The Struggle Against Hate Groups in Japan: The Invisible Civil Society, Leftist Elites and Anti-Racism Groups

Daiki SHIBUICHI*

The purpose of this article is three-fold: firstly, it explains how anti-racism groups, which oppose the overtly xenophobic and racist movements of Zaitokukai and similar hate groups, have emerged and developed. Secondly, it uses the example of anti-racism groups to illustrate how a meaningful advocacy movement can emerge in Japan from networks of ‘invisible civil society’. Thirdly, it shows how ‘leftist elites’ contribute to the advocacy movement by supplementing and enhancing resources provided by the invisible civil society. It thus argues that in Japan, to some extent, networks of the invisible civil society and the leftist elites have been taking over the role played by large and powerful advocacy groups in Western societies.

Keywords: anti-racism groups; advocacy movement; invisible civil society; leftist elites; Japan

1. Introduction

Since late 2006, Japanese society has seen an emergence of overtly xenophobic and racist movements for the first time in the postwar period. A nationwide hate group, the Civil Association Against Privileges for Resident Koreans (Zainichitokken o Yurusanai Shimin no Kai, hereinafter Zaitokukai), and smaller but similar groups stage demonstrations and protests that showcase hate speech against minorities. While the hate groups have consistently rejected physically violent tactics, their intimidating and ugly hate speech has disgusted society at large and, above all, shocked and dismayed minorities.

Anti-racism groups1 began to emerge in 2009 in an effort to counter surging hate groups. When facing off against xenophobic and racist demonstrations and protests, members of anti-racism groups express anger against hate groups and solidarity with the minorities targeted by hate groups. Moreover, anti-racism groups have been collaborating with concerned legislators, who drafted a bill prohibiting racial and ethnic discrimination and submitted it to Parliament in mid-2015.

While there is already a dozen of studies on hate groups in Japan,2 there are hardly any studies of the anti-racism groups and their movement.3 In an attempt to fill the void, this article addresses the questions of the identity of anti-racism groups and how they came to form a countermovement.

Daiki SHIBUICHI is Assistant Professor at Centennial College, Hong Kong and can be reached by e-mail at d.shibuichi@centennialcollege.hku.hk.

* He wishes to thank Fannie Wang, Iris Mielonen and Bill Moriarty for their valuable comments.

1 Anti-racism groups in this study are different from civil rights groups in, for example, US, which ‘typically have been organized in direct response to hate crimes against their communities and a perceived systemic bias against victims’ (Maroney 1998). Most of the members of anti-racism groups in Japan seem to be ethnic Japanese, which is the majority of society. However, detailed inter-society comparison of anti-racism groups and movements is not within the scope of this study.

2 For example, see the studies by Fackler (2010), Morris-Suzuki (2013), Penney (2013), Yamaguchi (2013) and the present writer (Shibuichi 2015). In Japanese, Yasuda (2012) and Higuchi (2012) each have several publications on hate groups.

3 A collection of interim reports on the anti-racism movement by four Japanese sociologists was uploaded to the Internet in August 2015 (Akedo et al. 2015).
In analyzing anti-racism groups in Japan and their movement, this article intends to apply theories of both civil society and social movements because they explain advocacy and contentious politics. Studies on civil society posit that a vibrant civil society produces social capital with which liberal democracy flourishes. In contrast, Pekkanen (2004) argues that Japan’s civil society is weak in the sense that it lacks large and powerful advocacy groups. He states that Japan’s weak civil society produces social capital without advocacy. In a similar vein, Avenell (2009) points out that since the 1970s Japanese mainstream civic groups have demonized contentious politics. Avenell states that Japan’s civil society has instead focused on social welfare, local issues and culture while intimately engaging with the State and the market.

However, Steinhoff (2015) refutes Pekkanen by suggesting that Japan possesses a ‘vibrant but invisible civil society’ that simultaneously produces advocacy and social capital. Steinhoff explains as follows:

(A generation of students which share experiences of participating in Japan’s New Left movement of the 1960s and 1970s)...had acquired practical knowledge and skills such as how to study issues and form positions, how to organize public meetings and demonstrations, how to publicize events, and how to produce and distribute alternative media using available low cost technologies. Many people with this background, who wanted to continue political activity...continued to meet together in small organizations and build the networks that constitute the invisible civil society.

In this context, Avenell’s observation that contemporary Japan’s mainstream civil society shuns contentious politics is congruent with Steinhoff’s theory. According to Steinhoff, the invisible civil society has stayed largely invisible, i.e. remained an alternative civil society, ‘because of their organizational style, the causes they advocate, and the continuing stigma of their association with the New Left’. This seems to suggest that there is an unintended division of labor between mainstream civil society, which distances itself from political advocacy, and the invisible civil society that actively pursues it.

This article argues that the emergence of anti-racism groups and the development of the corresponding countermovement can be plausibly explained by Steinhoff’s theory. Anti-racism groups apparently did indeed emerge from networks of the invisible civil society. This article also suggests that, beginning in around 2013, the anti-racism movement began to fully utilize resources from some established social elites in addition to resources it had tapped from the invisible civil society. These concepts as well as how anti-racism groups emerged and formed the movement will be explained in the following sections.

2. Advocacy Movements in Japan and the Invisible Civil Society

Even though Western mass media outlets traditionally depict Japanese society as passive and conformist, advocacy movements and contentious politics have always existed in postwar Japan. Most notably, New Left movements in the 1960s and 1970s had large-scale and violent collisions with the Japanese government over issues such as the Japan–US military alliance and the Self-Defense Forces. In addition to these issues, the Japanese leftist and rightist camps have skirmished over ideological issues such as the State authorization system for school textbooks, the publication and dissemination of rightist or revisionist school textbooks and the matter of ‘comfort women’, among others.

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4 The New Left is viewed very negatively in Japan, as the New Left movement of the 1960s later fragmented into several violent revolutionary movements, including the notorious United Red Army and the Japanese Red Army.
However, as Pekkanen holds, large-scale advocacy groups with professional staff have been largely absent from contentious politics in postwar Japan. Japan has had powerful leftist political parties, but advocacy groups in the style of the American Civil Liberties Union or the Anti-Defamation League have not been common. Since the New Left student groups radicalized and fragmented in the 1970s, the large, powerful and persisting actors in Japan’s ideological clashes seem to have possessed the characteristics of interest groups rather than of advocacy groups. Various trade unions in the leftist camp—most notably the combative Japan Teachers’ Union and its affiliated unions—and the Japan Association of Bereaved Families or the Military Pension Federation in the rightist camp are examples of these groups.

So how does advocacy emerge from Japan’s civil society? As stated before, Steinhoff answered this question by explaining how the invisible civil society works. Steinhoff’s theory elucidates the capability and potential of the small civic groups that constitute the invisible civil society from which advocacy emerges. Indeed, participation by numerous small civic groups—various rights, minority, culture, education and religious groups and tiny independent unions, etc.—have been observed in Japan’s left-right clashes. For example, the powerful countermovement mobilized against the movement to publish and disseminate revisionist school textbooks was composed of a coalition of numerous small leftist civic groups, including the New Left sect Revolutionary Laborers’ Association (Kakumeiteki Rōdōsha Kyokai or Kakurōkyo) (Shibuichi 2008).

3. The Role of Leftist Elites in Advocacy Movements in Japan

While fully concurring with Steinhoff, this article intends to add another factor by arguing that the participation of individuals with high capability and abundant resources, i.e. elites, has enhanced the social clout of leftist advocacy movements in Japan. Advocacy against hate speech is no exception, and this article uses this advocacy as a case to explain how leftist elites function. According to resource mobilization theory, in order to mobilize participants and achieve its goal, a social movement acquires resources such as money, publicity, legitimacy, networks and leadership, which are usually possessed by, or attributes of, social elites.

This article defines leftist elites in Japan as leftist writers, artists, journalists, academics and activists who have gained fame and influence chiefly through their achievements. It largely overlap with the existing notion of ‘progressive intellectuals’ or ‘progressive artists’ (Shinpoteki chishikijin 進歩的知識人 or Shinpoteki bunkajin 進歩的文化人) in Japan. But this article uses the term ‘leftist elites’ because it wishes to emphasize that they are not simply intellectuals or artists.

So who actually gives them publicity and thus influence? Mainstream leftist mass media outlets do—especially significant being the role played by media institutions such as the Asahi Shimbun and its affiliated magazines, the Mainichi Shimbun, some left-leaning television news programs, weekly Shūkan Kinyōbi and the monthly Sekai—by frequently interviewing them, soliciting their opinions and inviting them as guest speakers. This process turns the candidates into authoritative celebrities—leftist elites—whose private lives are followed by gossip magazines and tabloids.

Leftist elites contribute to leftist advocacy movements through two avenues: firstly, their celebrity or near-celebrity status allows leftist elites to provide legitimacy and name recognition to the advocacy movements with which they collaborate. By definition, the invisible civil society is unable to do that. Secondly, the leftist elites have extensive networks, so they are not functioning merely as individuals. The participation of leftist elites enables advocacy movements to tap resources such as the networks, money and membership of groups affiliated with leftist elites. Some leftist elites have links
with multiple civic groups and some have positions as representatives or cadres of nationwide interest groups. The leftist elites’ participation can enable advocacy movements to substantially enhance the relatively meager resources they can tap from the invisible civil society.

4. The Struggle Against Hate Groups

The following shows how the anti-racism groups and the corresponding countermovement emerged from the invisible civil society and developed. Based on available materials, significant events held by hate groups and opposing anti-racism groups are catalogued chronologically.

4.1. The Inception of the Countermovement: The Noriko Calderon Incident

According to a senior member of the hate group Zaitokukai, it was on 11 April 2009 in the city of Warabi during the ‘Noriko Calderon incident’ that they faced a counterdemonstration for the first time (Higuchi 2012). Noriko Calderon was a Filipina junior high school student who had been permitted to stay in Japan even though she did not have proper travel documents. In the incident, Zaitokukai and similar hate groups demonstrated in the street with some 90 participants, denouncing Noriko and her family as ‘illegal Filipinos’. They marched through the city of Warabi, including the area around the junior high school attended by the girl (Nikkan Berita 2009a). The group’s senior member stated that counterdemonstration participants angrily shouted ‘These are racist groups!’ and burned the group’s banner while marching in parallel with the hate groups (Higuchi 2012).

The group that organized the counterdemonstration—which had some 40 participants—was the Association to Oppose Xenophobic Demonstrations (Gaikokujin Haijodemo ni Hantaisurukai) (2009). According to its website, two days before the hate groups held their demonstration, concerned volunteers scrambled to set up the group. They spread a message by email to the effect that ‘An unbelievably heinous demonstration is going to be held in the city of Warabi’.

However, the organizers lamented on the website that their counterdemonstration was ‘unsatisfactory because an unexpected situation emerged’. One of the participants was arrested by the police for seizing Zaitokukai’s banner, and then another was arrested in front of the local police station when he and others protested against the first arrest. The organizers regretted that those incidents diverted participants away from their march against hate groups.

Judging from the extraordinarily harsh police response, it is possible that those arrested were affiliated with the New Left. The police detained them for 20 days—the legally allowed maximum—instead of just issuing a warning and immediately releasing them. Some volunteers did indeed seem to be seasoned activists because they responded to the arrests by immediately setting up a support group: the Rescue Group of the Counteraction against Xenophobic Demonstrations (Gaikokujin Oidashi Demo Hantaikōdo Kyuenkai). On their website (2009), the support group’s organizers blamed the police for letting their security intelligence section—not the ordinary criminal police—interrogate those arrested. When the police released the two members, the organizers expressed gratitude for help offered by some 10 lawyers, as well as for donations of 900,000 Japanese Yen (approximately 7,500 US dollars).

Thus, the Noriko Calderon incident of April 2009 effectively triggered the emergence of the countermovement. After the incident, participants in the counterdemonstration in the city of Warabi shared their experience of dealing with Zaitokukai and similar hate groups with the invisible civil society via their nationwide civic networks. According to the Nikkan Berita, a leftist alternative online newspaper, concerned civic groups organized four notable anti-racism events held in 2009 following
the Noriko Calderon incident: in the cities of Nagoya (in May), Kyoto (in June) and Osaka and Fukuoka (in July) (Nikkan Berita 2009b).

In anti-racism events held in the cities of Kyoto and in Fukuoka, anti-racism groups had a direct face-off against Zaitokukai and similar groups. In Kyoto, anti-racism groups conducted a counterdemonstration—with some 250 participants, according to the organizers—against an event organized by Zaitokukai. Some participants used fireworks when protesting against hate groups (Emergency Action 6.13 Against Xenophobia 2009a). The event garnered support from 75 civic groups, including 17 tiny labor unions, 11 anti-war groups, 5 religious groups, 7 minority support groups and 13 other rights groups such as those supporting precarious workers, the disabled and the aged. A group that opposes Tsukurukai (a rightist group that publishes revisionist school textbooks) and a group that advocates for ‘comfort women’ also signed up (Emergency Action 6.13 Against Xenophobia 2009b). Zaitokukai leader Sakurai Makoto (2009b) mentioned the counterdemonstration in his blog. Sakurai blamed obstruction by opposing protesters and he sourly complained that the opponents threw ‘some kind of explosives’ at them. In the meantime, their face-off in the city of Fukuoka, where the Zaitokukai side mobilized some 70 participants for their march, was more peaceful. According to Sakurai (2009b), 28 counter-protesters were quietly waiting along the route with banners unfurled.

In August 2009, the Nikkan Berita announced that a new group, the Association to Oppose Hate Speech (Heito Spēchi ni Hantaisuru Kai), was planning to hold a meeting in Tokyo (Nikkan Berita 2009b). This association’s website states that concerned volunteers, who had been discussing how to counter hate speech and hate groups since the Noriko Calderon incident, established the group (Association to Oppose Hate Speech 2009). The association has been active since then. Its main activity seems to be holding seminars and meetings in opposition to local governments terminating subsidies to schools for resident North Koreans. Since their inception, Zaitokukai and other hate groups have vehemently protested against such subsidies.

Zaitokukai’s infamous December 2009 protests against a resident North Korean kindergarten/elementary school in the city of Kyoto and its demonstrations in January 2010 in the Ikebukuro area of Tokyo to crush an attempt by local Chinese to build a new Chinatown gained the hate groups further notoriety. In late March 2010, lawyers and academics organized a large demonstration in the city of Kyoto to protest against harassment of the North Korean kindergarten/elementary school by Zaitokukai. According to the organizers, some 900 people participated in the event (Kyoto Shimbun Web News 2010) and it garnered support from more than 200 civic groups (Kusanone Tsūshin no Kokorozashi o Tsuide 2010a). After the meeting, participants marched in the city of Kyoto. A handful of participants skirmished with Zaitokukai members who were holding a counterdemonstration, but no one was arrested (Kusanone Tsūshin no Kokorozashi o Tsuide 2010b).

In April 2010, over a dozen Zaitokukai members barged into a local branch of the Japan Teachers’ Union in Tokushima Prefecture. They screamed slogans over loudspeakers, protesting the branch’s donation to a local resident Korean school. The members were later arrested and charged with ‘forcible obstruction of business’; six were subsequently given suspended sentences. Zaitokukai, which had often staged protests against the Japan Teachers’ Union, apparently earned the enmity of unionists in non-education fields this time. In May 2010, in support of the Tokushima Prefecture branch of the Japan Teachers’ Union, regional telecommunications and railroad unions sent their delegates to a large-scale demonstration held in the city of Osaka, the major purpose of which was to oppose xenophobia and to protest discrimination against resident Koreans (Shibano Sadao Current Affairs Research 2010).
In January 2011, a Zaitokukai member staged a protest at a museum of the Burakumin minority in the city of Nara; the museum was featuring a special exhibition on the issue of Korean ‘comfort women’. This member hurled expletives against the Burakumin minority and he was later sued and fined for defamation. This act would have antagonized the Burakumin minority, which has historically suffered from caste discrimination in Japan. Moreover, Zaitokukai and similar hate groups have employed hate speech against Okinawan anti-war and anti-military base activists (Social Democratic Party Official Website 2014).

All in all, in 2010, 2011 and 2012, anti-racism groups employed moderate tactics. They organized meetings, seminars, demonstrations and protests, but they did not seem to be that keen on holding events that directly confronted hate groups in the street. This can be confirmed by Sakurai Makoto’s blog. The numbers of counter-protesters he noted in events during this period ranged from a handful, if any, to a maximum of 30. Sakurai did mention attempts by counter-protesters to lay hands on Zaitokukai members, along with one use of pepper spray, but such incidents seem to have been quite sporadic. However, this relatively quiet situation changed dramatically in early 2013.

4.2. Collisions in Shin-Okubo: The Dispute Flares Up

On 12 January 2013, Zaitokukai organized a march in the Shin-Okubo area of Tokyo for the first time. This is an area with many foreign-owned businesses, and part of it had become a de facto Koreatown. The narrow alleys there are lined with Korean restaurants and shops, including ones selling ‘Korean-wave’ related goods. According to Sakurai Makoto’s (2013a) blog, rounds of negotiations with the local police, who had been reluctant, finally persuaded them to let his Zaitokukai hold marches in the area.

This march held in January shocked and baffled ethnic and resident Korean business-owners. Moreover, it is alleged that after Zaitokukai ended the event, many participants held an unofficial ‘walkabout [Osanpo]’ in the area harassing and bullying individual shops and restaurants (Musashi-kosugi Gōdō Law Office 2014). Such an act was, of course, not approved by the police or by Zaitokukai, and Sakurai Makoto has denied that his comrades harassed shops and restaurants during this ‘walkabout’. Be that as it may, the ‘walkabout’ or reports of the ‘walkabout’ led to the emergence of a new type of anti-racism group, like the Corps to Bash Racists (Reishisuto o shibakitai) (Lite-ra 2014). In February, March, May, June and September of 2013, new anti-racism groups engaged in heated clashes with hate groups when hate groups held events in the Shin-Okubo area. The mainstream mass media of all stripes reported those clashes. Since October 2013, hate groups seem to have given up holding events in the Shin-Okubo area. As of mid-2015, anti-racism groups and hate groups still clash in other places, with dozens of volunteers on each side.

The Corps to Bash Racists (hereinafter ‘C.R.A.C’, after the acronym for Counter-Racist Action Collective, and the current name of the Corps to Bash Racists) was founded by Noma Yasumichi in response to the Zaitokukai event in Shin-Okubo in January 2013. Noma explained in media interviews that participants in his group’s activities initially acted as volunteer vigilantes to defend Korean restaurants and shops from harassment by hate groups. As the number of volunteers increased, they began to act collectively. When confronting members of hate groups, people mobilized by C.R.A.C use abusive language such as ‘Get lost, you national embarrassment, you are human scum, idiots and cockroaches. Die!’ They also do not hesitate to engage in physical contact with members of hate groups. Their tactics have resulted in jostling, grabbing and fighting with members of hate groups, which has led to frequent arrests by the police.
The flamboyant and aggressive Noma Yasumichi used to work as the deputy editor of a well-known music magazine and is now a freelance journalist and writer. He is also one of the leaders of the anti-nuclear energy movement that gained momentum after the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster of 2011. When asked about the tactics employed by his group, he answered that his group’s policy is to ‘abuse members of hate groups mercilessly’, because ‘anger over discrimination must be expressed frankly’. He hopes the hate groups will eventually become demoralized. According to Noma, it is nonsense to regard his group’s verbal abuse as reverse hate speech, since they are not discriminating against anyone (ibid).

In fact, some in the progressive leftist camp openly criticize C.R.A.C tactics. Those who object contend that, by using abusive language, Noma and his followers have degenerated into something similar to the very hate groups they oppose. A journalist from the Asahi Shimbun and another from Newsweek Japan, who separately interviewed Noma, were both in agreement with this view (Asahi Shimbun 2013 and Newsweek Japan 2014). Noma refuted that view, stating that ‘the elegant protests of leftist liberals do not resonate with the general public, even if they are theoretically correct’ (Lite-ra 2014). He also stated that he had actually participated in anti-racism protests since 2009, but ‘those events were organized by leftist activists who highlight anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism’, and ‘there are very few like me’ (ibid).

Despite the criticism, C.R.A.C has often been able to mobilize hundreds of participants—a maximum of around 600—when it holds counterdemonstrations against hate groups. However, Noma says that formal members of his group actually number only in the dozens. He states that his group recruits participants through internet publicity, and the numbers of volunteers have suddenly ballooned since March 2013 (ibid). For some participants, the fact that hate groups were holding marches in the well-known ethnic and resident Korean enclave must have been enough of a reason to act. It may also have had something to do with the ‘Korean Wave’, whose popularity was peaking in Japan at that time. The Shin-Okubo area, with many shops selling goods promoting South Korean pop singers and television stars, is apparently an important area for Korean Wave fans. In fact, Zaitokukai’s Sakurai Makoto (2013b) noted in his blog that after their demonstration in January, Korean Wave fans ‘rabidly protested’ against Zaitokukai through Twitter. According to Sakurai, fans spread ‘silly lies of violence and vandalism by Zaitokukai’. It is possible that some of these fans or people connected with them have participated in C.R.A.C-led counterdemonstrations.

Speaking of the rift between C.R.A.C volunteers and the mainstream of the leftist progressive camp, the aforementioned Association to Oppose Hate Speech also noted on its website that they were disturbed by the attitude displayed by the members of Noma’s group (Association to Oppose Hate Speech 2013a). Nevertheless, the Association once participated in a major event led by C.R.A.C: the Tokyo Anti-Discrimination March (Sabetsu Teppai Tokyo Daikōshin) on 22 September 2013. According to the organizers, this march attracted 3,000 participants (Independent Web Journal 2013). However, members of the Association clashed with C.R.A.C’s radical subgroup, the Men’s Corps (Otoko Gumi), during the event (Association to Oppose Hate Speech 2013b).

4.3. Norikoe Net and the Leftist Elites

Despite intergroup bickering, the first Tokyo Anti-Discrimination March in September 2013 proved to be a success, which indicated that the anti-racism movement was gaining traction. Three days after that event, the International Network to Overcome Hate Speech and Racism (Heitospūchi to Reishizumu o Norikoeru Kokusai Nettowaku, hereinafter Norikoe Net), was launched by 21 figures who collectively represent the group (International Network to Overcome Hate Speech and Racism
Norikoe Net is the first umbrella group in Japan specializing in anti-discrimination and anti-racism. Group representatives include the names of many members of the leftist elites, as well as that of a former Prime Minister (Murayama Tomiichi of the Social Democratic Party of Japan, or SDP) and a well-known right-wing uyoku activist. How those leftist elites brought resources into the anti-racism movement is elaborated in the following section.

According to the Norikoe Net website, the group regards itself as ‘Japan’s Civil Rights Movement aimed at achieving a society of co-existence’. The website states that the group engages in a wide range of activities, including ‘(1) studying the conditions of racism in Japan, (2) sharing information, (3) organizing and supporting counter-demonstrations, (4) establishing links with domestic and foreign groups, (5) suing racist websites and issuing warnings, (6) lobbying legislators to introduce laws prohibiting racial and ethnic discrimination, (7) organizing study groups nationwide, (8) training local leaders, (9) producing anti-discrimination media programs, (10) maintaining its website, and (11) disseminating anti-racism advertisements’.

Implementing all those tasks would be a daunting task for any civic group, but Norikoe Net seems to be carrying them out. Numbers (1), (2), (4) and (7) would not be difficult for Norikoe Net, since it is an umbrella organization of concerned civic groups nationwide. Number (3) has been implemented by allied groups such as C.R.A.C and the Tokyo No Hate (Sabetsu Hantai Tokyo Akushon).

Number (5) has likewise been carried out, as Norikoe Net has supporters well versed in that field. Its website boasts that about 100 lawyers have volunteered to help the group. The internet readily yields examples of Norikoe Net issuing warnings. In October 2013, a known conservative television commentator, Takeda Tsuneyasu, defended the Zaitokukai movement during a program on Yomiuri Television. Norikoe Net and other minority groups protested, and in November 2013, Yomiuri Television issued a formal apology (Yūkan Ameba News 2013). In January 2015, Norikoe Net issued a warning statement against Nico nico dōga (a popular local equivalent of YouTube) for not restricting hate speech posted on its programs and for letting Zaitokukai utilize its paid channel service (Bengoshi.com News 2015). It was confirmed in May 2015 that Nico nico dōga had already shut down Zaitokukai’s paid channel (Nikkei Net 2015).

As for (9) and (11), in addition to publishing newsletters and maintaining its website, Norikoe Net produces television programs—Norikoe Net TV—which is disseminated via Nico nico dōga and YouTube. The programs feature issues such as xenophobia, hate speech and hate groups, immigration and foreign workers, gender discrimination, family issues and poverty, Korean culture and society, national politics, military bases in Okinawa, discrimination against Ainu and Buraku minorities, etc.

The leftist elites of Norikoe Net have facilitated those activities by utilizing their capability, fame and resources. As well-known writers, journalists, academics and activists, they write about anti-racism. They publish their writings in newspapers and magazines and upload them in blogs and on social networking sites. They talk about anti-racism on commercial television and radio programs. They utilize their links with other organizations and the positions they hold in various groups. They organize or participate in meetings and seminars in which themes of anti-racism and anti-discrimination are discussed.

Shin Sugok, a well-known media commentator who is the originator of Norikoe Net, explained to the web newsletter of the Korean Residents Union in Japan (Zainippon Daikanminkoku Mindan) that Norikoe Net’s collective representatives were engaging in exactly these types of activities. The newsletter noted that Norikoe Net’s networks were expanding faster than expected, adding that the Union’s Youth Association pledged support to the group in response to the Norikoe Net initiative (Mindan News 2013).
The leftist elites of Norikoe Net appear on Norikoe Net TV television programs. They leverage the programs’ appeal by appearing together with friendly celebrities and leftist elites. On one such program, Kitahara Minori, a Norikoe Net collective representative, talked about discrimination and xenophobia with Fukushima Mizuho, a well-known legislator and feminist who once held the positions of head of the SDP and Minister of State for Gender Equality during the Democratic Party of Japan (hereinafter DPJ) administration. These appearances enhance the name recognition and legitimacy of anti-racism groups. Norikoe Net TV has also extended frequent invitations to Yasuda Kōichi, a known writer and journalist who published an award-winning bestseller on Zaitokukai and similar hate groups.

What kind of people are the collective representatives of Norikoe Net? According to its website, some of them are members of, or have solid links to, established civic groups and associations like the resident Korean associations, the Buraku minority association, the Ainu minority association, Okinawan anti-war groups, a major trade union and the nationwide federation of bar associations. Top cadres (or former top cadres) have joined Norikoe Net from the Buraku minority association, the Ainu minority association and the nationwide federation of bar associations. Collective representatives from academia specialize in fields such as sociology and gender, feminism, Asian history, Asian culture, ethnic minorities, immigration, anti-war and postcolonialism. Writers and artists often touch on themes of gender, feminism, culture and social justice. Incidentally, at least four of the collective representatives of Norikoe Net used to be editors of the leftist weekly Shūkan Kinyōbi.

Norikoe Net is rather unique in that it has Murayama Tomiichi, a former Prime Minister from the SDP and Suzuki Kunio as collective representatives. Murayama Tomiichi could help Norikoe Net when it lobbies for laws against racial and ethnic discrimination. Suzuki Kunio’s case is complicated. Suzuki is the founder of Issukai, a well-known radical right-wing uyoku group, and he gained fame owing to the mainstream leftist mass media frequently interviewing him as the voice of radical right-wing uyoku. His current ideological position leans toward the progressive side, as can be seen in his involvement in the anti-racism movement. Suzuki has solid links to the invisible civil society.

4.4. Legislators

As the melees in the Shin-Okubo area began to attract nationwide attention, some left-leaning legislators waded into the fray. The most notable figure among them was Arita Yoshifu, a DPJ member of the Diet’s upper chamber (House of Councillors). Arita can be regarded as part of the leftist elite. He used to be a journalist who wrote for the leftist weekly Asahi Journal, which was discontinued in 1992, but in 1993 its former staff and writers founded the Shūkan Kinyōbi, whose editorial policy is similar to that of the Asahi Journal. In the 1990s, Arita became well known as a television commentator. Since 2009, Arita has supported the idea of endowing resident Koreans and other foreigners with voting rights, which is fiercely opposed by Zaitokukai and other hate groups. This may be why Arita understood the problems with hate groups. In 2010, he was elected to the House of Councillors.

In March 2013, Arita and 10 other concerned legislators from the DPJ and SDP invited lawyers, journalists and anti-racism activists well versed in the issue to a meeting at the Members’ Office Building of the House of Councillors. Invited experts included the aforementioned writer Yasuda Kōichi and Norikoe Net collective representative Suzuki Kunio (BLOGOS 2013). They held similar meetings in May and November (Arita 2014).

On 23 April 2014, the non-partisan Parliamentary League for the Enactment of the Basic Law against Racial Discrimination (Jinshusabetsu Teppai Kihonbō o Motomeru Giinrenmei) was formed. The league is represented by Ogawa Toshio, a DPJ legislator and former Minister of Justice during
the DPJ administration (ibid). Legislators from the DPJ, SDP, Japanese Communist Party, Japan Restoration Party and the Komeito Party from the ruling coalition have participated in this league (Jiji Press 2014). Various rights groups, including Norikoe Net, have supported and collaborated with the parliamentary league and its affiliated legislators (IMADR 2015; Liaison Group for Foreigners’ Human Rights Laws 2015). In May 2015, the parliamentary league submitted the bill they had drafted to the House of Councillors.

5. Conclusion
The purpose of this article was three-fold: firstly, it explained how anti-racism groups, which oppose the overtly xenophobic and racist movements of Zaitokukai and similar hate groups, have emerged and developed. Secondly, it used the example of anti-racism groups to illustrate how a meaningful advocacy movement can emerge in Japan from networks of the invisible civil society. Thirdly, it showed how the leftist elites, who in this case waded into the fray at a relatively late stage, contribute to the advocacy movement by supplementing and enhancing resources provided by the invisible civil society. It could be argued that in Japan, to some extent, networks of the invisible civil society and the leftist elites take over the role played by large and powerful advocacy groups in Western societies.

Aside from conceptual issues, there remains a question: have all those moves by anti-racism groups and concerned people really been helpful in restraining hate groups? It could be said that, so far, anti-racism groups may have been indirectly helpful. As of mid-2015, there are some signs that the hate group movement has plateaued. Membership in Zaitokukai, which is by far the largest of the hate groups, is not growing as rapidly as it used to do. An Asahi Shimbun (2014) article mentioned that members of hate groups recently appear to have somewhat softened their rhetoric when they use hate speech. In November 2014, Zaitokukai’s charismatic founder and leader Sakurai Makoto stepped down as the group’s chairman (BLOGOS 2015). This does not bode well for the group.

What could have caused such changes? Pressure from the courts may have played a role. The application of laws already on the books is proving to be an effective tool against hate group activities. In the incident involving harassment of a resident Korean kindergarten/elementary school in the city of Kyoto, the school sued members of Zaitokukai and other hate groups for defamation in civil court and won the case. In October 2013, the local court ordered hate group defendants to pay the school 12 million yen (approximately 100,000 US dollars) in compensation, and the Supreme Court rejected the defendants’ appeal in December 2014 (Asahi Shimbun English Edition 2014).

The financial impact of this civil ruling on Zaitokukai and the activities of affiliated groups cannot be overlooked: Zaitokukai had to initiate a campaign to raise donations to cover the damages and legal fees of its individual members targeted by this ruling (J-Cast News 2014). With respect to the involvement of the anti-racism movement in this lawsuit, there is some circumstantial evidence. A former head of the Kyoto Bar Association (Kyoto Bengoshikai), whose 98 lawyers supported the resident Korean school in the civil trial (Yasuda 2012: 108), was one of the main organizers of the aforementioned anti-racism meeting held in the city of Kyoto in March 2010 (Labornet Japan 2010). The Kyoto Bar Association, together with the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, has been well known for its strong support of leftist advocacy (Sankei Shimbun 2015).

As stated before, in May 2015 concerned legislators submitted to Parliament a bill proposing basic laws forbidding racial discrimination. As likewise stated before, the legislators have been warmly supported by anti-racism groups. The proposed law is weak because it does not include possible sanctions such as fines or jail time or clauses for the establishment of a human rights commission.
However, if enacted, this law would give courts stronger grounds for issuing unfavorable rulings or imposing punishment on hate groups when their members are sued or charged under existing civil or criminal laws.

Deliberations in the Japanese Parliament or Diet on the bill to prohibit racial and ethnic discrimination started in mid-August 2015. The Diet cannot pass the bill without the cooperation of the Liberal Democratic Party of the ruling coalition, which so far has been rather lukewarm on the need to restrain hate groups. The outcome will also depend on to what extent Japan’s broader civil society, which includes the invisible civil society, leftist elites and minority groups, can maintain the momentum of the anti-racism movement.

References


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