

Do Japanese Understand the Occupy Wall Street Protests?

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Abstract

This study investigated how Japanese think about the Wall Street Protests in a third and fourth year writing class. On September 2011, the Occupy Wall Street took place in New York. Thousands people gathered at the Wall Street, and they protested against unemployment increasing and the economic policy of the government. Also such a movement spread all over the world. It can be seen in England, Germany, Italy and Australia. This study investigated how Japanese think about the Occupy Wall Street and whether they understand about that.

Background

The Occupy Wall Street happened in September 2011, in New York, the United States of America. Participants protested against the divide between the rich and the poor, and high unemployment rate. They insist “1% have all the wealth and 99% is poor, and we belong to the poor.” The number of participants was increasing rapidly, and finally about 500 to 700 people were detained by the police.

After that, this movement spread all over the world, and such a demonstration occurred in the many places, England, Germany and Italy, etc. Actually, “Occupy Tokyo” movement took place in October 2011 in Japan.

The Occupy Wall Street was influenced by the pro-democracy movement in Tunisia and Egypt which is known as "Arab Spring." Also, this movement spread rapidly thanks to the Internet such as Twitter and Face Book. The insistence of the participants spread all

over the world through the Internet.

The movement is more remarkable where economic disparities and the young unemployment rate are high. In contrast, countries which continue economic growth have smaller demonstrations. For instance, the movement in Korea and Hong Kong was smaller than other areas.

That's why this research was needed to know how Japanese understand the Occupy Wall Street, and what they think about that. Through this research, we can understand the difference between Japan and other countries.

Methodology

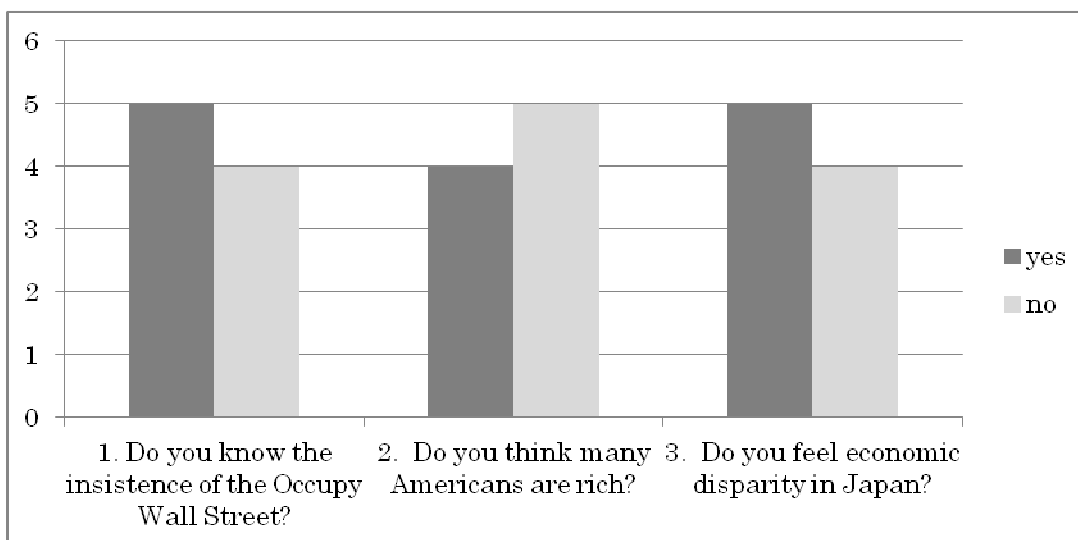
This project used interview for data gathering. Three interview questions were devised. Students in the third and fourth year writing class from Nagoya University of Foreign Studies were interviewed, including three males and six females, and a teacher of the class was also included. Each one was interviewed individually during class. Interview questions were:

1. Do you know the claim of the Occupy Wall Street?
2. Do you think many Americans are rich?
3. Do you feel economic disparity in Japan?

Results

For the first question, "Do you know the insistence of the Occupy Wall Street?" five participants answered yes, and four answered no. People who answered yes said that the claim is the complaints about economic disparity and high unemployment rate. Regarding the second question, "Do you think many Americans are rich?" four participant answered yes and five answered no. The people who answered yes told the reason. One said "America has 10% of the wealth of the world", and another student

said “American celebrities are always featured.” As opposed to this, participants who answered no said “America is developed, but it is an only part of America”, and another said “America has large gap between the rich and the poor.” For third question, “Do you feel economic disparity in Japan?” five people answered yes, and four answered no. Most participants who answered yes feel economic disparity when they work part-time job. One participant who answered no said “Japanese employee and education system is stable.”Also, these five participants who answered yes were given an additional question “If you know the demonstration such the Occupy Wall Street, will you join this?” all five people said no.



Discussion and Conclusion

This research showed that about half of Japanese understand the Occupy Wall Street. Also, some people think that many American are rich, but in fact, 1% of American earn 26% of whole income in the USA, and have 40% of the wealth, so it can be said that many Americans are not rich. Additionally, American insurance and medicine system is very hard for poor people. It is obvious that the disparity in the USA is wider than Japanese. That’s why no participants answered to join such a demonstration, and the interest about the Occupy Wall Street is limited, because Japanese don’t feel strong

economic disparity about their life.

About the author

Tomomi Mase is a third year student in the contemporary English and Society department in Nagoya University of Foreign Studies.

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