MA Asian Studies (60 EC): Politics, Society and Economy

Thesis (Final Submission)

Student activism in Japan: SEALDs.

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Contents

Introduction

The 1960s and 1970s are consensually considered the decades of the rise and diffusion of student movements in most of the world.[1] Student activism in this period was twofold: on the one hand, students were concerned with problems of an internal nature, regarding campus regulations and dynamics; on the other hand, student movements had an active role in political demonstrations outside campuses, targeting governments' policies and working side by side with other social movements of the time, mostly Left-wing progressive and pacifist movements.[2] In contrast, the subsequent two decades, the 1980s and 1990s, are regarded as marking the end of social mobilizations and especially of youth involvement in civil society. The loss of strength by social movements and student movements alike in this period is often attributed to the exhaustion of the "confidence in the possibility of large-scale transformation from below."[3]

However, this confidence seems to have recently been reborn among students in various countries around the world, including Japan.[4] Since December 2012, with the political comeback of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, Japan has been shifting its domestic policy in a more conservative direction, while at the same time opting for an assertive foreign policy involving a more resolute and proactive defense stance.[5] Notwithstanding the political victories reported by the Abe government on both fronts, internal opposition to the new bills has been strong and widespread,

[1] Colin Barker, "Some Reflections on Student Movements of the 1960s and Early 1970s," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 81, (2008): 43.
[2] Ibid. 43.
[3] Ibid. 81.
[4] See for example Alia Wong, "The Renaissance of Student Activism," *The Atlantic* (21st May 2015), about the emergence of a new wave of student activism in the U.S.; and Jeff Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 13, issue 36, no. 1 (7th September 2015), on Japan's most recent student movement.
[5] Christopher W. Hughes, "An 'Abe Doctrine' as Japan's Grand Strategy: New Dynamism or Dead-End?" *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* (21st July 2015).

involving not only the opposition parties, but also the LDP's coalition partner *Kōmeitō* and public opinion.[6] A wide range of protests and political activities have been held in Tokyo and in other major cities throughout the country against the government's policies; among them, those organized by the group known as SEALDs[7] have generated the greatest interest in the media and in the public.

The group has also gathered attention from scholars interested in social movements in Japan since its outset as SASPL[8] in December 2013. SASPL began stimulating the interest of scholars of social movements in the first place for being the first student movement since the 1960's *Zengakuren* to address the government policies directly, focusing in particular on the State Secrecy Act proposed by the second Abe cabinet.[9] When the bill came into force in December 2014, the members of SASPL decided to redesign their group as a multi-focal movement, which took the name of SEALDs. The new configuration of the group maintained the direct focus on government policies, asking for respect of the Constitution and of popular opinion in matters of both domestic and foreign policy. Since then, SEALDs have become the first college-based social movement in the last fifty years to gain consistent visibility in the media and public support.

Nevertheless, only some preliminary research notes and short articles have been produced so far in the academic domain,[10] and SEALDs' relevance in the wider context of civil society in

[6] Ibid.
[7] The acronym stands for "Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy."
[8] The acronym stands for "Students Against the Secret Protection Law."
[9] Also known as "Designated State Secrets Law" or "Special Secrets Protection Bill," the law allows the Japanese government to protect as state secrets matters related to the four areas of defense, diplomacy, counterespionage and counterterrorism. Masahiro Usaki, "What Japan's Designated State Secrets Law Targets," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 12, issue 21, no. 1 (May 2014).
[10] For example Slater et al., "SEALDs (Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy): Research Note on Contemporary Youth Politics in Japan," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 13, issue 37, no. 1 (14th September 2015). These researchers have had the possibility to follow the evolution of SEALDs since its very beginning and to collect

Japan has not been fully investigated yet. Therefore, in this thesis I seek to analyze SEALDs from a comparative perspective, with a view to clarifying the social and cultural roots of the group, and its originality in the context of contemporary Japanese social movements. Such a study would shed light on the political implications of the activities of SEALDs and on their potentiality to affect policymaking and public participation in civil society in contemporary Japan.

In the first chapter of this thesis I will investigate how the development of student movements since their rise in the 1960s through their resurgence in the early decades of the XXI century has been represented by scholars, in an attempt to historicize the academic analysis of student activism in Japan. Such a historical analysis is a necessary starting point to debate the relationship between SEALDs and their XX century forerunners. As Kristin Ross has argued, the social mobilizations of the 1960s "cannot now be considered separately from the social memory and forgetting that surround them;"[11] on the contrary, the way in which a dominant interpretation of the events related to those mobilizations came to prevail is just as important as the events themselves.[12] Thus, the historical analysis in the first chapter aims at exposing the predominant ways in which social movements in Japan have been framed from the 1970s onward, and at uncovering the ways in which these narratives have contributed, and still contribute, to delegitimizing youth's involvement in civil society as well as to depoliticizing the events surrounding June 1960 and the struggle against the U.S – Japan Security Treaty (known in Japan, and henceforth referred to, as Anpo).

interviews with members and non-members participants in the context of their ongoing research project on social movements in Japan, "Voices of Protest Japan."

[11] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

[12] Ibid. 6.

The second chapter will build on the historical analysis to discuss how SEALDs relate to the aforementioned dominant narrative about social movements and student political activism in Japan. Through a comparison between SEALDs and the 1960's *Zengakuren* I will show that there exists positive commonalities between the two movements, in spite of the image of contrast that has been portrayed in the press and in some academic research notes. I will also argue that despite these similarities, SEALDs have been pressured by the existing negative memory of student activism to cast an image of themselves as totally opposed to the dominant representations of the 1960's *Zengakuren* and of their activities as antithetical to those of the anti-Anpo mobilizations. In other words, I will use the historical investigation of the previous chapter as a starting point to analyze how SEALDs frame their actions, as well as how commentators interpret them, in relation to the legacy of their 1960s' forerunners.

The third chapter will address the role of SEALDs in the broader context of contemporary Japanese civil society. Comparing SEALDs with the *Zengakuren* of the 1960's anti-Anpo protests is relevant to understand the influence the 1960s' student movements still exert on student activism. However, a comparison with other current social movements is also significant because, instead of relating two movements that belong to different periods in the postwar history of Japan, it allows to analyze different responses to similar socio-economic and political conditions.[13] In particular, I will describe the relationship between SEALDs and two other contemporary instances of social mobilization which have influenced the founders of SEALDs in terms of methods of protests and ideological content of their advocacy, namely *furītā* movements and anti-nuclear

[13] Robin O'Day, "Differentiating SEALDs from Freeters, and Precariats: the politics of youth movements in contemporary Japan," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 13, issue 37, no. 2 (14th September 2015).

movements. Such comparison will help define the original characteristics of SEALDs and the points of overlap between the group and other contemporary social movements in order to determine SEALDs' long-term ability to influence public participation in politics, and thus policymaking.

Theoretical framework and methods

This study makes use of multiple research methods and sources. To analyze the academic discourse surrounding student movements active in the 1960s and 1970s I will rely on secondary literature, produced both in the very period of activity of the movements and in the following two decades, in order to show how a hegemonic narrative has developed over time. I will draw upon Kristin Ross's idea that the events related to the social mobilizations that happened in France in 1968 cannot be understood without considering the way in which they have been socially remembered and forgotten ever since.[14] Ross argued that after the social struggles that happened in France in 1968 a hegemonic history of the events was generated through strategies of "reduction;" in such a history "dominant narrative configurations" were detectable.[15] The most relevant of these narrative devices was the de-politicization of the mobilization, or in other words the casting of "May '68" as a cultural rebellion rather than as a political event.[16]

A similar narrative, deploying analogous strategies and narrative devices, dominates the discourse about social mobilizations in Japan since the anti-Anpo struggle of 1960. In order to restore the political dimension of social activism, politics have to be understood as something

[14] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, 1.
[15] Ibid. 8.
[16] Ibid. 13.

more than only "specialized, electoral politics."[17] Therefore, politics will here be understood as all those practices that denaturalize and disrupt the "logic of the social," or social order.[18]

The analyses of current social movements in the second and third chapters will rely both on primary sources, such as newspaper articles, posts on the official social media pages of the movements, and their sites; and on secondary sources, such as academic articles and research notes. To frame this data I will draw on social movement theory and on social media theory.

In particular, from social movement theory I will borrow the concept of "framing" as conceptualized in relation to social movements by Snow and Benford[19] and the notion of "political opportunity" developed by Sidney Tarrow.[20] Thus, social movements will be defined as "signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning" for members, adversaries, and the public.[21] Their signifying process will be referred to as "framing." In order to be effective, a framing strategy should identify one or more communal struggles among its (potential) members, and create the perception that through collective action the problem(s) could be redressed.[22] In this way a framing process mediates between a "political opportunity," that is "a set of clues that encourage people to engage in contentious politics,"[23] and the organization of collective action.[24]

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[17] Ibid. 15.
[18] Ibid. 24. Ross takes this definition of politics from Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement. Politics and Philosophy*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 29- 30.
[19] Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26 (2000): 611-639.
[20] Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[21] Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements:" 613-14.
[22] Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes- toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, ed. Doug Mc Adam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.
[23] Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 33.
[24] Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes- toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements," 8.

In other words, a change in institutionalized politics offers an opportunity to be used for political gain only by groups that organize themselves enough to construct the change as relevant to and influenceable by their members.

Lastly, in the third chapter I will also draw on social media theory as I will consider how the use of social media by social movements has variously influenced the engagement of civil society in political advocacy. Civil society is here understood as "the organized non-state, non-market sector that exists above the family and individual;"[25] and by endorsing the concept of multi-layered social reality[26] I will maintain that members of civil society are influenced in their political opinions and behaviors not only by their offline social networks and by mass media,[27] but also by online interactions happening through social media.[28]

The 1960's anti- Anpo struggle from a historical perspective

The first institutionally organized student movement in Japan was founded on September 18th 1948, and took the name of *Zen Nihon gakusei jichikai sō rengō* (translated in English as "All Japan Federation of College Student Governments"), which is usually abridged as *Zengakuren*. Despite this late institutionalization, student political engagement could be traced back to as early as the foundation of higher education in Japan, and was particularly strong in the immediate pre-

[25] Yūko Kawato, Robert Pekkanen, and Tsujinaka Yutaka, "Civil Society and the Triple Disasters: Revealed Strengths and Weaknesses," in *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan. Response and Recovery after Japan's 3/11*, ed. Jeff Kingston (Nissan Institute/ Routledge Japanese Studies Series, 2012), 78.
[26] Ken'ichi Ikeda and Sean Richey, *Social Networks and Japanese Democracy. The beneficial impact of interpersonal communication in East Asia* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 27-34.
[27] Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political issues* (The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2-3.
[28] David H. Slater, Keiko Nishimura and Love Kindstrand, "Social Media in Disaster Japan," in *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan. Response and Recovery after Japan's 3/11*, ed. Jeff Kingston (Nissan institute/ Routledge Japanese Studies Series, 2012), 94.

war period.[29] However, it was only after the end of the Second World War, during the Occupation of Japan by the Allied forces (1945-1952), that students could aggregate in a nation-wide movement, at first with the goal of "democratizing" campus life and university practices.[30]

The way in which this student movement came into existence and developed, as well as the reasons behind its emergence, have been differently interpreted by its contemporary analysts. However, most of the images of the movement produced by academics in its period of maximum activity (from the late 1950s until the mid-1960s) show a common tendency toward stressing its internal diversity. For example, Tsurumi Kazuko analyzed how the *Zengakuren* divided in different factions between 1955 and 1958.[31] Her analysis clearly showed that a plurality of political positions was present inside the movement: against the anti-authoritarian, Marxist-based Communist League or *Bund* faction, which together with the Revolutionary Communist League faction prevailed on the others and was therefore referred to as mainstream *Zengakuren*, stood the anti-mainstream *Zengakuren* or *Zenjiren*, which stayed loyal to the Communist Party of Japan (CPJ), and the Structural Reformist faction, which took a more radically critical stance inspired by the Italian politician Palmiro Togliatti.[32]

At the same time, by arguing that the students who participated in the *Zengakuren*'s struggle shared an "ideological posture" rather than a political ideology,[33] Tsurumi could reveal the eclectic range of approaches to Marxism present inside the *Zengakuren*, and consequently

[29] Michiya Shimbori, "Comparison between Pre- and Post-War Student Movements in Japan," *Sociology of Education* 37, no.1 (1963): 59-60.
[30] Ibid. 61.
[31] Kazuko Tsurumi, "The Japanese Student Movement (1) its Milieu," *Japan Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (October 1968): 445-446.
[32] Ibid. 446.
[33] Ibid. 431- 432.

highlight the heterogeneity of relations existing between the different *Zengakuren*'s factions and the Communist Party.[34] Other scholars have later shown how these different views on the theoretical level generated differences on the practical level of action, in particular with regard to the use of violence.[35]

Furthermore, scholars in the 1960s tended to focus on the development of the movement over time in terms of form and interests. In particular, Shimbori Michiya traced this development and distinguished three different periods in the evolution of the *Zengakuren*: a first phase from 1945 to 1947, characterized by "on-campus movements," or, in other words, student movements born spontaneously in specific universities and confined to the one institution where they had generated; a second phase between 1948 and 1950 characterized by "co-campus" agitations, organized around a permanent and inter-campus institution; and finally a phase of "extra-campus" engagement during which students participated in demonstrations as citizens, and cooperated with other social movements.[36] Such periodization not only stressed a transformation in terms of the movement's shape and *locus* of activity; it also pointed out the maturation of the students' concerns. While in the first phase students focused mostly on the democratization of their own university's practices, in line with the policy of democratization of society promoted by the Occupation forces, starting in 1948 they began having to face common political problems on a national level.[37] Around that time the General Headquarters of the Occupation forces had ordered an increase in university fees, the decentralization of national universities, and simultaneously the

[34] Kazuko Tsurumi, "The Japanese Student Movement (2) Group Portraits," *Japan Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (January 1969): 27-29.
[35] Ichiro Sunada, "The Thought and Behavior of Zengakuren: Trends in the Japanese Student Movement," *Asian Survey* 9, no. 6 (June 1969): 457-474.
[36] Michiya Shimbori, "Comparison between Pre- and Post-War Student Movements in Japan:" 61-63.
[37] Ibid. 61.

purge of professors and university employees affiliated to the CPJ.[38] It's this situation that led to the formation of the *Zengakuren* as an organized and permanent institution for students' inter-campus collaboration on matters relevant to university life. It was then in the third of the periods defined by Shimbori that student activism took a purely political form, with the involvement of the *Zengakuren* in discussions of national political nature about foreign policy and security policy.[39] This third phase reached its apex in June 1960, with the organization of the demonstrations against the revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.

Hence it is possible to argue that, in the period of the rise and development of student activism, Japanese scholars tended to depict student movements as internally diverse and to render in their analyses the movements' complexity, which developed horizontally through different factions, and vertically through time. However, already by the early 1970s an antithetical inclination appeared among scholars. As the involvement of students in civil society began to fade away, analysts started producing narratives that ripped student activism from its political value by ascribing the social unrest of the '60s and '70s predominantly to economic factors. According to one of these interpretations, for example, many college students joined the *Zengakuren* after becoming disillusioned with the post-war "middle-class dream," as the increase in graduate students had produced a surplus of workers with higher education degrees, making it difficult for them to find jobs as white collars.[40] According to this interpretation, just as the increase of unemployed university graduates had pushed students toward active political opposition, the

[38] John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat. Japan in the Wake of World War II* (The New Press, 1999), 272.
[39] Michiya Shimbori, "Comparison between Pre- and Post-War Student Movements in Japan:" 63.
[40] Nick Sarkady, *International Politics and the Left Wing Student Movement in Japan, 1952-1970 (Dissertation)*, (University of Utah, August 1970), 83- 84.

increasing consumerism of the late 1960s was to be accredited for the lessening of their involvement.[41]

While it is impossible to exclude economic factors from an analysis of social movements, and similarly of student movements, in the following paragraphs I will argue that narratives that ascribe the social unrest of the 1960s predominantly to the economic situation of Japan in that period are the product of a particular political strategy devised by the then ruling political élite in order to surmount the political crisis they were facing.

In contrast with the previous two decades, the 1980s and 1990s were characterized by little to no engagement of Japanese people in civil society. This tendency can be understood as an expression of the feeling of impotence felt by citizens after the failure of the anti-Anpo demonstrations of June 1960, as the way in which the treaty renewal was achieved was felt to have been undemocratic and to signal the indifference of the ruling politicians to civil society's demands.[42] Similarly, these two decades were marked by a paucity of scholarship on the conflicts of the 1960s, and on social movements and student activism in general. The decreased interest in these topics was accompanied by the emergence of fixed *topoi* to describe them. These recurrent motifs can be assimilated to the "dominant narrative configurations" described by Ross:[43] they had been extrapolated through strategies of "reduction" in order to construct an official story, and gradually crystalized as a narrative which had the effect of depoliticizing the activities of the *Zengakuren* and of the other social movements active in the 1960s.

[41] Ibid. 54-55.
[42] William Marotti, *Money, Trains, and Guillotines. Art and Revolution in 1960s Japan* (Duke University Press, 2013), 134.
[43] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives:* 8.

Ross has shown how the "reduction," or reframing of social activism, had happened in France on two main levels, first on a temporal level and then on a geographical level.[44] The same can be said about Japan: on the one hand, an abbreviated history of social resistance was created through a "temporal reduction;" on the other, a "geographical reduction" limited the action of social movements to one geographical area. This second reduction also operated on a social level, limiting social activism to student activism, and thus negating the oppositional political power of other classes, as workers for instance, which had taken part in the 1960s' struggles. In this way, social movements in Japan came to be identified with one particular instance of social mobilization, namely the student opposition that took place in the capital (and even more precisely, in front of the Diet building) in June 1960 against the revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.

Through these limitations, grassroots political opposition could be framed as a temporally determined and contingent issue, as a violent generational struggle rooted in cultural diversities, which however hadn't had the power to altered major institutions.[45] The official story thus delegitimized the role of social activism, and particularly of student mobilizations, by negating their political nature, or in other words their being a "practice which disrupts this order [the social order] with reconfigurations of the social."[46]

To understand the hegemonic history about student movements in Japan it is necessary to retrace the process that led to the formulation of such narrative. After a decade of escalating protest actions, in the summer of 1960 the attempts of Prime Minister Kishi Nobosuke to pass

[44] Ibid. 8-9.
[45] Ibid. 21.
[46] William Marotti, *Money, Trains, and Guillotines*, 27. Marotti, like Ross, uses the concepts of politics and social order as defined by Rancière in *Dis-agreement,* 28- 33.

through the Diet a revised version of the U.S. - Japan Security Treaty were met with strong opposition from both the public and the opposition parties. Despite the parliamentary maneuvers of these latter (in particular of the Japan Socialist Party) and the public demonstrations outside the Diet building and the prime minister's residence, the amendment was passed through the Diet and the treaty was revised.[47] However, Prime Minister Kishi was forced to resign, and his party, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), had to set aside its agenda of rearmament and constitutional revision.

Instead of addressing these controversial matters of foreign policy, the following government, led by Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato, decided to focus on economic issues, proposing an "income-doubling plan" which was meant to double the income of Japanese families in a period of ten years. Thanks to the period of fast economic growth that Japan was going through at the time, Prime Minister Ikeda's strategy succeeded in partly regaining the support of the electorate, but most importantly in shutting out the opposition of the Socialist and Communist parties, which based their campaigns on pacifism and social issues.[48]

Although their anti-rearmament stance proved ineffective against the new economic focus of the LDP, and in spite of the dissatisfaction of the electorate with the political conduct of the ruling party, the two Left-wing opposition parties couldn't reform their agendas in order to organize a coordinated opposition, thus failing to represent a valid political alternative to the LDP. Nevertheless, for the LDP to maintain dominance over the political scene it wouldn't have been

[47] Ibid. 134.
[48] Steven R. Reed and Kay Shimizu, "An Overview of Postwar Japanese Politics," in *Political Change in Japan: Electoral Behavior, Party Realignment, and the Koizumi Reforms*, ed. Steven R. Reed, Kenneth Mori McElwain and Kay Shimizu (Stanford, CA: Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2009), 6.

enough to rely exclusively on the lack of a political alternative to its rule; the party had to shift to a "consensus- based policymaking system," focused on internal unity and low-key policies which could gain support from the majority of the electorate and from the moderate ranks of the opposition.[49]

To sum up, soon after the confrontations of June 1960 the political élite designed a strategy to face the crisis based on economic growth and welfare, in order to suppress opposition by delegitimizing the issues of contention such as constitutional revision and rearmament. As a consequence, contentious policies were made a political taboo, and at the same time the social unrest of the 1960s was recast as a product of economic instability, which would dissipate thanks to economic growth. Commentators in the 1980s and 1990s internalized this image of the struggle of the 1960s as a series of violent student protests, generated by the economic instability and social insecurity of the time.

This political stratagem of the LDP of shifting the focus from politics of contestation to politics of consensus, from divisive security matters to favorable (or at least less contentious) economic policies, is still currently in use. In a way redolent of the strategy used by the LDP of Prime Minister Ikeda after the 1960s' social struggles, Prime Minister Abe and his ministers have been campaigning for elections on their fiscal and economic policies, known as "Abenomics," refraining from commenting upon defense issues and constitutional revision before elections.[50] Aware that the majority of voters oppose constitutional revision, as well as the country's engagement in military activities, the Abe administration has been avoiding such matters, while

[49] Ibid. 7.
[50] Keigo Kawasaki, "LDP avoids touching on constitutional amendment ahead of election," *Mainichi Shimbun* (6th June 2016).

emphasizing the importance of its economic policies.[51] Resorting to such strategy, the Prime Minister and his officials have managed to evade confrontations with the opposition; likewise, they have avoided officially recognizing social movements which campaign mostly on security issues as SEALDs as political threats. [52]

However, especially since the "Lost Decade" dissolved the impression of ever-growing economic wealth, scholars have started confronting this political dynamic and the hegemonic narrative about social movements that supports it. In 2001 Wesley Sasaki-Uemura recognized that the "Anpo struggle was the culmination of years of activity among groups trying to resist the state's drive to restore prewar structures and create alternative visions for postwar democracy."[53] This definition not only restored the diversity of movements that joined the social contestations of the 1960s, but it also reconstructed the struggles' extended chronology by casting them as a process developing over time, with a pre-history and an aftermath, rather than as a singular moment in time, isolated from (and thus irrelevant to) the flux of historical events. Thereupon, Sasaki-Uemura argued that "limiting the scope of the analysis to the vortex that briefly engulfed the Diet and then rapidly subsided after the treaty went into effect obscures the submerged reality of the social movements that produced the vortex. It also obscures the connections that Anpo era movements had to the new waves of circles and social movements that followed."[54]

Lately scholars have tried to uncover some of these connections; for example, Carl Cassegård, in his studies on protest culture in Japan, has retraced the links between campus

[51] Ichiyo Muto, "Retaking Japan: The Abe Administrations' Campaign to Overturn the Postwar Constitution," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 14, issue 13, no. 4 (July 2016): 1.
[52] Ichiyo Muto, "Retaking Japan:" 2.
[53] Wesley Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Spontaneous: Citizens Protest in Post-War Japan* (University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 3.
[54] Ibid. 196.

protests in the 1960s and the new precarity movements, or *furītā* movements, which have gained influence among youth since the burst of the financial bubble in the early 1990s.[55] Unlike other scholars, who have focused on the differences between the old and the new youth movements in terms of structure and organization, ideology, and forms of protest, Cassegård has investigated how the legacy of the 1960s' movements has influenced the new campus protests in terms of use of public space and performativity.[56] Thus, he has shown that in order to deconstruct the main narrative about student movements in Japan it is necessary to break with the negative legacy that has been associated with protests and activism in Japan; in this way he has been able to restore a positive connection between the 1960s' student mobilizations and contemporary youth activism.

In the next chapter I will follow his example and compare the 1960s' *Zengakuren* and SEALDs. I will show that despite the presence of voices of resistance to the hegemonic narrative about student activism in the academic field, such narrative is still dominating the public discourse, especially in social media and press outlets, creating a predominant perception of social activism that forces new movements, and in particular student movements, to define their action in opposition to the "negative legacy" of the 1960s and 1970s' mobilizations. In contrast with this tendency, I will highlight some points of overlap between the old and the new student movements which are relevant to the evaluation of SEALDs' political effectiveness.

SEALDs and the 1960s' Zengakuren: commonalities and differences

As mentioned in the introduction, SEALDs evolved from the student movement known as SASPL (Students Against the Secret Protection Law). SASPL was founded in December 2013 by

[55] Cassegård Carl, "Lovable Anarchism: Campus Protest in Japan from the 1990s to Today," *Culture Unbound* 6 (2014): 361.
[56] Ibid. 365.

three university students; Okuda Aki, Ushida Yoshimasa, and Honma Nobukazu.[57] The three of them were engaged in *kantei-mae*[58] protests against the government's State Secrecy Bills when they started reflecting on youth participation in social movements and in the public political debate. They acknowledged a lack of engagement, which they ascribed primarily to the scarce education in subjects as contemporary history and politics given by Japanese schools. Such "systemic avoidance of political issues by schools" led, and still leads, many high school and university students to regard politics and social problems as far from their everyday experiences and as irrelevant to their lives.[59]

At first, Okuda and his fellow students decided to tackle this problem by organizing study groups whose pragmatic aim was that of clarifying the various political issues and narratives presented by news reports, in order to make them more understandable to youth and to expose their relevance for the Japanese society.[60] Meanwhile they also started organizing demonstrations and activities against the State Secrecy Act in the Shibuya and Shinjuku wards of Tokyo.[61]

Because its opposition was primarily directed against the Special Secrets Protection Bill, SASPL had been defined by analysts as a "single-issue campaign," expected to dissolve after the State Secrecy Bills came into effect in December 2014.[62] In fact, the group disbanded soon after the law came into force. However, by this time the core members had already recognized the need to re-define their movement in a wider and multi-focal form, adequate to their long-term mission

[57] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[58] Held in front of the Prime Minister's official residence.
[59] Ayako Mie and Tomohiro Osaki, "Systemic avoidance of political issues by schools keeps youth vote in the dark," *The Japan Times* (2nd May 2016).
[60] http://www.sealds.com/, section "Where we're from."
[61] Ibid.
[62] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy);" they give the term "campaign" the meaning defined by Charles Tilly in *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Addison-Wesley, 1978).

of battling for a more democratic political process in Japan.[63] At the same time they managed to control the contrasting sentiments of defeat and impotence inside the group, and to frame the protests against the Secrecy Bills as just one aspect of their long-term battle for democracy.[64]

The new configuration of the group took the name of SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy), and debuted on May 3, 2015, the Constitution Day.[65] The initial group, formed by ex-SASPL members, was based in Tokyo and in the region around the capital. At this early stage the majority of members came from historically Christian universities as Meiji Gakuin, the International Christian University, Sophia University or Hosei University; however, many of them were not religiously affiliated to Christianity.[66] From Tokyo, SEALDs quickly expanded to cover other regions, and now have branches in Okinawa, Tohoku and Tokai. The core members at present count around 400 people, to which a consistent number of non-member supporters participating regularly in the activities, such as demonstrations, study groups, and conferences, organized by the members must be added.[67]

Currently, SEALDs organize study groups, talks and street demonstrations to promote what they define a "new political culture" (*atarashii seiji bunka*), or in other words political awareness, among the youth and help young people understand the roots and consequences of the policy choices made by the government.[68] The concrete issues they focus on are diversified, from the

[63] http://www.sealds.com/, section "Where we're from."
[64] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[65] The choice of such date symbolically refers to the high value placed in the Constitution and in constitutional process by the group.
[66] Jeff Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution." Kingston discourages from focusing too much on the religious affinity of the universities attended by the first members, as it could be misleading to link their political activism to Christian ideals; on the contrary, he suggests that a feature common to these universities that may have influenced some students is their liberal left-wing orientation.
[67] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[68] http://www.sealds.com/, section "Suggestion."

reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and the implications of the U.S. - Japan security treaty, to the relocation of the Futenma U.S. military base to the village of Henoko and the popular opposition to the military presence of the U.S. in Okinawa. On their official site, they group these variety of interests under the three main categories of "constitutionalism," "social security," and "national security."[69]

More important than the specific issues, however, is the fact that SEALDs have identified an underlying main argument behind them, namely that the Abe government doesn't respect the democratic principles represented by the Constitution, thus endangering the security and freedom of the Japanese people. Departing from this premise, SEALDs ask for respect of the law and of people's rights, and for attention to the weak groups inside Japan.[70] Furthermore, they try to sensitize young generations to the need for political participation of all citizens.[71]

In so much as they focus directly on the government's policies and because they frame their opposition as a fight for democracy and for a more democratic political process against a powerful political élite, SEALDs are similar to the *Zengakuren* of the 1960's anti-Anpo struggle. Like their XX century forerunner, SEALDs use as a focus for their activism the political behavior of the government and Prime Minister, in particular regarding matters of defense. On a discursive level, SEALDs define Prime Minister Abe and his way of using power as "fascist," and they resort extensively to comparisons between him and Hitler. Despite not being the only ones, nor the first ones, to make such a comparison,[72] SEALDs' direct criticism of the Prime Minister has attracted

[69] http://www.sealds.com/, section "Opinion."
[70] SEALDs, "SEALDs one year anniversary," post on *SEALDs Eng*, Facebook page (18th May 2016).
[71] Ibid.
[72] Comparisons between the Abe government and the National Socialist German Workers' Party have been drawn by both members of the Abe cabinet and by critics. For example, in July 2013 the Deputy PM Asō Tarō suggested that the Japanese government should shape its process of constitutional amendment on the example of the Nazi

various attacks, in particular by reactionary online groups known as *net uyoku*.[73] While it has been argued that many comparisons between the Abe administration and Hitler's Nazi Party are based on a misreading of history,[74] such parallels still hold value insomuch as they emphasize people's responsibility in the political direction taken by their government.[75] Thus it is significant that SEALDs, in opposition to Abe's "fascist" ways, uphold "democracy," and respect for the political voice of citizens.

The direct focus on the political behavior and policies of the government is also an important aspect of SEALDs because it reveals the sophisticated understanding of social activism the group has achieved. While Abe's proactive political actions have thrown many activists in a state of despair over the possibility to really affect politics through social mobilization, they have worked as a "political opportunity" for SEALDs.[76] In other words, the group has taken advantage of the disapproval felt by the majority of the population toward Abe's political conduct and given an alternative reading of the various reforms he has been pushing for. For example, while news reports on TV and print supportive of Abe have framed the recent reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution as a way to allow more room for the peace-keeping operations and disaster relief missions in which the Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF) have been involved in

party's process of replacement of the Weimar Constitution. Ichiyo Muto, "Retaking Japan:" 4. On the critics' side, the editorial written in February 2016 by Ikeda Hiroshi, professor at Kyoto University, for the Tokyo Shimbun is representative insomuch as it delineates the aspects of the Abe administration that are reminiscent of Hitler's rise to power. Hiroshi Ikeda, "Hitler's dismantling of the Constitution and the Current Path of Japan's Abe Administration: What Lessons Can We Draw from History?" *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 14, issue 13, no. 4 (July 2016): 1.

[73] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."

[74] Ichiyo Muto, "Retaking Japan:" 5.

[75] Hiroshi Ikeda, "Hitler's dismantling of the Constitution and the Current Path of Japan's Abe Administration:" 7.

[76] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."

order to render it more acceptable to public opinion,[77] SEALDs have exposed its military implications.

Nevertheless, the group has tended to reduce those implications to an over-simplified concept of war that it then associates with the U.S.-Japan alliance and constructs as a "fight for American geopolitical ambitions."[78] The simplification makes it easier for young people raised with the "peaceful country" ideal to empathize with SEALDs' stance; at the same time, it creates an "emergency," personified in a concrete enemy, which gives unity to the group and lends urgency to its actions.[79] In addition, the direct reference to the Prime Minister, done in public by young college students who look completely regular and wouldn't normally be expected to actively engage in politics has come as a shock to many Japanese older citizens, provoking an emotional response in people;[80] from such strong emotions indignation and a sense of emergency and relevance have burgeoned, which have led to popular mobilization.[81]

Thus, SEALDs have managed to create a sense of individual responsibility, by shifting the focus of their activities back and forth between the political issues they discuss and the ability of public opinion and civil opposition to affect them. For instance, SEALDs have extensively used the slogan "War is over," hinting at the famous song by John Lennon, whose chorus is "war is over/if you want it." Through the association between the slogan and the song a second association

[77] Paul Midford, *Rethinking Japanese public opinion and security: From pacifism to realism?* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 39.
[78] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[79] Ibid. Slater and his colleagues reproduce an argument common to most social movement theories, according to which a concrete enemy and urgency of action are two necessary elements for successful activism, as they construct a sense of opposition and a problem whose solution can't be postponed.
[80] Naomi Gingold, "The student group in Japan that's made it cool to protest," *PRI's The World* (27th May 2016).
[81] Randall Collins, "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions," in R*esearch Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions,* ed. Theodor D. Kemper (State University of New York Press, 1990), 28.

between the end of wars and personal commitment takes shape. Similarly, in preparation to the Upper House elections of the 10th of July 2016, SEALDs have launched the online campaign *#donttrashyourvote*, which aims at increasing voter turnout in the elections by stressing the importance of every single vote.

Critiques to the group's emotional strategies haven't lacked.[82] Older activists in particular have recognized the danger of focusing on the figure of Abe, who is only the current representative of a system, rather than on the system itself. Moreover, this strategy could become counterproductive because it resorts to strong, irrational emotions that could go out of control, thus nullifying the efforts made by the group to create a non-violent "normal" image of student activism (of which more later). Similarly, the focus on Abe relegates to the background the historical process that has led to the current situation, reinforcing the critiques about the naivety and superficiality of the group members.

Slater has contested these critiques arguing that the core members of the group are aware of the larger systemic failure and actually address it in their website and in print materials, while in street manifestations they try to elicit more spontaneous reactions by directing the emotional disagreement of the participants to a single individual.[83] He also maintains that taking Abe as a focal target allows SEALDs to avoid a radical systemic critique of the State and of its economic, social and political structures, while condemning the extreme position of the current Prime Minister, which is an attitude more acceptable to the mass of Japanese people. Such a moderate posture has positively influenced the popularity of SEALDs; however, the reliance on emotional

[82] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[83] Ibid.

responses from the public exposes the group to the shifting nature of the public's support. In other words, if the proactive stance of Prime Minister Abe and of his political faction will last enough to affect the security identity of the Japanese people, or if security threats will appear that justify an assertive defense posture, the danger is that SEALDs' focus on the non-democratic process through which security policies have been enacted will become alien to or irrelevant for the majority of the population.

Beside the direct focus on government's policies, SEALDs and the 1960s' *Zengakuren* also share another characteristic: both groups show internal diversity in terms of ideology and political leaning of their members. As Tsurumi argued, inside the *Zengakuren* several different approaches to political theories coexisted, making the members of the group share more an "ideological posture" than a single political ideology.[84] Similarly, SEALDs have refused to affiliate with political parties, allowing a wider range of people to join their activities without having to subscribe to a definite political ideology.

In spite of their refusal to choose a political side, SEALDs have collaborated with the old Left-wing protesters, now united in the nationwide *Sōgakari* union, in order to organize complementary protests when their interests overlapped;[85] similarly, in several occasions the group has invited representatives of the Japanese Left to speak with them against the current government, [86] or has been present at political events organized by the opposition.[87] However, these activities don't seem to aim at aligning with any of the different agendas inside the

[84] Tsurumi, "The Japanese Student Movement (1) its Milieu:" 445- 446.
[85] Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution."
[86] For example, in the debate held on June 27th 2015 at Shibuya's Hachiko, SEALDs invited exponents of the Communist Party of Japan and the former Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)'s Prime Minister Kan Naoto.
[87] For instance, SEALDs' founder Okuda Aki was present at the launch of the new opposition party *Minshintō*.

opposition, or to mean an acceptance of ideological positions; rather, they seems to represent attempts at dialogue.[88] The formation of the civil society umbrella group *Shimin rengō* (Civil Alliance for Peace and Constitutionalism) in December 2015 proves that these attempts have so far proven beneficial as they have helped overcome the traditional divisions inside the Japanese civil opposition.[89]

Thus, if on the one hand internal diversity meant for the *Zengakuren* of the 1960s and '70s division and the eventual collapse of the organization, on the other it appears to have been used as an opportunity to gain wider support by SEALDs. Because of their non-partisan position, SEALDs have appealed to a large variety of people, and their manifestations have been joined by old activists in their 70s-80s, mothers' associations, anti-nuclear activists, citizens unsatisfied with the current political situation, students form *Zengakuren*, and Christian groups alike.[90] Furthermore, from SEALDs many subgroups have sprouted: OLDs, for supporters in their 50s-60s; MIDDLEs, for those in their 30s-40s; and even a section for high-school students.[91] They all support the actions of SEALDs because they agree that Abe's political conduct and his pushing in the Diet his proactive military stance are anti-constitutional and objectionable. Likewise, other students in their early 20s have been encouraged to establish their own politically engaged social groups following the example of SEALDs.[92]

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[88] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[89] The alliance unites five social movements, namely *Sōgakari*, the Association of Scholars Opposed to the Security-related Bills, the Association for Constitutional Democracy, Mothers Against War (Association of Mothers Against the U.S. - Japan Security Treaty), and SEALDs. http://shiminrengo.com/yobikake.
[90] Kakuchi Suvendriki, "Student movement builds a broader political platform," *University World News* 431 (13th May 2016).
[91] Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution."
[92] For example, in 2014 the university student Hirokatsu Goto (21) founded the NPO "Let's change Japan a step at a time" 「僕らの一歩が日本を変える。」, whose mission is "to connect young people with politics in new ways" 「若者と政治に新しい出会いを届ける。」. http://boku1.org/about/.

In spite of the aforementioned similarities in terms of interests and internal heterogeneity, SEALDs have been focused on casting an image of themselves and of their activism as antithetically opposite to the student movements of 1960s and '70s. In particular, they have put much effort in creating a friendly and non-violent image of themselves in the media and in the eyes of public opinion. Likewise, the group has had to fight the assumption, widespread among Japanese youth, that street manifestations in their country are illegal, as they threaten the peaceful livelihood of the people.[93]

To overcome this assumption, SEALDs have had to shape their image and their message in a way that is appealing to young students, making extensive use of social media and youth culture to promote their activities; besides, they've had to carefully design their manifestations in order to control their image to the general public. They have avoided violent, threatening actions that would have been associated with the dominant negative image of student activism, and which would have alienated them from the public, favoring instead an image of "normality." They have rejected every form of radicalism, be it conservative or progressive, and the kind of extreme actions as violent protests and hunger strikes performed in the 1960s and '70s by student movements, recognizing that such actions would have played against them, giving to the conservative government a chance to reinforce the existing image of student activism as threatening and thus to undermine their public support.[94]

Thus an image of SEALDs as contemporary, easy-going, fashion-conscious regular students has come to prevail on the group's official online pages and in the media. As a consequence of the

[93] Naomi Gingold, "The student group in Japan that's made it cool to protest."
[94] Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution."

great emphasis which has been given to the appearance of the members and to the design of their print products and social media profiles, SEALDs have been criticized for not being serious enough, and for focusing on "style over substance."[95] Some critics have gone as far as to suggest that the real strength of SEALDs is not their ideas (which wouldn't be many anyway, according to the same critics), but rather their female members, who act as music idols and have thus gathered media attention for the rest of the group.[96] According to the founder and core member of SEALDs Okuda Aki these criticisms are inconsistent, as it has been the strategy of his group from the beginning to use channels of communication familiar to young people, such as magazines, social media and music events, to cast an image of the members as normal, and of their political activities as consistent with a regular student's everyday life.[97] Furthermore, it is evident from SEALDs' activities that women have an active role inside the group, other than lending their faces for representational ends. The active engagement of female citizens as core members inside SEALDs represents a divergence from other social movements. Even all-women anti-nuclear power mothers' associations base their activism on an ideal role of women which stems from a patriarchal system of gendered division of labor, thus not undermining such system;[98] instead, SEALDs female members promote the emancipation of women from gendered roles.

To sum up, being tech-savvy and media-aware, SEALDs "are just applying the on-line practices of their personal lives to political ends"[99] and by doing so they have effectively managed

[95] Naomi Gingold, "The student group in Japan that's made it cool to protest."
[96] William Andrews, "About My Liberty: SEALDs 2015 Documentary Film about Student Activist Released in May," *Throw Out Your Books* (blog) (10th April 2016).
[97] Naomi Gingold, "The student group in Japan that's made it cool to protest."
[98] Kathleen Uno, "The Death of the 'Good Wife, Wise Mother'?" in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (University of California Press, 1993), 293-322.
[99] Tom Gill, anthropologist, cited by Kingston in "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution."

to reject the stereotypical representations associated with violent student activism and with extreme Left-wing social movements. At the same time, instead of using social media as a diversion from real life, SEALDs have used their technological shrewdness to reach out to a wider public, to captivate young citizens, and to connect people who share their same political and social concerns but who are geographically distant. In this way, SEALDs have been actively defying the stereotypes surrounding young university students in Japan, refusing to be passive spectators of policymaking, retreated in a virtual world of leisure and amusement.[100] Combining these two different aspect, the group has managed to create a socially acceptable image of itself, which has proved to be decisive for the success of SEALDs' political advocacy, insofar as it has helped the group reach a wider public and gain its support and approval.

Street demonstrations have also played an important role in constructing the visual identity of SEALDs. The group has shaped its demonstrations as a space for encounter between pairs, where critical thinking and individuality are praised, creating a contrasting environment in comparison with the Japanese school system, which leaves little space for autonomous expression. Likewise, SEALDs have framed their manifestations as a chance to create ties with other young people with similar interests even for those who still don't feel at ease showing to classmates, friends and families their political concern, and thus don't publicize it through social media.[101] From this perspective, street demonstrations are a safe way to join the opposition while maintaining a relatively low profile and anonymity, if compared with reposting and sharing on social media.

[100] Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution;" and Hifumi Okonuki, "Should SEALDs student activists worry about not getting hired?" *The Japan Times* (Aug. 30th 2015).
[101] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."

SEALDs' coordinated use of both online and offline activities has been carefully managed by the group, and has ultimately proven effective in "mainstreaming political activism and making it seem unthreatening to the public."[102] As Slater and his research group have already argued, the effectiveness of SEALDs' activities depends on the conscious use of two specific kinds of framing strategies to construct issues as relevant to members and to influence public opinion: on the one hand, "cognitive or ideological frames," such as manifestos and websites' pages, are used to explicitly illustrate the relevance of the issues addressed and the potential effects of common action; on the other hand, "emotional frames," which are visual, instinctive appeals delivered through demonstrations and social media, are used to foster awareness of the issues addressed in the protests and connect them in a coherent fight against non-democratic, exclusive policymaking.[103]

Besides using social media and demonstrations to document their normality, SEALDs have also carefully managed their public image by collaborating with the traditional media (TV and print press) through interviews, press conferences and events.[104] In its official communications, the group stresses the ordinariness, politeness and education of its members to give out a reassuring image. Furthermore, SEALDs have been consciously aiming at the international press, as the English acronym they have selected as a name, and the presence of an official English-language Facebook page imply.

To sum up, there exist points of overlap between SEALDs and the 1960s' *Zengakuren*, namely the direct focus on government's policies and the internal heterogeneity of the two groups.

[102] Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution."
[103] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[104] Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution."

However, scholars have only briefly touched upon these commonalities, and in the media they are largely overlooked. Consequently, SEALDs are usually confronted not with the *Zengakuren* of the 1960s and '70s but with a stereotyped negative image of student activism. As a result, the assessments of SEALDs produced by the press and the media have been limited to their visual strategies and their image, which are the aspects of the group which contrast with the predominant image of student activism as a violent and anti-social kind of social mobilization; furthermore, the hegemonic narrative about social movements that depicts student activism as a violent anti-systemic activity has been perpetuated.

SEALDs in the context of contemporary Japanese civil society

In the broader political context of Japan, SEALDs position themselves as "liberal" opposition, whose principal aim is to create a "new political culture" which would lead to the birth of an effective political opposition able to resist the ruling LDP's tendency to "impose" legislations by forcing them through the Diet, in complete disregard of public opinion. Such an opposition would then support the establishment or the conservation of friendly and peaceful relations with the countries surrounding Japan, and promote equality and shared growth inside the country.

It is evident from their political goals that SEALDs don't aim at challenging the the post-war Japanese system and identity, but rather at restoring the fundamental ideals behind them. For example, their pacifist approach to national security, which reflects "Japan's long-standing identity of domestic antimilitarism,"[105] is more representative of the position held by Japan since the end of the Occupation than Prime Minister Abe's pro-active defence stance is.

[105] Andrew L. Oros, "International and domestic challenges to Japan's postwar security identity: 'norm constructivism' and Japan's new 'proactive pacifism," *The Pacific Review* 28, no. 1 (2015): 140.

Nevertheless, SEALDs' attitude is not one of anachronistic opposition to change, but one of contingent opposition to the direction of current changes. For instance, SEALDs don't oppose all modifications of the Japanese Constitution, but only those revisions that don't respect the due process and are not in line with public opinion. From the group's perspective, the Constitution could be changed to give equal rights to sexual minorities, which are increasingly accepted in Japan, as a legal change would accelerate the process of inclusion; however, the Constitution shouldn't be changed to allow Japan to move toward a military proactive behaviour, as the majority of the population still embraces a pacifist stance.[106] Likewise, SEALDs oppose the pushing through the Diet of legislations which effectively amount to revisions of the Constitution without formally and legally being, and which are opposed by public opinion (as for example the new interpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution which was rammed through the Diet on the 19th of September 2015).[107]

SEALDs' rejection of anti-systemic notions puts the group in a position of contrast with *furītā* movements, or precarity workers' movements.[108] *Furītā* is a Japanese neologism created from the English word "free" and the German word "*arbeiter*" (worker); it came into common use in the early 1990s, after the burst of the economic bubble, to describe "young people who are not regularly employed but who work at one or more part-time jobs or at one short-term job after another."[109] SEALDs and *furītā* movements address similar social issues, such as job insecurity and the lack of an extended welfare security system in Japan. These shared social preoccupations have

[106] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[107] Ichiyo Muto, "Retaking Japan:" 1.
[108] O'Day, "Differentiating SEALDs from Freeters, and Precariats."
[109] Yūji Genda, *A Nagging Sense of Job Insecurity. The New Reality Facing Japanese Youth* (International House of Japan Press, 2005), 52.

until now created a common ground of discussion between the two movements; however, they have also increasingly come to represent points of disagreement because of the divergent solutions sought to them by SEALDs and *furītā*. *Furītā* movements demand progressive changes in the socio-economic structure of Japan, and in the legal framework that allows the exploitation of occasional workers.[110] In contrast, SEALDs focus on the protection of the liberal democratic aspects of the socio-political system of Japan, which they think have been endangered by the political behavior of the Abe cabinet. Thus, while *furītā* call for a reappraisal of the post-war Japanese State system, SEALDs advocate a return to a moderate form of that system, and reject only the extreme stance represented by Abe and its government.[111] Furthermore, the identification of SEALDs with the political Left represents more a reaction to the increasing Right-wing penchant of the LDP than the expression of a wish for communist or anarchical revolution.[112]

This divergence between the two groups could be seen as a consequence of the difference in terms of social status and social capital of their membership, as *furītā* movements, whose members are occasional workers and students or new graduates who refuse (or in some cases are unable) to enter lifetime employment, appeal to marginalized individuals who have failed to integrate in social conformity,[113] while most of SEALDs' core members come from top-rank universities and don't consider subverting social order. On the contrary, they talk overtly of

[110] Gordon Mathews, "Seeking a Career, Finding a Job: How Young People Enter and Resist the Japanese World of Work," in *Japan's Changing Generations*, ed. Gordon Mathews and Bruce White (Routledge Curzon, 2004), 122.
[111] O'Day, "Differentiating SEALDs from Freeters, and Precariats;" Ogawa Akihiro, Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Melbourne, voices the same opinion (cited in Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution").
[112] Tom Gill, anthropologist at Meiji Gakuin, cited in Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution."
[113] Gordon Mathews, "Seeking a Career, Finding a Job," 131.

entering the mainstream society after graduation, and of promoting a wider political participation by involving in civil society "normal" people.

The attitude of SEALDs toward social and political change has been criticized by some members of *furītā* movements, who regard SEALDs as "rich kids playing at politics."[114] Scholars who have had the possibility to closely follow SEALDs' activities have opposed this assessment. In particular, O'Day has argued that SEALDs' core members are aware of their position of privilege in society and seek to use their advantage constructively.[115] Similarly, Kingston has suggested that SEALDs use the relative freedom given by their status as university students and their education to engage with the political debate and with social problems instead than opting for diversions such as sport clubs and other amusements that prevail among their pairs.[116]

Nevertheless, because SEALDs haven't shown an interest in radical social change their social advocacy has little meaning for those people who can't integrate in the contemporary Japanese mainstream society. However, the moderate stance they promote contrasts the existing tendencies of engaging with politics completely in a radical way or not engaging with it at all, showing that it's possible to be part of civil society and have a political identity for regular people.[117] In other words, SEALDs' position represents a middle-of-the-road alternative which appeals to the social strata which have until now been politically disengaged, without necessarily being satisfied with the socio-political situation of the country. From this perspective, the

[114] O'Day, "Differentiating SEALDs from Freeters, and Precariats."
[115] Ibid. His opinion is supported by interviews he conducted during fieldwork at the group's manifestations.
[116] Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution."
[117] O'Day, "Differentiating SEALDs from Freeters, and Precariats."

moderate stance of SEALDs on social issues represents the best choice to achieve the ultimate goal of the group of making political participation "a new norm in Japan."[118]

Besides *furītā* movements, SEALDs are also closely linked to anti-nuclear movements. For many core members of SEALDs, and for many young Japanese activists in general, the nuclear disaster that stroke the Eastern shore of Japan in March 2011 represented an important turning point and the beginning of their political awakening; for this reason, the anti-nukes component is very strong inside SEALDs.[119] Moreover, SEALDs are indebted to anti-nukes protests for a more concrete reason. Since after the 3.11 triple disaster, a wide variety of people has joined anti-nuclear movements in weekly gatherings that take place in front of the Diet Building and the Prime Minister's official residence to protest against reliance on nuclear power and for the right to live in a radiation-free environment.[120] To this day, protesters still meet every Friday evening in front of the Prime Minister's official residence and in front of the Diet.[121] The regularity of anti-nuke protests has contributed to normalize political demonstrations in the eyes of the population, at first in the capital and subsequently in most major cities; at the same time, the participation of mothers' associations, fishers' and farmers' unions, and of groups of evacuated families next to long-time activists has helped dissipating the assumption of violence and extremism surrounding demonstrators.[122] SEALDs have benefitted from this situation, and have further promoted the participation in street demonstrations of normal citizens, especially young ones.

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[118] Nakano Koichi, Sophia University (cited in Kingston, "SEALDs: Students Slam Abe's Assault on Japan's Constitution").
[119] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."
[120] Eiji Oguma, "A New Wave Against the Rock: New social movements in Japan since the Fukushima nuclear meltdown," *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 14, issue 13, no. 1 (July 2016): 1.
[121] Tetsuya Hyoka, "Kantei ya kokkai mae de 'Saikado hantai' 6000 nin (官邸や国会前で「再稼働反対」６０００人)," *Mainichi Shimbun* (11th March 2016).
[122] Slater et al., "SEALDs (Student Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy)."

The Japanese media have had an important role in the normalization of street protests, as after 3.11 newspapers and TV reports started to describe activists as "normal" (*futsū*), abandoning terms as "extreme" or "inappropriate," which were previously used to describe social movements, thus legitimizing the idea of joining a street demonstration in the mind of (young) citizens. Many examples can be found in Japanese newspapers, especially in the liberal Asahi Shimbun, of articles reporting demonstrations which include brief interviews with the participants. In these articles demonstrators are represented as regular people, and mostly talk about how their political engagement fits in their daily lives and has influenced their future goals. [123]

However, in spite of the fact that demonstrations by both anti-nuclear movements and SEALDs have been attended by hundreds of thousands of people, many of the groups' activities haven't been reported by the mass media.[124] With the mass media increasingly under the control of the ruling LDP,[125] social media and the internet have progressively gained importance in the mainstreaming of social activism. On the one hand, it has been shown that the use of online social media effectively influences the recruitment of members and demonstrators,[126] helps connecting otherwise isolated people who aren't conscious of the potential of common actions, [127] and is useful in generating political interest in citizens who were previously uninterested.[128] On the other

[123] Goto Ryota and Miako Ichikawa, "Koe wo ageugokasu- saki wo misueru Anpo hantai no wakamonora"(「声を上げ動かす」先を見据える反保反対の若者ら), *Asahi Shinbun* (Dec. 6th 2015) is an example of such an article, where SEALDs' members express their wish to become part of the Japanese society in an ordinary way, and at the same time to participate actively in the national political debate.
[124] Eiji Oguma, "A New Wave Against the Rock:" 14.
[125] Anonym. "Speak no Evil: Japan's media are quailing under government pressure," *The Economist* (16th May 2016).
[126] Bernard Enjolras, Kari Steen-Johnsen, and Dag Wollebæk, "Social Media and Mobilization to Offline Demonstrations: Transcending Participatory Divides?" *New Media & Society*, 15, no. 6 (2012): 904.
[127] Rebecca A. Hayes, *New Media, New Politics: Political Learning Efficacy and the Examination of Uses of Social Network Sites for Political Engagement* (Michigan State University, 2009), 6.
[128] Sanne Kruikemeier et al., "Unraveling the effects of active and passive forms of political Internet use: Does it affect citizens' political involvement?" *New Media and Society*, 16, no. 6 (2014): 915.

hand, however, online networks have a major weak point, namely that they can only connect individuals who already have something in common.[129] Thus, SNS need to be combined with other methods such as direct offline personal relationships to be effective in mobilizing citizens.[130]

SEALDs appear to have successfully coordinated their online and offline activities, and to have been able to take advantage of their connections with other social movements to enlarge their support basis, rather than let the different component of their activism, such as the anti-nuke component, tie them down to a single issue.

Conclusions

In one year of activity SEALDs have become the first student movement since the 1960s' *Zengakuren* to attract substantial civil support and media attention. They have managed to positively cope with the hegemonic image of student activism as a violent and anti-systemic form of political participation, defying the predominant narrative about social movements in Japan, as well as stereotypes regarding youth's political disengagement. Similarly, they have gained support by a variety of citizens and by a wide range of other social movements, creating a cooperative social opposition to the ruling LDP and Prime Minister Abe Shinzō.

Nevertheless, the results of the House of Councillors elections of July 10th 2016 indicate that they have failed to achieve their final goal of increasing Japanese civil society's political engagement. In the elections, the LDP, together with its coalition partner *Kōmeitō* and other smaller parties and independents supportive of constitutional amendment have secured the two-

[129] Eiji Oguma, "A New Wave Against the Rock:" 16.
[130] Ibid. 17.

thirds of seats in the Upper House necessary to start the process of revision.[131] Furthermore, the voter turnout in the elections increased only of a 2.09 percentage point in comparison with the previous Upper House elections of 2009;[132] the increase could represent a small growth in citizens' political engagement, but could also be a result of the lowering of voting age from 20 to 18 years old which has been introduced in the elections.[133]

In addition, a survey conducted by the *Mainichi Shimbun* on the 10th of July shows that besides failing to increase electoral attendance, SEALDs and the opposition parties have also been unable to frame the elections as a battle over constitutional amendment, while the LDP's strategy to focus on economic and welfare policies has once again proven fruitful.[134] Thus SEALDs, in spite of their promising features, have not been able to alter the predominant voting behaviour of Japanese citizens, who have tended to place less emphasis on security issues when deciding how to vote compared with issues related to the economy and to social security.[135]

In conclusion, SEALDs have reacted to the failure of their political struggle with a joint communique published on the site of the civil alliance *Shimin rengō* and on their Facebook official page. The message focuses primarily on the achievements of the opposition in terms of representatives elected, which are attributed to the cooperation between various social

[131] Yoso Furumoto, "Kaiken Seiryoku Sanbun no ni kosu. Jikō, Kaisen Kahansu" (「改憲勢力３分の２超す　自公、改選過半数」), *Mainichi Shimbun* (11th July 2016).
[132] Kei Satō, "Tōyōritsu bizō 54.70%. Kako yon banme no Hikui" (「投票率微増５４．７０％　過去４番目の低さ」), *Mainichi Shimbun* (11th July 2016).
[133] At the time of writing no data on this subject was available yet.
[134] Keigo Kawasaki and Yamasaki Katsuyuki, "Kenpō, Keizai de kakusare. Sanbun no ni 'Shirazu' tasū. Yūkensha 150 nin kiku" (「憲法、経済で隠され　３分の２「知らず」多数　有権者１５０人に聞く」), *Mainichi Shimbun* (11th July 2016.)
[135] Eiji Oguma, ""A New Wave Against the Rock:" 21.

movements and the opposition parties.[136] From another message published on SEALDs' official website also seems possible that SEALDs, in spite of their decision to disband after the elections, may be considering furthering their political engagement.[137] It also appears that the core members of the group have already recognized the need to improve collaboration among the opposition parties, and to promote dialogue between these parties and citizens, as one of long-term reasons behind the LDP political success is the lack of a rooted and stable political alternative.

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[136] Civil Alliance for Peace and Constitutionalism (*Shimin rengō*), official website, section News. http://shiminrengo.com/archives/1406.

[137] SEALDs, "2016 nen Saninsen no Matome" (「2016 年参院選のまとめ」), official website, section Archives, http://sealdspost.com/archives/4478.

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