Reflections on Makoto Oda and Beheiren: Participation in Beheiren, the Ideology of Meaningless Death, and the Logic of Self as Aggressor

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Established in April 1965, the Beheiren (peace for Vietnam! civil coalition) played a significant role as a civil movement in the development of the anti-war peace movement in post-war Japan. The intellectual, Makoto Oda, led the group as Beheiren’s “representative.”

Although the ideology and actions of Makoto Oda have often been discussed in previous studies of the Beheiren, some aspects still remain unexamined including the details of his participation in the Beheiren and the process of the formulation of his ideas such as meaningless death, and the logic of self as aggressor. The author of this paper use some documents from the exhibition, “1968: A Period of Eruption of Countless Questions,” to consider certain issues such as the course of Oda Makoto’s actions up to the time he joined the Beheiren, the background to Makoto Oda’s appointment when Beheiren was established, the process of formulation of the ideology of meaningless death and the logic of self as aggressor, and the relationship between these two.

Given this outline, the author focuses initially on the characteristics of Makoto Oda’s generation (the generation born around the time of the “Manchurian Incident”) and identifies the course of formation of his ideology of meaningless death while linking it to the experiences unique to this generation. Next, the author examines previous explanations by Eiji Oguma and Yo Takeuchi with regard to the appointment of Makoto Oda when the Beheiren was established, and clarifies the following facts: the option of selecting either Makoto Oda or Shintaro Ishihara as the representative of the Beheiren did not exist; the course of Makoto Oda’s discursive activities in the early 1960s was the line of thought espoused by militant liberals; and there was a measure of legitimacy for Makoto Oda among the intellectuals who belonged to the Beheiren.

Further, Makoto Oda’s logic of self as aggressor is examined. This notion has been explained so far in connection with the 1966 Japan-U.S. Citizens’ Conference. Actually, the logic of violence existed in Oda’s awareness of issues prior to his participation in the Beheiren. However, the present study elucidates the fact that Makoto Oda had grasped that the problem was quite complicated, that the experience of visiting Okinawa prompted him to actively confront this issue, and that the logic of self as aggressor was an idea formulated within the context of the movements that occurred at that time rather than being an conception that was unique to Makoto Oda.

Key words: Beheiren, Makoto Oda, the ideology of meaningless death, the logic of self as aggressor