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The No Nukes 2012 Concert and the Role of Musicians in the Anti-Nuclear Movement

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On July 7–8, 2012, a two-day mass rock concert called No Nukes 2012 was held in the Makuhari Messe Convention Center in Chiba, near Tokyo. The organizer was Sakamoto Ryuichi, member of the groundbreaking Japanese technopop group Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO) and Academy Award-winning composer. Profits from the concert were donated to Sayonara Genpatsu 1000 Man Nin Akushon (Citizens' Committee for the 10 Million People's Petition to say Goodbye to Nuclear Power Plants), an antinuclear group which Sakamoto has been backing, along with Nobel Prize-winning author Oe Kenzaburo and others. The concert featured performances by 18 groups, including pioneering electronic groups Kraftwerk and YMO as well as rock bands Asian Kung-Fu Generation, Acidman, and others.

The Entrance to the Concert

The concert took place the day after a massive protest in front of the Prime Minister's official residence (Kantei)—the latest and biggest in what has become a regular Friday-night protest, which, organizers estimated, attracted 150,000 people that evening. Sakamoto himself had participated in this protest, saying before the camera, "I come here as a *shimin* (citizen); it's important that we all do what we can and raise our voices."

Sakamoto's concert is a significant moment for the Japanese antinuclear movement. As Christian Lahusen and John Street have pointed out, celebrities can play an important function in social movements because they command audiences and thus bring attention and legitimacy to the causes they back (Lahusen 1996; Street 2002); Bob Geldof's role in famine relief efforts would be but one example. As one of Japan's most admired musicians, Sakamoto can be seen as using his social capital to set an example for both major artists and ordinary Japanese citizens. Although recent polls have indicated that 70% of Japanese oppose restarting the nuclear power plants following their temporary shutdowns, many people feel that in their work, school, or social settings, it is taboo to talk about nuclear issues. Some are afraid to attend protests due to heavy police presence and the social costs of being arrested in Japan, where the police can detain people for 23 days without an indictment. In fact, a large number of people at the No Nukes concert appeared to have come by themselves. By appearing at the Kantei protest as an "ordinary citizen," Sakamoto was demonstrating that everyone, indeed, should participate.

Entertainers, too, have felt a need to keep quiet. The case of Yamamoto Taro is a stark reminder of the high cost of taking a defiantly antinuclear stance. This popular actor, who had appeared in many films and television dramas, made a video for Operation Kodomotachi, a nonprofit organization supporting the evacuation of children from Fukushima; in it, he was bluntly critical of the government's setting of mandatory evacuation zones, which he claimed were too small and made so in order to save money. Yamamoto was dismissed from an upcoming television drama and prompted to resign from his agency; his acting opportunities evaporated; and his friends and girlfriend deserted him (Yamamoto 2012). He eventually took a job as a salaryman.[1]

Broadcast media, particularly television, continues to be an important means for promoting music,[2] and music and broadcasting industry personnel acknowledge that songs critiquing the government, specific companies, or named individuals are unlikely to be aired. Furthermore, musicians airing such views can see a reduction in bookings. Last year, the indie idol-pop group Seifuku Kojo Iinkai, which recorded the song, "Da! Da! Datsugenpatsu no uta" (Get Rid of Nuclear Power) was disinvited from the Fuji Rock Festival[3] and discouraged from singing the song at engagements.

Other performers have cited personal reasons for being reticent about antinuclear issues. One musician told me that he is reluctant to be antinuclear because he knows that rural communities have been economically dependent on nuclear power and that regional farmers have been hurt by radiation fears ("it's a complex issue—it's better for Tokyoites without personal connections to voice it"). Another musician said that if he became openly antinuclear, his music would be interpreted through an antinuclear lens thereafter—a situation he was reluctant to accept. Hence, whatever their views on the issues, most artists on major labels (with some notable exceptions) have not spoken out publicly against nuclear power, and much of the music of the antinuclear protest movement thus far has been from independent artists or from anonymous contributions distributed over the Internet. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that it was Sakamoto—a longtime resident of New York who splits his time between the two countries—who spearheaded this effort.

Sakamoto himself has noted that "a small number of musicians have been outspoken on social issues, but they tend to be dismissed as radical," so that he sought some non-political musicians for the concert. "That way, more musicians will gradually realize that it is all right to express their own opinions" (*Japan Times*, July 5). Indeed, while several of the concert's performers (e.g., Goto Masafumi of Asian Kung-Fu Generation, Akihiro Namba, Saito Kazuyoshi, and Soul Flower Union) were already known to be antinuclear, others, such as Hajime Chitose or Yamazaki Masayoshi, had not been so public with their antinuclear views; as Ken Yokoyama said at the concert, "I'd thought it was the role of *chindon-ya* (street bands) rather than myself to cry out against nuclear power, even though I really wanted to write it out in big letters on a banner." By providing a mass venue of like-minded musicians, the concert hence encouraged musicians to be more open about their antinuclear views and use their position as artists to serve the movement.

Communications tactics

Having brought a mass of people together through music, the concert aimed to convey that every citizen should think about the issues and that one can, indeed, speak up. This message was communicated in multiple ways. Preceding each performance, videos were shown featuring interviews with Koide Hiroaki, Assistant Professor of Nuclear Physics at Kyoto University; Iida Tetsunari, Executive Director of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies; Murata Mitsuhei, Professor at Tokai Gakuen University and former ambassador to Switzerland; and most movingly, Idogawa Katsutaka, the mayor of Futaba, one of the host towns of the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant. Among the arguments they presented were that the nation actually has enough plant capacity without restarting any of the nuclear power plants; that there are viable, environmentally friendly means to produce energy; that the Nuclear Village of the nuclear industry, the state and establishment intellectuals is interested in its own gains; and that the problems of Fukushima are far from over. These videos drew applause from an enthusiastic audience. Such views can be considered anti-hegemonic in Japan, where the mainstream media—which, in Japan, is comprised of the terrestrial television networks and national newspapers—has tended to convey the official pronuclear view.[4] By providing a space in which the pronuclear arguments that pervade the media could be reframed, the concert organizers aimed to raise awareness of nuclear-related issues—a crucial role.

Creative videos, such as that contributed by the German sound-art duo Diamond Version, also drew whoops of approval.

As Sakamoto explained in the forward to the concert guidebook, *No Nukes 2012: Bokura no mirai gaidobukku,* these messages were put together with the aim of giving audience members "a seed" of something to think about. The guidebook provided more seeds. It contains essays by Koide, Iida, and Murata, reinforcing the messages in the videos; interviews with two artists performing at the concert, Goto Masafumi of Asian Kung-Fu Generation and Nakagawa Takashi of Soul Flower Union, in conversation with young activists; a timetable of key events in Japan's nuclear history; and a cartoon about Chernobyl. The book cover is by popular artist Yoshitomo Nara; this artist's picture of a girl holding a "no nukes" sign is an increasing presence at demonstrations. In addition, the concession hall featured booths of several antinuclear and Tohoku-aid groups, such as Sayonara Genpatsu, the art group Sayonara Atom, the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, and a group from Iwai Island in Yamaguchi Prefecture, which has been in a 30-year battle with Chugoku Electric Power over the construction of a nuclear power plant.

Perhaps the most powerful messages were from the performers themselves as they spoke directly to the audience. As Eyerman and Jamison (1998) have pointed out, social movements are dependent on the formation of collective identities, and music plays a large part in that process; the No Nukes performers' messages seemed to show an intuitive understanding of this relationship. Many artists—Goto, Hajime Chitose, Ken Yokoyama, and others—reinforced Sakamoto's words that every citizen needs to participate in their own way. Goto, Acidman, and others called for like-minded individuals to connect with one another and encouraged them to talk about these issues in the workplace and among friends. Akihito Namba acknowledged that the process was likely to be long and encouraged audience members to persevere: "Let's not give up. Let's imagine a better future. We are the future." Performers also showed an intuitive understanding of their double role as ordinary citizens and as celebrities with the power to inspire action from their audiences. Oki Nobuo of Acidman, the citizen, admitted that he (like many Japanese) had not paid attention to the nuclear issue until the accident. He then spoke of a former label associate who had gone back to Fukushima and has been living a difficult life as an evacuee. Oki, the celebrity, then added, "We can't let such a disaster happen again. Perhaps that's just a high-sounding statement. But if a musician can't say that, who can?"

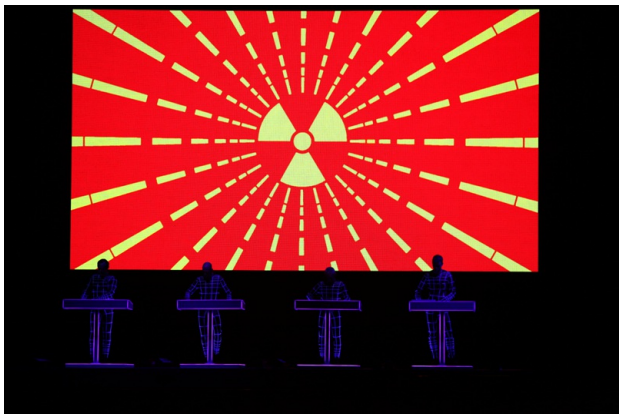
Messages through performance

Musicians also interacted with audience members through participatory performance and dress. Many artists wore T-shirts with No Nukes messages, with some selling their own No Nukes T-shirts at the concession stands; many audience members bought these T-shirts at the concert and changed into them. In addition to the sing-alongs common at live concerts, performers led call-and-responses reminiscent of demonstrations. Soul Flower Union finished their set with the familiar protest calls, "Genpatsu iranai" (We don't need nuclear power) and "Saikado hantai" (We oppose restarting nuclear reactors); rocker Akihito Namba led a call-and-response on No Nukes.

Antinuclear messages were also present in the songs performed. Asian Kung-Fu Generation played a new antinuclear song, while Soul Flower Union inserted antinuclear lyrics into their songs. Kraftwerk, the only foreign band that performed, refashioned "Radioactivity" for the current situation, memorably reciting in Japanese:

チェルノビイリ　ハリスバーグ　セラフィールド　ヒロシマ

チェルノビイリ　ハリスバーグ　セラフィールド　フクシマ



Kraftwerk performing "Radioactivity," No Nukes 2012 (Photo courtesy of Rockin' On)

今でも　放射能

今日も　いつまでも

フクシマ　放射能

空気　水　すべて

今でも　放射能

いますぐ　やめろ

Chernobyl, Harrisburg, Sellafield, Hiroshima

Chernobyl, Harrisburg, Sellafield, Fukushima

There's still radioactivity now

Today and forever

Fukushima radiation

Air, water, everything

There's still radioactivity now

Stop [nuclear power] now

YMO also played their own version of "Radioactivity" and showed visuals with the words, "No Nukes / Yes Life/ More Trees."

Yellow Magic Orchestra at No Nukes 2012 (Photo courtesy of Rockin' On)

Saito Kazuyoshi played his well-known antinuclear cover song, "Zutto uso dattandaze" (It Was Always a Lie), to resounding applause; he quipped, "It felt like the kind of atmosphere where I wouldn't be scolded for playing it. As you know, there are people who will say all sorts of things." He also performed three antinuclear songs from his 2011 album *45 Stones*: "Saru no wakusei" (Planet of the Apes), "Okami chunen" (Middle-Aged Liar), and perhaps most movingly, "Usagi to kame" (The Tortoise and the Hare). This song adopts the Aesop fable to offer a counterargument to the prevailing rationale for nuclear power: that it is necessary to sustain the economy. Pointing out that "money-obsessed people" have forced everyone into a "blinding pace" using "energy made from poison," Saito asks, "Which one was it that won in the end?"

Saito remains among the very few Japanese mainstream artists who have released a commercial recording with antinuclear content. In 1988, the rock band RC Succession recorded the album *Covers*, which contained versions of Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues" and Elvis Presley's "Love Me Tender" with antinuclear lyrics in Japanese. When the band's label, Toshiba EMI, declined to release the album, the group released it under Kitty Records; the album reached number one on the Oricon sales charts. In honor of the band's late frontman, Imawano Kiyoshiro, RC Succession member Nakaido "Chabo" Reichi led a session playing renditions of Imawano's songs.

Reach and reception

Each concert was attended by over 8,500 people, according to Sakamoto's management company; contrary to channel 2 reports, which claimed that the hall was empty, the crowd filled much of the rented halls at the large-scale Makuhari Messe Convention center in Chiba Prefecture near Tokyo. The audience was diverse in age, from the greying, to parents with young children, to twenty-somethings and students. Indeed, much of the concert seemed constructed purposefully to be inviting to college-age youth, as many have been reluctant to participate in protests given current difficulties in the job market. The inclusion of many acts who debuted in the 1990s or 2000s likely helped to attract them; the activists featured in the guidebook were in their twenties. To increase the reach of the concert, the show was streamed live over the Internet on U-Stream. More than 310,000 viewers saw the show this way; the feed was accessed over 542,000 times over the two days of the concert. In addition, Sakamoto featured the concert on his radio show on J-Wave on July 9, with interviews of the participating artists and clips from the performances. It is significant that an antinuclear event received such a long airing on a major radio station; only an artist with the stature of Sakamoto could have pulled off such a stunt.

The concert seemed to be stimulating for both activists and non-activists, as it provided a space that allowed for nuclear issues could be discussed. As the antinuclear activist Monjukun tweeted, "It was an environment where everyone could wear a No Nukes T-shirt and discuss nuclear issues in a relaxed manner. . . I came to understand that so many people thought as I did" (@monjukun, Twitter, July 9). The concert also seemed to inspire non-activists in attendance; several audience members said, "I came here because artists I liked were on the program. I had thought there was little I could do. From now on, I will do what I can, little by little." If the concert inspires more artists to use their celebrity status to speak out, and inspires citizens to participate in the process, it will prove to be an important milestone in the antinuclear movement.

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Notes

[1] "'Salariiman Yamamoto Taro' no iwakan," *Nippon Gendai*, April 18, 2012.

[2] See Manabe (2008) for an explanation of the structure of the Japanese music industry and the Record Industry Association of Japan for statistical updates.

[3] The objection is said to have come from a sponsor of the stage, not Fuji Rock itself.

[4] The editorial policies of these media outlets vary greatly. Among television networks, TV Asahi and TBS have offered more coverage of protests and other antinuclear viewpoints; among the newspapers, *Tokyo Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun* have printed more stories about protests or antinuclear views.

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