

# The burn-out, retirement, and suspension from social movement activity: The three categories of retired activists

TOMINAGA, Kyoko

Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology Faculty of Letters,

The University of Tokyo,

Doctoral Course

## 0. Introduction

Social movement theory is interested in the occurrence, persistence, and development of protests (Klandermans 1995). However, most researches have not observed the participants' retirement and burn-out from social movements.

Some researches cleared the protesters and activists are engaged persistently various social movement around the world. They have committed political activity by joining the some social movement organizations (SMOs) and the communities of social activism. At some time, they suspend, dwell and exit to be involved in their activity. The author supposed that a lot of disfunction is latent in their abeyance, intermission, and exit. Scholars have ignored such phenomenon in social movement; nevertheless they are closely related with their interest. The retirement prevents activists from doing political protest and the abeyance hampers protesters in their continuous social activity. Actually, a lot of protesters have confessed that they fell to they had a mental stress, emotional strain and physical pain after or during the engagement to social movements (Activist Trauma Support 2005). We can expect that such strains are tightly related to the processes of retirement in social movements.

The author conducted interview for the activists who have retired or paused from social movement activity. This paper aims to investigate the process of the retirement and burn-out from social movements. Therefore, this article finds the source and the result of retirement process. It contributes to social movement theory by finding the disfunction to the occurrence, persistence, and development of political activities.

Most of researches have not focused the retirement process of social movements. Some researches (e.g. Rodgers 2010, Taylor 1989) have been interested in the exit of movement participants but they targeted the limited activists and organizations. Some researchers have focused on career of individual participants in social movements. However, few studies mention the "retired" participants. Whalen and Flacks (1989) argued such activist, and Takada (1986) also mentioned it. Some retired activists engaged in activism alone through their private life (Kupers 1990, Takada

1986).

However, previous researches have written that the “retirement” and “exit” are not important factors. Recent researches focused on the activists’ career and the effect of certain magnificent movements (e.g. 60/70s activism, black insurgency). However the author argues that the exit from social movements includes the important elements in social movement studies. The exit prevents activists from participating and continuing their protests.

A lot of studies about organization theory have focused on the exit, suspension and burn-out of labor in profit organizations. (e.g. Hochschild 1983, Marlash and Jackson 1981) Especially, recent researches argued that retirement and burn-out are closely related with “emotional labor” (Hochschild 1983). The laborers of human service are burn-out from the loss of sense of accomplishment and emotional exhaustion.

Although many researches have challenged the retirement of social movements, the studies of organization theory ignored the retirement from social movements. Neugeboren (1985) argued that the participants who engaged in voluntary activity are willing to their activity and do not face stressful situations.

## 2. Method and Theoretical Framework

The method of this research is interview. I conducted the interviews to 14 respondents, all of whom were participants in some social movements previously. Although social problems which they tackled were not resolve, they exited from their SMO and social movement communities. The author chooses retirement activists in snow-ball sampling because they are not found from normal sampling methods. Moreover, The respondents include the members who are engaged in the groups which relate to the activist retirement and burn-out issues<sup>1</sup>. I initially had fewer numbers of respondents, and then some of them referred other participants for me to interview. All interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and each was fully transcribed. The analysis comprised of coding the interview texts in relation to the research questions. Among the 14 respondents, 5 are women. Four burn-out participants in the protest in their 20s; and three in their 30s; three in their 40s; two in their 50s, and two people in their 60s. Nine of the respondents are from Japan, and the rest are from UK.

The author choose them in snow-ball sampling because “retired activists” because they are always exit from activists’ community and do not belong to SMOs or other communities.

【Table 1: Informant list】

Name	Age	Job	Nationality	Movement	Interview date
A	Twenties	Graduate Student	Japan	Anti-Job searching	Oct 16, 2012

B	Fifties	Professor	UK	Poll-tax movement	Jul 17, 2012
C	Sixties	Employee in NPO	Japan	Student movement	Oct 15, 2012
D	Twenties	Graduate Student	Japan	Feminism/ Queer activism	Sep 16, 2012
E	Fifties	Representative in NGO	Japan	Student movement	Jul 27, 2010
F	Forties	Professor	US	Anti-globalism movement	Aug 2, 2012
G	Thirties	Government employee	Japan	Anti-globalism movement	Aug 11, 2010
H	Forties	Employee in NPO	Japan	Anti-globalism movement	Aug 11, 2010
I	Fifties	Therapist	Japan	Protest for airport construction	Feb 23, 2010
J	Thirties	Therapist	Japan	Anti-globalism movement	Aug 11, 2010
K	Thirties	Employee in profit organization	Japan	Anti-globalism movement	Apr 4, 2010
L	Sixties	Employee in NPO	Japan	The activity to rescue arrested activist	Oct 15, 2012
M	Forties	Employee in profit organization	UK	Feminism movement	Jul 27, 2012
N	Twenties	Part timer	UK	Anti-globalism movement	Jul 27, 2012

Recent researches have indicated that the retirement and burn-out are caused from organizational/environmental factor and individual factor (Rodgers 2010, Kelly and Breinlinger 1996). Therefore, in this research, the author pays attention to these two factors.

We regard the organizational/environmental factor in retirement of social movements as below:

The retired activists sometimes said that the reason of retirement was in the organization. For example, there are appeared as hard relationship with other participants, a feeling of intense fear for police and other actors, and so on. They are organizational factors which are latent in social

movement organizations, communities, and repertoires.

Furthermore, we consider the individual factor in the exit of social movements as below:

Some activists retired from political activity because they changed career. For instance, when they are graduated the school and began to work in their new workplace. Their lifestyle dramatically changed from before. The distribution of their resource (e.g. time, money and labor) is different from their school days. Such changes are effective for exiting the social movements.

There are three findings of the causes for retirement in social activities from recent researches: about the organizational factor and individual factor. The author analyzes the three retirement pattern and search for the *retirement and burn-out* from social movement.

### **3. What cause the “exit” from social movement? : Retirement and Burn-out**

#### **3-1. the individual factor: The case of A, B and C**

Some activists have changed their career during their social movements. Social movement process is continued for a long time and some activists often graduated their university or changed their office during the movement process. His/her career is not always fitted to engaging social movement.

A is a man in his twenties. He is in the master course in University in Japan and studies about education. He had carried out some social movements. Especially, he did protest for job-entry systems with his friends in college he belonged in the past. After entered the master course in other university, he has not done social movements. He confessed as below:

[1] A: Now I am searching a job. I cannot do political action because a lot of business people have a prejudice for activists. The one of my friends are quite excellent but he has no job because he belongs to a political party. He goes to job interview for over 100 companies... I thought that engaging political activism is very dangerous for me today.<sup>2</sup>

His career prevents him to do activism. When he had joined the social movements, he was in bachelor degree in University. B tended to enter the master degree; therefore he participated in demonstrations and forums without any anxious. He was forced to retire from social movement activity and movement community.

On the other hand, he noticed the importance of social movements through the job searching process. He said.

[2]A: I just played social movement when I was participated in. At that time I didn't think about earning money with getting job. However, it was not till now that I realized it. Doing social

movements is important for our lives. We treated important problems, for example labor, union and social welfare as the issues of our movement. I have no money and no job now, that's why I notice that social movements play the important role in society. If I will get a job, I would like to help other activists. <sup>3</sup>

“Career change” means not also changing jobs but also changing families. Some studies point out the effect of social movement for activists' vision of family (Sherkat and Blocker 1987, Fendlich 1993 and Whalen and Flacks 1989). B took the initiative of poll-tax movements in UK in 80s. Now he is professor in University. Usually he conducts his study and sometimes writes articles in Zine (Magazines for activists). For some years, he doesn't any radical repertoires for example sit-in, violence and demonstration.

[3] B: I do not take part in social movements. One of the big reasons is to have a child. My lifestyle changed totally after childbirth. I exited social movement community because more the change of my lifestyle than the conversion of me. <sup>4</sup>

Without social movements, he reflects his belief through the usual activity. He said that his present study is closely related to the “grassroots” social movements he engaged in. A and B retired from the social movements, nevertheless their motivations for movements are remaining in their minds.

C is 60 years old and working in a social movement organization. When C was in 30s, she paused to do political activity. She confessed:

[4] C: When my child was born, I was worried about my career... my salary is low in this organization. The work time is irregular and I have to work holiday if activists are arrested. (...) I supposed that my child cannot go together with friends (with laughing) because policemen brakes into our house and his parents and policemen have conflict at all times! <sup>5</sup>

However, she continued to work in an organization. She said the reason is “networks with other activists”. She lost the motivation for social movements temporally, however other activists needed her power. This is the great opportunity she returned to office. Was her anxious resolved? She said as below:

C: After my child got bigger, I came back to a social movement organization. Predictably, when my child said “police is wicked!” in his classroom, his friend and teacher were greatly surprised... (...)Anyway, in my case, things will take care of themselves. But I felt uneasy for participation and

continuation of social movements at that time.<sup>6</sup>

The cases of A, B and C give us suggestions about choosing “roles” in society. They had to choose the certain role among some roles in their life. They were in “role conflict” while doing social movement. A decided to play the role of labor than activist, B decided to behave as a father than an activist. C got the both roles of mother and protester.

### **3-2. the organizational factor: The case of D, E, F and G**

The individual factor is only one reason to keep activists at a distance from social movements. Most of movements are collective action. Collective actions are based on social movement organizations and networks. They have organizational structure repertoires, and member’s identity. Identities and Styles of every activist are not always converged to one schema. Sometimes certain ideals or goals exclude other counterparts from social movements.

D was activists in several social movements. D was usually participated in minority (gay and lesbian) movements in Japan. After the 3.11 disaster, he protested for the restart of nuclear power stations. Nevertheless, he had conflict with other activists.

[5] D: With the 3.11 disaster as momentum, newcomer came to social movements. It is great opportunity and basically I welcome newcomers. Nevertheless, they brought in their logics of “majority” society. For example they discriminated gender minority in political activity. If they noticed their mistake and correct it, this is all right. In reality, the more I point out their failure, the more stubborn they become. We cannot understand each other.<sup>7</sup>

The remarks from “newcomer” in the movement hurt him. Not only newcomer but also some participants do not consider situations of other activists. D often said some activists as “macho”. Social movements which have macho style have worried him. In such movements, male activists play a central role. Otherwise, artists and academicians are treated as important person among movement participants. Such movements are very far apart from D’s ideal activities.

In specific social movements, conflicts sometimes happen. Especially, many conflicts occurred in 60s/70s radical student’s movements. A lot of participants retired from there. E was the one of drop-out activist. He is supervisor in NGOs now. He needed the long periods to return to the social movement organization.

[6] E: The university I had entered was occupied with Kaku-Marū (revolutionary communist union Marxist group: written by author). Not Kaku-marū students were usually tortured by them. In this

conflict, a comrade of us was killed by Kaku-maru. Our movements started from the antipathy for such partisanship. Kaku-Maruo groups looked on me as an enemy; I felt that “I cannot go to school because I might be killed by them”. After I entered third-year in the Uni, I took a year off school and went to India.<sup>8</sup>

The existence of injured participants effected to other participants. However, after about ten years ago, he returned to the stage of social movements. I used this experience in India and engaged to develop movement in the global south worlds.

[7] E: I have a feeling that I betray my comrades... They continued to take part in social movement. Sometimes they were seized and took conflict with other sectors. On the other hand, I went India and enjoy my life in different situation... I ceased to commit myself for activisms in Japan.<sup>9</sup>

Not only relationship with other activists is the factor of retirement from activisms. Social movements often accompany with the risk of seize or injury to movement participants. They are significant cause of retirement and exit for activists.

F is working in the college in UK. He continued to participate in anti-globalism protest in UK. In UK and European countries, it appears huge demonstration and large-scale defense by police. As the result of conflict between demonstrators and police, sometimes protesters were died during the demonstration. The tragedy gave effects for not only died protester but also surrounding people. He lost his friend in a demonstration.

[8] F: I lost my friend in demonstration in New York. We had a heavy conflict with riot policemen. As a result, he was died. For a long time, I wasn't participated in any social movements. (...) Although it is unknown for me whether this incident was the direct cause or not, now I don't join the social movements.<sup>10</sup>

In Japan, only one person was died because of conflict on the street. However, the risk of conflict is in the public demonstration at all times. In some cases, activists see that other participants are arrested just before their eyes. The conflict, violence and arrest came into their view, and some protesters are greatly shocked.

G is the one of such participants. In the social movement, he, his wife (J) and his friends on a track with sound system. They played music and provoked mass demonstration on the street. During the demo, fellow passengers of him are caught by a neck and arms, and pulled down. Suddenly riot policemen tried to take his friends to their police car. As a result, his two friends are captured and

had detained for about 10 days.

After the demonstration, G engaged to help arrested protesters from outside of the jail. He sent things in to friends, explained detailed information for arrestee's family and friends, and so on. After the required period of confinement, his friends came back into his community. However, the effect of this tragedy remained in G. G's wife (J) said as below:

[9] J: For one or two year, G suffered from stomachache when he appeared in publics after the demonstration. For example, when he played music in his concert, his stomach hurts under strain. I am not suffered from it. I and his situation are different because he directly saw policemen seized our friends, but I didn't. I was also injured from the experience, but he is more wounded.<sup>11</sup>

In Japanese social movements, being seized is not rare. The longest term of detention amounts to 24 days. For about a month, arrested activists are isolated from other participants and his/her usual life. Their arrested life is full of "fatigue of isolation" and "skepticism for other activists". In jail, they have to struggle with incommodious alone.<sup>12</sup>

G was also isolated from his community. He was denounced by his other friends because they regarded that G exposed his friend to danger. By the occurrence of arrested people, activisms are regarded as "dangerous activity". G and J looked back at the time:

[10] G: I think that Policemen wanted to hurt not only arrestee but also relationship among activists. They tried to clash the network of us. The arrest sometimes breaks our relationship. I realized it... The term of detention is easily extended. It is harassment for us. Arrested activists cannot avoid feeling bitter about other participants. (...)

J: After the these incidents, G is overly nervous to not only participate activism but also invite somebody to do it. He always felt uneasy that somebody is seized by police.<sup>13</sup>

We can see the difference between the case of D and E and the case of F and G. However, the two cases are based on same roots. Some of them are tormented from police (F and G), but others are suffered from emotional or physical violence within a social movement group (D and E). At a different viewpoint, some activists come back to do social movement (E and G), others do not return to it (D and F).

However, their "injury" is based on the same cause. Their retirement is heavily connected with to clash the relationship among the activists. Sympathy with other activists is one of the most important factors in social movement process. In other words, they can resume doing social movements if they find the new relationship within other activists. E engaged in some development movement in India after his retirement in Japan. G renewed his surroundings and conducted his



movement again.

### **3-3. The individual and organizational factor: The case of H, I, J and K**

Through some social movements, certain participants are retired from some social movements. It is caused from not only the organizational factor but also individual factor.

H is a man in his fifties. He had carried out several social movements, such as students' movements and protests against airport construction. He joined the 2008 G8 summit protest in Japan. In the protest, he set up forums and demonstrations for a year with activists from Tokyo and Hokkaido, in Japan. However, he discontinued engaging in social movements after that. He confessed:

[11] H: I suspended social activities for private reasons and... I was tired to do activism. I got traumatized in the summit protest. I was so busy working as a nurse assistant and at the same time I was active in the protest. (Omitted by the writer) Anyway, I was so tired. I was worn-out...<sup>14</sup>

He explained that he did not continue his protest because of his personal reasons. Usually he worked hard as a carer. Nevertheless, his job did not change after and before the protest for G8 summit. Before the protest, he was engaged in political activism. His career was basically suitable to do activism and entered to the process of G8 summit protest as usual. After the summit protest, he retired from social movement.

Some readers might think that the summit protest is organizational factor of his retirement. However, H still has motivation to engage the social movement. It is not "burn-out" like D, E, F and G, but "retirement" like A, B and C.

I was also affected like I. He took part in the summit protest like I in his mid-thirties and worked in citizen group Z at the time. He was interested in problems of gender, human rights, and related problems. However, he did not go on his political activism. He stated his impressions about the summit protest:

[12] I: The protest was so dynamic. I was so excited that time but I was in low spirit. I have not recovered until now. I am depressed... But it has been two years since the protest and I should be well again. The summit protest only provided me with despair. We tried to do the 'anti-globalism movement.' However, I think that I am not able to exercise the skills and knowledge I learned from it. It is the reason of my 'burn-out'...<sup>15</sup>

I confessed his fatigue directly. He spent much effort, time and resources to set up the protest.

He felt it is very important that he helped in setting up protests for he will gain valuable experiences from it. After the protest though, he felt disappointed because he felt he did not gain what he expected to gain. Therefore, the summit protest depressed him. Moreover, he became too busy with work that is why he did not take part in any other movements. In addition to it, he could not stop leaving from setting up the protest and he thought he must gain experiences through the summit protest. The reason of it is that he spent various resources his own; labor, time, etc. He continued to set up the summit protest until gaining “something”.

In the “event-type” social movement, some activists had to spend their resources beyond their capacity. Therefore they were compelled to donate their own resources to set up the protest. Some protesters who have little resources were burn-out because they exerted time, labor, and money to the protest beyond their capacity. K engaged in social movement with I, she said “our activism occupied our life, therefore we cannot return to society we used to live after the summit protest”<sup>16</sup>.

J (G’s wife) quitted her activism temporarily. She talked about her retirement is due to her business life and the fear for police. She was very busy to manage her chiropractic clinic and couldn’t spend her time to do social movements.

[13] J: When I was participated in activism, I was just getting started to manage my clinic. After the protest, I had to spend my time to keep there. (...) I was filled up with management and I could not take part in social movements. I had dilemma between engaging social movements and running my clinic. Moreover, I feared police and to be arrested. Police gave me traumatic experience. <sup>17</sup>

In the Case of J, the individual factor and the organizational factor that the author showed in the above chapters. For a year, she cannot do political activity because of her business and fear for police.

The case of H, I and K and the case of J seems to be totally different. However H, I and K were not retired from the organizational factor of the event-type protest. It is evidence that a lot of other activists took part in same protest but they were not quitted from activism. H, I and K choose event-type protest in spite of their relatively little resources. The event-type protest requires us to provide our tremendous resources. They could not endure it. Their lifestyles are not fitted to the some kind of social movements. H, I and K felt the gap between usual life and activists’ life.

In the J’s case, we can get same suggestion about retirement process. She felt that not only her lifestyle is not suitable to do social movement but also her traumatic experience prevent her to be participated in it. This feeling is based on both the organizational and individual factor.

At last, H, I, J and K got back to doing social movements after one or two year. While he/she conducted ordinary life without any activism, activists could choice the movement which is suitable to their lifestyle.

#### 4. Conclusion

As a result of the author’s research, we can categorize the relationship between retirement pattern and their factors as below.

**【Table. 2 The Categories of Retired Activists】**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Situations of activists</b>	<b>Key concepts</b>	<b>Possibility of return to movements</b>	<b>Motivation of return to movements</b>
Individual Factors	Retirement [1][3]	Role conflict [1][3][4]	Low [1][3]	High [2][4]
Organizational Factors	Burn-out [5][8][9]	Rupture of relationship with other activist [5][6][8][10]	depend on his/her community for activism and usual life [7][10]	From Low to High (depend on the possibility of changing community) [5][7][8][10]
Individual and Organizational Factors	Suspension [11][12]	Gap between activism and usual life [11][12]	High [11][12][13]	Temporarily low [11][12][13]

Why does joining a movement cause retirement? To answer this, we have to consider the characteristics of protests and the career of participants.

Some activists retire from social movements because of their individual factors. They suffered a mental conflict between the social life and the life as activists. If they try to live as an activist, they cannot but give up living as an “ordinary” citizen. The possibility of return to movements of them is relatively low because their role in society cannot change easily. Once they become parent, they are mother or father for all the time. In spite of this fact, they continue to have a high motivation for activism. The author rebel the exit of them as “retirement” because they retire social movement in their own choice.

On the other hand, organizational factors let some protesters to quite political activities. Such activists are feel disgusted the rupture of relationship with other activists. The rupture sometimes appears from within the inside of social movement organization. In some cases, it is prompted by

police or other actors in outside of social movements. Basically they have low motivation to return to social movement community. However, problems of them are based on relationship with other activists. If we get rid of the factor, we can continue to do activism. Finding new social movement community assists them to resume doing social movement. The author regards such pattern as burn-out because they are forced to quit their activism. They had already lost their motivation at the time when they quitted.

At last, some activists retired from activities because of both organizational and individual factors. They choose large-scale activism which is not suitable to their lifestyle and resources. After the protest, they felt the gap between during the movement and while their usual life. They are out of adjustment for usual life and lost their energy for activism. However, they recovered for continuing usual life in society. After recovering, they became to be able to choice the movement that suitable for their life. The author considers this case as suspension because they didn't lost motivation and possibility for social movement. They lost motivation and balance between life and protest temporarily.

In this study, the author clears the burn-out, retirement and suspension of activists by analyzing the retired activists. The study shows that retired activists are categorized into three patterns: retirement, burn-out and suspension. Their category is determined by motivation of them and possibility to return to activism. However, the article shows the active condition of retirement. We should bridge between existing social movement studies and this research.

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## Notes

- 1 The groups are "Kyuen Renraku Center" in Japan and "Activist Trauma Support" in UK.
- 2 This interview conducted Oct 16th, 2012 in Tokyo, Japan.
- 3 This interview conducted Oct 16th, 2012 in Tokyo, Japan.
- 4 This interview conducted Jul 17th, 2012 in York, UK.
- 5 This interview conducted Oct 15th, 2012 in Tokyo, Japan.
- 6 This interview conducted Oct 15th, 2012 in Tokyo, Japan.
- 7 This interview conducted Sep 16th, 2012 in Hokkaido, Japan.
- 8 This interview conducted July 27th, 2010 in Tokyo, Japan.
- 9 This interview conducted July 27th, 2010 in Tokyo, Japan.
- 10 This interview conducted August 7th, 2012 in Colchester, UK.
- 11 This interview conducted Sep 14th, 2012 in Hokkaido, Japan.
- 12 This interview conducted Oct 15th, 2012 in Tokyo, Japan and Jul 27, 2012 in London, UK.
- 13 This interview conducted Aug 11th, 2010 in Hokkaido, Japan.
- 14 This interview conducted Feb 23th, 2010 in Hokkaido, Japan.
- 15 This interview conducted Aug 11th, 2010 in Hokkaido, Japan.
- 16 This interview conducted Apr 4th, 2010 in Tokyo, Japan.
- 17 This interview conducted August 11th, 2010 in Hokkaido, Japan.