Transnational Environmental Activism and Japan's Second Modernity

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Abstract

This article examines the new sphere of transnational activism in the Japanese environmental movement of the 1970s. What was previously a domestic phenomenon of local mobilizations against pollution and development expanded into a new array of transnational initiatives, many with a specific focus on pollution in the countries of East Asia. The article focuses on a transnational movement involving South Korean and Japanese activists to stop the relocation of a polluting mercurochrome plant from Japan to South Korea. I argue that such transnational involvement had a significant impact on activist identity. Within the framework of the Japanese nation, activists could seamlessly position themselves as victims of the state and industry. But transnational involvement upset this schematic by exposing their complicity in the transgressions of Japanese industry abroad. The result, I argue, was a more self-reflexive activist identity and the development of a kind of grassroots regional consciousness within some Japanese civic movements throughout the 1970s.

Keywords

Japan, South Korea, environmental pollution, transnational activism

This is article is adapted from the volume New Worlds from Below: Informal life politics and grassroots action in twenty-first-century Northeast Asia edited by Tessa Morris-Suzuki and Eun Jeong Soh (Canberra: ANU Press 2017). The overarching theme of that volume is the unfolding of what we call "informal life politics," conceptualized by Morris-Suzuki as acts of "collected self-protection in the face of the profound deficits of institutional politics." As she explains, informal life politics is often a form of "survival politics" responding directly to "threats to the physical survival of individuals or the social survival of communities." Different to formal politics centered on regulatory institutions, legislative processes, and professional political actors, informal life politics unfolds in multifarious and sometimes invisible spaces like rural communities, urban groups, and loose networks dispersed across political, geographical, and even national boundaries. This

essay approaches the theme of informal life politics – especially survival politics – through the lens of Japan's battle with industrial pollution in the 1960s and early 1970s. Although we know much about the highly-successful struggle against pollution within Japan during this period, we know little about the history of Japanese environmental activists' involvement in transnational mobilizations opposing the relocation of polluting industries from Japan to countries in East Asia around the same time. The essay focuses specifically on a transnational movement involving South Korean and Japanese activists to stop the relocation of a polluting mercurochrome plant from Toyama in Japan to Incheon City in South Korea.

As I explain in the essay, these early 1970s transnational mobilizations were important for a number of reasons. To begin with, the sharp decline in incidents of Japanese industrial pollution export to East Asian countries (or anywhere else for that matter) by the mid- to late 1970s, coupled with growing Japanese governmental criticism of responsible corporations, evidence a significant impact in the realm of formal politics. Through public shaming, the movements clearly contributed to slowing down this practice. I also see a number of significant developments in terms of informal life politics. The movements discussed in the article evidence the potential of localized protest to transcend the local while maintaining it as a critical site of struggle and identity. Scholars studying environmental protest often point to a parochial "NIMBY" (not-in-my-backyard) tendency in antipollution and environmental protection movements, but the cases in this article suggest that the local contains other potentialities. Moreover, they also remind us that, in practice, local and transnational activism are often not clearly demarcated spheres of activity but fluid, often overlapping, processes. Indeed, it was precisely because of their experience as victims of industrial pollution within local communities in Japan that some activists felt obliged to oppose the export of this pollution abroad. In other words, the struggle to protect local living environments clearly evolved into a larger question about environmental justice. Interestingly also, the fact that South Korea was the primary destination of Japanese pollution export also led the activists involved to an uncomfortable encounter with troubling legacies from Japan's imperial, militarist past in East Asia.

As I suggest in the article, I believe that involvement in these movements encouraged activists to reconsider their identities in a more multidimensional way. They certainly saw themselves primarily as advocates for the local community, but they also recognized their ethical responsibility to oppose environmental injustice wherever it manifested and, particularly, if they were somehow complicit in these frameworks of

injustice (for example, as protesting residents who forced polluting industry to relocate abroad). Informal life politics, in a sense, became the staging ground for imagining the whole world as one's "backyard." Admittedly, not all activists were transformed in this way, but the phenomenon was widespread enough to foster important developments in the subsequent history of grassroots activism in Japan. Leading activists like the engineer Ui Jun who had been largely focused on internal struggles within Japan, such as the one against methylmercury poisoning at Minamata Bay, began to develop of sense of responsibility to the outside world and Asia in particular. Ui realized that eliminating grievous industrial pollution within Japan was not enough. Japanese activists had a moral responsibility to communicate knowledge about the disastrous consequences of pollution abroad in the name of environmental justice. This was a new mentality among Japanese environmental activists and it served as the platform for a diversification of transnational environmental activism in the coming decades. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that environmental activists were not alone in their attention to, and involvement in, East Asia. We see a similar awakening to the region in the anti-Vietnam War movement (Beheiren), the Japan-Korea Solidarity movement, and the Asian Women's Association active around the same time. Indeed, the early 1970s moments witnessed a flowering of so-called Asian solidarity movements in Japan, the important history of which is yet to be written.

Sit-in protest over reparations for Minamata disease victims at Chisso Corporate Headquarters, 14 May 1970

Introduction

The early 1970s were an important moment of transnational engagement in the Japanese environmental movement. What had until then been a largely domestic phenomenon comprising thousands of local mobilizations against industrial pollution and rampant development expanded to include a new array of transnational initiatives, many with a specific focus on pollution in the countries of East Asia. The initial stimulus for these new movements was scattered media reports and anecdotal accounts that some Japanese companies were relocating their pollutive industrial processes to East Asia in response to stricter regulation in Japan. Such reports came as a rude awakening to many Japanese activists, who realized that so-called 'pollution export' undermined their 'victories' against industrial pollution within Japan. In response, a small number of Japanese activists promptly mobilized movements to address pollution export into countries such as Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Prominent civic activists like the

engineer Ui Jun and the novelist Oda Makoto organized international conferences with Asian activists, while others began publishing monthly newsletters on the issue in English and Japanese. A number of Japanese activists also travelled to the affected countries to inform local activists about the Japanese pollution experience and the successful strategies they had employed in their domestic struggles. Impressively, these meetings sometimes resulted in coordinated transnational actions between protestors on the ground in East Asia and supporters back in Japan. This kind of transnational activity was an entirely new phenomenon in the Japanese environmental movement and it marked a significant enhancement in the geographical reach of postwar Japanese environmental activism.

In this article I provide a brief overview of the new sphere of transnational activism in the Japanese environmental movement of the 1970s. As I explain, I believe the transnational movements were glued together by a powerful translocal sentiment in which local struggles and activists combined their strong communal identities with an emergent East Asian grassroots regionalism. Leading activists served as the important 'connective tissue' nurturing this translocal sentiment.[1] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn1) Though grassroots movements in the region have a long history, I believe that the transnational involvement of the 1970s nurtured a new reflexivity among the Japanese activists involved, emblematic of the mentalities and consciousness of reflexive or second modernity referred to by Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, and others.[2] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn2) If Japanese modernity was marked by a brash and unyielding state-led developmentalism focused on the questions 'how do we grow?' and 'how do we appropriate the resources we need to grow?' as an economy, as a national state, and as individuals, then reflexive modernity has unfolded as a deeply critical project in which some individuals have begun to ask 'what are the consequences of growth (or lack thereof)' and 'how do we survive?' in a world where the sureties of the national state framework of modernity are threatened and undermined by political, economic, and technological pressures. Transnational involvement had a particularly striking impact on the way the activists involved conceptualized their activist identity. Within the framework of the Japanese nation, civic activists could quite seamlessly position themselves as victims of the state and industry. But transnational involvement upset this schematic by exposing their complicity—albeit indirectly—in the transgressions of Japanese industry abroad. The result, I argue, was a more reflexive activist identity characteristic of the mentalities of reflexive modernity. I begin the article by briefly tracing some of the earliest and most influential of the transnational movements, paying special attention to the role of core activists in bringing people together across borders. The latter part of

the article examines the new mentalities and ideas born of this transnational interaction.

Pollution Export and Response

Civic groups were certainly well aware of Japan's troubled legacy in Asia before the mid to late 1960s, but until then their focus had been mainly on resisting conservative rule and the entrenchment of American influence domestically. The pursuit of 'Peace and Democracy' at home, in other words, was seen as the best way to address the misdeeds of the past, particularly in Asia and the Pacific. Coupled with this approach, restrictions on overseas travel until the 1960s also hindered the formation of transnational movement networks. But the outbreak of the Vietnam War and the advent of pollution export almost forced Asia onto the activist agenda by exposing the direct connections of the region to conservative rule, economic growth, and American hegemony at home. What resulted was a period of intensive grassroots regionalization among some Japanese civic groups which would continue to develop over the coming decades. By 'grassroots regionalization' I certainly refer to the numerical growth of Japanese NGOs and groups active in East Asia, which was truly significant. But I also allude to what is best described as the regionalization of an activist mindset which had been largely national or local in focus up to that point. We might say that the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a doubling of the civic mindset as domestic and regional initiatives came to be seen as necessary components of the same struggle. Needless to say, this progressive reengagement with Asia was by no means painless and, in many ways, proved more difficult for activists than for political or corporate elites who could 'buy' their way back into Asian countries. Activists, of course, approached their Asian counterparts with a deep sense of remorse for Japan's problematic history in Asia in the era of colonialism and the Asia-Pacific War, as well as a sense of responsibility for the pressing issues of the present. Nowhere is this clearer than in movements opposing Japanese industrial pollution export to the region.

Japanese pollution export of the early 1970s had its roots in the Japanese domestic pollution crisis which stretched from the late 1950s to around the early 1970s. I have discussed this domestic history in detail elsewhere but, for the purposes of contextualization, note the following here.[3] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn3) Japan's rise as an economic superpower, coming in waves from around the late 1950s and again in the 1960s, was accompanied by some of the worst cases of industrial pollution in modern global history. As industry spread around the Japanese archipelago local communities were devastated by extreme forms of atmospheric, water, and ground pollution. Industries willfully pumped dangerous gases into the atmosphere and dumped chemical toxins into bays and rivers.

Residents living in surrounding communities bore the brunt of this rampant industrial expansion. In Yokkaichi City, for example, many locals were afflicted with pulmonary diseases and chronic asthma caused by poisonous sulphur dioxide emitted from a nearby petrochemical facility. At Minamata Bay and later in Niigata Prefecture, people were struck down with debilitating motor neuron disease, impaired sensation, and loss of bodily coordination due to their inadvertent consumption of seafood contaminated with methyl mercury dumped by industry. To make matters worse, people in affected communities not only endured harrowing medical complications; they also faced cruel discrimination from an uninformed public.

Yokkaichi, circa 1960

Nevertheless, as the pollution problem intensified and spread (eventually into big cities like Tokyo and Osaka where air pollution reached dangerous proportions in the 1960s), local communities began to organize protest movements and to take offending industries to court. These protests and court battles sometimes took well over a decade to settle but, by the late 1960s, the Japanese government and judiciary began to respond. Local governments took the lead by passing stringent regulations and forcing industry into pollution prevention agreements. A reluctant national government followed, first by passing the Basic Law on Pollution Prevention in 1967 and then, at the historic Pollution Diet in 1970, amending the Basic Law to give it punitive force and passing over a dozen other pieces of pollution prevention legislation. By the early 1970s Japan had in place some of the strictest industrial pollution regulations in the world and a body of case law strongly on the side of pollution victims. Some even described this outcome as a "pollution miracle," although for pollution victims the debilitating consequences could never be undone.

Not entirely by coincidence, there was a marked increase in Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) into East Asia (and elsewhere) just as the new environmental regulations began to bite in the early 1970s. From 1967 to 1973 overall Japanese FDI increased tenfold and between 1973 and 1976 it essentially doubled that of the preceding 20 years.[4] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn4) Along with the quantitative change, Japanese FDI also began to change qualitatively in the early 1970s as polluting industries involved in chemicals and steel became more prominent.[5] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn5) To be sure, it would be a mistake to attribute this FDI spike entirely to domestic environmental regulations. Even activists recognized that other factors such as

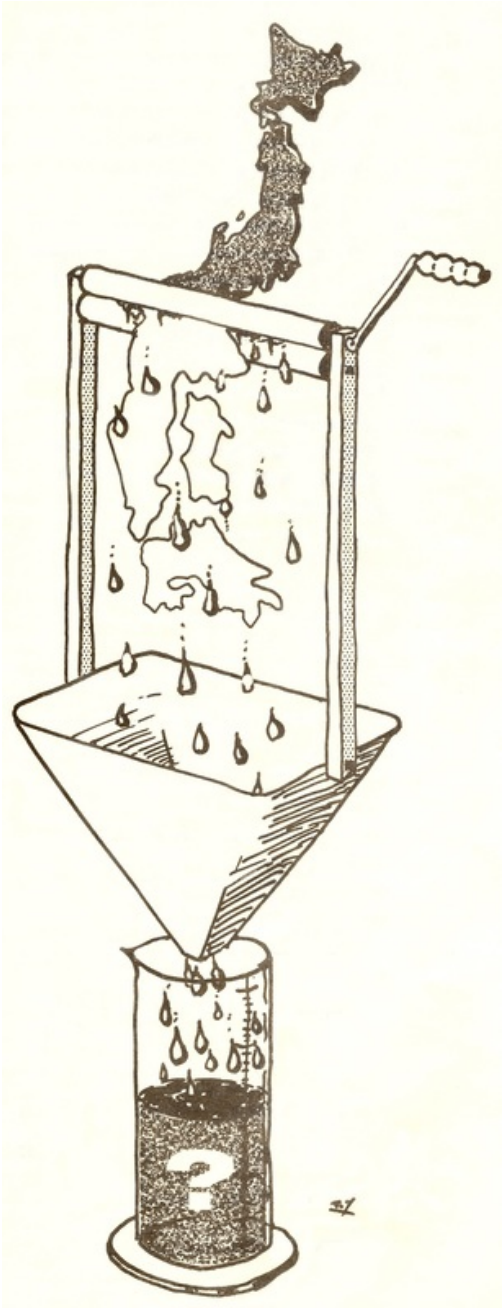
cheap labor and resources played an important role in corporate decisions to go offshore. But there is little doubt that domestic regulation also shaped corporate investment strategies. Important research by Derek Hall has shown that the strict Japanese regulatory regime was very much on the minds of corporate executives and government officials in the early 1970s, to the extent that pollution export even became a 'state strategy' at one point.[6] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn6) Utilizing a wealth of government and industry publications, newsletters, and public comments, Hall shows beyond doubt that the powerful Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and mammoth corporations like Mitsubishi openly admitted that environmental regulation was a factor shaping their FDI strategies. In 1970, for example, MITI established a special fund to help relocate the pollutive petrochemical industry abroad while in the same year the Mitsubishi Corporation noted siting difficulties in Japan due to local opposition as one reason for building an oil refinery in Southeast Asia rather than at home.[7] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn7) Overt strategy or not, the 1970s witnessed a proliferation of polluting Japanese industries throughout East Asia: hexavalent chromium plants in South Korea, chemical processing plants in Indonesia, mining operations and steel sintering plants in the Philippines, caustic soda plants in Thailand, rare earth mining operations in Malaysia, and asbestos processing in Taiwan.[8] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn8)

Ui Jun

Japanese environmental activists became aware of the pollution export practice relatively early on thanks to a number of fortuitous transnational encounters. The first was at the historic United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) held in Stockholm in early June, 1972. While participating in the nongovernmental forums running parallel to the main conference, Ui Jun and a group of industrial pollution sufferers from Japan met with activists from other East Asian countries. Ui and his group's main objective was to communicate the story of Japanese industrial pollution to the world, so they were deeply shocked to learn from their Asian counterparts that Japanese industrial activity was already causing concern in the region.

On his return, Ui communicated this news to antipollution activists through his national environmental network, the Independent Lectures on Pollution (ILP). He scolded himself and fellow activists for their naïveté in assuming that Japanese corporations would simply clean up in response to domestic protest and regulation. Indeed, so insular was their perspective that not until Asian activists alerted them to pollution export had they even considered the concrete implications of Japan's economic penetration into the region. For Ui such realities demanded far deeper and more substantive engagement with East Asian activists.[9] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn9) As a first step in the process of uncovering extant or potential cases of pollution export, Ui and his group began publishing an English-language pamphlet entitled KOGAI: Newsletter from Polluted Japan which ran articles on industrial pollution in Japan and throughout East Asia. ILP sent the newsletter free of charge to subscribers who, in return, provided information about industrial pollution in their countries. In this way the newsletter served as both a medium for information transmission and a vehicle for connecting antipollution protesters across East Asia into a rudimentary transnational grassroots alliance.

The contacts Ui and others formed with Asian activists at UNCHE resulted in substantive, face-to-face interactions and movements in the coming months and years. In late 1972 and early 1973, for example, Matsuoka Nobuo, an activist involved in ILP, travelled to Malaysia and Thailand where he met with environmental groups. In Kuala Lumpur activists told Matsuoka that they were desperate for technical information about pollution and were actively collecting newspaper clippings on Japanese industrial pollution. The Malaysian activists frankly stated that they were extremely skeptical—if not cynical—about so-called Japanese technical and economic 'assistance' since these were often simply code words for Japanese corporate exploitation of cheap labor and resources. As Matsuoka explained, 'if we fail to carefully reconsider what assistance really is, the Japanese run the risk of losing the good faith of our Asian friends to a point where it is irrecoverable.'[10] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn10) Later Matsuoka travelled to Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok where he gave a presentation on Japanese pollution to students involved in environmental activism. On learning that the Thai students had previously known nothing about Japan's terrible pollution history, Matsuoka felt an overwhelming sense of guilt and responsibility. From now on, he observed, Japanese activists 'must be prepared to shoulder another heavy load' (i.e. taking responsibility for Japanese corporate activity in neighboring countries).[11] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn11)



From "Polluted Japan," 1972

Ui, Matsuoka, and others' calls for a new commitment to East Asian environmental problems found a cause almost immediately. Only months after Matsuoka's visit to Thailand another colleague from the ILP's Asia group, Hirayama Takasada, visited Kasetsart University in Bangkok to meet with members of the university's nature preservation club. During these meetings the club's leader showed Hirayama a newspaper clipping entitled 'No Repeat of the Minamata Tragedy' from the Bangkok daily, Siam Rath, reporting that the Thai Asahi Caustic Soda Company—a subsidiary of the Japanese Asahi Glass Company of the Mitsubishi Group—was responsible for dumping effluent containing caustic soda, synthetic hydrochloric acid, liquid chlorine, and mercury into the Chao Phraya River, resulting in a massive fish kill and skin afflictions and diarrhea among residents who consumed the fish.[12] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn12) The discovery of a concrete example of Japanese pollution in Thailand was nothing short of earthshattering for Matsuoka and his visceral response is representative of the way most other Japanese activists reacted:

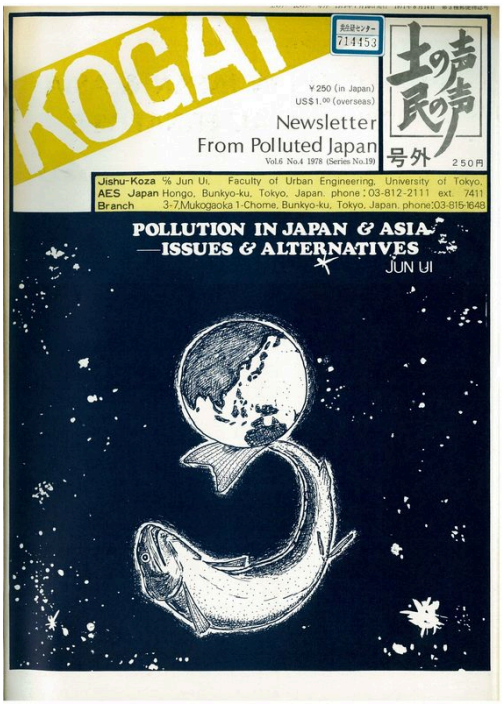
What's this!? The evil hand of mercury contamination has reached Thailand! My naïve assumption that full-scale pollution export was yet to come had been betrayed with consummate ease by these cold-hard facts. Utterly surprised, for a time I could say nothing. I was thrown into utter despair by a piercing reality: 'pollution export had begun! Thai Asahi Caustic Soda was just the tip of the iceberg.' I was quickly filled with rage. I could not allow this. I simply could not allow it. Once again I engraved in my mind the purpose of this trip: to communicate the situation of Japanese pollution and to find a way

to mobilize an antipollution movement based on cooperation between Japanese and Southeast Asian people.[13] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn13)

Throughout 1973 and 1974 Japanese and Thai environmental activists mobilized one of the earliest transnational movements against industrial pollution in postwar East Asian history. In late August 1973, students from Thammasat, Kasetsart, Chulalongkorn, Mahidol Universities organized a nature conservation exhibition on the campus of Thammasat University. Around 20 per cent of the exhibition was devoted to displays on Japanese industrial pollution with the remainder focusing on environmental issues in Thailand. Organizers distributed Thai translations of the ILP pamphlet Polluted Japan (prepared by Ui and others for UNCHE) which contained detailed information on Japan's pollution experience. They also ran screenings of Tsuchimoto Noriaki's disturbing documentary film Minamata: The Victims and Their World.[14] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn14) On the Japan side, in September 1973 around 150 activists from antiwar, environmental, and other civic groups marched on the headquarters of the Asahi Glass Company in Tokyo with placards reading 'Asahi Glass, Stop Exporting Pollution!'[15] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn15) The Tokyo protest was reported in the Siam Rath newspaper days later under the headline 'Japanese people demonstrate in opposition to factory polluting Thailand.' The full-page report contained photographs of the demonstration and interviews with Japanese activists, which generated a great response among Thai citizens.[16] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn16) After these protests, activists established the Japan-Thai Youth Friendship Movement (Nichi-Tai Seinen Yūkō Undō) to act as the organizational hub for the budding transnational mobilization.

In the coming months interactions between activists intensified, culminating in a historic simultaneous transnational demonstration in September 1974. As in the previous year, activists in Tokyo marched with banners and placards in Japanese and Thai reading 'Asahi Glass, Get out of Thailand!' Messages of support from Thai activists were read out during the Tokyo protest.[17] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn17) In Bangkok student activists held a three-day exhibition entitled 'Opposing Japanese Export of Pollution' which attracted some 15,000 people. The organizers' aims were twofold: to use the Japanese experience to raise awareness about industrial pollution among the Thai people and to exert pressure on the Thai Government to implement more stringent environmental regulations to control industrial pollution.[18] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn18) Visitors to the exhibition were greeted at the entrance by a large banner reading 'POLLUTED JAPAN' and a mock coffin with a photo of a fetal Minamata disease victim. Inside were displays of industrial pollution at Yokkaichi and Minamata, shocking

cases of food contamination from arsenic and PCBs, photos of Japanese nuclear power plants, and a series of panels on the Japanese economic penetration of Asia. Over the course of the exhibition various public discussions were held on pollution in Japan, local residents and pollution, and antipollution strategies for youth. Visitors were overjoyed when a statement from the demonstrators in Tokyo was read out and they eagerly signed a petition opposing the proposed construction of a petrochemical plant by Japanese industry in Si Racha in the Gulf of Thailand.[19] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn19) Thanks to this pressure, the Mitsui and Mitsubishi Corporations announced that they would be shelving their construction plans. The companies cited increased pollution monitoring by Thai students and intellectuals as one contributing factor.[20] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn20) Japanese activists walked away from the demonstration with a deepened awareness of the entanglement of Japanese industry and pollution with East Asia. As the KOGAI newsletter noted in 1975, 'We remember what a Thai friend said to us, 'what brings disasters upon [the] Thai people will surely bring them upon [the] Japanese. And conversely, what damages [the] Japanese will also damage [the] Thai people'.'[21] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn21)



KOGAI, 1978

Deeply concerned about the extent of pollution export, Japanese activists involved in the Thai Asahi movement began to carefully scrutinize Japanese corporate activity elsewhere in East Asia. Their concerns were not unfounded. In mid-February 1974, Hirayama Takasada was alerted to an article in the Tōyō Keizai Nippō, a financial newspaper run by resident Koreans in Japan. The article, entitled 'Polluting Plant Exported to South Korea?!,' reported how a resident Korean entrepreneur, one Mr. Koe, had purchased a mercurochrome plant from the Toyama Chemical Company and reconstructed it in Incheon City, South Korea, where he was applying for permission to commence operations. Pointing to a possible instance of pollution export, the article noted that Toyama Chemical had decided to sell the Toyama plant in 1973

after running into problems with Japanese regulators over contamination issues.[22] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn22) Toyama Chemical had in fact been forced to halt production of mercurochrome—a highly toxic substance—in September 1973 when waters in Toyama Bay were found to have mercury levels equivalent to those in Minamata Bay. In December 1973 tests by the Toyama Prefectural Government revealed toxic levels of mercury contamination in industrial sludge near the plant's drainpipes.[23] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn23) It was at this point that managers hatched the 'ingenious' solution of selling the factory to Koe and simply importing mercurochrome from his company once the factory was operational in Incheon.

In February 1974 Hirayama Takasada and Inoue Sumio—both involved in the Thai movement—met with local civic groups in Toyama which confirmed the newspaper report. Hirayama and Inoue subsequently produced their own detailed report on the incident and began to mobilize in opposition. In late April groups gathered in protest in Toyama and outside the company's Tokyo headquarters. In Tokyo, ILP members were joined by representatives from the Zainichi Korean Youth League (ZKYL) and the Japanese YWCA. The 200-strong protest group waved placards in Japanese and Korean reading 'Toyama Chemical, Stop Exporting Pollution!' In Toyama local residents' groups protested outside railway stations and at the Toyama Chemical facilities where they distributed pamphlets to employees.[24] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn24) At the Tokyo protest Hirayama and Inoue were surprised to learn from YWCA participants that women in the Incheon chapter of the YWCA had been conducting a similar protest against the mercurochrome factory since February 1974. The Incheon women had apparently learned of the factory relocation from the Korean-language Christian Newspaper which had reproduced the article published earlier in the Japanese Tōyō Keizai Nippō. Thereafter the Incheon YWCA women took the bold step of petitioning the Incheon Mayor to deny Koe's application to commence mercurochrome production. They did this at substantial personal risk given the nature of authoritarian rule under President Park Chung-hee. The Park regime actively encouraged the establishment of Japanese polluting industries in South Korea by intentionally avoiding pollution regulation and cracking down on local protest.[25] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn25) In mid-1973 Park brazenly declared that 'for the purposes of the industrial development of our country, it will be best not to worry too much about pollution problems.'[26] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn26)

Faced with mounting pressure in both countries, on April 30, some three days after the protests, NHK television news reported that the Toyama Chemical Company board of directors had

decided to abandon their plan to import mercurochrome from the plant in South Korea, effectively ending operations at that end too. Although the nature of political dictatorship in South Korea had made direct coordination impossible, Japanese activists rightly concluded that their protest had been a 'de facto' transnational struggle with the women of the Incheon YWCA.[27] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn27) Indeed, it was thanks to this joint transnational action that they had succeeded. As with the Asahi Glass incident in Bangkok, the Incheon case provided yet another opportunity for Japanese activists to rethink their domestic struggle in a wider regional context and, by consequence, to reevaluate their situation as pollution victims. As one of the placards at the April protest noted, 'We cannot ignore this mechanism in which our "affluence" is built on the sacrifice of the South Korean people….Come on, let's destroy from within Japan the economic invasion and export of pollution into Asia…exemplified by Toyama Chemical's corporate activity.'[28] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn28) The statement of the ZKYL expressed a similar sentiment, noting that 'We are committed to transforming this struggle against Toyama Chemical's pollution export into a joint struggle of the Japanese and South Korean people to oppose all forms of pollution export and economic invasion and to intensify our condemnation of responsible corporations.'[29] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn29) To this end, in June 1974 Hirayama and Inoue established the monthly publication, Don't Let the Pollution Escape, to monitor Toyama Chemical and other companies looking to relocate their polluting activities offshore. What just a few years before had been a domestic struggle between local communities and Japanese corporations was now escalating into region-wide battle against pollution export and political dictatorship throughout East Asia.

The range of movements in ensuing years is too broad to cover here but one further movement against the Nippon Chemical Company (NCC) deserves attention in the context of my discussion of the emergence of a new reflexivity in 1970s Japanese environmental activism stimulated by transnational involvement. Activists became aware of NCC via a report in the Nihon Keizai Shinbun newspaper in June 1974. The article reported that NCC and its South Korean partner were planning to produce sodium bichromate and thenardite at a factory located in the Ulsan industrial region. According to the article, NCC's decision to go abroad was prompted by numerous worker compensation claims, increased regulation, and civic protest relating to the toxic compound hexavalent chromium, a byproduct of sodium bichromate production. NCC's move was provocatively described as 'a new direction in the development of production bases for pollutive industries by way of international dispersion.'[30]

(http://apjjf.org/#_ftn30)

Hirayama and Inoue of the Don't Let the Pollution Escape movement began to investigate NCC immediately. They discovered a record of blatant disregard for environmental regulation and a longer history of transgressions against Asian people. NCC began producing sodium bichromate in 1915 at factories in Tokyo and the surrounding Chiba and Kanagawa Prefectures. During World War II the company actively provided material for munitions manufacture and, more troublingly, operated a chromium mine which made extensive use of forced Korean labor. In the course of their investigations activists discovered horrific instances of torture and inhumane treatment at this mining operation—all of which they documented (with graphical reproductions) in Don't Let the Pollution Escape and other activist newsletters. Adding to its troubled wartime record, in the postwar period NCC began to sell its chromium slag to the construction industry for use in the foundations of domestic dwellings and for filling unused wet rice paddies. Although it would only come to light much later, this slag contained highly toxic chromium which the company was well aware of.[31] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn31) Under increasing pressure from residents complaining about foul smells and chemicals leaching from their gardens and cases of pulmonary afflictions in workers and communities around the factories, in 1972 NCC shifted production of sodium bichromate to its Tokuyama factory. Before commencing operations there, the company signed a pollution prevention agreement with Tokuyama City pledging that it would convert all waste material into soluble trivalent chromium.[32] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn32) Yet, despite these undertakings, in September 1972 when a ship sank in waters off the coast of Shimonoseki, it was revealed that NCC had been dumping unprocessed chromium slag at sea in direct contravention of the agreement. Subsequent investigations revealed that the company had ocean-dumped an astonishing 5,000 tons of toxic waste material since July 1972. As a result, the Tokuyama Municipal Assembly ordered a temporary suspension of production at the factory.[33] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn33) It was shortly after this incident the NCC executives hatched the plan to relocate operations to Ulsan in South Korea.

The opposition movement which began to gather steam around mid-1974 is an excellent example of the way growing awareness of the pollution export problem—thanks to the transnational activities of individuals like Ui, Hirayama, and Inoue—encouraged activists in very localized movements within Japan to reconsider the industrial pollution problem on a wider regional canvas and, in turn, reconsider their own sense of victimization. By acting as the connective tissue between pollution and protest abroad and mobilizations back in Japan, core activists like

Hirayama helped to grow this awareness both within themselves and other Japanese activists. As I noted earlier, it was an awareness which resulted in substantive action because some activists began to develop a sense of empathy, comradery, and responsibility toward the victims of Japanese pollution export, even though in many cases they would remain physically separated by geographical, cultural, and political distance.

The Residents Association to Rid Kōtō, Sumida, and Edogawa Wards of Pollution (RAR) is a case in point. This group initially formed to examine contamination of their neighborhoods by toxic materials illegally dumped from NCC's factories. With the cooperation of an ethical municipal employee, the RAR was able to identify numerous locations of NCC's illegal chromate slag dumping, some containing levels of chromium 1,300 times in excess of regulatory limits.[34] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn34) Importantly, activists in the RAR did not limit their public protests to the local contamination issue. On the contrary, as leaders of the movement explained to Inoue Sumio, a central pillar of their action was to prevent NCC exporting its pollution to South Korea. For these people, NCC's South Korean maneuver was part of a single 'structure of discrimination.' People in this downtown area of Tokyo knew all too well that the rich of uptown Tokyo sent all of their unwanted things—trash processing, toxic chemical factories etc.—in their direction. When Tokyo downtowners complained, the company simply relocated out to the Japanese countryside. But the structure now extended even further, with Japan treating Asia in just the same way uptown Tokyoites had treated people downtown. The challenge was to oppose this structure of discrimination through the straightforward logic of 'don't force bad things on others, keep them in your own backyard.'[35] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn35) To this end the RAR organized a series of public protests under the banner 'NCC, Stop Exporting Pollution to South Korea!' The central refrain of participants was that 'there is no valid reason to inflict the pain we are enduring right now onto the South Korean people.'[36] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn36) Moreover, as the following extract from an RAR publication reveals, local residents had begun to understand the pollution problem not only on a wider regional canvas but also in the context of a fractured history between Japan and its neighbors:

There could be nothing more disrespectful to South Korea and its people than to impose this [factory] on them simply because it is not possible in Japan. Nippon Chemical must not be allowed to replicate the same 'imperialist mentality' of the war when it forcibly brought Koreans to Japan and imposed abusive labor on them. We will fight until pollution export is stopped so that normal ties of friendship and

goodwill lasting for 100, 200, or forever can be constructed between South Korea and Japan.[37] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn37)

For Inoue Sumio, the shift from insular localism to regional awareness was all about activists abandoning the logic of 'Old Maid' for that of a 'dual-frontal attack.' Just as the aim of the Old Maid card game was to deflect the joker card on to other players, for too long local movements in Japan had focused on eradicating pollution from their own backyards without concern for its subsequent destination(s). But things were different now. Activists—even those in very localized movements—were trying to deal with the pollution 'joker' at home. Moreover, even when the pollution joker managed to escape to Thailand, South Korea, or elsewhere in East Asia, activists were now forming transnational ties across borders, effectively mounting 'dual-frontal attacks' on polluting industries.[38] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn38)

Of course, we need to keep in mind that these transnational movements were very small in scale and, as in the case of NCC which successfully began sodium chromate production at Ulsan in 1976, that they often failed. But, by connecting activists across borders, by opening their eyes to the regional implications of Japanese corporate activity, and by connecting industrial pollution of the present to transgressions of the past, these movements facilitated a rethinking of extant activist identity built around entrenched notions of victimhood.

Understanding Aggression

While not all were successful, the rise of transnational movements against pollution export in the 1970s undoubtedly forced Japanese corporate and government elites to tread more carefully in their strategy for economic expansion in East Asia. As Hall explains, 'MITI began criticizing the practice [of pollution export] as early as January 1974, when it called for increased surveillance of FDI projects which might constitute pollution export.'[39] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn39) Moreover, as we have seen, decisions to abandon industrial projects by Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and other corporations also reveal a greater corporate sensitivity to the problem. But the reverberations of the new transnational movements were also felt in the realm of Japanese civic activism. In this section I look at a few typical examples of how Japanese activists began to rearticulate their activism in light of their experiences in Asia. I see important ideational developments, especially with respect to the degree of reflexivity in activist identity and consciousness. Whereas to date the problems had always been positioned external to the self (i.e. industrial pollution, state power) now some activists began to reconsider their complicity in these problems.

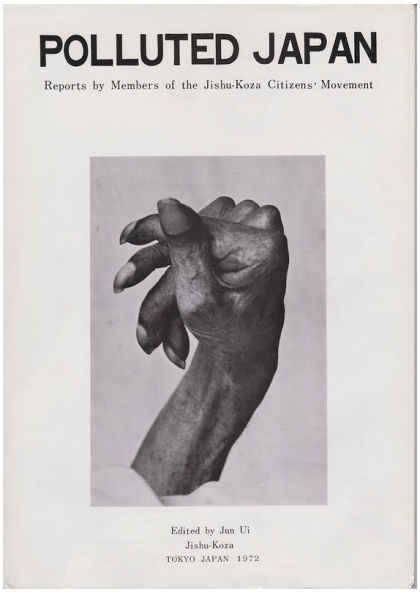
The more activists learned about pollution export, the more they began to suspect that one

of the troubling paradoxes of their successful protest at home was how it had—unintentionally, to be sure—encouraged Japanese corporations to take their polluting processes abroad. This realization came as a rude awakening because it hit at the heart of a victimization consciousness running very deeply in the Japanese environmental movement and, indeed, in postwar Japanese civil society more broadly. Oda Makoto, the charismatic anti-Vietnam War protestor, of course, had articulated this tension between Japanese activists' sense of victimization by the state and their complicity as aggressors in the context of the Indochina conflict.[40] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn40) As Oda explained, ordinary Japanese had, to an extent, been victimized by the wartime state and the U.S. fire and atomic bombings at the end of the Pacific War and they were now victims of quasi-American colonization in the form of military bases and facilities. But this victimization also made them aggressors toward the Vietnamese people because the US assault on that country was using Japan as a staging ground. The same could be said of the pollution problem: ordinary Japanese people were certainly victims of industrial pollution but when this pollution was directed abroad, these same Japanese victims became unwitting accomplices in Japanese corporate transgressions overseas. After all, to an extent, the affluent daily life and cleaner living environments of all Japanese were built on the suffering of people throughout Asia.

Such logic pervades the discourse of Japanese environmentalists in the early to mid-1970s, for example, as in the following ideas of a young ILP activist, Aoyama Tadashi, in 1976. From Aoyama's perspective the Japanese people's battle against the 'contradictions born of high-speed economic growth' had produced impressive results. Thanks to these struggles the public was now resolutely opposed to industrial pollution and the Japanese natural environment was much cleaner. Yet, despite such successes, the Japanese had been woefully unaware of people overseas 'suffering in the shadows of Japanese affluence,' nowhere more so than in Asia.[41] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn41) 'Haven't we essentially ignored the voices and existence of our neighbors up until now?' Aoyama asked.[42] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn42) If the Japanese were to 'properly comprehend' their future pathway they needed to 'listen to the appeals' of these neighbors and to act accordingly.[43] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn43) In this connection, Aoyama felt emboldened by the flowering of the new antipollution export movements. 'Ours is a small struggle which began as a battle against pollution export and in pursuit of genuine friendship between the people of [Asia] and Japan…. But from this starting point it escalated into a new pollution issue causing uproar throughout Japan.' More significantly, Aoyama observed how remarkably different the new mobilizations were from the earlier domestic antipollution movements. Whereas these earlier

movements were begun by victims who gathered supporters and through joint struggle achieved legal, political, and social recognition, the new movements were initiated and spearheaded by a cadre of antipollution export advocates who were not themselves direct victims. This was an entirely new phenomenon in postwar Japanese environmental activism because the initial motivation for action stemmed not from a desire for individual or communal retribution and compensation but out of concern for others.[44] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn44) Ui Jun's ILP movement was a pioneer in this respect, opening the way for later transnational movements involving Japanese, Thais, South Koreans, Filipinos and others from East Asia. For Aoyama the rise of such advocacy for fellow East Asians promised to be a truly revolutionary force in Japanese environmental activism because it overlay a victim-focused agenda with an outward-looking, other-focused rubric (i.e. a reflexive outlook). The result, concluded Aoyama, could be a movement 'beyond our wildest dreams.'[45] (http://apjjf.org/#_ftn45)

Aoyama's exuberance is admirable if not a little overstated, but he was on target with respect to the powerfully transformative impact of the new transnational movements on Japanese environmental activism and the consciousness of activists. Pollution export demanded that Japanese activists deal with the aggressor within as a necessary element of any new transnational alliance. Indeed, this was the very crux of the matter, and its urgency pushed Japanese environmental thought beyond the somewhat insular earlier focus on Japanese victims. Only when Japanese activists exposed the aggressor within and, from this position of vulnerability, attempted to fashion ties of equality with their East Asian counterparts, did genuine border-crossing sentiment begin to take root. To be sure, this process unfolded at first only in a handful of Japanese environmental movements. But I believe its effects on activist identity and civic activism in Japan were more widespread. After these movements it was no longer possible to consider Japanese environmental problems or activist identity within the narrow framework of the national state, national citizenship, or national victimization. The problems and the responses now transcended borders and, hence, demanded a new mentality which in a similar way transcended the confines of the nation alone.



"Polluted Japan," 1972

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Notes

[1] Sidney Tarrow, The New Transnational Activism (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 206.

[2] Ulrich Beck, 'The Reinvention of Politics: Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernization,' in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash eds., Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994), 1–55.

[3] Simon Avenell, 'Japan's Long Environmental Sixties and the Birth of a Green Leviathan,' Japanese Studies 32, no. 3 (2012): 423–44.

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[5] Hall 'Pollution Export,' 262.

[6] Hall, 'Pollution Export.'

[7] Derek Hall, 'Environmental Change, Protest, and Havens of Environmental Degradation: Evidence from Asia,' Global Environmental Politics 2, no. 2 (2002): 22, 23.

[8] Ui Jun, 'Pollution Export,' in Shigeto Tsuru and Helmut Weidner eds., Environmental Policy in Japan (Berlin: Sigma, 1989), 396, 401.

[9] Ui Jun, 'Kokuren kankyō kaigi hōkoku I,' Kōgai Genron 13 (July 1972): 17–18. Reproduced in Saitama Daigaku Kyōsei Shakai Kenkyū Sentā ed., Ui Jun shūshū kōgai mondai shiryō 2 fukkoku

'Kōgai Genron' dai 1-kai haihon dai 3-kan (Tokyo: Suirensha, 2007), 221–2.

[10] Matsuoka Nobuo, 'Tōnan Ajia no tabi kara (Marēshia nite),' Jishu Kōza 18 (Sept 1972): 2. Reproduced in Saitama Daigaku Kyōsei Shakai Kenkyū Sentā ed., Ui Jun shūshū kōgai mondai shiryō 1 fukkoku 'Jishu Kōza' dai 3-kan (Tokyo: Suirensha, 2005), 346.

[11] Matsuoka Nobuo, 'Mō hitotsu no omoni o seou kakugo o: Higashi Ajia no tabi kara (3),' Jishu Kōza 20 (Nov 1972): 38. Reproduced in Saitama Daigaku Kyōsei Shakai Kenkyū Sentā ed., Ui Jun shūshū kōgai mondai shiryō 1 fukkoku 'Jishu Kōza' dai 4-kan (Tokyo: Suirensha, 2005), 106.

[12] Inoue Sumio, 'Bokura wa kōgai yushtsu to tatakai hajimeta,' Tenbō 191 (Nov 1974): 50.

[13] Hirayama Takasada, 'Tōnan Ajia kōgai saihakken no tabi (1) Tai nite,' Jishu Kōza 31 (Oct 1973): 52. Reproduced in Saitama Daigaku Kyōsei Shakai Kenkyū Sentā ed., Ui Jun shūshū kōgai mondai shiryō 1 fukkoku 'Jishu Kōza' dai 2-kai haihon dai 1-kan (Tokyo: Suirensha, 2006), 382.

[14] Hirayama Takasada, 'Exporting Pollution (The Export of 'KOGAI'),' KOGAI: The Newsletter From Polluted Japan 2 (Winter 1974): 7; Inoue, 'Bokura wa,' 52.

[15] Jishu Kōza Ajia Gurūpu, 'Tai Asahi Kasei Sōda no kasen osen,' Jishu Kōza 31 (Oct 1973), 48. Reproduced in Saitama Daigaku Kyōsei Shakai Kenkyū Sentā ed., Ui Jun shūshū kōgai mondai shiryō 1 fukkoku 'Jishu Kōza' dai 2-kai haihon dai 1-kan (Tokyo: Suirensha, 2006), 378.

[16] Inoue, 'Bokura wa,' 51.

[17] Inoue, 'Bokura wa,' 52–3.

[18] Inoue, 'Bokura wa,' 53.

[19] Okuda Takaharu, 'Nichitai o musubu kōgai hantai undō,' Jishu Kōza 44 (Nov 1974): 41–54. Reproduced in Saitama Daigaku Kyōsei Shakai Kenkyū Sentā ed., Ui Jun shūshū kōgai mondai shiryō 1 fukkoku 'Jishu Kōza' dai 2-kai haihon dai 4-kan (Tokyo: Suirensha, 2006), 53; Okuda Takahara, 'Documents of the First Co-operation Between Japanese Citizens and Thai People Acting Simultaneously to Stop the Exporting Pollution,' KOGAI: The Newsletter From Polluted Japan 7 (Spring 1975): 10–11.

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[22] Hirayama Takasada, 'Sōkan no ji,' Geppō kōgai o nogasuna 1 (1974): 1; 1974/2/15; Inoue, 'Bokura wa,' 54.

[23] Hirayama Takasada, 'Toyama Kagaku, kōgai yushutsu chūshi!?' Jishu Kōza 39 (June 1974): 28. Reproduced in Saitama Daigaku Kyōsei Shakai Kenkyū Sentā ed., Ui Jun shūshū kōgai mondai

shiryō 1 fukkoku 'Jishu Kōza' dai 2-kai haihon dai 3-kan (Tokyo: Suirensha, 2006), 94.

[24] Inoue, 'Bokura wa,' 55.

[25] Ogawa Hiroshi, 'Ajia no mado: Nihon Kagaku no kōgai yushutsu o kokuhatsu suru,' Jishu Kōza 42 (Sept 1974): 57. Reproduced in Saitama Daigaku Kyōsei Shakai Kenkyū Sentā ed., Ui Jun shūshū kōgai mondai shiryō 1 fukkoku 'Jishu Kōza' dai 2-kai haihon dai 3-kan (Tokyo: Suirensha, 2006), 307.

[26] Hall, 'Pollution Export,' 269.

[27] Inoue Sumio, 'Babanuki no riron o koete: Nihon Kagaku no kuromu tarenagashi to kankoku e no kōgai yushutsu,' Tenbō 204 (Dec 1977): 89.

[28] Emphasis in original. Hirayama, 'Toyama Kagaku, kōgai yushutsu chūshi!?' 95.

[29] Hirayama, 'Toyama Kagaku, kōgai yushutsu chūshi!?' 93.

[30] Ogawa Yoshio, 'Dai 2 no Toyama Kagaku = Nihon Kagaku no Kankoku e no kōgai yusutsu o yamesaseyo,' Geppō kōgai o nogasuna! Kankoku e no kōgai yushutsu o kokuhatsu suru 3 (August 1974): 2.

[31] Ogawa Yoshio, 'Dai 2 no Toyama Kagaku,' 2; Masayoshi, Hideo, 'Nikkan no genjō to kōgai yusutsu soshi undō.' Geppō kōgai o nogasuna! Kankoku e no kōgai yushutsu o kokuhatsu suru 7 (Dec 1974): 1.

[32] Inoue, 'Bokura wa,' 59.

[33] Kawana Hideyuki, Dokyumento Nihon no kōgai 13: Ajia no kankyō hakai to Nihon (Tokyo: Ryokufu, 1996), 101.

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[35] Inoue, 'Babanuki,' 91.

[36] 'Damatte irarenai: Jimoto higaisha ga dantai o kessei,' Tōyō Keizai Nippō (May 6, 1975). Reproduced in Geppō kōgai o nogasuna! Kankoku e no kōgai yushutsu o kokuhatsu suru 14 (July 1975): 31.

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[38] Inoue, 'Babanuki,' 92.

[39] Hall, 'Pollution Export,' 274.

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[42] Aoyama, 'Nikkan jōyaku,' 68.

[43] ibid.

[44] Aoyama, 'Nikkan jōyaku,' 67–8.

[45] Aoyama, 'Nikkan jōyaku,' 68.