 1970 a wave of extended protests flooded the streets of Japan. This prolonged period in the Japanese history could be considered as a moment of reflection and questioning the values of the Japanese post-war social order, after the American occupation had long and deeply changed the society in its own core. Although it has been mostly streets demonstration and clashes between civilians and the riot police, a mayhem of chaos erupted in most university campuses in the mid '60s; there have been records of protests and occupation in universities prior to the mid-60s, but the university protests that were considered to be part of the New Left wave have had extremely distinctive features from the previous student movements⁴. It was a period that has been remarked as a major trauma that has been inherited by the following generation of students. Major Japanese universities that exploded into mayhem and chaos had common reasons, especially within the public university system; the increase in the fees system that was considered a burden both on the students and the families and demand for more self-government on the part of students. Although the latter have been regarded as valid and real conditions to overcome the current system, this was only the surface. Beneath the surface of these reasons, campus occupation and student violence were not only expressions of domestic disapproval within the on-going historical period and the progressivism that, but also an internal struggle to analyze and question the old social order and their own self, along the action of dealing with the matter by themselves and questioning their role in society as active social actors. Nonetheless, more than one hundred universities in Japan decided to start mobilizing and demanding for more autonomy from the university administration⁵; yet in this analysis it will be only discussed the specific case of the University of Tōkyō and its internal riots between student associations, the faculty body and their will and strength to counter the core idea of post-war II. Technically, to the students that were displaying their disillusionment towards the bright society, the University of Tōkyō not only represented the establishment, but also embodied the values of

⁴ Patricia G. STEINHOFF, "Memories of New Left Protests", *Contemporary Japan*, 25, 2, 2013, p. 132.

⁵ Rikki KERSTEN, "The Intellectual Culture of Postwar Japan and the 1968-1969 University of Tōkyō Struggles: Repositioning the Self in Postwar Thought", *Social Science Japan Journal*, 12, 2, 2009, p. 228.

social order and capitalism, since there have been deep interests within the industries to be included into research fields⁶.

What began as an internal dissent within the faculties at the University, spread largely as violent conflicts between student associations and the riot police that lasted one year long. The significant part of the yearlong occupation was not only the struggle itself, and the demands required by the students and the student associations but also the peculiarity of the student association themselves and how they distinguished themselves from the previous student movements that marked Japan's pre-war decades. The movement that long reigned and guided significant aspects of the Tōdai struggle was *Zengakukyōtōkaigi* 全学共闘会議, established on the 5th of July of 1968 during the Tōdai tōsō has been declared as a crucial turning point for the student movements in Japan and the fighting at the University, as it completely altered the perception of student movements still to this day and its model was adopted by other universities opposing to their own academic establishment⁷. Although its relevance is tangible, to this day its impact is still a debate between academics⁸. The focus of the student group was concentrated on the subjectivity and self- development of the students and the criticism of the 'everyday life', crucial aspect has marked an enormous difference between the Old and New Left.

The occupation that took place at the University of Tōkyō between 1968 and 1969 was the outcome of events that occurred in 1965 in which students of the Faculty of Medicine have demanded for a better treatment during their mandatory internship, as they were required to work without getting paid⁹. Since their requests were being continuously ignored by the research community and the University administration, during late January of 1968 the students decided to merge their struggles under a single medical student association¹⁰. Although medical students were committed to making their requests being heard, asking for better treatment and higher pay during their mandatory internship, their actions such as libraries occupation and boycotting mandatory exams, were ignored and barely moved anything in the university's administration¹¹. Their

⁶ Andrew WILLIAMS, *Dissenting Japan*, London, Hurst & Company, 2016, p. 88.

⁷ STEINHOFF, "Memories of..." cit., p. 141.

⁸ KOSUGI Ryoko, "Zenkyōtō to ha nandattanoka – tōdai tōsō ni okeru sankasha kaishaku to imi duke ni chakumoku shite", (What was Zenkyōtō? Focusing on the Interpretations and Meanings attributed by participants in the University of Tōkyō Struggle), *Ōhara shakai mondai kenkyūjō zasshi*, 697, 11, 2016, p.37.

小杉亮子、「全共闘とは何だったのか—東大闘争における参加者の解釈と意味づけに着目して」、大原社会問題研究所雑誌、第 697、2016 年、p. 37.

⁹ Christopher PERKINS, *The Tōkyō University Trial and the Struggle Against Order in Postwar Japan*, University of Edinburgh Press, Edinburgh, 2023, p. 78.

¹⁰ STEINHOFF, "Memories of..." cit., p. 143.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

requests, being turned down and ignored by the university administration, contributed to a further deterioration of the situation and led the students to occupy the Yasuda auditorium on the 15th of June, being considered as the university's symbol. Following the occupation of the building for two consecutive days, the University administration decided to call the *kidōtai* 機動隊¹² on the students to normalize the campus, as president Ōkōchi affirmed¹³. It was the first time the university administration called on the students, as public universities were considered more reluctant to involve law enforcement since it was considered as a violation of the autonomy and they were leaning more towards the promotion of negotiation between the injured parts. This specific moment has been perceived by the students as a turning point since the decision to request police intervention led them to question whether the University administration, the conservative government and authorities were more closely aligned than they had previously assumed¹⁴.

Following several protests and strikes by students from several faculties on the campus, president Ōkōchi sought to engage a discussion with groups of students; however, the meeting was perceived by them more as a lecture rather than a discussion. This meeting led students to solidify their actions and their occupation of Yasuda auditorium by building barricades to prevent further interruptions¹⁵. After a couple of days, students decide to establish Tōdai Zenkyōtō, fundamental student association within the Tōdai tōsō that will be analyzed in detail in the following paragraphs. Immediately after the establishment of the group, seven demands were issued by Zenkyōtō to the University administration, inquiring to condemn the riot police being called to intervene on campus. The issues were answered by the administration though the group was not satisfied, and it was not perceived as a victory but as a mere defeat. The answers to the seven demands were delivered to each student by mail as public notice and the university administration seemed to not condone issuing the riot police on the campus but were more concerned about the students' reaction, as their actions were defined as 'anti-intellectual.' Secondly, delivering the answers by mail was regarded by the students as their concerns were being unheard and ignored again, although students were issuing confrontation with the administration¹⁶.

As reported in Patricia G. Steinhoff's work 'Memories of New Left Protest' (2013), during the following months, severe strikes were conducted by the students of almost each faculties leading the campus to resemble a war zone. President Ōkōchi and his administration agreed to resign,

¹² 機動隊 means 'riot police' in English.

¹³ PERKINS, "The Tōkyō University...", cit., p. 80.

¹⁴ KERSTEN, "The Intellectual Culture...", cit., p. 237.

¹⁵ STEINHOFF, "Memories of...", cit., p.143.

¹⁶ PERKINS, "The Tōkyō University..." cit., p. 83.

leaving his position to his younger successor Katō, who quickly began negotiating and engaging discussions with the students to reach an agreement and bring the occupation and the guerrilla situation to an end.

Negotiations and agreements were not being taken into consideration as several faculties along Zenkyōtō decided to continue the strike and under both pressure from political parties and the Ministry of Education officials, President Katō reached the decision to cancel the entrance exams for 1969 unless the conflict would be resolved quickly. The occupation of Yasuda building continued with several group of students along Zenkyōtō, despite some of them not even being affiliated with Tōdai University. It was widely known that the situation inside Yasuda building resembled a war zone and President Katō and his administration were conscious of this as they eventually advised the students to leave the auditorium before being forced to call the riot police. Eventually, the president had already informed the riot police, though the government needed a formal approval to intervene. However, since most of the students were unwilling to bring the occupation to an end, President Katō on the morning of 18th January of 1969 decided to call in the riot police to normalize the campus. The confrontation between the students and the riot police was fierce; however, students could not endure it for long, as they were extremely sleep deprived and were far less equipped compared to the riot police. As a result, the fight lasted one day only ending on the 19th of January.

1.1.2 Politics and Thought of Zenkyōtō

The analysis will continue by examining the politics and thoughts of Zenkyōtō, since the student association has been one of the most prominent in the Tōdai tōsō, challenging the students and the whole university administration into a new and experimental aim and perspective of society and politics.

As it has been previously analyzed, Zenkyōtō was established during the Tōdai tōsō as a self-proclaimed entity as an expression of individual agency, and the initial purpose of the movement was to merge each department's struggle under one single joint organization using direct democracy instead of sect affiliation¹⁷. What declared the student association as particular and different from the Old Left student associations, was that it was not necessary to hold or sign a

¹⁷ STEINHOFF, "Memories of...", cit., p. 141.

membership to participate in political actions under Zenkyōtō's name, as for non-sect students it was a way to give voice and identify their actions¹⁸. The movement's model did expand throughout other universities in Japan until the 1970 and due to its particular and atypical formation it was perceived as fundamental in the Japanese 1968¹⁹. However, due to its the ambiguous formation, Zenkyōtō did eventually divide experts during its research leaving the question open to whether it belongs to the traditional definition of a social movement²⁰. As it will be analyzed further, the association itself had no hierarchy it was mostly horizontal, relying on the utilization of direct democracy. However, the association had representatives from each faculty in the university to negotiate with the university administration and organize political actions. Due to its dual formation, it did create internal struggles and divisions but, according to students, the revolution was necessary to change the Japanese society to its own core²¹.

The features that made Zenkyōtō differ from the Old Left student groups as Zengakuren²², were that Zenkyōtō decided to not affiliate with any specific political group or party, particularly keeping themselves separate from the Japanese Communist Party, though they obviously did share some ideas and political actions with the affiliated groups such as *Nihon minshū seinen dōmei* 日本民主青年同盟²³. Several students at Tōkyō University who participated in the Tōdai tōsō along the actions carried out by Zenkyōtō, have highlighted how traditional forms of political associations, commonly the ones associated with JCP, were reluctant to challenge the norms of the capitalistic society they were living in. As a result, students' disappointment within the political aim that group such as Minsei executed made them diverge from traditional student associations.

As previously mentioned, Zenkyōtō differed from traditional student associations not only due to its ambiguous foundation and structure, but also due to their aim and how to achieve their designated goals. Post war progressive student associations had different political goals as they

¹⁸ KOSUGI, "Zenkyōtō to ha...", cit., p. 44.

¹⁹ NAGASAKI Hiroshi, "On the Japanese '68", in Walker Gavin (ed.), *The Red Years, Theory, Politics and Aesthetics in the Japanese '68*, Verso, London, 2020, p. 14.

²⁰ KOSUGI, "Zenkyōtō to ha...", cit., p. 44.

²¹ KOSUGI, "Zenkyōtō to ha...", cit., p. 40.

²² "Zengakuren" is the abbreviation for *Zen Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sō Rengō* 全日本学生自治会総連合, one of the most notable student associations in Japan. Formed in 1948 and affiliated to the JCP the group had its peak political activities during 1950-1960 being heavily involved in the organization of the ANPO protests against the US-Japan Security Treaty. As of today, there have been no more activities registered under Zengakuren's name since the association has had several internal warring sects due to their aversion to the JCP. For a deeper understanding of the history, political thoughts, and impact of the student association, the author of this thesis highly suggests reading "Zengakuren: Japan's Revolutionary Students" by Stuart J. Dowsey.

²³ TAKEMASA Ando, "Transforming 'Everydayness': Japanese New Left Movements and the Meaning of Direct Action", *Japanese Studies*, 33, 1, 2013, p. 2.

were drawn to change national policies and political institutions, while New Left student movements began to question themselves first as social actors and then the alienation and the control in the society they were living in; Zenkyōtō students targeted the Japanese state and how it manifested in the broader in the Japanese university and, since university is inherently connected to society, their questioning and analysis also expanded towards the entire society²⁴.

Since Zenkyōtō students were targeting the whole society to their analysis, the key to their discourse was based on the concept of everydayness and self-negation. Considering that their purpose was to comprehend society, how common sense and order were being manifested within their society, the concept of everydayness was mainly related to how and which structures of routines normalized violence and inequality, meaning which kind of ‘thinking’ was the dominant one in their society²⁵. Students enrolled in Tōdai University were aware of their privileged position since this meant to have the opportunity to be in the future elites one day, while they were aware of their privilege they began to question how they would inherit and benefit from this system of violence and inequality. The idea of self-negation came logically when speaking of everydayness. The concept itself originated from the philosopher Yoshimoto Takaki, which eventually spread towards the students in the movement. Zenkyōtō students adopted and extended this perspective to sympathize and connect with struggling masses and create a brand-new society while dismantling university administration within themselves creating a space and a community within the barricades to experiment with new social roles and forms of governance.

Consequently, the students identified the riot police and the university administration as forms of injustice and inequality, which they have been trying to fight against since in this specific historic moment these were the two main factors that made the students question their role in society. The heavy use of riot police from the university administration during the confrontation in Yasuda auditorium, has been perceived by the students not only as an expression of the inseparability between state violence and the university, but also as the demonstration of the ‘everydayness’ they were trying to fight against²⁶. Eventually, this confrontation and physical fight between the two parties was the manifestation of their self-negation.

One last interesting point regarding the politics and thoughts of the student association is that they believed in the spontaneity of their actions, having no precise direction and exact future vision, as they had no intention in transforming political institutions. Their main concern as a student

²⁴ TAKEMASA, “Transforming ‘Everydayness’...”, cit., p. 8.

²⁵ PERKINS, “The Tōkyō University...”, cit., p. 91.

²⁶ PERKINS, “The Tōkyō University...”, cit., p.93.

association was to modify the core of their society and dismantle the violence and injustice deeply rooted in the post war Japanese society.

1.1.3 War of Interests Between Zenkyōtō and Minsei

The struggle at the University of Tōkyō has been conducted by three big spheres of students that eventually had fights between each other due to their completely different political visions. The clash on campus has been mainly conducted by New Left students, who were in any way not affiliated with the Japanese Communist Party and were very critical and vocal against it; but at the same time they did fight for both university related issues and broader issues, such as the Vietnam War and the renewal of ANPO in 1970. Indeed, they connected university related issues to a bigger picture, being the one of their current political issues²⁷. Non-Sectarian students, who were not involved with the JCP but concentrated their attention on self-liberation self-revolution and issues mainly connected to university; they distanced themselves from any left-wing political party or faction. New Left students also had no connection with the JCP, leaving Minsei as the only student association connected to a political party²⁸. Being associated with a political party meant to follow and to heavily rely on their guidelines and, especially, political vision. As it was previously analyzed, most of the students that identified themselves under the name of Zenkyōtō, were highly critical and had no intention of being affiliated with a political party, especially the JCP. The reason lies, as mentioned previously, in the very different vision that Zenkyōtō students had, implying that their ultimate mission would be to change the prevailing discourse of violence and injustice in the society. Nonetheless, the first direct consequence of society change would have been linked to a change in politics as well.

Students affiliated with Minsei had indeed a very different vision of the tōsō in Tōdai and would have wanted to organize the struggle in divergent manners. Being directly connected to the Japanese Communist Party meant also to adhere to their political vision and guidelines. According to the students not affiliated with Minsei, they were leading the struggle pursuing strategic politics,

²⁷ PERKINS, “The Tōkyō University...” cit., p. 85.

²⁸ KOSUGI Ryoko, “1968 nen no datsuseijika to shakaiundōron ni okeru tekitaisei no bunseki wo megutte”, (The depoliticization of 1968, an analysis on the antagonism between social movements), *Shakaigaku kenkyū*, 106, 2020, p.49.

小杉亮子、「1968年の脱政治化と社会運動における敵対性の分析をめぐって」、社会学研究、第106、2020年、p. 49.

exploiting the mayhem that was occurring at Tōdai to accomplish their ultimate outcome, that being the whole revolution of the Japanese state²⁹.

However, along with the different visions and pursuing their own aim, Minsei being connected directly to the JCP, was heavily relying on both their decision and guidelines. As it was reported in “全共闘とは何だったのか” (2016), one of the students that took part in the Tōdai tōsō has stated that the students in Minsei often had to head to the JCP headquarters to attend to formal meetings, listen and adhere to the party’s guidelines. Nonetheless, as the former student reported, this behavior was heavily incompatible with the ideas of self-liberation and autonomy that the students were aiming at during the protests in 1968. These disagreements on their strategies placed step by step an enormous discrepancy that would never be filled during the struggle; instead, this would only lead to an irreparable fracture in the movement.

The Japanese Communist Party has not only been thoroughly present during the struggle at Tōkyō University, but also historically has established a tight relationship within the various university administrations and professors³⁰. After establishing their presence among the academic community, during the struggle at Tōkyō University they perceived the astonishing rise of Zenkyōtō as a threat to their legacy, concluding to send trained activists on the university site to clash with Zenkyōtō students³¹. Following the resignation of Tōdai President Ōkōchi, the Katō administration undertook his previous president’s responsibility. As it was mentioned prior to this paragraph, the Katō administration was stricter and heavily oriented to establish a closure with the students to revert to the normal state of the University.

To achieve this closure the Katō administration cooperated with the JCP, since the party had long established a presence in the university and wanted to regain hegemony on the student politics within the campus, the agreement was beneficial for both the Katō administration and the JCP. After the intervention on campus from the JCP, naturally Minsei students decided to redefine their strategies to be more aligned with the party’s decision. Along the decision of Minsei students to cooperate with the Katō administration to terminate the strike, 4th year medical students worried for their future decided to merge their paths with Minsei. This partnership was identified as a threat to the activities carried out by Zenkyōtō students, marked the beginning of a series of violent fights

²⁹ KOSUGI, “The depoliticization of 1968...”, cit., p. 53.

³⁰ NICK Kapur, “The Japanese Student Movement in the Cold War Crucible”, *The Asia Pacific Journal*, 14, 1, 2022, p. 1.

³¹ PERKINS, “The Tōkyō University...”, cit., p. 88.

between Minsei and Zenkyōtō³². Not only did Zenkyōtō students perceived this agreement as a threat since Minsei was being cooperative with both anti-strike students and the university administration, but also it was directly cooperating with the riot police while addressing themselves as the vanguard of the revolution³³.

The two student associations made their position clear during November of 1968, when they both decided to divide the campus and assert their hegemony on two different parts of the campus and use them as their permanent base for councils and meetings, these being the Komaba dormitory and the building number eight of Tōkyō University. The conflict between the two groups became extremely explicit, as various students who participated in the struggle reported being heavily surrounded by Minsei students as they were constantly throwing stones and bottles and breaking through the windows of the campuses³⁴.

The situation quickly escalated and grew more dangerous as both groups began to get more physically violent towards each other. Approximately around December 1968, Zenkyōtō decided to occupy one building on the Komaba campus. This decision declared the moment when violence escalated excessively. According to various students on the campus the fights had undergone a significant escalation of violence, eventually leading to the capture and detention of members of both opposing groups. What had appeared as a series of confrontations gradually developed into a more structured and detailed conflict. The situation had come to resemble a state of near warfare, characterized by reciprocal acts of aggression and the taking of prisoners³⁵. Furthermore, what emerges is that students themselves employed a paramilitary vocabulary to describe the situation in which they found themselves. This linguistic choice, such as terms as *buryōkushōtotsu* 武力衝突 and *yasenbyōin* 野戦病院, respectively “military conflict” and “field hospital” reflects the extent to which the conflict was perceived in militarized terms by the actors involved³⁶.

The struggle between Zenkyōtō and Minsei raises a broader question: was the conflict driven by the necessity to identify a real and visible enemy, through whose opposition and ideological

³² PERKINS, “The Tōkyō University...”, cit., p. 87.

³³ TAKEMASA, “Transforming Everydayness...”, cit., p. 11.

³⁴ KOSUGI Ryoko, “Tōdai tōsō no senryaku – senjūtsu ni miru, 1960 nendai gakuseiundō no gunjika”, (The Militarization of the 1960s Student Movement, Analysis of Strategies and Tactics in the University of Tōkyō Struggle), *Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan Kenkyū Hōkoku*, 216, 2019, p. 159.

小杉亮子「東大闘争の戦略・戦術に見る。1960年代学生運動の軍事化」、国立歴史民俗博物館研究報告、第216、2019年、p.159.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ KOSUGI, “The militarization of the 1960s...”, cit., p.162.

purification could be achieved through violence and forms or self-negation? Furthermore, this confrontation might also reveal an enormous inability of communication in the New Left community, which eventually led protests and student movements to slowly disappear in the following decades.

1.2 From Student Protest to Political Violence: the Aftermath of Zenkyōtō

Following the outbreaks of violence and chaos during 1968-1969 in several universities, the Japanese student movements slowly began to wane. As it was positioned in the previous paragraphs, the struggle at the University of Tōkyō was brutally evicted following a harsh battle between the student's sects and the riot police in 1969. The battle was cruel and the aftermath of several students who participated in the riot was uncertain as their association was increasingly being prosecuted as a criminal act, public support began to diminish over time, reflecting the disillusionment with the government³⁷. The campus situation gradually reverted to normal conditions, with the admission examination being reintroduced.

For many students that were involved in the movement and scholars as well, this attempt to overthrow and radicalize the university institution has been considered as a failure. With particular reference to the case of the Tōdai struggle, as Zenkyōtō has been mainly active at the University of Tōkyō, one of the factors behind its failure was the absence of a clear future-oriented vision, coupled with the ambiguity surrounded its central objectives. As was analyzed in the previous paragraphs, the students were entirely focused on present actions with no specific intention to change the politic institutions, since it would have been a direct consequence of the radicalization of the Japanese society. During the initial stage of the movement's development, it really had an impact on the students and the university administration. Its existence and political activities contributed to awakening Japanese universities from a state of stagnation. However, the disproportionate deployment of riot police and excessive occupation of campus sites led the students to a state of disillusionment, which caused them to drift further away from the movement³⁸.

Zenkyōtō can be understood as an agglomeration of diverse sectarian groups, many of which had either been expelled from the JCP or unable to coordinate within a council capable to enact a unified strategy. These several sects would come together under the name of Zenkyōto and, as it

³⁷ YOSHIKUNI Igarashi, "Dead Bodies and Living Guns: The United Red Army and its Deadly Pursuit of Revolution, 1971-1972", *Japanese Studies*, 27,2, 2007, p. 123.

³⁸ LEITING Nei, "From Cradle to grave: Long Term Influences of Campus Spatiality on the Dynamics of Japan's Zenkyōtō movement (1968 -1969)", *Social Movement Studies*, 25, 2, 2025, p. 7.

has been analyzed before, the absence of centralized committee in Zenkyōtō represented its defining characteristic, thereby distinguishing it from the Old Left Movements. However, it was precisely the absence of an internal committee together with the diversification of ideological principles within the various sectarian groups that ultimately led to an ulterior fragmentation and gradual dispersion of the movement. In the absence of cohesive leadership structures, internal divisions become increasingly pronounced, undermining the movement's coherence and effectiveness over time.

The failure of the political actions of Zenkyōtō and the occupation of Yasuda Hall in Tōkyō University has been indeed a crucial turning point for several political activists. Along the heavily involvement of the riot police in the struggle at Tōkyō University, this has been perceived as the student movement was being increasingly oppressed by the government and the university administration. As it was analyzed in the previous paragraphs, the students involved in the struggle did not obtain all their demands, rather they have been their requests have been silenced by the new Katō administration.

The outcome of this process has been deeply uneven. The criminalization of the actions carried out by the students has effectively discouraged political engagement, encouraging several students to abandon activism and retreat into their conventional academic roles. However, for the remaining fragment of the student activists their actions have in fact been suppressed by the state institutions. In this case scenario, rather than framing themselves as victims of the state power, they responded to the oppression by engaging in an escalation of political violence.

This was specifically the case of the *Rengō Sekigun* 連合赤軍 or United Red Army, which emerged in 1971 from the merger of two other revolutionary factions namely the Red Army Faction of the Second Communist League and the *Kakumei saha* 革命左派, being the Revolutionary Left³⁹. Rather than producing cohesion, however, this merger of political and material interests eventually triggered a cycle of internal violence that culminated in a spiral of deadly purges that shocked the whole nation.

³⁹ YOSHIKUNI, “Dead Bodies...”, cit., p. 123.

1.2.1 Ideological Foundations and the Birth of the Red Army Faction

Both two groups had very clear mindset and political intentions towards their objectives and, as has been mentioned previously, the two have merged to combine both their material and political interests.

Regarding the Red Army faction, its history traces back to the mid 1960 circa, as the Communist League usually had international meetings along with several New Left sects and various students, giving the opportunity to share and visualize each political encompasses and ideology. During the conference, the leader of one of the three Bund, Shiomi Takaya decided to present his controversial thesis that cost him the expulsion from the Communist League. During his presentation, he eventually advocated for a ‘transitional world theory’, concluding that it was necessary to pursue a revolutionary war capable of destroying the bourgeoisie. To achieve this objective, it was necessary to create a Red Army even in Japan⁴⁰.

Following an intense internal conflict, the Communist League determined that they could not endorse such violence at that particular historical junction, already characterized by widespread violence and clashes associated with the student movements. On these grounds, the Communist League decided to not adopt Shiomi Takaya’s thesis advocating a revolutionary war and ultimately concluded to expel him from the organization. The Red Army faction was a product of the unrest and intense exposure to other World Struggles insurgency frames as well, eventually creating international connection with other organizations.

Nonetheless, Shiomi’s transitional world thesis was heavily influenced by contemporary world events, and consequently this led to including Japan into a critical stage of changing, aiming to join to the revolutionary war. The entire Red Army faction manifesto is an allusion to different political theories, as is it possible to understand how heavily the influence of Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara has been on this declaration of independence. In his world thesis, when referring to the elimination of the bourgeoisie, he was indeed determined as the bourgeoisie transcended border nations⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Patricia G. STEINHOFF, “Transnational Ties to the Armed Left, Shared Revolutionary Ideas and Direct Personal Contacts”, in Alberto Martin Alvarez and Eduardo Rey Tristan (ed.), *Revolutionary Violence and the New Left, Transnational Perspectives*, New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 172.

⁴¹ KEVIN Coogan and CLAUDIA Derichs (ed.), *Tracing Japanese Leftist Political Activism (1957-2017)*, New York, Routledge, 2023, p.145.

Specifically in Japan, the influence of Maoism was heavily overlooked and not dominant in the movements, the Japanese Communist Party direction as well was very uncertain whether to support the idea or not⁴².

Though it did not gain popular support and their theories were not heavily relying exclusively on China, Maoism and the Chinese revolution, which was happening slightly at the same period as the New Left protests, have been heavily influencing both Shiomi Takaya's ideal and Mori Tsuneo ideological background⁴³.

Maoism primarily offered an anti-imperialist framework, which would later appeal to the radical groups such as the Red Army Faction and the United Red Army. During the Chinese Revolution students and militants were particularly inspired to carry out dramatic and direct actions against those who perceived as their oppressor. This emphasis on revolutionary activism and direct strategies became a particular feature of political practices of groups like the Red Army, who sought to change and radicalize society through an armed revolution. Thus, the appeal to Maoism lay not only on its ideological critique of Imperialism, but also in its encouragement of practical, direct and radical engagement with political struggle⁴⁴.

Regarding the notion of armed revolution, this ideological framework was profoundly inspired by the revolutionary and political agenda of the Cuban leader Che Guevara. Guevara's advocacy emphasized the necessity of taking direct and immediate action rather than waiting for ideal conditions to emerge⁴⁵. This concept encouraged militants to perceive the armed struggle not only as a theoretical concept but also as something urgent and morally justified by the oppression that they were suffering. The influence of Che Guevara's ideas strongly influenced revolutionary groups in seeking to emulate this exact mode of guerrilla activism, potentially leading them to a concrete political practice and world armed revolution.

As for the Revolutionary Left, they both shared broadly similar ideological positions, advocating that militants and activists should engage in a struggle for simultaneous armed world revolution. However, the Revolutionary Left tended to emphasize anti-American sentiment strongly and as

⁴² CHO Hang Chi, "Transforming Maoism: the Maoist Elements and Origins of the United Red Army in Japan", *The Global Sixties*, 17, 2, 2024, p. 141.

⁴³ Mori Tsuneo was the leader of the United Red Army along his companion Nagata Hiroko. As scholar Cho Hang Chi underlines in "Transforming Maoism: the Maoist Elements and Origins of the United Red Army in Japan", Mori Tsuneo was more drawn to Maoist ideology rather than Shiomi Takaya, though he did not completely praise utterly Mao's ideas.

⁴⁴ GILDA Zwermann, PATRICIA G. Steinhoff and DONATELLA Della Porta, "Disappearing Social Movements: Clandestinity in the Cycle of New Left Protests in the U.S, Japan, Germany and Italy" *Mobilization, an International Journal*, 5, 11, 2000, p. 93.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

previously noted, they demonstrated a great alignment to the Maoist political agenda. This orientation shaped both their strategic priorities and their approach to activism, highlighting the appeal of Maoist ideas as a model for their revolutionary organization and political impact. The strong influence of Maoism can be also observed in Nagata Hiroko's political writing for the Revolutionary Left faction. However, she later admitted that she was not fully familiar with Mao's ideas; rather, she was primarily intrigued by them and believed that they were well suited to the situation the society and the group was about to face⁴⁶. Revolutionary Left differentiated from Sekigun-ha not only for its strong Anti-American sentiment, but also for its strong feminist presence as they sought the liberation of women from a male dominated society⁴⁷. Furthermore, their leadership position was held by a woman, Nagata Hiroko⁴⁸.

As previously pointed out, the Red Army Faction made its debut in 1969 after two years of internal struggle with the Bund. Though they defined themselves as a military unit, they did not exactly have enough military training to pursue armed operations. Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that most militants in the Red Army faction were university students or circa around that age, so they were not absolutely trained enough for the activities they were actively trying to pursue.

The military actions quickly started in 1969 marking a decisive shift from theoretical to direct action. The group's initial objective was to obtain firearms as they lacked any weapons at that stage. After internal deliberation, members concluded that the easiest, yet highly risky course of action would be to raid a police station⁴⁹. This decision embodied their limited resources and their willingness to embrace increasingly confrontational and violent tactics in pursuit of their goals. Their initial plan after obtaining weapons would be to incite the public to obtain guns themselves and use them against police officers and government institution. Arguably, this plan failed instantly as they could not acquire any guns. They continued to implement their plans in a hazardous and largely improvised manner, without a well-defined plan of action.

During this specific moment, as the group was under strict surveillance by government authorities, they still needed to obtain firearms and acquire more military training despite their initial failure.

⁴⁶ CHO, "Transforming Maoism...", cit., p. 152.

⁴⁷ William R. FARREL, *Blood and Rage: The Story of the Japanese Red Army*, 'Issues in Low-Intensity Conflict Series', Massachusetts, Lexington Books, 1990, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Nagata Hiroko was an extremely controversial person for events that occurred in the Asama Sansō lodge and for how she treated women close to her. However, she did define herself a feminist.

⁴⁹ COOGAN and DERICHs, "Tracing Japanese Leftist...", cit., p.145.

If the group was willing to pursue their political attacks resembling an actual military unit, they had to acquire enough military training. In response to this necessity, the group determined to set up a secret military training camp in the Yamanashi Prefecture; though their skills were very limited and did not exactly know how to go through an actual military training.

However, this military set up was not only for them to acquire their military skills, but it was also the proper time to discuss and organize the hostage attack that would take place during the encounter between President Satō and Nixon. Their initial plan was to attack president Satō's mansion in November and held him hostage, making impossible for him to reach Washington and discuss with President Nixon regarding the return of Okinawa under the Japanese jurisdiction⁵⁰.

The group had was not only under severe media surveillance, but furthermore media outlets were also highly aware of their actions and attacks planned in the past. The newspaper outlet *Asahi Shinbun* published a detailed article regarding the possibility of an attack towards President Satō executed by the Red Army faction. The article, run by one of the most known newspaper outlets in Japan, was another supporting evidence that their actions were being carefully observed by both government authorities and media outlets⁵¹.

Indeed, their military training in the Yamanashi prefecture lasted only a couple of days before circa four hundred police men decided to raid the location and arrest circa fifty-three young and untrained people who decided to take part in their military training.

As the group was permanently observed by government authorities, the Red Army faction began quickly to shrink since various members were being arrested in their own apartments⁵².

Following several arrests, the range of possibilities that opened for the Red Army faction became extremely complex and uncertain. The loss of certain members and the increasing pressure from the law enforcement constrained their operational capacity, forcing the organization to reconsider both their short-term and long-term actions. Adhering to the broader ideology of global-revolution framework, one of the most compelling ideas was to establish an abroad military base. This move would allow the organization to strengthen their international ties with other revolutionary groups

⁵⁰ FARREL, "Blood and Rage...", cit., p. 91.

⁵¹ COOGAN and DERICHES, "Tracing Japanese Leftist...", cit., p. 146.

⁵² During this time, the police went through a tactic of "rolling over apartments of supposed members of New Left groups, including the Red Army Faction. The tactic consisted in knocking on the doors of alleged members of the Red Army faction and ultimately ask to have a look inside the house, if the answer resulted too suspicious.

and access new resources. At the same time, this action entailed high-level risks and further segregation as well⁵³.

Another possible option was to go underground and minimize their operations and their public exposition. Their strategy would involve adopting clandestine methods, restructuring internal communication in order to evade repression and surveillance. At the same time, the group tried to maintain relationships with groups and militants that were still operating freely and openly, using them to preserve networks, circulate information and obtain money and firearms⁵⁴.

The possibility of establishing an international military base was for many members an appealing idea that could shed light and interest toward the activities of the organization. To some extent, they actively sought visibility, since the group required support and the involvement of civilians in order to advance its revolutionary agenda and challenge the foundation of the Japanese bourgeoisie. In March 1970, Shiomi Takaya along with his fellow companion Takamaro Tamiya decided to expand their base as far as to North Korea, specifically through the hijacking of a plane⁵⁵. The decision to choose North Korea was not incidental but rather it was well planned since North Korea provided military training to far-left military groups⁵⁶.

Several days prior to the hijacking, Shiomi Takaya was arrested by the police since he was recognized as the mastermind behind the entire hijacking plan. Following his arrest, it became evident that problems were beginning to arise with the upper levels of hierarchy and it was necessary for a new leader to hold the principal position and guide the members. For this exact position, one of the members that was more suitable was Mori Tsuneo.

His leadership was far more different from the previous one in fact, rather than establishing an international base, he was more oriented toward the foundation of a logistical network. In particular, he advocated for the creation of domestic support cells that would be able to operate on a national level and be capable of providing financial resources for the central cell and maintaining contact

⁵³ This fraction will not be analyzed in this specific thesis, but former *Sekigun* member Shigenobu Fusako and Tsuyoshi Okudaira will establish the affiliated association *Nihon sekigun* 日本赤軍 (1971-2001) in Lebanon, connected with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). They will be mostly remembered for the attack in Lod Airport, Tel Aviv in 1972 where 26 people were killed.

⁵⁴ The Red Army faction way to acquire money was mostly through robbing banks. These money were used to fund political attacks and members' necessities as well.

⁵⁵ The entire operation is called *Yodogō Haijaku Jiken* よど号ハイジャック事件. The hijacked plane landed in North Korea on the first days of April 1970. Most of the hostages on the plane were safe and sound. As it is explained by William Andrews in "Dissenting Japan" (2016), the hijacking was unsuccessful since most of the hijackers failed to get on the aircraft on time. Some of the hijackers decided to still live in North Korea after the operation.

⁵⁶ COOGAN and DERICHES, "Tracing Japanese Leftist...", cit., p. 154.

with other members in prison⁵⁷. Under the previous leader, the guidance was rather loose and not as strict as when Mori Tsuneo was in charge, as for the creation of supporting cells, he preferred to supervise the entire organization plan.

1.2.2 The Birth of *Rengō sekigun*

The leadership of Sekigun-ha under Mori Tsuneo's guidance was inherently different from the previous one, Mori was deeply focused on the creation of support cells who would be in charge of securing financial resources through robbing banks and funding their activities. Additionally, Mori's desire was to militarize the organization even further by submitting the organizations' members under strict military training⁵⁸. Though the organization was able to obtain money and establish stable support cells, they have been struggling to acquire firearms and the ones they previously had were not sufficiently equipped to sustain their activities.

To overcome the lack of firearms and shotguns, the headquarters of Sekigun-ha concluded to merge their organization with *Kakumei saha* 革命左派 or Revolutionary Left which, in contrast to Sekigun-ha, Revolutionary Left lacked financial resources while being heavily equipped with weapons. The union between Sekigun-ha and Kakumei-saha was perceived as a marriage of convenience since both groups were operating under similar circumstances as they both were organizing their operations underground, with strictly less contact with groups who could operate freely, though Kakumei-saha had little financial resources to protect their members and not enough shelters to defend themselves and their members.

The merger of the two organizations turned out to be an extremely complicated process, as they were originally distinct entities with differing leadership structures and formative experiences. Beyond the difference in the hierarchy, each group also adhered to different ideological frameworks, which needed to be reconciled in order to create a single and coherent organization. Not only ideological frameworks needed to be coherent, but also each member had the duty to develop a sense of loyalty to the new developed organization. To facilitate this process, both leaders of Kakumei-saha Nagata Hiroko and Sekigun-ha's Mori Tsuneo concluded retreating to an abandoned lodge in the mountains of Gunma prefecture. This period of isolation provided a

⁵⁷ FARREL, "Blood and Rage...", cit., p. 101.

⁵⁸ YOSHIKUNI, "Dead Bodies...", cit., p. 125.

controlling setting in which the members of the newly formed organization could have intensified their military training and ideological conformity. Furthermore, being distant from society pressure gave the members the possibility to test their loyalty both to the new organization and to the revolutionary ideology. The seclusion of the lodge became a critical tool in shaping the members' identity and revolutionary profile, furthermore the decision of setting their retreatment in this isolated place was also because both organizations could operate freely from the surveillance of the police. On the first days of July 1971, both leaders decided to merge their organizations under the name of *Rengō sekigun* 連合赤軍, or United Red Army.

1.2.3 The Failure of Unification and Internal Escalation of Violence

The merger of both groups has been ultimately proven to be a failure, not only because the leadership structures were inherently different and their respective ideological frameworks were exceedingly impossible to converge, but also due to the violent consequences that emerged from the process itself. Regarding the structure of the two organizations, the Red Army faction was composed of trained military members who have been underground for several times as an attempt to resemble intensively a military unit. On the other hand, Revolutionary Left was formed by many women and even younger boys and girls⁵⁹. The attempt to unify the Revolutionary Left and the Red Army faction was a task that generated intense internal conflict, coming from both leaders. This process, rather than producing cohesion and loyalty to the organization, induced paranoia, suspicion and an escalation of violent internal conflicts. Ultimately, the process culminated in a series of extremely violent purges that would shock the nation.

The idea of unification came from the excessive disparity of experiences in military training between the two organizations, especially coming from the Revolutionary Left side which was formed mostly of women. From Nagata Hiroko's perspective, feminism and femineity were important aspects regarding the wellbeing of a woman, but not when it concerned revolutionary ideology. As a matter of fact, being a woman had no space in a revolutionary context, women had to modulate their femineity in order to embrace the revolution as an entirety⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ As mentioned previously, Revolutionary Left was mostly a feminist leaning group, this explains the heavily participation of women and the leader being a woman.

⁶⁰ Patricia G. STEINHOFF, "Death by Defeatism and other Fables: The Social Dynamics of Rengō Sekigun Purge", in Sugiyama Takie Lebra (ed.), *Japanese Social Organization*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1992, p. 198.

One of the first methods employed to unify the members and set them on the same level of ideological framework was to asset their level of commitment to the revolutionary ideology as well as their willingness to sacrifice some of their individual aspects for the collective cause. This was achieved by making each member confront with their internal weaknesses, compelling them to engage in processes of self-examination and ideological reflection. A similar method was once employed by the leader of the Red Army faction Mori Tsuneo, where individuals were required to analyze personal shortcomings and reflect upon them through structured confessions.

This method used on the Rengō Sekigun members was employed by both two leaders under the name of *sōkatsu* 総括、 which was described by the two as a forced confession and reflection on acts of bourgeoisies within themselves. The goal of this reflection and confession was to eliminate every aspect of self-ness and bourgeoisies within the person in order to dedicate and compel the whole body and mind to the sole purpose of the revolution.

The process was first introduced by the former leader of Sekigun-ha Mori Tsuneo whomed in comparison to his fellow comrade Nagata Hiroko, proved to be extremely persuasive and manipulative. He demonstrated high abilities to construct, internalize and operate the revolutionary theory upon his soldiers, compelling them to confess their perceived ideological shortcomings. The technique employed for this confession-based exercise aimed to heighten the members' political consciousness, particularly regarding their adherence to revolutionary ideology. It focused on assessing whether individuals were sufficiently prepared to overcome their residual bourgeois traits and fully dedicate their bodies and entities to the revolutionary cause. In this sense, the process functioned also as a form of coercive tool of self-criticism, through which personal weaknesses and flaws were exposed and ultimately defined as an obstacle to the revolutionary cause.

This *sōkatsu* technique has been used as well in American group-based therapy and its ultimate purpose is to build a stronger personality by first tearing down piece by piece the person involved⁶¹. Furthermore, this method is widely employed in totalitarian regimes against political prisoners, though is not exactly regarded as 'sōkatsu', the process itself is extremely common and similar. The author and scholar Robert Jay Lifton in 'Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism' (1961), describes how the process of forced confession was adopted to require a confession from prisoners held captive in Chinese camps. In this study, the author proposes the confession as a form of purge of the soul, a total liberation from internal sins and struggles. Through this process,

⁶¹ STEINHOFF, 'Death by Defeatism...', cit., p. 200.

the prisoners feel compelled and obligated by the guards to deploy a confession, even though the prisoners may not be directly responsible. Nonetheless, in order to avoid potential physical violence from other prisoners and guards, the prisoner may construct a false statement that would clear his soul and sin. As further described by the author, the prisoners are induced in an endless state of paranoia whereas the guards and authorities aim to elicit a confession by warning the prisoners that the government is highly aware of the crimes that he has committed. In doing so, they place him under a perpetual state of paranoia and psychological pressure, effectively coercing him to confess a crime that has never been committed in the first place. Furthermore, the prisoners are induced in incessant scrutiny by other prisoners as well, where they believe everyone is a potential traitor as the author himself describes

Everyone wants to eat others but is afraid of being eaten himself, so everyone looks at everyone else with such profound distrust and suspicion⁶².

What happened in the lodge between the members of URA is the same, what started as a process of thought purification and reflection on past actions ended as a deadly purge. First, the members were not allowed to leave the residence until they would satisfy the leaders' expectations for the confession⁶³. Indeed, this rule would later imply extremely dark and sinister outcome.

The escalation began extremely quickly after the first unexpected death of one of the members, his death was inflicted by the other members who were not expecting his body to react in that way. It was the first death in which beatings and tortures were inflicted by other members and Nagata Hiroko herself, who later in her life admitted of feeling uncomfortable and unable to beat one of her comrades, but she decided to follow the orders⁶⁴. In attempt to avoid any question regarding the absurd death of his comrade, the leader of the Sekigun-ha admitted to his comrades that he died by defeat, aiming that his body was not prepared enough to embody the revolutionary cause⁶⁵. By doing so, he manipulated the entire group by believing that dying and not fighting meant to be weak and not ready to dedicate the whole body and mind to revolutionary purposes.

The first ever death could be implied as a possibility to turn back and deescalate the course of the violence, instead physical tortures and beatings were slowly being added to their routine. To

⁶² Robert J. LIFTON, "Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: a Study of Brainwashing in China", University of North Carolina, 1961, p. 327.

⁶³ STEINHOFF, "Death by Defeatism...", cit., p. 203.

⁶⁴ YOSHIKUNI, "Dead Bodies...", cit., p. 130.

⁶⁵ STEINHOFF, "Death by Defeatism..." cit., p. 207.

validate this theory, the leader of Sekigun-ha admitted that participatory violence was to endure their resistance and to elicit further confessions, starved and traumatized people followed their leaders' orders without deciding to oppose their will.

At this point the process was irreversible and sōkatsu was not being achieved in any form since most members were confused by the absurd escalation of violence and were being paranoid even of their surroundings; as was explained by Lifton, prisoners in totalitarian regimes tend to make up false statements in order to free themselves or even out of pure confusion.

At the beginning of February 1972, the group realized that the police were slowly approaching their base in the Gunma prefecture, they eventually decide to move their base to Nagano prefecture, closely to the Japan Alps. While the remaining members⁶⁶ were approaching to their new location, Nagata Hiroko and Mori Tsuneo had dispatched themselves to Tōkyō to raise funds for their activities but they were quickly arrested by the police, leaving the entire group completely disoriented⁶⁷. By that time, it was clear that the police were aware of their location and their purpose was to arrest every one of them, since all the members were criminals wanted nationwide.

The last remaining members barricaded themselves in the Asama Sansō mountain lodge, where the housekeeper was held hostage by the members. The police were surrounding the place, without the intention of killing or hurting anyone as their only purpose was to release the hostage and arrest the criminals.

However, since no one within the criminals and police officers was willing to initiate the confrontation, the siege lasted ten days until the very last day where the police dismantled the area and started the battle to rescue the hostage that lasted eight hours circa. Though the media outlets were denied access from the siege area for security reasons until the last day, at which point the confrontation was broadcasted live on a national scale television for approximately eight hours, reaching an audience share of about 90%⁶⁸. At the end, police officers were able to release without any damage both the hostage and the five remaining criminals, revealing fourteen dead bodies of the previous members.

⁶⁶ By that period, circa eight members had been killed.

⁶⁷ YOSHIKUNI, "Dead Bodies...", cit., p. 135.

⁶⁸ STEINHOFF, "Memories of New Left..." cit., p. 153.

1.3 Radicalization and Decline

The trajectory of the aftermath of the student movements in Japan and the violent internal collapse of the United Red Army stands out as the most significant yet controversial transformation on the landscape of political activism in Japan, especially for young people and students.

What emerged as the students of one of the most prestigious University in Japan reflecting on their role as social in the post-war society, eventually increased in the militarization of the student association Zenkyōtō. The students, towards the very end of the struggle, initiated clashes with the opponent student association Minsei and it was perceived as a form of initial militarization. As was mentioned in this chapter, the use of military terms was crucial for the development of the student association in terms of militarization. The case of Zenkyōtō is peculiar, the association and its structure illustrate both the potential and the struggles of not implying the use of a hierarchy within their association. The emphasis on subjectivity and self-negation brought students to question themselves as social actors in a corrupted system that protected the internal link between conservative state authority and university, however as remarked by the scholar Kosugi Ryōko in her work ‘‘全共闘とは何だったのか’’(2016), the student association was completely lacking of a central committee and a solid future political vision of the association. These factors combined contributed to its fragmentation and internal decline.

Furthermore, the internal confrontation between Zenkyōtō and the political association Minsei worsen the situation even more. The violent physical and verbal clashes between the two groups weakened the integrity of Zenkyōtō, precluding the possibility for the student association to achieve their objectives with the student administration of Tōkyō University. As a result, the combination of having little cohesion and hierarchy within the groups and not embracing a strong and certain ideal for their future activities, set their failure as a political student association.

The confrontations with the riot police that occurred at Tōdai have also been broadcasted by media outlets of the country, giving the possibility to most of the population to develop a strong opinion regarding the event. The sympathy towards the students was depicted by the display of violence. Furthermore, media outlets barely analyzed the actual reasons behind the students' protests, leaving students with limited space to express their frustration towards their university

administration⁶⁹. At this point, though the movement tried to expand its legacy towards other universities across the country, it quickly worn out.

In the aftermath of the protests at several universities across the country the radicalization of students marked a decisive turning point that could have led to different outcomes. Some of the students returned to their former academic position, as most of them were almost close to graduating. This moment of failure could have been used as an opportunity for reflection on mistakes made during the confrontations, on what might have been improved and how they could have acted more effectively in specific situations. Instead, some of the students framed state interventions along the use of riot police in universities as the necessity of an armed struggle. The shift from collective protests to armed struggle reflects the urgency of being immediately heard, combined with a broader perception of political action. In this context, urgency and immediacy replaced negotiation and deliberation. Violence was no longer perceived as the last resort but an essential and legitimized instrument of revolutionary change.

As noted, the formation of United Red Army represents the most extreme outcome of this perception. The merger of Sekigun-ha and Kakumei-saha was conceived as a strategic solution to overcome political and material interests; however, it exposed ideological incompatibility, descending into a loop of internal violence and homicides. The process of bringing the two groups together was ultimated through the utilization of the technique *sōkatsu*, highly employed in American group therapy. It was originally intended by the leaders as a form of self-criticism, designed to set free the members from any kind of bourgeois thought. This attempt to impose unity through coercive practices reveals how the pursuit of ideological unity and purity can generate infinite forms of violence, fear and suspicion among the members. Rather than identifying the enemy within government authorities, eventually the group ended up doubting each other and their surroundings, until they revealed extreme and gruesome sides of this process. It was described by the police so gruesome that even for the authorities it was almost impossible to believe in.

The Asama Sansō represents the symbolic conclusion both of this trajectory and the New Left movement. The siege was broadcast for circa eight hours, revealing the gruesome details of the URA to the public. Along with the struggles throughout several universities in Japan, the horrific images of the deadly purge shaped the public's perception of New Left movements. Perceiving militants distancing and disconnecting themselves from society, stuck in a loop of violence and

⁶⁹ STEINHOFF "Memories of New Left..." cit. p. 148.

horrors, helped tighten the relationship between violent extremism and the New Left community. Eventually this perception spread broadly towards political student actions, experiencing a significant loss in participation.

Both cases invite a reflection whether the dynamics of political radicalization and conditions under which their movements may evolve into forms of internal violence and disruption.

SECOND CHAPTER

The crisis of the Japanese New Left: Trauma, Repression and Collective Memory

2.1 Media Representation, Political Violence and the decline of the Japanese New Left

The battle between riot police and students at the University of Tōkyō, the Asama Sansō incident have been both heavily broadcasted to the public. The entire duration of the conflict between the police and the members of the Rengō Sekigun was broadcasted live only on the last day of the conflict, though the authorities did not want it to be publicized. The media coverage for both events has given the opportunity to the public to develop an opinion and strong feelings towards the events.

Regarding the clashes at Tōdai, the general public manifested very high interest towards the events that were occurring at the Yasuda Auditorium. According to the ratings of the main events, circa 97% of the Japanese population was tuned in following the events of the riot police taking over the Yasuda Auditorium. However, this did not mean that the entire population had been watching the entire battle at Tōdai, several people only followed the very last part of the clashes, where the students had been defeated⁷⁰. This high media coverage, however, did not always mean that the students' reasons were heard or supported. On the contrary, most of the viewers were not emphasizing the students' will, rather they were feeling widespread sympathy towards the riot police. At the same time, according to surveys conducted by major media outlets of that time, some viewers did align with the students' struggle but did not support in any case the extreme engagement with violent tactics⁷¹. The general opinions regarding the event were not uniform, instead they were highly divided whether to support or not the students' struggle; however, as mentioned above, none of them supported the use of violence. Nonetheless, most of the people watching the event from their home felt as if they had been included in the riots, leading them to elaborate a sort of parasocial connection to the event. The formation of parasocial feelings did give the opportunity to people to form a personal stake towards events, as the event was constantly broadcast throughout the day, interrupting the everyday news.

⁷⁰ CHUN Makoto Jayson, *'A Nation of Hundred Million Idiots? A Social History of Japanese Television'*, New York § London, Routledge, 2007, p. 231.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

Moreover, media outlets did decide how to lead the broadcast of the event and which kind of information and images to select. In the foundations of the general opinions, media outlets had an outstanding role. The use of violent tactics employed by several students was not supported in any way by the general public, but media outlets did carefully select moments of violence ignoring the students' real reasons behind the violence. Furthermore, the outlasting use of violence meant for television the opportunity to have a higher amount of media coverage, if there were not enough violent and divisive images then media outlets would decide not to hire that specific segment of picture. For this, journalists carefully picked what media pieces to hire, without further analyzing the reasons beneath the surface of exploding violence, leading the public witnessing the riots from home to develop different and divisive opinions regarding the event⁷².

Regarding the Asama Sansō incident, media outlets operated in the exact same method as they did for Tōdai riots. The situation at the lodge was completely unsafe and absurd, both police officers and journalists were suffering the cold weather, though the latter decided to not abandon the site hoping to obtain a newsworthy material. The siege lasted ten days circa with police authorities willingly not to move and waiting on a formal response to attack, as their only notice was to rescue the hostage safe without shredding any blood and violence. On the last day, they did decide to attack the terrorists by using a wrecking ball and open the walls of the house. The television turned a gruesome event like the Asama siege into a drama focused on the rescue of the hostage of the lodge. Though only the last day of the siege was televised due to safety reasons, the broadcasting of the event lasted the whole day without any interruption, with roughly sixty million viewers⁷³. It was considered so important that it even overshadowed other important news such as the shift in the politics regarding the USA-China relationship⁷⁴.

The aim of broadcasting TV this time was to manipulate the event, turning it into an absurd and heartbreaking moment of rescue from the hostage. As a matter of fact, the whole nation was far more worried about the rescue of the lodge's housekeeper rather than the arrest of the terrorists inside the house. As it happened for the Tōdai riots, journalists carefully selected the images from the event in order to have enough content to create an unscripted media-drama, rather than showing the real events. The viewer's attention was completely on the hostage rescue, which happened safely at six-pm circa.

⁷² STEINHOFF, 'Memories of New Left...', cit., p. 148.

⁷³ YOSHIKUNI 'Dead Bodies...', cit., p. 119.

⁷⁴ CHUN, 'A Nation of...', cit., p. 236.

Following the broadcasting of the event, the public developed different opinions regarding what they had witnessed. In fact, they were not aware at all the horrors that happened in the lodge, leading some of the viewers to sympathize with the terrorists' reasons, remembering that some of them were just young students. Though this was the beginning, after gruesome details of the event were revealed to the public, they slowly began to realize the type of violence and manipulative actions the victims had both to suffer and to fulfill. Once the members of the United Red Army were arrested and the news of the purge came out, the people that once were sympathizing with them and supporting their reasons were left shocked by the gruesome details of the events. Furthermore, their heroic anti-capitalism scenery and imaginary was completely drawn out, reducing them to a mere product for entertainment to the Japanese media outlets⁷⁵.

The display and engagement of both events on the Japanese television gave the opportunity to the public to develop several opinions regarding these happenings, especially after being exposed to an extreme amount of violence and gruesome details regarding the purge. The people and leftist students that once were supporting the ideals performed by the members of the United Red Army, could not stand the violent homicides executed far in the mountains of Asama Sansō. Inevitably, this led to a slow end to the students' protests and broadly this extended to New Left support as well. Though these events marked an enormous turning point for the wave of protests and support, it's crucial to remember that the engagement of violence portrayed during the siege and the struggles in Japanese universities, was not the only factor that made people slowly departing themselves from political activism and interest in politics.

New Left Movements and ideologies have generally been estranged with the waves of changing times that Japan was experiencing. The demands inquired by the students and the United Red Army were incompatible with the profound transformations that the Japanese society was undergoing, particularly in the aftermath of rapid economic growth which encouraged broader adherence to capitalistic ideologies. As individuals and families increasingly prioritized employment and income generation, they aspired to attain and consolidate middle class status, with fixed gender roles that became extremely normalized⁷⁶.

A cycle of protest is usually lined up as well with the transformation undergoing in the environment they are set in. Protests are characterized by conflicts across social systems, influenced by the changing tones of everyday life. They are marked by high peak of collectiveness

⁷⁵ YOSHIKUNI, "Dead Bodies..." cit., p. 120.

⁷⁶ Carl CASSEGÅRD, *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan*, Leiden & Boston, Global Orientation, 2014, p. 36.

and conflict, usually associated with moments and events where there's a necessity for collective action due to the extreme tension undergoing in society⁷⁷. When the protests are worn out, the need for action went undertone, meaning that it is not necessary anymore for people to revolt against the government. In this specific case of Japanese student protests and political violence, as the New Left was specifically not aligned anymore with their current times, the population started slowly to turn away from the goals of the New Left Movements.

2.1.1. Collective Trauma and the Memory of Political Violence

These two events in the Japanese history marked and Japanese activism in general, leaving a deep scar that inevitably made the following generation despise being closer to activism and political action. Participation in political actions had been inevitably connected to strong political events that involved violence, slowly leading to the creation of collective trauma. Before analyzing what a collective trauma is and how it is created, it is crucial to remember again that the disastrous outcome of Asama Sansō and the defeat of the university struggles are not the only reasons that led the population to despise and reject the radical left. As previously mentioned, high economic growth and incompatibility of ideologies have also been remarked as principal reasons for population to be detached from political interests and political participation. However, in this analysis it will only be presented how violent outcomes can influence the perception of political events, leading the popular perception to reshape a whole movement.

Firstly, a trauma experienced by the whole society can be compared to that experienced by a singular individual. Society reacts to shocking events by attempting to reshape their meaning and, over time, to limit their transmission to the following generation. However, trauma is not a naturally occurring phenomenon; rather, it is socially constructed and defined in response to a series of unexpected events that trigger the perception of the population by creating a distance between them and the movement. Moreover, those events can be perceived highly traumatic thus they become unsayable things to the point that the aftermath is not only recognized by the generation that lived through the trauma, but it is also transmitted through several generations that still perceive those events as traumatic experiences, though they did not experience them firsthand⁷⁸. Experiencing violent events as a society does not mean that those specific events will automatically turn into traumatic experiences; for an event to become a cultural trauma it needs to

⁷⁷ Sydney TARROW, "Cycles of Collective Action: Between Moments of Madness and the Repertoire of Contention", *Social Science History*, 17, 2, 1993, p. 285.

⁷⁸ CASSEGÅRD, "Youth Movements..." cit., p. 18

cause a profound sense of discomfort felt by the entire society, close to transforming the event to a threat to the cultural identity and representation of the entire population⁷⁹. Collective traumas at a society level are decided not only by the population that experienced traumatic events, but by ‘carrier groups that may represent the elites or even a marginalized sphere of society. This part of society can hold material or political interests towards society, hence so the necessity to attribute a particular meaning to an event is even higher⁸⁰.

Regarding the specific case of Japan, the New Left movement and broadly the student protests, have been recognized as a moment of failure of the Japanese history. Failure cannot be defined by merely one condition, but several conditions need to come together for it to become recognized as a failure. Moreover, not all the events concerning a defeat automatically turn into failure. The Japanese student movement and New Left movements did not achieve their ultimate goals, but how is this movement widely recognized as a defeat? Several movements or events with unpleasant outcomes turn out to be considered by society as remarkable heroic moments, the factors that contribute to the negotiation of ‘failure’ or ‘heroic’ appealing are mostly social and cultural context not merely the movements’ qualities. Furthermore, the protests have been perceived also as a defeat since they have constantly been compared to the events occurred both in places such as Italy and United States of America, where the students and the protests have effectively reached their goals or, they did come closer to the realization of their objectives compared to Japan. Even if the loss was little, comparing Japan’s situation to other countries of the world made the gap widen broadly, causing it to be described as a generational loss.

Indeed, several factors have contributed reshaping the image of the student movement in Japan, and the definition of cultural trauma cannot be understood alone but needs to be aligned to factors of high economic growth and how is the movement portrayed by media outlets to the eyes of the population. When the population faces a shocking event, they are not the only actors in charge in shaping the future identity and remembrance of the event; rather they are influenced as well by the authorities. Thus, the creation of collective trauma is inertly connected to power.

⁷⁹ ALEXANDER, ‘‘Toward a Theory...’’ cit., p. 10.

⁸⁰ ALEXANDER., ‘‘Toward a Theory...’’, cit., p. 11.

2.1.2 Criminalization, State Repression and the Help of Kyūen Renraku Center

Firstly, students participating in the anti-ANPO protests have been extremely criminalized to the point where students and participant broadly have been arrested based only on suspect of carrying rocks⁸¹. Consequently, students participating in university struggle, especially the one that occurred at the University of Tōkyō, have been portrayed as criminals from the beginning of the struggle. The deployment of riot police on campus aimed at normalizing the guerrilla-like situation represented a disproportionate authoritarian use of power against largely unarmed students or only marginally armed students. The intense shutdown of students' arrests culminated in a series of juridical procedures that extended beyond the moment of the protest itself, giving rise to the formation of defense committees and solidarity networks. In this sense, the shutdown of arrests did not only suppress the unrest but also contributed to the long-lasting period of criminalization and political polarization. During the riots at Tōkyō University of January 1969, a total number of circa one thousand students had been arrested, broadly circa thirteen thousand people have been arrested for participating in protest activities⁸². These mass arrests caused a shift not only in the perception of political action but also in the perception regarding the students that decided to participate in these struggles.

According to one of the Tōkyō Chief Prosecutor, the movement initiated by the students on campus was a new way of protests in terms of methodic organization and, most importantly, in the severity of the methods employed by the students themselves. According to the new stances utilized by the revolutionary students, the police authorities had to adapt their methods according to the new ones adopted by the students; moreover, this message was perceived by the students as a change in the level of tolerance that the police had towards the students, discouraging other students to join the movement⁸³. As a matter of fact, following the sensational mass arrests of the students, their treatment was different compared to how students were treated in previous arrests. During these mass arrests and prosecutions, students were regarded as 常習的犯行 *jōshūteki hankō*⁸⁴. Normally, students were not treated as *jōshūteki hankō*, since their profiles did not fulfill

⁸¹ STEINHOFF, ‘‘Disappearing Social Movements...’’ cit., p. 7.

⁸² Patricia G. STEINHOFF, ‘‘No Helmets in Courts, No T-shirts on Death Row: New Left Trial Support Groups’’, Patricia G. Steinhoff (ed), *Going to Court to Change Japan: Social Movements and the Law in Contemporary Japan*, Michigan, University of Michigan, 2014, p. 20.

⁸³ PERKINS, ‘‘The Tōkyō University...’’ cit., p. 123.

⁸⁴ The English translation for 常習的犯行 is habitual criminals.

any of the criteria to be considered an “habitual criminal”; instead, regarding this specific arrest the students were not guaranteed to be fulfilling the criteria to be released on bail⁸⁵.

Since the JCP did not want to lend its support lawyers to defend and help the students throughout the entire juridical process, several support groups have been created throughout the struggle. Students and their families had basically not enough sustained financial funds to go through several jurisdictional procedures; in order for families to avoid severe monetary debts, lawyers and students from universities concluded in creating a center that would help arrested people and students throughout the protest period. The 救援連絡センター *kyūen renraku senta* was formed independently at the beginning of the 1960 by various university professors that sympathized with the New Left ideologies and were willing to protect arrested students and people⁸⁷. Moreover, this center was created not only to defend their students during the entire process, but also to provide them with food, necessities and support during their jail time⁸⁸. Their help was also provided during protests, so students and participants could acknowledge their rights if they eventually got arrested by the police. Eventually, the creation of this center gave several people the opportunity to endorse the career of lawyer and gain enough experience in this field.

Several students arrested during this period reported how roughly they have been treated by the police, some of them had still declared how they would get often beaten up by police officers after getting arrested, reporting severe bruises⁸⁹. Furthermore, the helping center was created to guide the students through the articulate Japanese juridical system, since the system is heavily confessed oriented the students would need help defending their rights and, most of all, they would need to know their rights when getting under the spotlight of the interrogation room. Additionally, usually the strategy for police officers to track down personal information of the students is to track down their entire life including very personal information in order to obtain enough information about the movement they were affiliated to.

To avoid the release of too many information, the method adopted by the volunteers at the *kyūen renraku senta* would be to warn the students to not release any type of information regardless they

⁸⁵ Being released on bail means that an accused person can be released from prison while waiting for their trial. This happens after an amount of money is paid and, certain conditions need to be respected in order to be released. In this case, students were severely limited from being released on bail, not prohibited.

⁸⁶ PERKINS, “The Tōkyō University...” cit., p. 123.

⁸⁷ The 救援連絡センター is still active today: <https://kyuen.jp/>

⁸⁸ William ANDREWS, “Trial Support Groups Lobby for Japanese Prisoner Rights, Fight to Rectify Injustices”, *The Asia Pacific Journal*, 12, 21, 2, 2014, p. 2.

⁸⁹ PERKINS, “The Tōkyō University...” cit., p. 113.

acquired the opportunity to speak to a *kyūen* lawyer. Hence so, the first method was to immediately request to call in defense one of the volunteers at *kyūen*, since the student had given the opportunity to memorize the number's center by heart before the protest. Secondly, the lawyers at *kyūen* had the necessity to firstly speak to the parents of the arrested student, before the police could get the chance to speak to them. The reason behind the necessity to speak to the parents of the students before the police could reach them, is that not only the Japanese criminal system is heavily confession oriented, but in such cases the police would try to lean on the students' feelings by bringing up their parents' remorse. Parents played a crucial role in this framing so, in order to avoid the possibility of losing the student to the confession system of the Japanese police, the lawyers and volunteers had the duty to reach out the parents before the police could do it and explain that the student did not commit a crime neither anything wrong has been committed by their child⁹⁰.

⁹⁰ Patricia G. STEINHOFF, "Mass Arrests, Sensational Crimes and Stranded Children: Three Crises for Japanese New Left Activists' Families", *Imagined Families, Lived Families: Culture and Kinship in Contemporary Japan*, Akiko Hashimoto and John W. Traphagan (ed.), New York, State University of New York Press, 2008, p. 85.

	KANJI	HIRAGANA	ROMAJI
Defense statement	弁解録取書	べんかいろうくし ゆしよ	Benkai-roku-shu-sho
Interrogation Report	取調べ調書 (供述調書)	とりしらべ ちょうしよ (きょうじゅつ ちょうしよ)	Tori-shira-be-cho-sho (Kyojutsu cho-sho)
Lawyer	弁護士	べんごし	Bengoshi
Appointment of Counsel	弁護士選任	べんごにん せんにな	Bengonin Sen-nin
Remain Silent	黙秘	もくひ	Mokuhi
Detainment	留置	りゅうち	Ryu-chi

Kyuen Renraku Center is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that sees the violation of basic human rights by the state power on an individual as oppression for all people. We provide relief for those who are oppressed by state power regardless of the ideological beliefs and political views of the victims.

2-8-16 SHINBASHI,
MINATO-KU, TOKYO
ISHIDA BLDG. 5F
3 minute walk from SL Plaza,
Hibiya Exit of JR Shimbashi Station
TEL #: 03-3591-1301 FAX: 03-3591-3583
E-MAIL : kyuen2013@gmail.com

No one at KRC is fluent in English, so email or letter is best for communication.

We are sustained by the goodwill of the people, so please help us if you can. We operate through membership fees, subscriptions, and donations. One way to help is to become a cooperative member. The monthly fee is 1000 yen per month. If you would prefer not to become a member, please consider subscribing to our newspaper, Kyuen (in Japanese). It contains information and analysis of the realities of oppression, as well as reports from all over the country.

KYUEN RENRAKU CENTER

WHAT TO KNOW WHEN YOU'RE ARRESTED

IF YOU'RE ARRESTED
STAY CALM

HAVE THEM CALL
03-3591-1301

AND SAY "I would like a
lawyer chosen by the
Kyuen Renraku Center!"

OUR REPRESENTATIVE
LAWYER IS
TAKEO HAYAMA

[HTTP://KYUEN.JP/](http://kyuen.jp/)

[Fig. 1] *What to know when you're arrested* in '救援連絡センター', <https://kyuen.jp/?p=2010> 2025, 24th of April 2024.

The center is still active and still present today to defend protestants and students and regardless of their political and ideological affiliation, as noted both in their blog and in their flyer, they will provide help for activists oppressed by the state power. However, there has been a shift in their method of acting, encouraging activists to engage with police if the period of isolation might become too complex to handle, instead of staying silent and not cooperating⁹¹.

⁹¹ William ANDREWS, *A War of Words or a Battle over Silence*, in "Throw Out Your Books", 2016, <https://throwoutyourbooks.wordpress.com/2016/01/17/kyuen-renraku-center-kanmoku/>, April 24th, 2026.

2.1.3 The Aftermath of the University Struggle

Following the intense struggle and clashes between police officers and students at national universities in Japan, the university administration had to recover from the severe backlash and one-year long of not being able to hold university entrance exam, especially at Tōdai University. It is not correct to affirm that similar situation did not happen before, considering that the student association Zengakuren was very popular amongst leftist students and confrontation between the police and groups of students occurred even before the ones in the 1960s. However, this was the first time that the university administration had to intervene and, along with the Minister of Education's intervention, they agreed to interrupt the university entrance exam for at least one year, or until the student associations decided to suspend their occupation and clashes. The decision was not lightly taken by the association, but it was also perceived as a threat by the students on campus, who did not surrender their fights and barricades, eventually confronting themselves with the police in January 1969. As a result, the authorities won over the students, ending on the student occupation on campus.

As expected, the riots did not only happen in Tōdai University but happened all over the country generating political and administrative issues within the university body, the student administration and the management of university dormitories⁹². Moreover, since one of the formal reasons for the struggle to arise was the mistreatment of medical students during their mandatory medical training program, it also faced consequences since it had to be revised in order to adapt to their students' requests. In addition, following the severe damage that the riots and occupation had caused, during 1969 circa one-hundred twenty-nine campuses all over the country had to be disrupted⁹³.

Along the end of the students' occupation at the universities and following the severe repression they had to endure from the university administration, student association slowly started to become less popular among the students. While the first reason for the less and less affluence of students might be the intense repression they had to confront with, one of the other reasons could also be the absence of future direction and purposes for students' associations like Zenkyōtō. It is important to remember that according to Zenkyōtō's ideology and plans, their political purposes were mostly set in the present time, acknowledging the necessity to first work on their present and,

⁹² As explained in the first chapter, university dormitories have been largely used by the student associations as a camp for organizing and managing their plans. Furthermore, dorms have also been the core of intense fights between student associations, such as Zenkyōtō and Minsei.

⁹³ Data obtained from the official site of Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/others/detail/1317449.htm, 26th April 2026

later the changes of the society would have come naturally with that. Their characteristic of exhibiting little interest for future purposes and lacking future directions may have led the students to slowly not associate themselves anymore with them.

2.2 Asama Sansō and the Crisis of Revolutionary Violence

In 1972, fourteen bodies of murdered young men and women were discovered in the mountains of Asama Sansō; leftist students and people that were once supporting the fighting reasons of the members of the Red Army, were found to be at loss for words facing the harsh reality. As mentioned previously, this might not have been perceived as the only reason for some people to slowly engage less with political activism, but it surely shed a different light on leftist political activism making people reconsider their affiliation and their support for certain ideals. Radical activists themselves have expressed their resentment regarding the actions carried out during their activities with the Rengō Sekigun. Several years later the Asama Sansō purge the ex-radical activist Yasuhiro Uegaki, that did participate in the violent purge in the lodge but was arrested before the confrontation with the police, admitted that he is deeply aware of the complete lack of positive impact regarding their actions especially the purge in 1972 and he somehow wish it never happened. Moreover, he adds that instead of leaving a positive impact on future generations, their actions only revealed further issues⁹⁴. After spending more than 25 years in prison, the activist recognizes the horrors and the lack of positive impact on the following generations; he also realized at that time that the beatings and the violence were not necessary at all to unite the group members, but he was just a soldier who had been assigned of a task and he thought that executing traitors for the sake of the group's integrity was exactly what soldiers were obligated to do in military fields. Even Shigenobu Fusako, leader of the JRA that was once located in the Middle East, admitted her deep resentment and hard feelings toward the Japanese Red Army after being released on 28th of May 2022, since she spent almost 20 years in prison. She expressed regretting the choices and actions portrayed by her and the group all together, being extremely aware of the grudge and sadness caused by their terroristic attacks and the kidnapping of hostages and innocent people, apologizing for the issues and sufferance caused to the people involved and to the population⁹⁵.

⁹⁴ NAKAMURA Akemi, *We did not leave anything positive, says ex-radical*, in "The Japan Times", 2008, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2008/03/20/films/we-did-not-leave-anything-positive-says-ex-radical/>, 1st May 2026.

⁹⁵ TSURU Shingo, *Former head of the Japanese Red Army now free and apologetic*, in "The Asahi Shinbun" 2022, <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14632166> , 1st May 2026.

The statements of both the terrorists emphasize their personal transformation through years spent in prison reflecting their past actions; they also highlight a sense of disillusionment toward with both outcomes of the revolutionary violence and the methods implied in their military actions. Their testimony can be interpreted as part of a wider process of post-radicalization reflection, in which former militants reassess their past within new ethical and social frameworks. Moreover, these narratives not only challenge the legitimacy once attributed to the armed struggle but also reshape the historical memory of groups like the Japanese Red Army, as one marked by less political achievement, then enduring trauma and unresolved questions.

2.3 Society and the Japanese Police System

The Red Army actions transformed society's perception of armed struggle and political movements in general; furthermore, their actions expressed a deep changing and transformation of government authorities and police and their formal response to terrorist attacks as their actions were perceived as something extremely intense and severe, surely not usual for their way of cooperating with society. To understand the ties between the United Red Army and the government authorities, it is crucial to underline also the foreign activities of the Japanese Red Army, that deeply challenged the vision and perception of the Japanese state abroad.

During these years, Japanese terrorism was heavily centered around the activities, both internationally and domestically, of the Japanese Red Army and the United Red Army. While the URA lastly had a confrontation with the police in the mountains of Nagano prefecture, declaring the formal end to their terroristic activities, the Japanese Red Army prolonged their actions abroad along the fight and the support for the liberation of Palestine. Their actions and proclaimed ideologies have been perceived as a new field to explore for the Japanese government authorities.

If we examine the presence of the police in the Japanese society, it is possible to understand how rooted it is in the lives of the population. With the system of the *kōban*, the police monitor the lives and actions of the neighborhood in which it is located; portraying the police as omnipresent and pervasive. Moreover, the policemen stationed in the *kōban*, in the years between the 1970s and 1980s, did count at least for 40% of the police workforce in Japan, with the ability to have solved circa 70% of the crimes committed annually⁹⁶. Eventually, having the possibility to observe and

⁹⁶ Peter J. KATZSTEIN, *Cultural Norms and National Security, Police and Military in Post-war Japan* "Cornell Studies in Political Economy", New York, Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 63.

monitor the entire area they are in, the police men also own personal and precious information of the people living in the neighborhood, including existing right-wing and left-wing political groups. According to a survey presented to a Japanese community during 1984, it revealed that one half of the population stays in contact with the police at least once throughout the year, revealing it to be a constant presence in the everyday lives of the population⁹⁷. Nonetheless, the police have active contacts with the people in the neighborhood, since some of the people living in the area will collaborate heavily with the police for the prevention of crimes in the area; in fact, the community works together in associations for crime prevention. Hence, the police are heavy, and the population have deep correspondence of the situation and well-being of their neighborhood.

The crime rates in Japan have always been extremely low compared to other countries in the world, that being the reason for the shock felt during the years of the student and civil protests and the formation of the left-wing terrorism in Japan. In fact, the rise of left-wing terrorism in Japan made the police system rethink their set up and organization as a whole, in order to fight and prevent the country from left-wing terrorism. Due to the extreme secrecy of the Japanese police, it is slightly difficult to report the exact numbers of riot police deployed during the year of civil revolt since they are not always revealed, but it can be estimated that at least 5.700 members of the police workforce were members of the Riot Police unit, concluding that at least 7/8% of the workforce were members of the riot police unit⁹⁸.

2.3.1 Counterterrorism and the Japanese State

The method of action within the police and the people in the neighborhood has always been to cooperate with the population by the intense and deepened roots in society. That being said, when the police did intervene on the Asama Sansō lodge, the siege lasted circa ten days, and the police was not meant to attack the terrorists until the very last day. The order came from government authorities that were leaning to save and release the hostage and do not hurt anyone. The terrorists at the lodge were so well equipped that it would have been highly dangerous to open the fire on them, risking losing their hostage and innocent lives; at this point they could no longer use the punitive method but were willing to accept and negotiate with the terrorists⁹⁹. As it is widely

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸ Peter J. KATZSTEIN and Yutaka TSUJINAKA, “Japan’s Internal Security Police”, in Peter J. Katzstein (ed.)

“*Rethinking Japanese Security, Internal and External Dimension*”, London & New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 73.

⁹⁹ MIYAOKA Taiji, “Terrorist Crisis Management in Japan: Historical Development and Changing Response: 1970-1990”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 10, 2, 1998, p. 27.

reported, only fifteen shots were fired by police forces, though they did use other methods to rescue the hostage and fight the terrorists¹⁰⁰.

Their method to negotiate with terrorists has been also employed in dealing with terrorist activities by the foreign-based group 日本赤軍 or, Japanese Red Army in English. Between the years of 1970 and 1991 the JRA has accomplished circa eighteen terrorist attacks, valued by the world as shocking and unpredictable attacks, as the aim within the attacks resides in the shock value. Some of the attacks planned by the group were merely an attempt at planning an attack, resulting in failures. Regarding their ideology at the core of their group, the JRA leant on Marxist-Leninist vision of the world.

From the start it was clear from the police side that their goal was not to save the terrorist, but to save the hostages and avoid any possible unnecessary bloodshed of innocent people, except for the disastrous attack at the Lod Airport in Israel in 1972, that was brought to the end with the employment of Israeli military forces¹⁰¹.

The utilization of military forces to end terroristic actions has never been perceived as the first choice by the Japanese government, since their primary goal was to save the hostages and not turn the attack into a bloody massacre; in fact, according to Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, the most important part during the attacks was to concentrate on the rescue and never aim at a bloodshed since “a life is heavier than the earth”, meaning that the protection of human lives should be the first concern during the moments of rescue¹⁰². This approach towards the terrorists was appreciated by most of the Japanese population since they really valued life as important as the earth; however, the approach was not well recognized and perceived by other foreign countries that were fighting against terrorism such as Germany, that adopted an entirely different and direct method compared to Japan.

Due to external pressure and criticism coming from other countries regarding the approach employed by the Japanese government in terroristic attacks, following the hijacking in 1977 towards Dacca airport, a shift in direction managing has been approached by the government. The initial plan of the JRA terrorists was to land the plane in the Bangladesh precisely in Dacca and

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰¹ During the attack at the Lod Airport twenty-six people were killed and eighty were injured. The attack was carried out by the three members of the Japanese Red Army Kōzō Okamoto, Tsuyoshi Okudaira and Yasuyuki Yasuda. Kōzō Okamoto is the only member that was not shot dead by the authorities and was instantly captured, the other two members were accidentally killed.

¹⁰² ITABASHI Isao, OGAWARA Masamichi and David LEHENY, “Japan” in Yonah Alexander (ed.), *Combating Terrorism: Strategies of Ten Countries*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 346.

demand the Japanese government of six million dollar in addition with the release of some of their comrades held prisoners in Japan. The fear of losing human lives to terrorism was high, so the government decided to fulfill the terrorists' requests and release the other members held in prison and save the passengers on the plane. According to their plans and demands, the JRA members released all the hostages on the plane as soon as they landed in Dacca¹⁰³.

Though the public opinion did not agree with the shift in policy regarding the treating of the terrorists, the government decided it was not acceptable anymore to always negotiate with the terrorists. Specifically, this change in direction was conducted by Minister Setoyama, who expressed his concern towards the decision making regarding the negotiation with the terrorists, explaining that is nowhere acceptable for the Japanese people to endure the terrorists' attacks both in the big cities and in small towns. To avoid this, he expressed his determination to protect the country and the people of the country at any cost. Though he did not express it clearly, the government's aim from that moment would be only to protect the lives of the people involved, implying that the government would do anything in order to protect the people, even if this meant sacrificing human lives.

The government has been harshly criticized for implying this less direct approach to external terrorism, implying that their method was not enough severe and reliable. These criticisms have been moved by the Algerian government during the negotiations for the Dacca hijacking.

The approach of always negotiating with the terrorists was perceived by the other government as a way for terrorists to obtain their demands in return. When a government has to face terroristic attacks there are not so many paths to follow; in fact, there are only two main methods to counter terrorism. The first one being the main one adopted by most countries under terroristic attacks is the "hard line", which often implies either the engage of the military acts or the legal repressive path¹⁰⁴. When governments face terroristic attacks, they usually implement the latter path, which is by far more repressive and direct compared to the former one. When the hard line is set to use, it can usually be interpreted in two different ways; the first one is the recognition of terrorism as a

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴ The deployment of military forces during terrorist attacks requires approval at Cabinet level. In such specific cases, the government may authorize the use of military intervention only when the situation is confirmed to be extremely severe and poses a significant threat to the nation. This decision often entails confronting the possibility that human lives may be sacrificed in order to protect the nation and neutralize the attackers. Consequently, the use of military forces represents one of the most drastic measures within counterterrorism policy, reflecting that the government assets are either insufficient or no more available.

form of war or low-intensity conflict whereas the last one needs to be interpreted from the standpoint view of a legal act, meaning that terrorism should be treated as crime¹⁰⁵.

Regarding the Japanese approach to terrorism overseas and in the country carried out by the JRA, they decided to adopt the soft line, implying that the aim beneath the mission would be to rescue all the hostages. In order to achieve the goal, the government must go through a series of several direct negotiations with the terrorists but, this approach has been hardly criticized for various reasons from other governments.

First, engaging with direct negotiations with terrorists often implies that the authorities, may be compelled to surrender to a least some of their specific demands. This was the approach adopted by Japan in several cases involving the terrorist, when the government prioritized the safety of hostages rather than go through directly the use of military forces. Such strategy is often addressed as soft line of counterterrorism, which prioritizes dialogues, compromises and conflict de-escalation. Another dimension of the soft-line approach is addressing the attackers' demands and grievances without necessarily entering in direct connection with the terrorist organizations themselves. In this specific case, the authorities may seek to respond to broader social, political, or ideological issues that fuel their radicalization meaning while avoiding formal negotiations with the actual perpetrators. Therefore, mediation does not go directly through the terrorists, rather intermediators, political reforms or political adjustments targeting specifically the attackers and aimed at reducing and preventing further damage.

2.3.2 Constitutional Limits and Soft-Line Counterterrorism

The deployment of military forces may be the most adopted approach among states combating terrorism, Japan resented from the implication of superior forces due to limitations and several reasons that will made practically impossible to incorporate military within the fight against terrorism.

Regarding Japan, the first reason against the utilization of military forces within terrorism may be that the use of the former could imply a slackening in the process of rescuing hostages and, moreover, could trigger a vortex of violence and revenge. Therefore, the consequence within adopting the military path could lay in the birth of sympathy regarding the perpetrators and their cause.

¹⁰⁵ MIYAOKA T. "Terrorist Crisis Management..." cit., p. 35.

In relation to the slackening of the rescuing activities, when the government decides to deploy military forces, it needs to be considered the problem within the arrangement and preparation regarding the plan. Preparing a rescue plan needs time and effort, and it might not be successful; the option of the plan not being successful implies that lives could be lost during the process, causing resentment towards the government and authorities. Moreover, the no-concession policy is not always designated to turn out in favor of the government, considering that it may trigger a negative response from the terrorists and overturning the dissatisfaction towards the victims¹⁰⁶.

The most important factor to not ignore is how the Japanese constitution is constructed. According to the Article 9 on the Japanese constitution, the Japanese state renounces war as a means of settling international peace and prohibits the use and maintenance of self-defense forces in order to maintain stability in the country. As a result, the defense forces actions may be extremely limited due to the Japanese constitution and Japan has been extremely reluctant to the deployment of the former since the Second World War¹⁰⁷.

One of the last limits that concerns Japan when engaging with terrorism, is the lack of strong intelligence-gathering organizations. Compared to other countries as the United States of America, Japan does not possess enough reliable organizations that can define and defeat potential threats. During the pre-war period, Japan used to rely on these organizations that were abolished during the U.S occupation.

Nonetheless, the Japanese government possess some intelligence-gathering organizations, but their actions and coordination are strongly limited due to the Constitution and public opinion as well¹⁰⁸.

The reasons outlined above help to explain why Japan has historically refrained from considering the deployment of Self-Defence forces during terroristic attacks. This reluctance is deeply connected to the country's post war culture, the limitations imposed by Article 9 of the Constitution and the preference for maintaining domestic stability over engaging with Self-Defense forces. As a consequence, Japanese counterterrorism policies have leant towards more police intervention, diplomatic mediation and crisis management. At the same time, Japan soft approach toward terrorism, particularly through negotiation to rescue hostages, has been harshly criticized as

¹⁰⁶ MIYAOKA T. "Terrorist Crisis Management", cit., p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ The debate among the Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution is still very present and it divides the public opinion and the politicians on whether it should be revised or not. For the Constitution to be revised, it requires two-thirds in both houses of the Parliament as well as majority vote in a public referendum. As of today, the ruling party (LDP) aims at the revision of the Constitution.

¹⁰⁸ ITABASHI, OGAWARA and LEHENY, "Japan", cit., p. 357.

potentially counterproductive. Making concessions to terrorists may unintentionally encourage further acts of terrorism by demonstrating that violence and coercion can be tools used for achieving political and personal requests. In this sense, the willingness to negotiate may risk enforcing the perception that terrorists can pressure governments and authorities into complying with specific demands and requests, reinforcing and increasing the possibility of future attacks.

2.4 Conservative Bias and the Criminalization of the New Left

Terrorism and public attacks carried out by leftist groups and student associations were certainly regarded as an extreme threat by the government, the authorities and the public opinion, yet one may still ask whether the authorities' portrayal of leftist movements was influenced by conservative bias. The answer is complex and not definitive, but historically armed forces and security institutions have often tended to lean toward the conservative side. Nonetheless, right wing terrorism has always been present in Japan as well as leftist terrorism; however, Japan's policy of internal security has presumed that right wing terrorism was not as a serious threat as leftist terrorism.

According to the numbers of participants and membership of right-wing groups, it has been issued that in the 1960s the number of people taking part in right wing activities was almost three times the number of sympathizers of New Left activities¹⁰⁹. The number of arrests was higher compared to arrests of New Left participants, and in the 1980s the participants in right wing activities increased by 30%, compared to leftist groups. However, despite the extreme discrepancy between right-wing groups and leftist groups, most radical activities carried out by right wing extremists did not cause arrest due to lack of sufficient evidence or, sometimes, extortion were sufficient to gain protection from the police unit.

The conservative bias can be also observed in the police force's White Paper¹¹⁰. The White Paper taken into examination will be the one issued in 昭和48年, or in 1973 regarding the situation of extremist political factions, both right-wing and left-wing factions¹¹¹. The analysis will briefly focus on how both the parties are issued and described in the movement, highlighting how the use

¹⁰⁹ KATZSTEIN, 'Cultural Norms...', cit., p. 74.

¹¹⁰ White Paper are documents issued by official entities that generally contain the description and plans of resolution regarding a specific critical situation. In this case, it was issued by the police forces of Japan, but White Papers are used also in different work context as well, for example in marketing companies.

¹¹¹ National Police Agency Japan, *White Paper on Police 1973*, National Police Agency, 1973, <https://www.npa.go.jp/hakusyo/s48/s480700.html>, 10th May 2026.

of language can and will alter the perception of a specific group of people, especially in official documents issued by official entities being the armed force, moreover the White Paper has been taken into consideration in order to have an institutional point of view, being released in 1973 it would provide a broader point of view. The first element that is underlined is how left-wing groups are issued; the name used to describe left-wing groups is ‘極左暴力集団’, which can be translated to ‘radical left’ or ‘extreme left’ ‘violent groups’. This description of political groups does not describe exactly the movement itself, but it directly underlines the violence and the radicalism within the movement. Moreover, in the document both student unrest and terrorist threat are being entitled together, despite the actions carried out by the two are not comparable; however, both student unrest and leftist groups’ actions are brought under one umbrella and issued as a ‘社会不安の増大’, which in English would be translated as an ‘enlargement in social anxiety’. The element of bringing together two aspects and elements of society, that being the armed struggle and the dissent from students where the actions carried out are nowhere comparable, is a sign that the armed force considers both of them without exception as a threat to the peace of social order.

Concerning the actions portrayed by leftist groups, the terms in the document used to describe the situation the police was currently dealing with, would be terms of guerrillas and terror that they were inducing and conducting in the society; in fact, in the document it is possible to find terms like ‘テロ’ and ‘ゲリラ’ regarding the activities and how the atmosphere was perceived in those specific years, conjuring emotions of an upcoming threat.

The possibility of a threat being upon the people of the nation, has been issued in the official document as a ‘destruction of the democratic state’ or Japanese as a ‘民主主義体制の破壊’, describing the actions of the left not as a feeling of dissent towards political institution, but as illegal and as a serious threat that could disrupt the foundation of the democratic state.

However, in the document taken into consideration, right wing groups were acknowledged as a violent threat as well, but the language and the narrative used is slightly different. While the leftist groups’ actions are criminalized, right-wing violence is usually contextualized and historically justified through patriotism and national restoration. Right-wing extremism is still recognized in this White Paper, but their intention and actions are connected to the national body, even when their methods were addressed as awful and violent. Unlike the left-wing groups, which were perceived as an external threat to national peace, the right-wing groups’ action was regarded both as exaggerated and attached to the idea of a new-born nation.

The role of the police and armed forces during these years was not only to protect and, on some occasions, oppress the new-born movements; it went beyond that. It also involved the production of hierarchy discourse in which some political movements were perceived as understandable within the framework of the nation, while others were presented as a threat to it. The conservative bias within the official document was not expressed through ideological implications but using specific linguistic terms and narration, while demonizing left-wing dissent.

2.4.1 Collective Memory, Stigma and the Depoliticization of the New Left

Throughout the 1970s and the years that followed, New Left movements began to lose participants and public support. This decline, however, was not the result of a spontaneous disappearing of the movement, rather it was due to the harsh backlash received from both by the governmental institutions and by media outlets. Media representations often framed episodes of protests through narratives centered on violence, radicalism and social instability, overshadowing the initial ideological and social demands that once motivated the activists to start their journey. At the same time, state repression and the implement of riot police contributed to the growing public perception of activism as socially unacceptable and disrupting. As violent and negative events began to be unleashed by the police, many citizens and including people that once were New Left's sympathizers, slowly began to distance themselves from the movements they once supported. As previously discussed, the traumatic political event can induce collective forms of memory that persist overtime and may even be transmitted across generations that did not even participate in those events, but through mediated memories, family narratives and family discourses they can inherit a glimpse of negative perceptions of what past movements were. Consequently, activism itself gradually became associated not only with political radicalism but also with fear and public disorder.

Nonetheless, the collective trauma generated from such shocking events can leave a scar onto a generation of activists as well, but is it possible to recover from it? And how are people that decide to still participate in political events perceived by the people around them?

As time passes by, generations that did not participate in periods of political unrest often tend to merge different historical events into a single, generalized and negative image of violence and extremism. Their understanding of these events and movements is frequently shaped not through direct experience, but from through media representations and people who witnessed them

firsthand. Regarding the media pieces that they could have access to, for several years during anniversaries Japanese media outlets have shown to their public violent images and representations of what happened during the years of social unrest. Although the period that goes from 1960 to 1970s has been undeniably characterized with forms of political violence and unrest among students and citizens, the choice of displaying only depicting scenes affiliated with violent politics has contributed to the creation of a simplified and generalized image of certain aspects of New Left movements¹¹².

Moreover, during the 1980s, Japan alignment with the United States within the broader framework of the so called ‘‘War on Terror’’ further reinforced the correlation between radical political movements and violence. Japanese media increasingly circulating images and representations of international militant organizations and extremist groups, often presenting them alongside domestic narratives of political radicalism. Even when not related, the juxtaposition of these representations contributed to the formation of a broader social stigma surrounding activism and activists themselves. As a result, political participation itself gradually came to be perceived by many not as a democratic practice, but as something potentially linked to instability, extremism and disorder.¹¹³

The violent and dark implications that surround post-war activism, can become a stigma and a handicap in how today’s activism is perceived, but the discourse among this topic is deeper than one could imagine, as with the slow disappearance of New Left activism movements and dynamics of social organization have slowly been modified. Indeed, the violent scenery among 1960s and 1970s protests has become a stigma for some people who decide to participate in political settings, forcing them to decide to not associate themselves anymore with certain words that could resonate with the aspects of political activism. By distancing themselves from the ways in which activists used to be perceived during the peak of political unrest, can help the following generation of activists to dissociate themselves from the radical and extremist component that used to fall within the action of being a political citizen.

One of the main difficulties faced by individuals who chose to participate in social and political activities was the possibility that activism could compromise their social status as citizens. Public involvement with activism risks attracting social judgment and professional disadvantages, leading many individuals to distance themselves from the idea of being involved in any sort of political activism. Nonetheless, several of them sought to preserve political participation while

¹¹² David H. SLATER & Patricia G. STEINHOFF, ‘‘Rejecting the Radical Left: Transformations in Japanese Social Movements’’, *Società Mutamento Politica*, 15, 29, 2024, p. 52.

¹¹³ The War on Terror of the 1980s was a series of policies of counterterrorism promulgated by the Reagan administration against Soviet-backed actors and events.

simultaneously removing the radical elements that had once characterized post-war movements. By reshaping activism into new forms that appeared less ideologically extreme and more compatible with everyday social norms, political engagement became to be perceived as more legitimate and socially acceptable.

Moreover, it is important to understand and acknowledge how much of the post-war Japanese activism has been taught and how it is perceived within educational spaces. According to the study conducted by David H. Slater and Patricia G. Steinhoff in “Rejecting the Radical Left: Transformations in Japanese Social Movements” (2024), post-war activism is formally included in schools as a part of modern Japanese history; however, the topic is only partially addressed and the parts that are meant to be taught are carefully selected and limited. This selective transmission of memory contributes to the shaping of younger generations’ understanding of political activism through institutional narratives that may emphasize conflict and disorder while neglecting the original and official reasons behind the movement itself.

Universities as well played a crucial role in the diffusion and perception of participation in modern activism, especially concerning the effect of a painfully perceived era. Nonetheless, in response to student strikes and student unrest, different private universities decided to abolish the student government organization in order to prevent similar events from happening in the future. The dismantling of these organizations had important and long-term consequences for student political participation, especially considering that university campuses had historically functioned as a central space for political debate, mobilization and collective action.

Moreover, when private universities abolished student organizations, it created an environment where students were left without any specific connection to any leftist scholar that once encouraged and supported the New Left movements. As a consequence, subsequent generations of students often lacked direct and institutional foundations through which to approach political participation. The decline of organized student political structures therefore not only weakened collective activism on campuses but also contributed to the broader depoliticization of younger generations of activists and to the persistence of the social stigma surrounding political activism in Japan.

People who choose to engage in activism continue to confront the negative perception and social stigma historically associated with New Left movements. Therefore, the risk that political engagement and activism become depoliticized remains particularly high. Individuals who pursue sustained forms of political participation often end up distancing themselves from the label of ‘activist’ and, more broadly, dissociating themselves from politics in general. This tendency can be understood as a direct consequence of the enduring and unsettling legacy attached to leftist

political movements, whose historical connotations and representation shape contemporary understanding of today's activism. The persistency of these negative images affiliated with the past movements, contributes to the delegitimization and weakening of present-day activist practices, making political engagement appear controversial and somehow ineffective. In this sense, political activism is not only challenged by external political and institutional pressures, but also by the symbolic weight of past movements, which continues to influence how political participation is perceived among society¹¹⁴.

It is equally important to consider how the perception of political participation and the stigma that weakens movements and protests have altered activism and how individuals engage with it. In the past, student associations in university used to be tied to bigger political parties, bringing them to being a branch of that specific political party; not only were they connected to political parties, but they were also connected to each other through larger communities. However, the aspect that needs to be underlined the most is how the past movements used to be built upon a vertical hierarchy in which members could climb their positions through a series of responsibilities and works. In today's contemporary movement, the vertical hierarchy is an unknown aspect of groups. Members of a specific group of activists today tend not to lean anymore on rigid hierarchies where members have set up positions and roles, instead they rely on what are called 'flat hierarchies', where there are no designated positions for the members; the lack of membership and hierarchy in a group determines the will and intention of the group to create an ideological cohesion and embraces its own practices, with the aim to extend their own practices to society. Furthermore, the absence of a fixed hierarchy symbolizes the desire of the group to express their ambition to develop and practice equity within the members of the group.

The jeopardization of protests and movements comes also with a transformation in how social dissatisfaction is represented; but deeply it needs to be understood what political participation is and how it can be implemented. An individual can choose to engage in political participation in different ways and paths, not only by showing dissatisfaction through protests. First, political dissatisfaction can be expressed through engaging in electoral politics, meaning that the paths by which individuals can express themselves are through the act of voting and working together with parties and unions. On the other hand, individuals can communicate their dissent by being proactive and collaborating with their social cues; this means that the tools implemented in this chosen path are mostly petitions, attending public meetings and writing letters in order to voice

¹¹⁴ David H. SLATER & Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Rejecting the Radical...", cit., p. 53.

their dissent¹¹⁵. According to a study conducted by the scholars Kobayashi Tetsuro, Miura Asak, Morales Dani-Madrid and Shimizu Hiroshi in ‘Why are Politically Active People Avoided in Countries with Collectivistic Culture? A Cross-Cultural Experiment’ (2021), voting is still the most common form of expression and empowerment; in fact, among the Japanese population the act of voting remains the easiest way for the population to express their dissent. The act of choosing to vote to exercise the duties as citizens can be explained through the fact that voting is still perceived as the preferred path for some Japanese people. Due to the hard and violent legacy that movements from the last century carry with them, several people may associate the act of protesting as a threat to society and well-being of the population, explaining why this way of protesting can be overlooked by several people, allowing them to distance themselves from the joining activism practices¹¹⁶. However, since protests are considered to cause unrest and threat to the public society on a large-scale, they tend to be perceived as ineffective and merely a threat to the public’s well-being. Moreover, since the negative memories and perception did not influence the participation on voting activities based on the assumption that voting is the only legitimized form of political expression in the Japanese society, the concept of protests is isolated and the negative influence attached to them might not always be descending from the student protests in university campuses.

According to the study conducted by Tominaga Kyoko, Sakamoto Haruya and Kanazawa Yusuke, the negative influence on political participation might not directly descend only from the university struggle concerning Zenkyōtō’s activities, because according to the people that participated in the survey for the case study, the attack promulgated by the students was not directly aimed at the government but at the university administration demanding change in their student body. Since it was not directly aimed at the government and the space in which the protest was coexisting was mainly on the university campus, it did not create an extreme reaction in the following generations. On the other hand, if campus protests were not perceived as extremely violent and only limited to the university area, ANPO protests were perceived as extremely intrusive and a threat to the peace

¹¹⁵ KOBAYASHI Tetsuro, MIURA Asako, MORALES Dani-Madrid and SHIMIZU Hiroshi, “Why are Politically Active People Avoided in Countries with Collectivistic Culture? A Cross-Cultural Experiment”, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 52, 4, 2021, p. 390.

¹¹⁶ SAKAMOTO Haruya, TOMINAGA Kyoko, KANAZAWA Yusuke, “Kako to shakai undō nitaishuru hiteitekihyōka ha seiji sankā ni dou eikyō suru” (How do Negative Evaluations of Past Movements Affect Political Participation? Explaining Japan’s Low Level of Political Participation) *The Non-Profit Review*, 23, ½, 2024, p. 4

坂本治也、富永京子、金澤悠介、「過去の社会運動に対する否定的評価は政治参加にどう影響するのか、*The Non-Profit Review*, 第 23 巻、2024, p. 4.

of society. In fact, whoever has a negative perception of ANPO protests, tends now to participate less to activities of public donations and petitions¹¹⁷.

However, it would be inaccurate to affirm that New Left movements disappear completely throughout the subsequent years. Although campus protests were no longer widespread as they had been decades previously, demonstrations and student activism remained a principal means through which students expressed their dissent against state institutions and university administration. Even after the dissolution of Rengō Sekigun, new student and political organizations continued to emerge and remained socially active within the context of university campuses. Especially during the 1980s, campus protests persisted in several Japanese universities, demonstrating that the culture of political engagement had not entirely vanished but rather evolved into less radical and more fragmented forms¹¹⁸. Despite the decline of large-scale demonstration, the legacy of New-Left ideologies survived through smaller networks and localized campus struggles.

Nevertheless, speaking of a complete death of the New Left movements would also mean to oversimplify the process of its decline. Continuous repression actions by state institutions and frequent clashes with the riot police gradually weakened many political organizations, while the most radical groups faded more rapidly. The violent image perpetually associated with leftist movements, alienated large sections of student population and contributed to a broader crisis within the movement.

By the 1980s, significantly fewer students decided to organize student councils; estimates suggest that membership had fallen to 500 active participants nationwide. This figure stands sharp in contrast to the massive involvement recorded during the 1960s and 1970s, when student activism reached its peak and many students still believed that the collective political action could bring to a change. The decline in participation was no accidental, but rather a consequence of severe traumatic events that led students to distance themselves from ideologies and organizations that they had previously supported.

As a matter of fact, according to a survey conducted among several university students in the 1990s, they were asked why they decided to abandon student activism. Many responses explained that the abandoned political activism because they became disillusioned with the violence that increasingly started to represent the rallies and demonstrations. Another frequent answer was that the shock caused by the 1972 internal purge carried by the Rengō Sekigun, during which fourteen

¹¹⁷ SAKAMOTO Haruya, TOMINAGA Kyoko, KANAZAWA Yusuke, ‘How Do Negative Evaluations...’, cit., p. 7.

¹¹⁸ WILLIAMS Andrew, ‘Dissenting Japan...’, cit., p. 160.

members ended up being killed by their comrades, was so intense that brought several students and individuals to slowly distance themselves. The incident profoundly damaged the public image of the Japanese radical movement, that led many activists to question their work and ideologies.

In this sense, violence, internal purges and a sense of political nihilism slowly contributed to the significant decline of the New Left.

THIRD CHAPTER

The Transformation of Student Activism in the Digital Age: Institutions, Networks and the Case of Pro-Palestinian Movements

3.1 The 2004 Corporatization Reform and the Transformation of Japanese Universities

In 2004, the Japanese government implemented one of the most significant and important reforms regarding Japanese higher education since the post-war period. Through National University Corporation Act, national universities were transformed from state-administrated universities into semi-autonomous corporate entities. The reform itself is extremely complicated and dense, and it profoundly altered the social and political environment of university campuses.

The reform itself emerged in a period of enormous monetary and financial uncertainty, especially after the 1990s financial crisis erupted in Japan. In the 1990s, Japan experienced severe economic crisis that affected first the areas of the real estate market, finance and banking, later affecting every aspect of society and changing drastically the lives of every-day people. The crisis experienced in the 1990s even influenced regular jobs, meaning that regular employment was drastically reduced and regular employment increased. The position of Japan in world's competitiveness was also deeply affected by the crisis; in 1990s Japan was considered as the world leader in this field however, after the crisis in 1990s its position also slightly declined¹¹⁹. The significant losses in terms of financial crisis had a severe impact on the quality of education as well, several universities that once held a high position in national and world rankings decreased their position.

This is the historical context in which the reform had to be included, considering that there have been severe government spending cuts in public and private education alongside the downsizing of the staff in higher education¹²⁰. Furthermore, the anxiety and uncertainty regarding the employment situation that young Japanese people were facing once they graduated university, has been another prompt of why the government needed to introduce putative business methods within

¹¹⁹ FUNABASHI Yoichi and BARAK Kushner, *Examining Japan's Lost Decades*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. xxvii.

¹²⁰ The aim of this chapter is not to analyze in details the economic bubble and the lost decade of Japan; however, the author of this thesis suggests 'Examining Japan's Lost Decades' (2015) by Funabashi Yoichi and Barak Kushner to have a deeper understanding of the Lost Decades in Japan and its consequences.

the academic context to shape the academic world into a context directed towards business innovation, the promotion of employment by swiftly forming the students into becoming new entries in the corporate world.

In November 2004, national universities acquired the status of NUCs, in other words National University Corporation; previously national universities were considered a part of national government under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The initial aim of the reform itself was to promote and emphasize autonomy from government entities within the context of higher education, giving them the opportunity to gain more freedom regarding their decision within the context of how to manage their funds obtained from the government. Moreover, it can be considered as a response to a series of external demands from society and the corporation that the world of higher education had to embody¹²¹.

The reform itself transformed the entire academic body, altering the whole decision-making system as well; before the reform the decision-making board was composed of a collegial system; with the introduction of the reform on November 4th, the decision board was centralized on the figure alone of the President itself inducing a shift of power from each faculty to the singular decision of the President allowing the university president to show effective leadership; by introducing this transformation, consequently downsizing among the number of committee per faculty have been drastically reduced¹²². Consequently, the university staff not only has been drastically downsized in order to manage their costs more diligently and magnify their efficiency but also, the staff in universities lost their status as civil servants. Before the reform, the staff were fixed by their government position and each university could not modify its staff or establish new position, with the introduction of the new reform the staff is official not considered anymore as part of the civil servants body; this transformation had given the opportunity to several universities to manage the hiring and the performance of the evaluation system that influences promotions and the payment system¹²³.

In the reform, the most crucial aspect to be considered is the introduction of an evaluation system for both academic staff and the university itself and its competitiveness. Since the reform is a performance-based management model centralized on the achievement of targets and accountability, the reform has shifted its evaluation from a directive administrative oversight to an

¹²¹ YAMAMOTO Kiyoshi, “Corporatization of National Universities in Japan: Revolution for Governance or Revolution for Downsizing?”, *Financial Accountability & Management*, 20, 2, 2004, p. 158.

¹²² JUN Oba, “Incorporation of National Universities in Japan”, *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 27, 3, 2007, p. 192.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

ex-post evaluation model. The newly introduced system works on a 6-year evaluation methodology that involves several layers of review within the academic body. Each university must draft medium-term goals regarding the quality of activities, teaching and efficiency. Consequently, the university must also propose medium-term plans to achieve its goals. The minister, however, remains in charge of evaluating and determining the plans and goals of each university¹²⁴. Furthermore, additional evaluations are performed towards the scheme developed by each university; these periodic evaluations are performed by a newly created system within MEXT, which happens to be nominated as the National University Corporation Evaluation System (NUCs)¹²⁵.

The system itself is comprehensive and will focus its evaluations on several layers of the university structure. First and foremost, it focuses on evaluating the quality of teaching methods and research outputs. In particular, the evaluation of research outputs will mostly be built around the analysis of a database of published research articles, scientific productivity and the overall impact of scholarly research¹²⁶. Alongside research assessment, the reforms also introduce the evaluation concerning the financial health and administrative efficiency of each university; this evaluation will be mostly based on how each university manages its external funds, donations and research grants¹²⁷. Although the principal focus of the reform will always be the evaluation of the institutions and teaching methods, the new framework allows universities to obtain greater autonomy in managing their academic personnel based on the necessity of each faculty. Consequently, the reform itself strongly encourages each faculty and university to increase its own merit-based personnel system, connecting individual academic staff to promotion and remuneration¹²⁸. In this context, the academic staff are increasingly evaluated based on the measurable criteria related to the teaching effectiveness, research activity and contribution to the institutional development.

The outcomes of these evaluations are critical considering the possibility that high-performing universities may receive public funds from the government, if the evaluation turns out to be

¹²⁴ Shaun GOLDFINCH, “Rituals of Reform, Policy Transfer and the National University Corporation Reforms of Japan”, *Governance, an International Journal of Policy, Administration and Institutions*, 19, 4, 2006, p. 595.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ YAMAMOTO, “Corporatization of National...”, cit., p. 159.

¹²⁸ SAWA Akihiro, “Kokuritsu daigaku hōjin-ho to kokuritsu daigaku kaikaku” (The National University Corporation Act and National University Reform), *Rieti Policy Discussion Paper Series*, 03-P-002, 2003, p. 16.

澤昭裕、「国立大学法人法と国立大学改革」、*Rieti Policy Discussion Paper Series*、第 03 巻き 002 号、2003 年、p.16.

positive. If the evaluation is not considered positive as the universities may not fulfill their goals, the existing evaluating organs could declare that the universities taken into consideration could face the possibility of seeing their operational grants reduced. Therefore, the evaluation systems function not only as a mechanism of quality assurance but also as a tool aimed at fostering competitiveness, accountability and efficiency within the higher education sector.

Although the reform is finalized to ensure the universities gain independence from the government agencies to implement efficiency within its university body and to merge the corporate world and the academic world so that students could be able to have an easier approach to the world of work, scholars have had several doubts regarding the efficiency of this implemented reform.

First and foremost, the first opponents of this reform are the Union for Staff of National Higher Education Institutions; according to the reform, the Minister could set the goals for the universities, since as it is stated in the reform the university should propose a draft for their goals. Though the Minister should listen and support the voice of the university first, the risk for the Minister to overpower the necessities of the university might be extremely high. For the government to overpower the university decision-making process, it would be that the university does not have an established voice in its decision regarding planning functions of research and teaching, specific aspect that should be handled by the university alone¹²⁹. Furthermore, another aspect criticized by the Union is the aspect concerning the evaluation of performance carried out by the ministry committee. According to the Union, in order to ensure real autonomy of the university, the evaluation should be conducted by academic peers at the University¹³⁰. The third criticism voiced by the Union concerns the aspect of taxes and more broadly finances. The base of the reform is to promulgate efficiency and raise the standard higher regarding each university's performance; the criticism expressed concerns the fear of the possibility for universities to raise fees to improve efficiency or productivity. Though several universities like Tōkyō University did assure the students that fees would not be raised following the reform, their decision has been overridden by the central government's budget decision¹³¹.

The rise of tuition fees at several universities has been a consequence of the government approving a draft budget that included a high increase in the 'student standard payment amount';

¹²⁹ YAMAMOTO, "Corporatization of National...", cit., p. 164.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹³¹ IWASAKI Minoru, "The Deception of the Idea of 'Self-Responsibility' and 'Individualization': neo-liberal Rhetoric as Revealed in the Corporation of Japan's National Universities", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 10, 2, 2009, p. 251.

following the approval of the draft, each university had to re-calculate the standard tuition amount by subtracting the university's fixed expenditures, effectively compelling each university to raise its tuition fee. With few exceptions of national corporate universities that opted to freeze their tuition fees, the impact had been so widespread that coerced several universities to raise their tuition fees¹³².

The criticisms moved to this reform are several and have been moved to various layers of the reform, but within scholars examining the reform the most common one concerns university autonomy undermined by the outcome of the reform.

As is expressed in the reform, each university must submit a draft in which they express their long-term goals every six years as corporate universities. The long-term goals may face the possibility of causing damage to research and researchers. The long-term goals and plans are not aligned with the methodology used for conducting research, especially longer research that may need more than six years. One of the outcomes that may undeniably emerge could be the possibility of researchers and scholars publishing different research from the one they originally planned to carry out, in order to fulfill the university's long-term goal. Moreover, since the long-term draft will be evaluated by government entities according to its performance and efficiency, scholars and researchers could potentially be driven to conduct a research project or publish a paper based on the ones that could possibly bring more government funding to the university¹³³. The evaluation of a specific research project is long, complicated and requires a high amount of time; connected to the possibility of the scholar carrying out a different research project in order for the university to obtain more money, there could also be the possibility of the project not being properly evaluated. As the project will be evaluated by an external committee, there could be an option for the external commission to not comprehend the complexness and specialty of the project that will be taken into examination. As previously mentioned, the evaluation of a research project is extremely complex, and the committee may apply rigid or different quantitative methods that may undermine the research project¹³⁴. In other words, the evaluation system may penalize the effectiveness and quality of research projects if not correctly executed, coercing scholars to submit to the criteria of efficiency and performance of the external committee in order to be able to obtain more external funds, mining their academic and intellectual freedom.

¹³² *Ibidem*.

¹³³ YAMAMOTO, "Corporatization of National..." cit., p. 179.

¹³⁴ SAWA Akihiro, "Kokuritsu daigaku..." cit., p. 7.

Concerning academic freedom and the autonomy of the university, one of the purposes of the reform is to make the university independent from the decision of the governing body. Although when the draft of the six-year long-term goal is presented to the government they should respect and listen to the opinions performed by the university committee, on the other hand one risk that the university could potentially face could be the government and the bureaucracy system to gain control on the university body; this aspect could generate a concrete dependency of the university administration, creating a vertical system of codependency.

However, the majority of the critics moved by scholars towards the reform concerns especially the intellectual honesty and academic freedom of each university.

Firstly, the reform itself concentrates the entire power within the figures of the president of the university, allowing its figure to gain more liberty regarding the decisions of the university. On the other hand, the faculty councils will lose their autonomy regarding the decision-making process, leading their legacy to become merely advisory bodies; this transformation could result in the end of the ‘colleagueship’ necessary for a university body to be perceived as autonomous within the academic environment. The decision to centralize power only in the figure of the academic present may result in professors and faculties committees turning merely into operational limbs for the administration, without their opinion being taken into consideration within the decision-making process¹³⁵. Hence so, the presidential authority can be overwhelming and superior compared to its colleagues.

Though the reform promotes academic freedom and autonomy, several scholars questioned the perception of autonomy within the reform and the self-responsibility given to the university administration. The government’s decision to adopt long-term goals in order to receive funds after university is estimated to perform well, remains an issue on whether the research project will still be evaluated for its effectiveness or not. The aim of the government to create a ‘knowledge-based society’ elicits several doubts on what can be considered as ‘knowledge’ worthy according to the government. In this case, knowledge is reduced to a piece that will be necessary for commercial and business resource, downgrading knowledge to a mere connection to the business and economic world. Consequently, if some research fields do not yield quick profits or results, they are immediately cornered and not prioritized, like social sciences or humanities in general¹³⁶.

¹³⁵ SUZUKI Masumi, “dokuritsu gyōsei hōjinka to genshō kokuritsudaigaku hōjin”, (The Trend Toward Independent Administrative Institutions and National University Corporations), *Yamaguchi Keizaigaku Zasshi*, 52, 3, 2024, p. 111.

鈴木眞澄、「独立行政法人化と現象国立大学法人」、山口経済学雑誌、第 52 巻き 3 号、2024 年、p.111.

¹³⁶ IWASAKI, “The deception of...”, cit., p. 252.

According to the scholar Iwasaki Minoru (2009), with the incorporation of national universities, this process has already become visible.

The university that was once considered as a place for scholars and researchers to gain academic credibility and enrich the academic research world has been altered to a business-based reality; especially with the newly introduced method of obtaining fund and research-based funds, can effectively block the innovation within the research world mining their autonomy in deciding which aspects is worthy of research. If a chosen topic of research does not produce immediate profits, can be discerned as not safe to publish or to be researched about, hence so encouraging researchers and scholars to focus merely on topics that can be quickly published or that can easily produce business results. Therefore, the scholar Iwasaki Minoru questioned if the academic freedom and autonomy that is said to be gained within this reform is academic autonomy or corporate servility.

3.1.1 Student Activism Within the Context of Neo-Liberal Universities

The connection between the 2004 higher education reform and student activism on university campuses cannot be understood as a strictly direct connection, since performing political activism on campus has never been formally prohibited in Japanese universities. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two dimensions emerges implicitly from the broader logic and structural consequences of the reform. As reported by the scholar Yamamoto Kiyoshi (2004):

Often forgotten in the debate are the students, who seem more interested in services than the system... ‘I would believe that certain competition makes classes more attractive than now’ ‘currently some professors just keep talking without communicating to students.’

In the reform the student’s position has shifted from a political subject to a consumer; hence the university in this case will be more focused on satisfying the needs of the ‘consumer’ rather than perceiving the students as citizens to be educated. With the possibility of the university becoming a corporate structure, the students automatically become human capital and a consumer that needs to be satisfied, not taking into consideration the academic aspects to be fulfilled. Furthermore, with the university’s administration becoming similar to how corporates reality is managed, the

university adopts a vertical governance deeply connected and careful to how the university can be evaluated by the government. Consequently, the university administration becomes increasingly concerned with its corporate profile, paying attention as well to the performance-based evaluation and to the opportunity to receive funds from government entities.

Therefore, this transformation also affected the symbolic and social function of the university campus itself. Rather than remaining a space traditionally associated with political debate, collective organization and ideological confrontation, the campus increasingly became a place expected to embody institutional harmony, efficiency and social stability. As a result, university administrations often adopted a more cautious and neutral stance toward forms of political participation that could potentially disrupt the public image of the institution.

Within the broader framework of neoliberal reforms, universities tended to distance students from opportunities to develop political consciousness and sustained forms of political engagement.

However, it is not exactly correct that student activism completely disappears in the context of neoliberal reforms; student activism has never disappeared, rather it has evolved into different approaches and methods from the ones that were adopted during the peak years of leftist student activism in the 1960s-1970s. Contemporary forms of activism are often less ideologically unified and less confrontational, but they continue to represent important spaces through which students negotiate their political identity, social concerns and resistance within the changing structure of higher education.

A central theme that is often debated within the academic context is how students in neo-liberal universities experience the feeling of living in a bubble that exempts them from connecting to issues of the external world. As several students have admitted, performing activism represents a way in which they can rupture the bubble that they describe as the university context. In this case, whenever the students begin to approach different forms of political activism, they soon realize how university is deeply connected and involved in external social issues¹³⁷.

Furthermore, the process of consumerization within higher education has also generated a serious debate between the economic logic of university and the understanding of the university as the traditional space for intellectual and personal development. In an increasingly market-oriented society, students feel their relationship with the university as becoming progressively transactional, in which the payment of tuition fees is implicitly associated with the consequence of obtaining the

¹³⁷ KARTER, ROBBINS and MCIERNEY, 'Student Activism in the Neoliberal...', cit., p. 975.

degree as a form of economic return. Within this framework, education risks being transformed into a commodity, while academic success becomes slowly connected to performance, productivity and financial value¹³⁸.

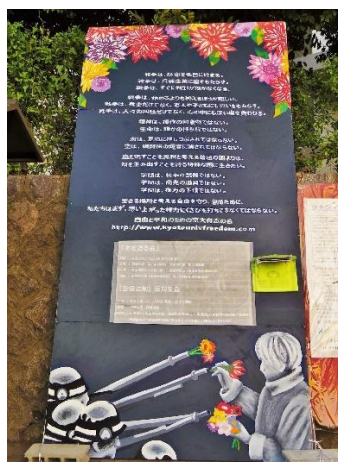
In response to these dynamics, students affirm the necessity to reclaim educational spaces like university as a place for personal growth and to develop academic knowledge. Rather than accepting a purely consumer-based relationship with higher education institutions, they seek to reaffirm the importance of knowledge production, intellectual autonomy and collective action as central dimension of university life.

Furthermore, the tension between consumerization and the pursuit of genuine knowledge represents one of the most controversial aspects of higher education within the neoliberal context. Students continue to negotiate and contest the true meaning of university being education itself in the first place, attempting to preserve its social and political aspects beyond purely economic factors. In this sense, activism acquires a sort of emotional and social dimension as collective participation creates a sense of belonging and spaces of mutual support. Even in hostile spaces and realities like universities in neo-liberal contexts, activist communities can continue to provide students with opportunities to engage in different forms of activism, compared to the common ones that used to be performed by 20th century activists.

In many cases tensions emerge whenever student activism challenges directly economic interests or institutional priorities for the university. Administration may respond to criticism negatively or with dismissive attitude by discouraging the students, especially when the criticism made to the university administration concerns university's corporate image. Under these circumstances, university may adopt solutions that differ from a different range of options like from disciplinary actions to intimidatory actions. University tolerance has slowly decreased over time, and the neoliberal reform of higher education might be one of the reasons why this phenomenon has been occurring. Especially in prestigious universities like Kyōto University and Hosei University the university administration has been extremely harsh towards students expressing their dissent concerning both university's policies and social issues. One of the peculiar methods in which political groups in universities has always manifested their dissatisfaction was the employment of *tatekanban* 立て看板 which essentially are billboards that students from various universities may

¹³⁸ KARTER, ROBBINS and MCIENERNEY, 'Student Activism...', cit., p. 981.

use to promote their club activities, but usually they are connected to student activism and protests employed to publicly display the students' grievances.



[Fig.2.] 2015 年 8 月 @ 百万遍 (提供ひろせけえな) in ‘面白く変人でもない京大’

<https://sites.google.com/view/tatekan-yoshidaryo/tatekan> (27th May 2026)

The signs have been long part of the campuses' scenarios, until 2018 when the administration of Kyōto University demanded the students to remove all their signboards affirming how no one will be exempt from the punishment if the rules were not going to be observed. Historically, the *tatekanban* used at Kyōto University resemble its political history and have a strong anti-authoritarian connotation and after the forced prohibition the billboards used by students have become more impactful¹³⁹. The request made by the University of Kyōto concerning the use of billboards, was perceived by the student community as a way to “beautify” the campus, transforming these types of restrictions as an emblematic way to silence students' voices.

In relation to this topic, on many occasions university officials have been involved in cracking down over university sites or dormitories, especially the Yoshida Dorm of Kyōto University. The story behind the Yoshida Dorm is extremely interesting, representing the legacy of Kyōto University. The dorm facility is one of the oldest structures for students in Kyōto University, which was built around 1913, and it has been the birthplace of several leftist student organizations during the 1960s-1970s.

¹³⁹ “Kyōto Daigaku, tatekanban kiseishitahazu ga...kontesuto ka to mimagau yōsō”, (The University of Kyōto had imposed restrictions on billboards, but it looked like a contest), *Chōshū Shinbun*, <https://www.chosyu-journal.jp/shakai/8417> 20th June 2018. 「京都大学立て看板規制したはずが・・・コンテストかと思まどう様相」長周新聞、20日6月2018年。



[Fig. 3] Photo representing the dorm's entrance

京大吉田寮公式サイト <https://www.yoshidaryo.org/> (27th May 2026)

The characteristic that makes the dorm extremely special to students, except for the fact that is a self-governing dormitory, is the opportunity to not pay exaggerated housing fees and still being able to attend university. However, the fate of the residence has been uncertain for some time due to safety reasons. In fact, the dorm's condition is not the safest, but it is a place that has been considered part of the neighborhood and described by ex-residents as a residence with an inestimable value, that has held for years stories of resistance and acceptance among the residents¹⁴⁰. Moreover, it has been a safety net for students with financial issues, considering the extremely low entering fees. The discourse of demolishing the residence has been issued by Kyōto University around 2017, raising concerns among the dorm's community. Hence, the community continuously questioned the university as to whether renovating the facility would be preferable instead of demolishing it, thus erasing both the residence's centenary history and its political legacy. As of today, the university and the dorm community have reached an agreement concerning the

¹⁴⁰ "E, senpai wo yobisute? Yoshida ryō de mita furattona ningenkankei no katachi", (Eh, calling by name an older student? An inside in the equal relationships in the Yoshida Dorm), *Asahi Shinbun*, <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASV5D7TX6V5DUQIP00CM.html> 17th May 2026. 「え、先輩を呼び捨て。吉田寮で見たフラットな人間関係の形」、朝日新聞、17日5月2026年。

renovation of the building; students and residents have left the building in the 31st March 2026 and Kyōto University will pledge to complete the renovations within five years¹⁴¹.

At the same time, contemporary student activists expressed a sense of lacerating pessimism that erupts with the possibility of obtaining a systemic change at a large-scale. The increasing transformation of universities into corporate realities and the broader dominance of neo-liberal structures can often generate a sense of frustration and powerlessness among young activists, who happen to perceive the higher education system as reluctant to change. Though the sense of pessimism concerns most of the students that decide to perform political activism, on the other hand for some of them this might be a strong ethical commitment and solidarity developed through the community of activists¹⁴².

Once again, performing activism in Japanese universities is not prohibited in any way but is implicitly severely discouraged. For example, Japanese recruitment culture strongly advises that employability is associated with conformity and social harmony, especially within traditional companies. Hence, visible activism may influence negatively hiring outcomes during *shūkatsu*¹⁴³.

Hence, this is the reason why affirming that student activism has completely disappeared might be not correct. Approaches to student activism evolve according to time and changes within the context they are carried out, like university and campuses. Moreover, it adapts to the different transformations occurring over time and in society, implementing methods and approaches that might blend more with society and its necessities.

3.1.2 The Case of the Student Movement SEALDs and Why is it Important

Although the organization lasted for less than a year, the case of the student movement SEALDs can be considered as a peculiar moment in the history of student's political movement for the way the members engaged with the academic community, the rest of the students body and the approach they adopted to convey their political message through social media¹⁴⁴. Through the innovative methods engaged to spread their social and political message, SEALDs have slowly regained a

¹⁴¹ The history of the dormitory is extremely interesting and tortuous, the author of the thesis highly suggests having a look at the official site of the residence to find out more about the history and the events held by the community: <https://www.yoshidaryo.org/> (27th May 2026).

¹⁴² KARTER, ROBBINS and MCIENERNEY, "Student Activism...", cit., p. 974.

¹⁴³ Falch DANIEL and D. Hammond CHRISTOPHER, "Social Activism and Spaces of Autonomy in the Context of Japan: an analysis of the Student Movement SEALDs", *Globalization, Societies and Education*, 18, 4, 2020, p. 442.

¹⁴⁴ SEALDs is an acronym that stands for Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy.

position in student activism and brought together large groups of students, even with different political views.

SEALDs has been formed by several students in 2015 in response to the intention of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's former President Shinzō Abe to reinterpret the Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Though the group engaged with several other social issues, they have always been formally associated with the opposition to the revision of Article 9. As previously noted, for decades article 9 has always been challenged by political actors advocating for constitutional revision.

SEALDs distinguished themselves from the rest of contemporary student movements for their use of social networks combined with a strong presence in university context. In fact, their online presence spread throughout Facebook, Twitter and Youtube with the intention of teaching and giving the opportunity to new learners and students to approach politics by themselves on social media in different ways; the decided approach to use social media more throughout their campaign has been perceived as a smart move to connect more with the youth of that time. In fact, frequent posts of the group ranged from a variety of informative posts to promotional photos to even songs composed by the group to commemorate activists' struggles. The interesting point of SEALDs is that they gained support from people of various ages, from children to adults who found in SEALDs a way to express their voice.

With the intention of distancing themselves from the past student movements and especially how they were perceived by the general public's opinion, the group has never organized a protest inside the space of university, although they often collaborated with several scholars for their activities. In fact, before the association decided to flood the streets with their protests, they often invited various scholars to their meetings and events to educate the members¹⁴⁵. Connected to this, it is possible to affirm that their credibility and acceptance among the community comes also from the connections that they were able to establish within the academic community that for long supported them in their events; the members have been able to create an off-campus space for learning and expanding their work through the academic community.

Moreover, the group consistently sought to establish a stronger connection with the Japanese youth of the time by normalizing political engagement and participation in social movements. One of the group's central messages was that protesting and engaging in activism should be considered a natural and legitimate component of living in a democratic society, rather than an exceptional

¹⁴⁵ FALCH and HAMMOND, "Social Activism and Spaces of Autonomy...", cit., p. 439.

and radical act¹⁴⁶. At the same time, the members decided to not make the movement and activism their entire life, but just a part of it. Through their activities they sought to normalize political participation as something accessible to everyone, rather than something exclusive for only a small percentage of people.

At the same time the group avoided presenting activism as an all-encompassing commitment. The members did not expect young people to dedicate their entire lives and academic careers to political causes; instead, they promoted the idea that civic engagement could coexist with private lives and responsibilities, approaching the balance between activism and personal lives. This perspective made activism more accessible to a younger generation that often felt disconnected from traditional forms of political participation.

Though SEALDs only existed for a limited amount of time, its influence extended beyond the duration of the movement itself. Through their innovative use of social media, the group succeeded in making political information more accessible for younger audiences. SEALDs reduced some of the barriers that traditionally discouraged youth involvement in politics and encouraged awareness in contemporary social issues. Furthermore, the movement contributed to reshaping the image of political activism in Japan. By incorporating music, communication and modern aesthetics into their campaigns, SEALDs created a space in which political activism could be perceived as relevant and even ‘cool’ by younger generations. The group challenged stereotypes that associated protests with older generation, leaving a lasting impact on the ways in which youth activism and civic engagement are understood in contemporary Japanese society.

3.1.3 The Effects of Online Activism: The Phenomenon of Slacktivism

The increasing importance of social media over the last decade has generated an extensive debate regarding the quality of effectiveness of digital participation. As it was mentioned before, movements like SEALDs sought to expand their political message using social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter not only to connect more with the Japanese youth but also making political information more accessible for everyone. The discussion is always framed through the concept of slacktivism, which is a term used to describe low-cost and low-risk forms of political engagement conducted online, for example sharing content, signing petitions or more broadly expressing support through social media platforms. Such practices may substitute effective

¹⁴⁶ FALCH and HAMMOND, “Social Activism and Spaces of Autonomy...”, cit., p. 433.

meaningful political actions with symbolic gestures; however, online activism can contribute to the formation of political entities, facilitating information sharing and support collective mobilization.

The issue surrounding slacktivism that is questioned by several scholars is whether practicing online activism can be a precursor or a gateway to more significant social protests¹⁴⁷. People engaging in online activism can further move to real-life activism, this is why the line between activism and slacktivism is sometimes extremely blurry.

In the work 'Activism or Slacktivism? The Potential and Pitfalls of social media in Contemporary Activism' (2017) published by Nolan L. Cabrera, Matias E. Cheryl and Montoya Roberto, the authors propose a series of different ways in which activism and slacktivism are perceived and their interactions with power and political action as well.

The authors propose three ways and dimensions in which these aspects interact. The first dimension of power concerns direct exercise, for example when universities create 'free speech-zones' so the administration is able to deal with and take care of students' protests or sit-ins on the campus.

The second dimensions concern the decision-making power, in which institutions are able to deal with and decide to ignore petitions or refuse policy changes and every kind of transformation that is issued by the population.

The third dimension operates on the higher level of hegemony, in which the dominant cultural discourse practices normalize inequality and make systemic oppression almost inevitable. Within these spaces activism functions as a counter hegemony force capable of disrupting dominant discourse regarding injustices and economic inequality, opening debates among these topics.

The scholars also emphasize the broad difference between activism and slacktivism; activism requires connection to a broader social movement, since the action of a single person alone cannot bring enough change. Moreover, activism requires actions that trigger the reactions of political institutions, without their reaction it's almost impossible to obtain and remark political influence. Another essential element required for activism is risk, whether it might be social risk, economic or legal but actions that do not require personal risks are more likely to fall into the category of slacktivism. To broaden the discourse of activism, the authors argue as well that activism is not

¹⁴⁷ Nolan L. CABRERA, Matias E. CHERYL and Montoya ROBERTO, 'Activism or Slacktivism? The Potential and Pitfalls of Social Media in Contemporary Activism', *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 10, 4, 2017 p. 403.

performed through a fixed standard of performance, but it requires genuine and direct interest carried out through a visual of social transformation and genuine practices sustained by hope and understanding of the active struggle going on when performing activism, not only a passive optimism.

The purpose of activism is not mainly to gain social attention, rather it's all about obtaining social change through social agitation that serves as a form of social conscience by drawing attention to social injustice and suffering. Eventually the authors also admit that activists constitute just a small part within social broader movements, while many supporters still participate in activist strategies without assuming the responsibilities associated with activism itself.

Eventually social media is presented as a valid but limited tool for contemporary political mobilization. Digital platforms provide ways to organize a petition or a protest, ways to educate ourselves on different topics related to world issues and several ways to connect with other activists all around the world. Whether this can be true, it can also be true that these actions' value also depends on the way they are supported by the online and offline community. Social media can be useful to spread content and information related to a particular political issue going on in the world, but it cannot substitute in-person activism, which can generate social and political tension necessary to challenge political powers. Eventually, online activism should be accompanied by in-person activism, rather than just an end in itself.

On the other hand, online activism can be also explained with the concept of 'moral balancing'. When individuals face a moral decision, they usually trace back to their memories to learn if in the past they had committed bad or good actions. If the individual happened to carry out a positive action in the past, they sometimes feel that it is acceptable to loosen up a bit and feel less guilty about executing a morally dubious choice. On the contrary, if the individual in question made a dubious or unethical choice in the past, they will feel to redeem themselves and made up for their past deed. This discourse can easily be connected to online activism and slacktivism, as some individuals may engage in political discourse or activism online for the mere aim to feel good about themselves. In fact, performing online activism does not necessarily mean that someone may be interested in performing in-person activism; it may also mean as a way to 'excuse' themselves for not engaging in political activities in real person¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴⁸ LEE Yuhao, HSIEH Gary, "Does Slacktivism Hurt Activism? The Effects of Moral Balancing and Consistency in Online Activism", *Chi 2013: Changing Perspectives, Crowds and Activism*, 2013, Paris.

The case illustrated previously of the group SEALDs presents many of the struggles and critical issues between digital engagement and in-person social activism. Though the group gained support from their diligent and innovative use of social media platforms, online communication functioned mainly as a way and process to gain mobilization rather than to end in itself. Throughout their activities SEALDs members employed social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to spread information, coordinate events and reach out to young people who had previously shown little interest in participating or engaging in political content.

However, the movement's significance ultimately rested on their ability to translate their online engagement into actual offline collective action, eventually what happened since they have been able to gain people for their movements and protests against the 2015 security legislation. In this sense, what SEALDs has done is to challenge interpretations that generally reduce digitally mediated participation to slacktivism.

While the public image of SEALDs was generally associated with digital activism, the movement was also capable of embodying several of the characteristics associated with in-person activism, such as triggering a reaction of the government institutions, the willingness to assume political and social risks and the ability to create public debate.

At the same time, as was highlighted before, the movement encountered a rapid decline following the passage of the security bills. This rapid decline opens broader questions about the long-term sustainability of digitally facilitated activism and the extent to which online visibility can be transformed into enduring political influence.

3.2 Higher Education and The Wave of Mobilizations for Palestine in 2024

The year of 2024 witnessed a global wave of student mobilization in support of the Palestinian issue, marking it as one of the most significant and impactful student activism of the recent years. The protests and student uprising across the world has been triggered after the tension between Israel and Palestine quickly escalated on October 7th of 2023.

The first protests erupted first on April 17th of 2024 in North America in the elite Columbia University, later spreading across the country and quickly reaching Europe and Southeast Asia. Students all around the world decided to organize themselves adopting different approaches in support of the Palestinian cause. Most of the campuses across the world initiated protests and rallies on their university campus while other student organizations used educational campaigns to show solidarity while educating other students concerning the still on-going conflict between Israel and Palestine, shedding light on the centenary conflict history, trying to understand the complexity of the conflict by inviting and discussing with scholars and activists from all over the country. Another common path followed by student organization is the adoption of the acronym BDS which stands for boycott, disinvestment and sanctions; in fact, it could be legit to question why students are protesting and erecting sit-in camps in their university campuses and why is their university specifically involved in the conflict. On this matter, students and students' organization worldwide are calling to end any academic or research collaboration and stop getting funds from or to Israeli companies¹⁴⁹.

The spreading of the movement has also been heavily influenced and facilitated by the use of social media, as students have been using the platform to share news, articles and events organized by their university as well. Moreover, in the age of social media where news from the other side of the world can be spread in the bat of an eye, social campaigns can go viral and can help spread awareness on the specific topic reaching people who might not have been connected with the news yet. On this specific matter of social media, Instagram accounts whose their content is based on spreading awareness and news from the Gaza strip, have been helpful in reaching people's Instagram feed from all over the world; in doing so the news are spread faster and the possibility of connecting with various people of all gender, age and ethnicity is higher¹⁵⁰. The importance of social media in this specific age of protests and movements is also to help create a bridge between

¹⁴⁹ Mohamed BUHEJI, Aamir HASAN, "Echoes of Wake Up: Realising the Impact of the Seeds of Student Pro-Palestine Protests", *International Journal of Management*, 15, 3, 2024 p. 58.

¹⁵⁰ Instagram accounts such as @eye.on.palestine have been spreading news in real time from the Gaza strip long before the 2023 escalation between Israel and Palestine: <https://www.instagram.com/eye.on.palestine/> (May 5th 2026).

university students across the country and mobilize support on a larger scale; in fact, one of the reasons why the movement spread so quickly was also thanks to the support gained through social media.

The first ever encampment recorded was at Columbia University in April 2024, where the students decided to establish a ‘Gaza Solidarity Encampment’ until the demands issued to the university would be met.



[Fig. 4] *In Focus: the first 24 hours of the Gaza solidarity encampment.*

“Columbia Spectator” <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/main/2024/04/18/in-focus-the-first-24-hours-of-the-gaza-solidarity-encampment/> (5th June 2026)

The students specifically called on the university to sever its institutional ties with Israeli academic institutions and to divest its endowment funds from companies and organizations linked to Israel. These demands formed part of a broader campaign advocating greater institutional accountability and ethical investment practices. Protesters argued that universities should ensure that their financial assets do not contribute, directly or indirectly, to ongoing human rights violations. However, the university’s investment portfolio and the extent of its financial connections were not fully transparent to the public, making it difficult to assess the precise impact

of students' demands. Consequently, calls for disinvestment were also accompanied by requests for increased transparency regarding the university financial holdings and investment strategies.

In this case, networking and working together with other universities from across the country can be a starting point for connecting and forming coalitions to unify their disinvestment campaigns, share resources and amplify their voices against the university administration and against the on-going genocide in Palestine.

In the specific case of Columbia University after weeks of encampment, campaigns and protests, the University did not meet the students' demands and the situation quickly escalated with the New York Departments' Police mass arrests on students who have been occupying Hamilton Hall for consequent days¹⁵¹.

Universities such as Columbia University are considered as elite universities in the United States of America and have a history of activism on their behalf, but why is it considered as making a difference when elite universities are perceived as the breaking point of activism? Elite universities generally have access to specific academic resources and usually the students are set in an intellectual scenery that makes it fertile for movements like the one in support of Palestine to grow. Moreover, these kinds of universities have a fertile background of students coming from all over the world that can help build a concrete environment of complex ideas and a deeper understanding of the on-going conflict. In this case scenario, elite universities are usually the ones supporting broadly freedom's expression of their students, even considering their strongest and boldest opinions¹⁵². Furthermore, having connections with various scholars and access to different resources makes it slightly easier for them to develop and spread the movement across the country and in other parts of the world.

In fact, with the help as well of social media the movement in support of the Palestinian cause quickly spread across the country and all over the world. The students all over the world protesting in support of the Palestinian cause were all issuing almost the same demands to their home university, while executing their demands in different ways according to their home university's rules. In May 2024, the protests wave had reached Japan as well and the students from various universities decided to organize sit-ins, meetings and conferences in order to educate themselves

¹⁵¹ For a more detailed tracing of students' encampment at Columbia University, the author of the thesis highly suggests consulting the website: <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1655523> which has traced day by day the events occurred at Columbia University.

¹⁵² Mohamed BUHEJI, Aamir HASAN, "Echoes of Wake Up...", cit., p. 67.

concerning the topic and let the university administration understand their point of view regarding the on-going conflict.

3.2.1 Regulating Collective Student Activity: Recognition, Space and Institutional Control at Tōdai and Kyōdai

Before addressing the next discussion topic, it would be important to highlight the norms and regulations that concern student organizations and organizing events on university spaces such as the main campus. Regarding this topic, Tōkyō University and Kyōto University's regulations will both be analyzed; these institutions have been selected not only because of their status of two of the most prestigious universities in Japan, but also because of their long and complex history with student activism. The university of Tōkyō in particular played a central role in the student movements of the late 1960s, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. The analysis of regulations concerning student organizations cannot be separated from its historical context. Indeed, contemporary administrative framework may be understood, in a small part, as responses to past experiences of student mobilization and contestation. This is especially evident with the University of Tōkyō, where the 1968-1969 campus struggles culminated in the occupation of university buildings by student groups and a profound challenge to institutional authority. Consequently, current regulations concerning student organizations and access to university facilities may be perceived as reflecting a broader historical effect to regulate the use of campus space and to prevent the re-emerge of conflict that once disrupted university life.

With regard to students' organizations at the University of Tōkyō, its official document entitled *kagai katsudō dantai ni taisuru kitei* 「課外活動団体に関する規程」 which actually means in English 'rules concerning extra-curricular activities', suggests a relatively stringent administrative framework concerning the existence of student organizations. Although the regulations do not address student activism or the expression of political opinions, they are nonetheless relevant to the broader question of political activity on campus. In particular, the provisions governing the recognition of student organizations and their access to university facilities may indirectly affect the ability of students to organize events and engage in political activities broadly.

First, as it is cited in the document regarding the existence of student organizations, Tōkyō University accepts the existence of informal organizations as well but, if the students wish to have access to university's spaces or obtain official support from the university administration, they need to officially notify their student organization to the university administration. The moment the organization is officially notified and has completely filled out the notification process to the university, then it is eligible to use designated university spaces for extra-curricular activities.

「本学の課外活動施設*1（体育施設を除く。）を利用又は支援*2を希望する課外活動団体は、本学の学生3名以上の責任者（うち1名は責任代表者）及び顧問教員を定め、所定の様式により本部学生支援課長に届け出るものとする」¹⁵³。

Moreover, not only do the associations need to be officially registered to have access to university's public spaces like meeting halls or designated spaces for student organizations, but it is also necessary for them to have a reliable, registered leadership. The registration procedure requires at least three student officers and a faculty advisor.

Access to university spaces and organizational resources is mediated through administrative procedures which requires formal requests, though this does not necessarily mean that the Tōdai administration requires all of its organizations to be officially registered; in fact, the notification system does not constitute an evaluation of the group's activity.

Eventually the distinction is clear, the Tōdai administration avoids formally to judge the content or objectives of student organizations, but access to physical spaces remains under the strict surveillance and approval of the university administration. As a result, collective student activity is incorporated into a framework of institutional oversight without being explicitly subjected to systematic ideological approval.

On the other hand, if students or professors need to have access to Yasuda Auditorium for large scale events, it is necessary to go through a strict examination process

¹⁵³ The University of Tōkyō, “kagai katsudō dantai nitai suru kitei”, [課外活動団体に関する規程], (Rules Concerning Extra Curricular Activities), art. 3. https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/gen01/reiki_int/reiki_honbun/u0740863001.html (7th June 2026).

使用許可に際しては、全学会議への附議等を含む審査がありますので、企画書を用意の上、使用希望日の1年6か月前から4か月前までの間に、担当窓口において職員と相談・協議してください¹⁵⁴。

If student organizations or professors have the necessity to use the Yasuda Auditorium for large scale events, the authorization is subjected to a formal approval process that has to be submitted prior to the event in question, from eighteen to four months prior to the designated event. Applicants are required to submit a detailed project to the university administration, once the project is formally approved, formal applicants are able to use the Yasuda Auditorium.

Given the symbolic significance of the Auditorium during the 1968-1969 University of Tōkyō struggle, the contemporary regulatory system is particularly noteworthy. A space that once was occupied by student activists in defiance of university authorities is now governed through formal administrative procedures and institutional approval mechanisms.

On the other hand, the system for recognizing student organizations at Kyōto University is slightly different compared to the system at Tōkyō University. The administration at Kyōdai adopts a stricter system for the organization and regulations of student organizations. Students who wish for their organization to be officially recognized by the university administration must undergo through a strict evaluative process that holds various sessions of meetings with different supervisors and the evidence of sustained activity over the course of a defined period. Only the organizations that are able to meet these criteria are granted access to university facilities and institutional support.

This framework implies that student activism is tolerated but at the same time is heavily structured through institutional criteria that determine eligibility for recognition. The system adopted at Kyōdai introduces a more distinctive and clear analysis for non-recognized groups and those who are integrated into the university's administrative infrastructure.

¹⁵⁴ The University of Tōkyō, “todokede gakusei dantai, undōbu heno shien”, 「届け出学生団体・運動部への支援」, (Support for Registered Student Organizations and Athletic Teams), https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ja/students/clubs/h07_04.html, (7th June 2026).

As a result, student participation is mediated through procedures that combine supervision, evaluation and periodic renewal highlighting how even relatively autonomous universities like Kyōto University embed student life within an institutional regulated framework¹⁵⁵.

Both cases of Kyōdai and Tōdai symbolize how contemporary Japanese universities seek to balance student autonomy with institutional oversight. These frameworks, however, do not exactly prohibit political activity but they shape the conditions under which collective framework student activism can take place. In this sense, this framework reflects the broader transformation of Japanese student activism since the late 1960s, as forms of participation that were once associated with confrontation and direct action have increasingly been incorporated into structured institutional frameworks.

3.2.2 Contemporary Student Activism in Japan: The Case of pro-Palestinian Mobilizations at Tōkyō University and Kyōto University

As a result of the norms and regulations established in two of the most prestigious universities in Japan, the concept of activism portrayed by students can change as well. As analyzed in the first chapter, the Tōkyō University struggle represented a turning point in the relationship between student movements and university authorities. During this period, student activists occupied symbolic university spaces such as Yasuda Auditorium, disrupted lectures and openly challenged institutional governance, transforming the campus into a central arena of political consideration.

As previously analyzed, the contemporary administrative systems adopted by universities such as Tōdai and Kyōdai differ substantially from the rules that once existed during the 1960s. Through the regulation and recognition of certain student organizations, access to campus facilities and the organization of events, university administrations have slowly incorporated student organizations into institutional frameworks; this means that political activism is not remotely prohibited on campus but it may be subjected to rules and conditions.

Consequently, the relationship between activism and university authority has become less antagonistic and more structured through mechanisms of negotiations and oversight. Though student activists still continue to engage both in domestic and international issues, their activities

¹⁵⁵ The University of Kyōto, “zengaku kōnin dantai nitsuite”, 「全学公認団体について」, (Regarding the Process of Registration for Student Organizations), <https://www.kyoto-u.ac.jp/ja/education-campus/support/circle/public> (7th June 2026)

are conducted within a framework that emphasizes compliance rather than direct confrontation with university governance.

In this sense, recent pro-Palestinian mobilizations illustrate how student activism in contemporary Japan has adapted to an institutional environment shaped by the historical experiences and conflict of the late 1960s. As previously analyzed, pro-Palestinian mobilizations began in American universities in 2024 and soon their legacy expanded overseas, reaching Japan in April 2024 as well. Compared to the wave of mobilizations that first started in the United States of America, the numbers in Japan were relatively smaller; however, this does not mean that the mobilization could not help the students raise their voices in support of the on-going violation of human rights that people in Gaza are currently facing. In fact, the student protests in Japan were motivated by a desire of peace, but at the same time they represent a significant shift in the perception of student activism.

Though university administration deals differently with student activism both in Japan and in America, Japanese students decided to join the mobilization and support Columbia university as well.

The mobilization in Japan began in April 2024 and spread more broadly all over the country, both in major and minor universities. Specifically analyzing the case of the Tōkyō University, several activities have been organized by student activists such as sit ins, petitions, campaign and educational meetings regarding the Israeli-Palestine conflict, in order to educate students who might not be familiar with the conflict. Following the path of American universities, sit ins and solidarity camps have been organized in the Komaba campus of the University of Tōkyō as well. According to students who decided to take part in the solidarity camps, they have been inspired by other student activists in America; following the path they decided to set circa fifty tents in the campus and stay overnight in the campus, as the university administration expressed that camping itself should not constitute an issue¹⁵⁶. Several activities have been organized by the students who took part in the encampments at Tōdai University, as the encampment was not only meant to represent a mobilization but to the students there it represented a safe place for sharing their thoughts and ideas regarding the conflict in Gaza; in fact, along with the encampment the student activists have organized a ‘die-in’ set in which the students lay on the ground representing all the lives that were lost during the conflict and a ‘reading book session’, where student activists decided

¹⁵⁶ Kunimoto Ai, “More Japan University Students Join Protests Against Israel Invasion of Gaza”, *The Mainichi*, May 18th, 2024, <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20240517/p2a/00m/0na/030000c> (8th of June 2026).

to raise awareness regarding the conflict through lectures and meetings¹⁵⁷. As a result, the students and the people who took part in the encampment raised circa 4,000 dollars to provide direct support to the affected civilians in Gaza¹⁵⁸.



[Fig. 5] 東大生「パレスチナ連帯キャンパス」 in

“Arab News”, 2024, https://www.arabnews.jp/article/japan/article_118456/ (8th June 2026).

During the encampments organized by the students at Tōdai, the students have questioned themselves and what they would wish for the university administration to stand for. In fact, on May 6th, 2024, one of the most active student organizations concerning the Palestinian issue, has presented a series of demands to the Tōdai administration; the demands are very clear although they differ from the ones that the students at Columbia University have advocated for. In fact, compared to the majority of American universities where the call for divestments is much stronger, Japanese universities are not heavily supported by private funds. However, former Prime Minister

¹⁵⁷ WATANABE Shiena 渡邊詩恵奈, ‘Tōdai to Gaza 『zenpen』 Daigaku ha Paresuchina mondai to dou mukiauka’ 「東大とガザ・前編・大学はパレスチナ問題とどう向き合うか」 (How Should Tōkyō University Deal with the Palestinian Conflict?), 15th February 2025, https://www.todaishimbun.org/palestine1_20250215/ (8th of June 2026).

¹⁵⁸ CHANG Sena, “How Tōkyō’s Young Activists are Leading Japan’s Pro-Palestine Movement”, *The Diplomat*, 30th July 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/07/how-tokyos-young-activists-are-leading-japans-pro-palestine-movement/>, (9th of June 2026).

Shinzō Abe pursued a policy that encouraged the participation of Japanese universities research institutions in defense-related technological research and development¹⁵⁹.

On May 6th, the student group ‘UT4Palestine’ submitted a set of demands to the Tōdai administration calling on the institution to take a clear position concerning the war in Gaza. The document submitted urged the university to officially recognize Israel’s actions against the people of Palestine as genocide under the control of international law and to publicly support an immediate ceasefire. Moreover, the document refused the interpretations that equate criticism of Israel’s policies with antisemitism and challenged the narrative that portray Palestine resistance primarily as a religious conflict. The activists argued that the University of Tōkyō as a leading institution committed to critical thinking and human rights has a major responsibility to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. On the other hand, connected to funds and investments, the activists call for a precise and greater transparency towards university’s investments, partnerships and relationship with companies linked to Israel’s military sector or to the broader military-industrial complex supporting Israeli military operations. In this document the most important part concerns Tōdai relationships with Israel’s academic institutions, including exchange programs and research collaborations. According to the activists, the three major universities in Israel have contributed during the years to the maintenance of structures of occupation and military domination; according to the, Tōdai should not engage in any sort of collaboration with these institutions as it would be considered as unethical and unacceptable as academic institution.

The last interesting point claimed by the activists concerns the comparison of Tōdai immediate response to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022. The activists have pointed out how Tōdai administration had immediately reacted to the invasion by condemning Russia’s actions towards the Ukrainian population, while remaining silent on the situation in Gaza. This evidence was perceived as a double standard that should not happen during humanitarian crises. Eventually, the set of demands was also a call out to the students and the administration at Tōdai to take a moment to reflect on the state of the world and show more empathy towards the people of Palestine.

Formally, the deadline for a reply from the Tōdai administration was set by the student activists on May 15th, but there is no clear evidence of a formal reply by the university administration addressing the demands issued by the student activists. Concerning this topic, on May 16th students have organized a mobilization outside the principal entrance of Komaba campus, where circa 500 students have participated in the mobilization. During the mobilizations, the student activists have

¹⁵⁹ Suvendrini KAKUCHI, ‘‘Gaza War Sparks Unprecedented, Sustained Campus Protests’’, *University World News*, 21ST May, 2024, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20240521182242886> (8th of June 2026).

addressed how the Tōdai administration did not formally responded to the demands set by the students¹⁶⁰.

At the same time, encampments and mobilization were being held at Kyōto University; as their peers at Tōdai, pro-Palestinians activists in Kyōdai have submitted a series of demands to the university administration, asking to publicly condemn violence against Palestinian people in Gaza. The group formally called ‘Kyōto University Association in Solidarity with the Palestinian People’ who has been active since 2019, has called out on the Kyōdai administration to sever its academic ties and any kind of relationship that has indirectly or directly contributed to the Israeli military operations on Palestinian people. Furthermore, as the group has been focused since 2019 on organizing activities such as forums and meetings concerning the understanding of the on-going conflict, they encourage the University of Kyōto to establish educational spaces to foster the comprehension of the conflict¹⁶¹. According to the students, the university as an educational institution has a moral obligation to acknowledge the genocide and stand with the oppressed people of Palestine.

¹⁶⁰ “*Komanba de Paresuchina rentai puotesuto Tōdai no gakusei nado 500nin chikaku*”, 「駒場でパレスチナ連隊プロテスト東大のが癿 500 人近く」 (Almost 500 students, including students from Tōdai have taken part into the protest held in Komanba in support of Palestine), 1st June 2024, https://www.todaishimbun.org/palestine_20240601/ (8th of June 2026).

¹⁶¹ Riyaz UL KHALIQ, “Japanese Student Demand to end Military Research with Israel”, *Andalou Agency*, 15th May 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/japanese-students-demand-end-to-military-research-with-israel/3219958> , (8th of June 2026).



[Fig. 6] 京大学生グループが要望書大学にガザ支援求め in

“Arab News”, 2024, https://www.arabnews.jp/article/japan/article_119387/ (8th June 2026)

To this day, there has been no formal message addressed from the University of Kyōto condemning the genocide in Gaza, unlike other universities across the world.

However, student organizations in Kyōdai continue to stay active and organizing events in support of the people in Gaza¹⁶².

The pro-Palestinian mobilizations in Japanese universities show how student activism has not entirely disappeared from university spaces. Instead, it has evolved both in response to the institutional transformation that happened with the 2004 reform and to the institutional changes occurred following the 1960s conflicts. Most contemporary activists do not challenge authorities

¹⁶² The students have an active account on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/kuvasp/>) which still to this day continues to post information regarding their meetings and seminars.

through confrontational tactics that once characterized student activism, instead they continue to perceive university as a fundamental space for political activities and social responsibility.

The case of Tōdai and Kyōdai show that students remain willing to mobilize around international issues and still demanding ethical accountability from their universities. At the same time, limited responses provided by their universities show the constraints faced by contemporary student movements within extremely regulated educational frameworks. Nevertheless, these mobilizations show how student activism in Japan is still used as a form of fostering public debate, raising awareness and redefining the relationship between university administration, students and political responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to examine how student activism has changed after the intense cycle of protests between 1968 and 1969 and whether it can be considered to have disappeared after the failure of New Left and the spiral of violence that characterized the final phase of the movement. Through an historical analysis, this thesis has shown how most common narratives describing how Japanese student activism has disappeared and how Japanese student are pictured as politically apathetic only partially reflects reality.

The events occurred between 1968 and 1969 inevitably marked a turning point for Japanese student activism; the occupation of university campuses, the emergence of student organizations and the consequent radicalization of New Left sects transformed universities into spaces of intense political conflict. The internal fragmentation of the movement, the increasing use of violence and the absence of long-term political goals contributed to the decline of the Japanese New Left and student activism. Moreover, the intense criminalization of student activists that participated in the Tōdai struggle and the violent dynamics that erupted following the revelation of the internal purge committed in 1972 by the members of *Rengō-sekigun*, as a consequence student activism and the Japanese New Left slowly lost the central position that it had once occupied within Japanese politics in the late 1960s.

Nevertheless, the decline of the Japanese New Left did not correspond with the disappearing of student activism, instead activists progressively adapted to changes occurring in the society and especially in their universities. On this matter, particular attention has been devoted to the 2004 corporatization reform of Japanese universities, that transformed universities in semi-autonomous corporations. The reform introduced a system of internal evaluation and market-oriented principles that inevitably altered the role of Japanese universities in the Japanese society. Within the framework of the reform, the students began to be perceived as consumers of education and future human capital, while universities were prioritizing efficiency, institutional reputation and productivity. With this reform, student activism on campuses was never prohibited although it came to be perceived as a relatively small threat to the campus and administration well-being. These transformations began to create an environment in which activism became less visible and, in some cases, even discouraged although academic spaces are supposed to be a place where students are encouraged to develop their critical thinking skills.

At the same time, the cases taken into examination throughout this thesis explain how the university campus is perceived by the students as a place where political dissent still holds a significant role. The examined cases at Kyōto University such as the controversies within the framework of the *tatekanban* and the intense defense by the students of the Yoshida dorm in Kyōto, represents the conflicts concerning university administrations, student governance and public spaces are still present and still hold a severe position. In this sense, student activism has evolved along the evolution of university administration and became a more controlled, institutionalized and less confrontational compared to last decades' student activism.

Furthermore, the analyzed case of SEALDs allows us to understand how student activists further dissociated themselves from violent political practices that were once associated with New Left student protests. As one of the group's aims was the normalization of student activism, through intelligent use of social media outlets, close relationships with academic spaces, they have been able to demonstrate how student activism could still have an appeal and be a resource for people who have never been involved in political practices. Although the group lived only for a very short period, their legacy has contributed to reshaping the ways in which student activism was perceived, highlighting the importance of participation in politics and, moreover, the value of new forms of political participation in a new digital age. On this matter, online participation in political movements has shown how offline participation cannot be substituted, although it can definitely create a bridge for people who have never been involved in political participation, as it can be a useful tool to spread awareness related to a certain political and social topic.

On this matter, the final and most important case study of this thesis shows how pro-Palestinian mobilizations in 2024 have spread across the world also thanks to the existence of social media outlets. The analysis furthermore provides a fundamental highlight of how universities still remain a place for students to exercise their political governance. In this section, the universities in Japan taken into consideration have been the Tōkyō University and Kyōto University. Although, in terms of numbers, the mobilization has been way smaller compared to the ones in the United States of America, the protests and the events organized by the organizations demonstrated how students still today care deeply about global political issues. On this matter, activists operated differently than activists during last century, expressing their dissent towards university through petitions, educational meetings and encampments.

The findings of this thesis suggest that the question should not be whether student activism disappeared after its peak during last century but more how it has evolved through time and in response to what events. Forms of collective action that once dominated last century's activism

slowly disappeared yet political engagement among students continues to be relevant; it shows how activism still exists through digital changes and transformations within the university administration. Contemporary activism in Japan, for the most part except some exceptions, is less confrontational but still remains capable of mobilizing students questioning their position towards political and social issues. This thesis shows how contemporary student activism in Japan has not disappeared after the failure of student protests in 1968 and the following defeat of the Japanese New Left; rather it should be understood as an adaptation and transformation. The mass decline of radical student movements did not mark the end of contemporary student activism instead it evolved alongside natural broader changes in Japanese society and, most importantly, higher education. This demonstrates the capacity of activism to adapt in response to changes and historical circumstances. Moreover, if students in 1968 who occupied Yasuda Auditorium symbolize the peak of student activism during 1968, the pro-Palestinian encampments in 2024 demonstrates how students still perceive university campuses as a place for political negotiation, despite all the different challenges and changes that they are facing.

On the matter of limitations concerning this research, although exhaustive research has been provided concerning the Tōdai struggle, Zenkyōtō, *Rengō-sekigun* and more broadly concerning past decade student activism, pro-Palestinian Japanese student movement remains too contemporary as it has begun almost two years ago and is still active today. Hence, it remains extremely difficult to gather academic resources concerning the topic as it is a phenomenon that is still perceived as new and in development. Therefore, it is also hard to declare what type of impact it has on contemporary Japanese society.

To have a more complete perspective from the inside of the movement, attempts were made to contact the student activists from Tōdai and Kyōdai to collect additional data. However, no response was received, hence limiting the inclusion of their views in the data collection. In the future, the academic community will be able to portray more clearly what type of impact this movement has had in within the Japanese society.

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[Fig.1] *What to know when you're arrested* in ‘救援連絡センター’, <https://kyuen.jp/?p=2010> 2025, (24th April 2026).

[Fig. 2] *2015 年 8 月 @ 百万遍 (提供ひろせけえな)* in ‘面白く変人でもない京大’
<https://sites.google.com/view/tatekan-yoshidaryo/tatekan> (27th May 2026)

[Fig. 3] *Photo representing the dorm's entrance* in ‘京大吉田寮公式サイ’
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[Fig. 4] *In Focus: the first 24 hours of the ‘Gaza solidarity encampment’*, in ‘Columbia Spectator’, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/main/2024/04/18/in-focus-the-first-24-hours-of-the-gaza-solidarity-encampment/>, (5th June 2026).

[Fig.5] 東大生「パレスチナ連帯キャンパス」 in ‘Arab News’, 2024,
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[Fig. 6] 京大学生グループが要望書大学にガザ支援求め in ‘Arab News’, 2024,
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Dichiarazione del ricorso a strumenti di Intelligenza Artificiale (IA)

Io/La sottoscritto/a **Francesca Ciampa**, matricola numero **903017**, iscritto/a presso Ca' Foscari al corso di Laurea magistrale in *Lingue e Civiltà dell'Asia e dell'Africa Mediterranea*, autore/autrice della tesi di laurea *Between Memory and Mobilization: Political Trauma and the Prospects of Contemporary Japanese Activism*, relatore/relatrice **Utsumi Hirofumi**, consapevole delle sanzioni previste dall'art. 76 del Testo unico, D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n.445, e della decadenza dei benefici prevista dall'art. 75 del medesimo Testo unico in caso di dichiarazioni false o mendaci, sotto la propria personale responsabilità ai sensi degli artt. 46 e 47 del D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n. 445,

DICHIARA

- ☒ di NON aver fatto ricorso a tecnologie di intelligenza artificiale generativa per supportare vari aspetti della ricerca e della scrittura del suo elaborato finale/della sua tesi di laurea;
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- *indicare il nome dello strumento (es. "ChatGPT" se applicazione o "GPT" se modello) con riferimento alla versione specifica (ad esempio, "ChatGPT-4, versione rilasciata a marzo 2024");*
 - *se sono stati utilizzati più strumenti, specificare ciascuno di essi indicandone nome e versione;*
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 - ☐ *supporto alla scrittura automatica di frasi;*
 - ☐ *produzione di immagini illustrative per integrare la parte metodologica;*
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 - *indicare le sezioni/i capitoli interessate/interessati;*
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