Certain crucial dates in history become wellsprings of collective memory. In Japan, one only has to mention August 15, for example, to prompt a chain of reflections about the 1945 radio broadcast announcing Japan’s surrender in World War II, the transition from the old imperial system to the new postwar democracy, “Year Zero”¹ and the “good defeat”² that resulted in the postwar economic miracle, and the irrevocable changes that this day brought to everyone’s life.

May 19 and June 15, although less ubiquitous, evoke a similar stream of memories from 1960, when hundreds of thousands of Japanese across the country took to the streets to protest the revised U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, or Anpo as it is abbreviated in Japanese. The two dates mark the peak of the demonstrations. On May 19, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke used police force to secure passage of the treaty, provoking a storm of popular reaction against his regime. The date, therefore, elicits memories of people rushing to defend Japan’s fragile new democracy, a month of daily meetings and rallies and demonstrations, and the awe participants felt at seeing such a vast range of people who had gathered for a common purpose.
June 15, in contrast, evokes bitter memories among those who took part in the protests. That day, right-wing groups violently attacked citizen marchers, and a clash between students and riot police at the National Diet building resulted in the death of a university coed, the first fatality of the protests. Those events, in turn, prompt angry reflections on the state’s suppression of dissent and the mass media’s capitulation to the ruling party when they blamed the demonstrators for the violence. People recall mourning for the student at her memorial service a few days later and mourning for the movement at the Diet building as the treaty went into effect.

The chain of memories extends further to how the prime minister ultimately resigned in disgrace and the ruling party ended its high profile attempts to revive prewar structures and turned its attention to promoting economic prosperity instead. Some participants recall feeling enervated and disillusioned in the aftermath of the struggle as the movement fragmented and the general public became quiescent, while others were energized by the level of activism during the protests and entertained hopes of recapturing its potential for social and political change.

Even today, the 1960 Anpo protests are described as a major historical watershed that set the course of postwar democracy. Participants and analysts alike trace the protest movement against the Vietnam War that started in Japan in 1965, the campus revolts of the late 1960s, the environmental movements of local residents that proliferated in the 1970s, the grassroots networking of citizens’ groups, and the consumer movements of the 1980s and 1990s all back to Anpo. The 1960 protests mark a paradigm shift in social movements away from ideologies of class struggle and mass movements dominated by workers and the opposition parties to smaller, diverse movements based on citizens as the main actor.

However, May 19 and June 15 were not just lines of demarcation; they also stood at the peak of an arc of protests that built up over the latter half of the 1950s and waned in the first half of the 1960s until the Vietnam War and campus unrest set off an-
other major wave. 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. Citizens’ movements articulated new ideas of political subjectivity through both their organization and their social and political praxis, and these ideas had important consequences for future movements. Thus, the Anpo protests need to be seen as an extended process rather than a single, limited event.

This book seeks to present a fundamentally different perspective on the process than seen in previous analyses by examining four citizens’ groups that took part in the Anpo protests—the Mountain Range, the Poets of Ói, the Grass Seeds, and the Voiceless Voices. It looks at the origins, structures, and activities of these groups from the participants’ point of view in order to comprehend better how and why these massive protests occurred. From their perspective, the protests were a struggle over the form Japanese democracy would take rather than a critique of international relations. Despite the Japanese government’s image of closely managing and controlling social and political conflict, significant ruptures have continued to appear, and an analysis of these Anpo era movements provides insight into how citizens have challenged state control throughout the postwar period.

The discussion of each group focuses on a key context or aspect of the Anpo protests. The Mountain Range shows the importance of the historical context and, more specifically, the specter of World War II to the protesters. The group was formed by people who wanted to reassess their experiences of the war at a time when the ruling party seemed intent on bringing the war days back. The key struggle here was over historical memory and assuming personal responsibility for the past. The question of war responsibility has recurred down to the present, as evidenced by the textbook controversies in the 1980s, in which the Ministry of Education attempted to remove or soften references in school history texts to Japan’s aggression in Asia, and the recent movement by “comfort women” to extract an official apology from the gov-
ernment for its abuse and exploitation of them during the Pacific War. The government’s failure to engage in a sincere and genuine “settling of accounts” from World War II still affects Japan’s economic and political relations with the rest of Asia.

The Poets of Ōi illustrate a crucial organizational context for the movements of the Anpo era. The foundations for grassroots activism lay in the face-to-face interaction and debate that occurred in small groups known as culture circles. Circles were egalitarian groups formed around people’s own interests and related to their daily lives. They stood at the junction between culture and politics and played an important role in people’s political socialization. The Poets of Ōi were a poetry circle at a large industrial factory, and they illustrate how workers imbued their work with new meaning by creating their own workplace culture. The group also shows the crucial transition that labor was undergoing and the waning influence that a bureaucratic, ideologically based labor movement would have in the coming years.

The Grass Seeds show the importance of new sectors and constituencies that had been politically enfranchised under the post-war constitution, especially women. The question of gender is crucial to the development of citizens’ movements and the subsequent residence-based environmental movements of the 1970s. The heavy identification of women with the domestic sphere affected the style and content of groups they formed or joined. The Grass Seeds organized themselves to tackle problems of their daily lives and thought of themselves as a kind of gossip session around the village well (idobata kaigi), an informal circle of friends who gather to discuss village affairs in exhaustive detail. Thus, their political involvement grew out of everyday concerns and the need to express themselves. The group also illustrates the way citizens’ movements dealt with the problem of free expression by developing “mini-communications” networks to address the limitations of the centralized mass media.

The Voiceless Voices show the importance of ideas and values in mobilizing protesters. The Anpo protests manifested a political
philosophy based on the citizen as the subject of political engagement, and groups such as the Voiceless Voices refined this philosophy through social praxis. Citizens’ movements strengthened the idea of direct democracy and shifted the emphasis from ideology to action as an organizational principle. Unlike the other groups discussed, the Voiceless Voices formed in the midst of the Anpo protests and had a fairly high profile in the press during this period. Their influence extended beyond their numbers, and their name is often mentioned as a precursor to citizen movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

The four groups examined here do not exhaust the types of groups engaged in the demonstrations. This book does not, for example, focus on the Japan Communist Party or its organs, because there is considerable material written by or about them, and they represented the old paradigm that citizens’ movements were beginning to displace. The student movement is another aspect of the protests that is not analyzed in detail because it has been covered extensively in other works. Nor should the four groups covered here be considered ideal archetypes against which other groups should be measured. The Anpo protests encompassed a wide variety of movements, and other groups could certainly be used to illustrate the same aspects discussed here. Indeed, this is part of the point. The participants were a diverse collection of bodies that displayed numerous variations on the themes discussed in this book. So even though the movements discussed here were comparatively small, they were important for the themes they illustrate. As Fernando Calderón, Alejandro Piscitelli, and José Luis Reyna have written about recent social movements in Latin America, “the multiplicity of practices by the new social actors in the region—stimulating, colorful, and polyvalent—teaches us that ‘small’ does not amount to ‘insignificant.’”

The analysis presented here begins with the premise that the Anpo protests, like other large-scale movements, were not monolithic or homogeneous. The demonstrations comprised several diverse elements, some of which conflicted with others (especially the
opposition parties), and although the massive marches around the Diet drew the most attention, protesters engaged in a variety of actions. They held rallies and meetings, set up debates, put on lectures, and engaged in petition drives and letter-writing campaigns, working on a variety of levels to encourage broad participation in the movement. In other words, the Anpo protests were ideologically and organizationally diverse.

Because of the cold war context and the prominence of the Japan Socialist Party and the Japan Communist Party in the protests, the Kishi administration consistently portrayed the protesters as a single-minded mob in the grip of outside Soviet agitators. Some scholars have perpetuated the claim that the protesters were controlled by the opposition parties, and, indeed, the party leaders did try to enforce ideological and organizational unity. However, a deeper examination of the protests shows that the participants were conscious political actors, not an unconscious mass. When they described their actions as spontaneous, protesters were asserting that their movements were self-generated entities rather than externally formed and directed.

Therefore, accounts that focus on so-called great men of history (and all too many of these histories are gender exclusive) as the prime movers and shapers of movements and events fail to explain these events adequately. Western and Japanese scholars who concentrate on government or party leaders and party politics in their accounts of Anpo find it difficult to explain why a seemingly contained policy dispute suddenly turned into a crisis of democracy that brought hundreds of thousands of workers and citizens into the streets. While much of the writing about Anpo minutely dissects the provisions of the treaty or details the complex behind-the-scenes strategies and maneuvers by politicians, government leaders in Japan and the United States had no major disagreements over the treaty. Diplomatic history, therefore, cannot explain the size and vehemence of the protests. Instead, the protests need to be seen as a struggle by ordinary Japanese to consolidate participatory rights in both state and society rather
than as a conflict between the leaders of Japan’s political parties or as an international dispute between Japan and the United States.

This account, then, does not rely on official communiques or military records or party documents, but instead tries to present the participants’ own voices. Over and over throughout the Anpo protests, participants said they could no longer stand by and watch silently; they felt compelled to demonstrate their will (ishi hyōji). The image used by student poet Kishigami Daisaku to open his lengthy poem on the Anpo protests is suggestive: “I simply strike the match in my hand as voiceless voices at my back demand to show their will.”⁵ All of the groups examined in this book considered their newsletters and writings to be crucial elements of a democratic social praxis, but their words have often been excluded from previous accounts of the protests. Thus, this book relies heavily on the groups’ own publications, participant-observer accounts, and interviews with members.

Finally, this analysis ties the philosophies and organizational characteristics of Anpo era movements to others that developed in later decades, often referred to as new social movements. Movement participants frequently described their groups as underground streams that came together during the Anpo protests in a giant whirlpool or vortex that engulfed the Diet but then afterward quietly slipped below the surface, where they joined other streams later on. The progressive journal Science of Thought (Shisō no kagaku) even carried a column titled “Japan’s Underground Streams” (Nihon no chikasui) dedicated to providing information on the activities of various small citizens’ movements. The imagery suggests a Daoist respect for water’s power while also implying a flexible, pliable form that adapts to the land’s contours as it flows along. The analogy implies that these movements think of themselves as small grassroots groups with fluid organization and fluctuating memberships that alternate between periods of high and low activity. The streams are not confined within the banks of artificial channels, forced to adhere to a particular ideological position. They freely link up with other streams according
to mutual concerns and feed new streams of activity. The groups see themselves as having left legacies for the new social movements in terms of shared characteristics, especially those of personal autonomy and the “autonomy of struggle.” In light of this perceived connection, it is useful to review recent social movement theory in evaluating the historical continuities and differences between the earlier progenitors and the movements that surfaced in the subsequent waves of protest in Japan.

Theoretical Considerations

Many theorists acknowledge the difficulty of defining the characteristics of new social movements. There are two major reasons for this. One is the wide range of groups that are placed in the category and the extreme diversity of issues around which they have formed. The variety of issues and groups is even taken as a defining characteristic that distinguishes new social movements from previous ones. This assumption of diversity, or, to put it another way, the more specific, specialized focus of each group, may have led theorists to emphasize the form these groups take more than the content of their philosophies. They describe organization, membership, modes of collective activities, and a general anti-establishment disposition.

However, as Alan Scott points out, using organizational form as the major criterion for distinguishing new social movements is problematic because those groups display a broad range of forms, which, moreover, often change over time. Some groups that are categorized as new social movements may not even see themselves as “new.” They may not be oppositional but may advocate the defense of parts of the social or political order. Given the tendency to define social movements as antiestablishment, the question arises as to whether or not a right-wing group can legitimately be considered a new social movement. Certainly some of the usual organizational characteristics could be applied to conservative or reactionary groups. This is why it is necessary to
examine the values that each group promotes through its organization and actions.

The other difficulty in defining such movements is that the major paradigm in new social movement theory has shifted over the past three decades, so the theories themselves must be historicized. New social movement theory was prompted by a sense that in the late 1960s and 1970s protest movements had become very different from previous ones based on socialist ideologies. These new groups were suspicious of united front protest movements led by left-wing vanguard political parties that insisted on ideological conformity. The appearance of new social movements has been taken as an indication that, as Stuart Hall writes, “Socialist Man with one mind, one set of interests, one project, is dead. And good riddance.” In the case of Japan, Kurihara Akira sees the emergence of new social movements in the 1960s as a rejection of “old paradigm” social movements that identified the main actor or subject as the proletariat, engaged in struggle dichotomized as progressive (or left-wing) versus conservative (or right-wing), and that were organizationally based on Marxist-oriented political parties.

The new social movements, by contrast, identify different subjects—whether citizens, local residents, or people who suffer discrimination—and reject the ideological orientation of “old” movements in forming their own autonomous groups. As they did in Europe and North America, new social movements in Japan developed around a plethora of issues, but residence-based environmentalist movements of the late 1960s and 1970s are most often cited as typical examples. These residents’ movements arose in response to the contradictions of Japan’s state-directed rapid economic growth and in response to the state’s attempt to establish a “managed society” (kanri shakai), integrating systems of production and information and exerting central control over them.

New social movement theory, then, needs to be approached historically as a multivalenced response to both Marxism and functionalism (which takes a positivist, objectivist approach and
focuses on institutionalized relations), one that may have neo-Marxist or postmodern as well as neoconservative impulses. Carol McClurg Mueller presents a succinct, useful intellectual history of new social movement theory. Her description provides a framework for situating some notable works on social movements in Asia and places the analysis of this book in perspective.

Mueller notes that the grievance model was the key paradigm in social movement theory up to the 1970s. This model sees protest movements as arising mainly from severe deprivation and the accumulated grievances of those who suffer from major structural changes in society but lack channels for expressing their discontent or addressing their problems. Although theorists were divided as to the origins of the grievances, they generally stressed mentality and social psychology in explaining movements.

The resource mobilization paradigm developed in response to the grievance model and emphasized the acquisition of material resources and political opportunity to explain why some movements developed with relatively light grievances while other groups with seemingly much greater reason to protest did not. This theoretical approach quickly came to dominate the academic literature on social movements during the 1970s and early ‘80s, and it was applied in research on Japan as well. Krauss and Simcock wrote their analysis of resident-based environmental movements in the heyday of resource mobilization theory, and they explicitly emphasize that theory as a corrective to the grievance model. The residents’ movements often used existing local organizations and government connections, so they were not seriously alienated from their communities, and their constituencies cut across class lines and status boundaries.

Samual Popkin’s 1979 book The Rational Peasant attempted to apply these notions of resource mobilization and rational choice to the case of peasant protests in Vietnam. Popkin was responding specifically to James Scott’s Moral Economy of the Peasant, which Popkin casts as a variation on the grievance model. Popkin asserts that peasants make individual, rational choices (albeit in
the context of their immediate families) to maximize their positions, and they base the decision on whether or not to join a protest movement or revolt on this calculation. He presents this theory as an explanation of why areas with more “modern” (i.e., capitalist) forms of agriculture were the sites of revolt rather than places with much more severe conditions of exploitation and deprivation, and therefore supposedly greater grievances. That is, peasants decide that they can better maximize their profits in areas with more “modern” agriculture than in traditional areas with much more limited growth potential.

The problem with Popkin’s analysis was that it misrepresented Scott’s argument, which although written before Popkin’s book actually constituted a response to problems with the resource mobilization paradigm. Scott’s analysis begins from the position of the peasant embedded within the cultural context of the village and the historical context of colonialism’s disruption of traditional social arrangements. His hypothesis of peasants’ “subsistence ethic” is used to show why peasants may prefer traditional landlord arrangements over the more “modern” capitalistic ones that came with the colonial period. That is, peasants may prefer an admittedly exploitative situation over one that potentially brings greater profits because the former provides a stable livelihood at or above subsistence level and offers relief through community relationships when peasants dip below subsistence level.

Scott’s work presaged the critiques of the resource mobilization paradigm that developed in the 1980s by emphasizing the social embeddedness of the peasants. Popkin’s characterization of Southeast Asian peasants shows a tendency to presume that the actor in social movements is a universal but atomized, self-interested individual without giving sufficient weight to the variety of social networks and cultural contexts in which a person is embedded. Feminists, for example, quickly pointed out that resource mobilization theory presumed the social actor to be male and that if one presumed a mother, that is, a woman with a particular social relation, as the actor, the analysis would differ greatly. In addition
to gender, identities and networks of race and ethnicity, nationality, class, and religion all affect the notions of grievances one has and choices one can make. Further, “resource mobilization theory, as originally conceived, self-consciously minimized the role of ideas and beliefs and their elaboration. Like grievances, the cultural configurations that legitimate and make collective action meaningful were taken as givens.”

Identity-centered theories that “emphasize the processes by which social actors constitute collective identities as a means to create democratic spaces for more autonomous action” quickly became dominant in social movement theory outside of North America and England. For example, Latin American scholarship in the 1980s was so heavily weighted toward a focus on identity that the concerns of the resource mobilization approach, such as concrete practices and resource constraints, were neglected. Being outside of the North American context made the presumptions of the social actor in the resource mobilization paradigm clear to the Latin Americanists, and America- or Eurocentrism is a problem that sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists working on non-Western regions have had to tackle.

For example, Robin LeBlanc criticizes the application of new social movement theory to a consumer cooperative, because it obscures the distinctive nature of the Japanese housewives’ movements she investigates and does not pay enough attention to how members of those movements perceive their own identities. The groups, like their European or American counterparts, are constituted almost entirely of women with “concerns for peace, a clean environment, and a greater degree of political and economic self-determination.” However, LeBlanc considers the particular images associated with housewives in the Japanese context to be crucial to their political positions and strategies. Although housewives are acutely aware that their image of being political amateurs often results in exclusion from the political process, the image can be useful in the public political sphere, because women are seen as less corrupt than men, without vested interests
in the system. Housewives are seen as more altruistic because Japanese women are identified with being caregivers in the domestic sphere.

Jeffrey Broadbent also finds resource mobilization theory inadequate in explaining the development of environmental protest movements in Japan. In the cases he examined, he says, “new material resources did not play an important role in sparking protest mobilization” nor did new political opportunities account for the protests. He disputes the assumption of Western theories that collective action in Japan arises when atomized individuals come together in a liberal, pluralist political system, arguing that Japanese society has not been atomized, and the persistence of old collective organizations has led to a different process of movement formation. In emphasizing particular social and cultural contexts, Broadbent eventually suggests that social movements cannot be accounted for with a fixed general theory. “Rather, they are exceedingly contingent upon the ontological quality of the structure of power, which they take shape within and against.”

Nancy Abelmann takes a somewhat different approach in her use of social movement theory to inform her ethnography of the Koch’ang Tenant Farmers Movement in South Korea in the late 1980s. Drawing from Alberto Melucci, Alain Touraine, and Arturo Escobar, Abelmann stresses identity formation without making an explicit critique of resource mobilization theory. She sees social movements as networks, rather than as unitary entities with a single mind, engaged in a discursive process of self-production. That is, social movements interact, negotiate, and conflict with social, political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts. Abelmann is especially concerned with the context of historicity and points to the implicitly Eurocentric assumption that self-producing, self-aware movements are possible only in a postindustrial society. In Touraine’s formulation, the Koch’ang movement could not be a new social movement, because South Korea had not achieved the same stage of development as Europe. Abelmann thus agrees with “Escobar’s corrective that historicities are
multiple and that they emerge in heterogeneous idioms and metaphors in different historical moments and cultural milieus.”

The question of multiple historicities is important to the formation and activities of the groups examined in this book. Protests also imply a struggle over histories and who will be the custodians of the past, in Carol Gluck’s words. In order for movements to construct collective identities, they must historicize their situation.

Works by LeBlanc, Broadbent, and Abelmann reflect a recent reconsideration of the resource mobilization paradigm as applied to East Asia that parallels a shift in theoretical emphasis among commentators on Western movements, as Mueller notes. Mueller sees these reconsiderations as centering on three elements: “a reconceptualization of the actor, the extension of the central role of micromobilization in face-to-face interaction within a variety of group contexts, and the specification of meaning generating oppositional elements within sociopolitical cultures at varying levels of temporal extensity, formality, and instrumental appropriation.” Theorists have reasserted the importance of values and philosophies in producing movements and have turned their attention to fairly circumscribed “collective action frames” that focus on the concerns of daily life and take personal contacts as the key to forming groups and identities. This book also takes these as major focal points and like Abelmann sees the contest over historicities as crucial to understanding the Anpo era movements.