

Article

“The Root Cause of Conflicts”: Student Activism and Government Campaigns against Autonomous Dormitories in Japan, 1971–2001

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ABSTRACT: In June 1971, following the aftermath of the 1968–1969 Japanese University Protests, the Ministry of Education’s Central Council for Education issued a report declaring self-governed student dormitories “the root cause of conflicts” and asserting that they no longer filled an educational function within universities. In response, many universities progressively curtailed student autonomy in dormitory management, a process that culminated in the demolition of historic facilities and the construction of new dormitories subject to strict government regulation. This paper examines Japanese state and university initiatives to dismantle autonomous dormitory housing during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the protest movements organized by students in opposition, with a particular focus on Kyoto University’s Yoshida Dormitory. The targeting of autonomous dormitories formed part of a broader campaign to suppress student activism in the wake of the 1960s. By replacing the older structures with facilities designed to prevent self-governance, the government sought to promote discipline, conformity, and passivity among university students. The persistence of student efforts to preserve these dormitories, however—extending into the present—demonstrates the continued vitality of youth resistance and political engagement in post-1960s Japan.

KEYWORDS: Student protest, Yoshida Dormitory, Ministry of Education, autonomous dormitories, Japanese higher education reforms

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1. Introduction

Since the Meiji era, autonomous self-governed dormitories at national universities have played a significant role as welfare facilities, sites of communal living, and centers for the exchange of ideas in Japan. Originally, these dormitories were conceived as residences for the top students of the imperial universities—state-run institutions established during the Meiji Restoration to educate the nation’s elite. The government promoted student self-governance within the dormitories as a means of cultivating moral character and training future leaders. Dormitories were initially intended to serve as “a melting pot where the broad spectrum of family background, social status, and regional dialect was narrowed by the students’ common conviction of their own superiority and common allegiance to the institution which brought them together.”¹ Architecturally, the facilities reflected this purpose: they included shared rooms and dining halls that also functioned as spaces for meetings and community events.

In the years following the initial founding of the imperial universities, universities expanded in size with the establishment of new facilities, including science, engineering, medical, and law departments, significantly increasing the number of enrolled students.² With the expansion of the student population, the roles of the dormitories began to transform. Students living in dormitories faced fewer restrictions than those living in boarding houses, and the cost of living in the dormitory was half that of boarding house fees. As a result, dormitories began to attract a wide range of students from different economic and social backgrounds. By the mid-1900s, as leftist and Marxist ideas spread from abroad, universities became spaces where ideas flowed freely. Debates arose over the importance of preserving academic freedom and university autonomy, rather than allowing higher education to remain directly tied to the state. As the nature of the university shifted, so too did the dormitories.³ The self-governance structure of autonomous dormitories meant that each resident had a say in the values that shaped communal life, prompting critical discussions about authority, equality, and the social role of the university itself. Over time, autonomous dormitories evolved into centers of intellectual exchange and debate. Dormitories were no longer seen as nurturing students most loyal to the government, but rather those most critical of it.

By the 1960s, autonomous dormitories were well established in their roles as afford-

¹ Henry DeWitt Smith, *Japan’s First Student Radicals*, Harvard University Press (1972), 10.

² Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, “Japan’s Modern Educational System; The University Order and the Growth of Universities” mext.go.jp/

³ See: Konishi, Sho, *Anarchist Modernity* (244–256) for an interesting connection into Hokkaido University’s Keiteki-ryo and cooperatist anarchist thought during the late Meiji-Taishō period

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able welfare institutions—costing no more than a few hundred yen per month—and as sites of youth activism and alternative styles of living. By 1971, however, in the aftermath of the Zenkyōtō protests, a revolutionary student movement in the late 1960s, the Japanese government identified student dormitories as a source of unrest and began to actively target them. This campaign led to the demolition of nearly all Meiji-era self-governed dormitories across the country. The government subsequently mandated the construction of new facilities designed according to strict regulations intended to eliminate the possibility of student self-governance. Now, only one prewar autonomous dormitory remains: Yoshida Dormitory at Kyoto University.

This article examines the Japanese government’s and national universities’ efforts to dismantle autonomous dormitories in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the student-led protest movement that arose in opposition. Particular attention is given to Yoshida Dormitory, whose residents mobilized against demolition and launched a large-scale protest movement at Kyoto University in the 1980s. Of the many dormitories that resisted the government efforts to suppress dormitory autonomy from the 1970s onward, Yoshida residents alone were successful in preserving both their historic building and self-governance system.

In this paper, I make two central arguments. First, I argue that the targeting of autonomous dormitories was part of a broader effort by the government to suppress student activism in the wake of the 1960s protests. In the aftermath of the movement, Japan’s Ministry of Education conducted a major reform of the state’s education system, introducing legislation meant to increase government control and limit student autonomy. The Ministry specifically targeted autonomous dormitories, calling for universities to remove self-governance, demolish old buildings, and impose new restrictions on dormitory construction intended to curtail autonomy. By destroying the old buildings and constructing new ones in accordance with regulations designed to prevent self-governance, the Japanese government sought to use student housing to promote discipline, conformity, and passivity among the nation’s youth.

Second, although scholars often characterize the 1970s and 1980s as an era of political disengagement among youth following the passage of the Emergency University Control Law of 1969, I argue that the movement to preserve autonomous dormitories demonstrates the persistence of student resistance in post-1960s Japan. While smaller in scale than the mass protests of the late 1960s, these struggles represented a meaningful continuation of student activism, challenging the state’s attempt to depoliticize campus life. At Yoshida Dormitory in particular, the campaign to prevent demolition demonstrated how students could redefine student activism in a period often described as politically passive.

2. Dormitory Reform in the Aftermath of the University Protest Movement

In this section, I examine efforts by the Japanese government to institute dormitory reform in the aftermath of the 1968–69 Japanese University Protests, specifically the Ministry of Education’s Central Council for Education’s 1971 Report, “Basic Measures for the Comprehensive Expansion and Improvement of School Education in the Future.”⁴ The report identified autonomous dormitories as “the root cause of conflicts” and called for national universities to assume control over dormitory governance. In response, universities began to introduce internal reforms that aligned with the Ministry of Education’s push to “normalize” dormitories. This effort was meant to bring autonomous dormitories under administrative control and curb student self-governance.

In 1968, student protests emerged at Tokyo University and Nihon University, associated with the Japanese New Left. This movement became known as the Zenkyōtō movement, an abbreviation of *Zengaku kyōtō kaigi*, translated as “All-Campus Joint-Struggle League.” Student protests spread rapidly at universities across Japan with the goal of causing mass disruption to everyday life on campus. Students barricaded themselves into campus buildings and participated in highly public street clashes with riot police. As the students’ actions intensified, campuses faced increasing disorder. From 1968 to 1969, police made 16,175 arrests in relation to the student movement protests.⁵ In June 1969, at the height of the protests, forty percent of university students were not able to go to class.⁶

At national universities, autonomous dormitories were highly involved in the 1968–69 protest movement. Already deeply connected to student activism, dormitories became centers of resistance as students clashed with university administrations and the Ministry of Education over issues of autonomy and state control. The spread of the student conflict to the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in June 1968 began over the issue of rebuilding an aging prewar student dormitory, Nisshin Dormitory. The dispute escalated when students barricaded the central campus building, banning faculty from entering campus.⁷ At Kyoto University, one of the centers of the student movement, the self-governed dormitories Yoshida and Kumano were seen as the “direct trigger” for

⁴ 今後における学校教育の総合的な拡充整備のための基本的施策について（答申）（第22 回答申（昭和46年6月11日））

⁵ Schieder, *Coed Revolution*, 85.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 学園紛争～東京外国語大学における経過と特徴～, TUFs ARCHIVES
https://www.tufs.ac.jp/common/archives/ex_gakuenfunsou2_1.html

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the spread of the university conflict to Kyoto in 1969.⁸ In January 1969, negotiations had failed between dormitory residents and the president of Kyoto University over demands related to the expansion of dormitory facilities. In response, Yoshida and Kumano residents, inspired by the protests in Tokyo, had blockaded themselves into the Student Affairs Building, an event considered the official start of the protest movement at Kyoto University.⁹ At Tōhoku University, residents of the prewar-style autonomous dormitory, Yūhō Dormitory, barricaded university buildings in order to fight back against government dormitory restructuring policies that residents believed were “a reorganization of the dormitories, which were welfare facilities, into ‘educational facilities,’ and a path toward establishing a system of control and domination of the dormitory residents by the university.”¹⁰

In January 1969, at the University of Tokyo’s Yasuda Auditorium, students who had been blockading the building for nearly 250 days faced off with over 8,000 riot police, throwing Molotov cocktails, acid bombs, and pavement down at them from above.¹¹ The 36-hour siege, in which police finally recaptured the auditorium, was broadcast live on televisions across the nation. Following the siege of Yasuda, support from the broader public towards the student movement began to erode.¹² Although university administrations had initially resisted police interference, there was increasing public approval for the use of riot police to suppress demonstrations and restore order. In the summer of 1969, police were granted full authority to intervene in campus protests under the Emergency University Control Law, which also enabled the Ministry of Education to shut down university departments or whole campuses if disputes were not resolved within nine months.¹³ This legislation, combined with new riot police tactics for suppressing street clashes, led to the demolition of nearly all barricades erected at universities and high schools across the country. By the end of 1969, the loss of general support for the student movement became even more evident: during the December general election, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the conservative ruling party, faced a major victory,

⁸ 京都大学百年史編集委員会. 【総説編】 [第1編：総説] 第7章：京都大学の再編と発展. 京都大学百年史：総説編. 1998, 602

⁹ 『学生部封鎖に伴う一連の事態についての経過』, 1969年1月, 大学紛争III-2-21, MP 70099, 【閲覧室4-2-2】 1-2/2-2-3 (“The Progress of the Situation Following the Blockade of the Student Affairs Department.” January 1969, Kyoto University Archives).

¹⁰ 東北大学日就寮「生活を闘争に闘争を生活に」1979年, 吉田寮記録資料館

¹¹ Nick Kapur, “The Japanese Student Movement In The Cold War Crucible, 1945–1972,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 20, no. 5 (2022). <https://apjif.org/2022/14/kapur>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

winning 288 of the 486 Diet seats, while the Japan Socialist Party lost 50 of its 141 seats.¹⁴

In November 1968, Prime Minister Satō Eisaku appointed Sakata Michita as the Minister of Education. Previously, Sakata had served as the chairman of the LDP's Education and Culture System Research Council (ESRC).¹⁵ Sakata was highly critical of the student movement, and, from September to November 1968, under the ESRC, had led an investigation into the causes of the protests, resulting in a proposal for major reform of the university system. Three years later, on June 11th, 1971, in line with the ESRC's proposal, the Ministry of Education's Central Council for Education published a report titled "Basic Measures for the Comprehensive Expansion and Improvement of School Education in the Future," which outlined recommendations for a major overhaul of the education system.¹⁶ The council called this a "third educational reform," the first two being the reforms of the early Meiji period and those implemented in the aftermath of World War II. This "third reform" stressed administrative restructuring and increased state control over education. Since the Meiji era, the Japanese educational system had been modeled on the Humboldtian tradition, which emphasized university autonomy from the state. The 1971 report asserted, however, that in the aftermath of the student movement, "political and professional organizational activities and economic temptations, both inside and outside the academy, have come to have a significant influence on university management and educational and research activities."¹⁷ While emphasizing the importance of protecting university autonomy, the council argued that "this does not mean simply excluding the involvement of public authority" and that excluding the state "could even make it easier for unjust power to take control."¹⁸

One specific target of the report was autonomous student dormitories. The council acknowledged the initial intention of Meiji-era dormitories to provide students with "not simply...a living environment with food and housing, but rather...with valuable experiences through communal living."¹⁹ The report maintained, however, that dormitories could only fulfill their "original educational function" if "a relationship of trust and coop-

¹⁴ Eiji Oguma, "Japan's 1968: A Collective Reaction to Rapid Economic Growth in an Age of Turmoil," *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 13, no. 12 (March 23, 2015), <https://apjif.org/2015/13/11/oguma-eiji/4300>

¹⁵ 熊谷忠泰「70年代の大学政策」『長崎大学教育学部教育科学研究報告』第29号, 昭和56年10月31日.

¹⁶ 中央教育審議会「今後における学校教育の総合的な拡充整備のための基本的施策について(答申)」(第22回答申(昭和46年6月11日)).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

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eration [is] maintained between faculty, staff, and students.”²⁰ In the political climate of the early 1970s, the council argued, this function could no longer be achieved. The report recommended that universities assume full control over dormitory governance:

In recent years, changes in the social conditions surrounding schools, increases in student numbers, and the expansion of schools have made it practically impossible for all higher education institutions to have dormitories that aspire to such ideals. At Japanese universities in particular, dormitories have long been treated as mere welfare facilities, and their physical conditions have long been left in poor condition. Furthermore, student self-governance activities based on particular student groups have been brought into dormitory management, often bringing them into conflict with university management policies. Today, many dormitories are in such an unfortunate state that they are not only not educationally meaningful for students, but are even seen as the root cause of various conflicts...Therefore, in the future, universities in general will likely need to break down the functions previously performed by dormitories and find alternative solutions.²¹

In response to the 1971 report, many national universities began examining the conditions of their existing dormitories and petitioning for the construction of new ones. The issue drew such widespread attention that, in 1976, the National University Association's General Assembly resolved to carry out a nationwide survey of student dormitories across Japan's national universities. The results of the survey showed that national universities collectively maintained 225 dormitories with a total capacity of approximately 59,000 students, equivalent to 10.8 percent of the total national university enrollment of about 560,000 students at the time. Actual dormitory residency, however, stood at only 27,800, or about 4.8 percent of the student population. Of these facilities, 106 were “old” prewar dormitories, in the traditional style, housing roughly 6000 residents.²² The low capacity of prewar dormitories in particular gave university administrations another justification for their removal.

In 1978, the Ministry of Education issued two new directives that, like the 1969 Emergency University Control Law, permitted direct government interference in university affairs. On March 7, 1978, it required all national universities to implement the

²⁰ Ibid, 6.

²¹ 中央教育審議会「今後における学校教育の総合的な拡充整備のための基本的施策について（答申）」

²² 国立大学協会第3・第4常置委員会『学寮に関するアンケートの集計報告』，昭和52年11月。

“University National Property Handling Regulations.”²³ These regulations stipulated that “when it is recognized that the use or purpose of national property has been or is likely to be obstructed, which will interfere with education and research, it must be reported to the president of the university.”²⁴ Shortly thereafter, on April 20, 1978, the Ministry issued the “Notice on the Maintenance of Order in Universities,” which called for “strict and appropriate measures [to] be taken to maintain order and eradicate violent acts at schools.”²⁵ Both directives were explicitly designed to suppress campus protests and authorized, when deemed necessary, the deployment of riot police.

The decisive blow to autonomous student dormitories came in 1980, when the “Study Group on the Improvement and Enhancement of Welfare and Guidance Facilities at National Universities” submitted a report to the Ministry entitled “Improvement and Enhancement of Welfare and Guidance Facilities at National Universities.”²⁶ This report recommended the adoption of a “new standard dormitory system” requiring that dormitories consist of individual rooms and exclude shared dining halls. The report also stated that, “[as] dormitories are established and operated by universities, it goes without saying that the authority and responsibility for management lies with the university authorities.... Universities must clearly define and stipulate necessary matters, such as dormitory selection and admission, expense allocation, and usage conditions, in dormitory management rules and regulations.”²⁷ In response, the Ministry formally adopted a policy that all new dormitories meet four conditions: the establishment of management and operational regulations; clear delineation of financial responsibilities (including self-payment of personal living expenses); the provision of individual rooms; and the absence of communal dining facilities.²⁸ These conditions were explicitly meant to counter the “old” style of autonomous dormitories, where students shared rooms, cafeterias served as political and social meeting places, and utilities were collectively funded.

By the late 1970s, the campaign against autonomous dormitories was already in full force. In 1976, Osaka University suspended recruitment for its self-governed dormitories: Miyayama, Kōnoike, and Shinina.²⁹ In 1979, following resistance by dormitory residents, the university deployed riot police to forcibly close Shinina Dormitory.³⁰ In

²³ 京都大学新聞1978年7月16日号

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ 学生協同組合ニュースレター第16号, 東北大学, 2001年8月7日。「国立大学における福祉・指導施設の改善と充実」

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ 連帯第1号, 京都大学寮共同闘争委員会発行, 1981年, 吉田寮資料館所蔵.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

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1980, Okayama University announced plans to abolish autonomous dormitories, including Kikyo Dormitory, one of the oldest autonomous women’s dormitories in Japan.³¹ In 1981, at Otaru University of Commerce, university officials launched full-scale evictions of both the male and female dormitories, barring new admissions and deploying riot police when residents resisted removal. In response, Otaru residents issued a statement denouncing the administration: “What the administration is truly attempting is the eradication of the autonomous dormitory culture that has persisted since the postwar period. Rather than acknowledging its value, the administration considers it outdated and incompatible with ‘modern’ educational ideals. They intend to replace the dormitory community with sanitized, controlled living environments, devoid of collective life or activism.”³²

Just as Otaru University of Commerce dormitory residents predicted, after the announcement of the “four dormitory conditions” in 1980 by the Ministry of Education, universities began to gradually replace the old dormitories in the “new” style. By 1982, Kikyo Women’s Dormitory had been demolished and replaced by a “new” dormitory conforming to the Ministry’s standards. In 1981, at Hokkaido University, the administration decided to demolish the long-standing prewar dormitory, Keiteki Dormitory, and construct a new, centrally managed facility³³ Although students denounced the process as undemocratic and protested what they viewed as a forced imposition of administrative authority, by 1983 the old dormitory had been demolished and replaced with a new building.³⁴ Its design—six separate buildings arranged around a central tower, evoking the structure of a panopticon—became emblematic of the new dormitory style.

In April 1981, in response to the perceived crackdown on autonomous dormitories, representatives from 20 self-governed dormitories across national universities formed “The National Dormitory Exchange Association.” The association sought “to prevent the dismantling and reorganization of dormitories by the Central Council for Education and to protect dormitory autonomy and dormitories as welfare facilities, and out of the necessity for a truly militant nationwide dormitory union.”³⁵ Advocates of autonomous dormitories hoped that collective action would strengthen their opposition and foster a national movement. At the forefront of this struggle was Kyoto University’s Yoshida Dormitory. During the 1980s, Yoshida was the site of a highly publicized battle against forced closure. Despite the extensive efforts by the Ministry of Education to eliminate

³¹ Ibid, 8.

³² Ibid.

³³ 連帯第1号, 京都大学寮共同闘争委員会発行, 1981年, 吉田寮資料館所蔵.

³⁴ Keiteki Dormitory Alumni Association, 恵迪寮の歴史 (6) [“History of Keiteki Dormitory (6)”], <https://www.keiteki-ob.jp/asset/history06/>

³⁵ Solidarity Vol. 1, Issued by the Kyoto University Dormitory Joint Struggle Committee, 1981, Yoshida Dormitory Archives.

self-governed dormitories, Yoshida residents succeeded in preserving their autonomy, ensuring the dormitory's continued existence to the present day. In the following section, I will examine the unique circumstances that allowed for Yoshida Dormitory to build a successful large-scale protest movement to save the dormitory.

3. The “Basic Policy” and the Campaign to Save Yoshida Dormitory, 1968–1989

In this section, I will look specifically at the protest movement to save Kyoto University's Yoshida Dormitory. Among the autonomous dormitories that resisted “normalization” policies from the 1970s through the early 2000s, only Yoshida Dormitory succeeded in preserving both its historic building and its system of self-governance. Although Kyoto University employed many of the same strategies other national universities used to close autonomous dormitories, Yoshida Dormitory residents were able to mobilize exceptionally broad support from peers, faculty, alumni, and local residents, directly challenging the Ministry of Education's nationwide campaign to demolish and assert control over student housing.

The dormitory movement at Kyoto University began long before the 1971 Central Council for Education's report. The origins of the movement lay in the early postwar period, when a number of newly enrolled students at Kyoto University launched a campaign to increase the number of dormitories in order to provide additional student housing.³⁶ In the 1960s, the struggle for dormitory construction re-emerged at Kyoto University. The movement resulted in an agreement to construct a new dormitory, Kumano Dormitory, a self-governed dormitory in the style of Yoshida. The movement for dormitory construction at Kyoto University coincided with a new Ministry of Education directive: in 1964, the Ministry of Education issued an order that imposed resident cost-sharing and centralized control over university dormitories, effectively undermining long-standing dorm autonomy and reclassifying dorms as nationally regulated “educational facilities.” These policies threatened long-standing student control over admissions and governance.³⁷ In response, a new conflict emerged surrounding the autonomy of the Yoshida and Kumano Dormitories. The dormitories joined together to demand for the end of university dormitory fees, particularly against the student responsibility for covering the cost of water and utilities.³⁸ Their calls for nonpayment were rejected in December 1967, when the

³⁶ 『吉田寮9-28京大読本0号』京都大学新聞社, 1985年4月11日. 京都大学記録資料館所蔵.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

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university won the right to compel residents to pay utility fees.³⁹

By late 1968, dormitory activists framed their struggle as part of a broader confrontation with state-managed university reform. On December 12, 1968, about 150 students from Yoshida and Kumano Dormitories confronted Kyoto University president Okuda Azuma, issuing three demands: unconditional dormitory expansion, withdrawal of a 20-year development plan that included closing Yoshida Dormitory, and full financial disclosure in response to the university's claim that it could not fund dining staff.⁴⁰ After a month of unsuccessful negotiations, talks collapsed on January 16, 1969. Inspired by the blockades occurring in Tokyo, dormitory residents began an occupation of the Student Affairs building. The blockade, which lasted until September 1969, is credited as the initial spark of the wider Kyoto University struggle.

In the immediate aftermath of the blockade, dormitories won substantial procedural autonomy within the university. From 1969 onward, the university administration agreed to allow dormitory councils to handle all application materials, a significant win for the right to maintain dormitory self-governance.⁴¹ By 1971, the student affairs director formally affirmed that recruitment, selection, and decisions on admissions or expulsions belonged entirely to dormitory residents.⁴² Throughout the 1970s, dormitory issues were negotiated through direct collective bargaining between self-governing dormitory associations and the student affairs department.

In the 1970s, even as riot police had successfully suppressed student demonstrations across the country, protests continued at Kyoto University. In 1972, the student government at Kyoto University became directly controlled by students associated with the New Left, and the mobilization of rallies of up to 1,000 people continued throughout the decade.⁴³ The largest conflict in the 1970s centered around an assistant professor of economics at Kyoto University, Takemoto Nobuhiro. In 1977, Takemoto, an assistant professor of economics and a leader of the university's Zenkyōtō faction, was dismissed from his position at the university, triggering mass strikes, building occupations, and the

³⁹ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁰ 『学生部封鎖に伴う一連の事態についての経過』, 1969年1月, 大学紛争III-2-21, MP70099, 【閲覧室4-2-2】1-2/2-2-3 (“The Progress of the Situation Following the Blockade of the Student Affairs Department.” January 1969, Kyoto University Archives).

⁴¹ 『吉田寮9-28京大読本0号』京都大学新聞社, 1985年4月11日. 京都大学記録資料館所蔵.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ 【連載第五回】吉田寮百年物語, 京都大学新聞, 2019 ([Fifth series] Yoshida Dormitory 100 Years Story, *Kyoto University Newspaper*, 2019).

reintroduction of riot police.⁴⁴ By the end of 1977, the protests had forced a total of 221 classes and 126 meetings to be held off campus, and 139 classes to be canceled altogether.⁴⁵

In the spring of 1978, a new dean of students was established at Kyoto University, Professor Sawada Toshio. After the scale and disruption of the Takemoto Protests in 1977, Sawada wanted to restore order to the campus and was no longer interested in maintaining the previous arrangement of directly negotiating with student demands.⁴⁶ The appointment of Sawada as the new dean coincided with the Ministry of Education announcement of the “University National Property Handling Regulations” and the “Notice on the Maintenance of Order in Universities.” As a first step towards preventing campus activism, using the Ministry of Education directives as justification, Sawada declared that he would no longer allow collective bargaining with Yoshida Dormitory, and that the agreements made before he took office would be “handled on a fair and equitable basis.”⁴⁷

On September 14 1979, the National Board of Audit (*Kaikei kensa-in*), in charge of reviewing government expenditures, issued a report based on an investigation conducted into Kyoto University’s dormitory expenses.⁴⁸ The board reported that 490,000 yen in dormitory utility fees had not been collected the previous year, and asserted that because its officials had been unable to enter Yoshida’s building for inspection, “the dormitory was in a state of occupation.”⁴⁹ In response to the board’s report, the Kyoto University leadership promised to handle the situation within three years.⁵⁰ As promised, three years later, in October 1982, the “Basic Policy for the Abolition of Yoshida Dormitory” was announced by the dean of student affairs. In it, the dean declared that, based on the 1979 investigation by the Board, the dormitory was violating university policies and was structurally unsound:

The history of the university’s dormitory problem is a long one. Despite sincere efforts over the years by those involved, the problem has not yet been resolved, although some improve-

⁴⁴ 『吉田寮9-28京大読本0号』京都大学新聞社, 1985年4月11日. 京都大学記録資料館所蔵.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ 1985/7/4「在寮期限」粉碎! 新自治寮獲得! 全学集会基調 (案) 吉田寮自治会/熊野寮自治会/室町寮自治会

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ 【連載第六回 吉田寮百年物語, 京都大学新聞, 2019 ([Sixth series] Yoshida Dormitory 100 Years Story, *Kyoto University Newspaper*, 2019) .

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

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ments have been made. As far as the current situation is concerned, the Yoshida and Kumano dormitories are aging and the residential facilities are deteriorating, the utilization rate is extremely low compared to the dormitory capacity, the dormitory students claim the right to enter and leave the dormitories, and there are many dorm residents who do not pay the 100 or 300 yen per month dormitory fee. In addition, the cost of utilities and personnel expenses for cooks are also paid out of government funds. This does not justify the current situation of the dormitories, even if it is necessary to provide assistance to dorm residents who are in dire financial straits.⁵¹

The abolition of the dormitory was justified on the grounds that the dormitory residents had not been meeting necessary financial regulations and that the deterioration of the building posed a safety hazard. In response to the “Basic Policy” announcement, Yoshida Dormitory residents conducted a sit-in in front of the university clock tower demanding a public meeting with the dean of students.⁵² The sit-in lasted for twelve days, with students camped out in tents, and culminated in an all-university rally on October 30th, 1982.⁵³ More than 250 people attended the protest, and in the lead up to the rally, Yoshida was able to collect over 1,500 signatures in support of their demands.⁵⁴ Instead of agreeing to open up the policy to discussion, university administration called in 200 riot police.⁵⁵

Despite the strong criticism from students, on December 14th, 1982, it was decided by the University Council, the highest decision-making body at the university, that the expiration date of residence in Yoshida Dormitory would be March 31, 1986.⁵⁶ After the expiration date, all residents would be evicted and the old dormitory building would be demolished.⁵⁷ The University Council also announced that they would no longer negotiate with the students representing the dormitory residents.⁵⁸ This method was based on other universities across Japan, such as at Osaka University, which had successfully

⁵¹ 京都大学学生部長北川善太郎, 「大学の学寮問題について」1982年9月, 吉田寮9-11-2/2-2-5/吉田寮39, 京都大学大学文書館 (Dean of Student Affairs Kitagawa, “On the University’s Dormitory Problem,” September 1982, Kyoto University Archives) .

⁵² Yoshida Dormitory Autonomous Association, “Sit-in and Fight for the Struggle!”, October 10th, 1982

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ 1985/7/4「在寮期限」粉碎！新自治寮獲得！全学集会基調（案）吉田寮自治会／熊野寮自治会／室町寮自治会

⁵⁷ 吉田寮6-40吉田寮資料集「在寮期限」の到来からその終結へ1985-90資料集を刊行する会 1994年2月1日

⁵⁸ Ibid.

achieved dormitory closure by suspending dormitory recruitment but allowing current residents to remain until graduation.⁵⁹

In January 1983, students attempted to negotiate with the dean of student affairs over the policy, but, after three rounds of negotiations, the dean reversed course and decided to terminate any discussions between the administration and the dormitory.⁶⁰ On February 3rd, the dean confirmed the university's plans to replace Yoshida with a "new dormitory [that] will be built according to the Ministry of Education standards."⁶¹ In March, utility invoices, which were usually paid by the university, were sent to all four of the dormitory associations on campus.⁶² The dormitory associations refused to pay the bills, claiming that they could not be billed without open discussion with the university. The following month, on April 15th, 1983, dormitory residents participated once again in a protest to prevent the Board of Audit from coming into the dormitories, occupying the clock tower and Student Affairs building.⁶³ In response, riot police were called to campus, leading to eight dorm residents from Yoshida and Kumano dormitories to be arrested under the charge of trespass.⁶⁴

Yoshida residents, facing an administration unwilling to negotiate the "Basic Policy," began organizing a broader campus movement to save the dormitory. As the official expiration date of Yoshida approached, residents collaborated with the student government, which was still deeply associated with New Left campus protests, and other Kyoto University dormitories, including Kumano Dormitory, the Women's Dormitory, and Muromachi Dormitory, all of which were structured in the self-governance model, to organize collective actions. Residents also appealed to the deans and councilors of various faculties who were more sympathetic to student activism, including the Faculty of Letters, the Faculty of Liberal Arts, the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Agriculture.⁶⁵ The faculties issued statements in support of Yoshida, criticizing the University Council for making the decision to demolish the dormitory without discussion with the residents.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁰ Yoshida Dormitory Autonomous Association, "Sit-in and Fight for the Struggle!", October 10th, 1982, published in Nomura Kanta, *The Yoshida Dormitory Students' History*, Cesura (2022).

⁶¹ 1985/7/4 「在寮期限」 粉碎！新自治寮獲得！全学集会基調（案）吉田寮自治会／熊野寮自治会／室町寮自治会

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ 京都大学新聞第1885号，京都大学新聞社，16-Apr-1983 (Kyoto University Newspaper No. 1885, April 16, 1983, Kyoto University Newspaper Repository, <https://repository.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/dspace/handle/2433/255416>) .

⁶⁴ 1985/7/4 「在寮期限」 粉碎！新自治寮獲得！全学集会基調（案）吉田寮自治会／熊野寮自治会／室町寮自治会

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

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In July 1985, Yoshida residents led a university-wide assembly in order to gain support for their movement. At the rally, residents presented a keynote speech, written in collaboration with Kumano and Muromachi Dormitories, in which they introduced the history of autonomous dormitories in Japan and their importance as welfare facilities. The speech then situated the attack on Yoshida within a wider Ministry of Education effort to restructure universities and curtail student autonomy, citing the 1971 Central Council for Education report that identified dormitories as “the root cause of conflicts.”⁶⁷ The campaign against Yoshida, they argued, was not merely a dormitory issue but part of a larger assault on student freedom: “By destroying students’ free and independent creative spaces, [Kyoto University] is attempting to create a silent and obedient student body and thoroughly strengthen security on campus. We must position the closure of Yoshida Dormitory as part of Kyoto University’s policy to strengthen security and build a fight to crush it.”⁶⁸

At the same time as their external campaign, internally, Yoshida residents began to brainstorm a proposal for a long-term solution against the abolition of the dormitory. Residents were uncertain whether they could argue against the university’s claims that the dormitory’s wooden structure was a safety hazard, as well as if it would be possible to maintain the wooden building, which was in need of significant upkeep and repair.⁶⁹ However, they argued that allowing a new building to be constructed under the Ministry of Education’s “four conditions”—which required formal management and operational rules; clearly defined financial responsibilities, including self-payment of living costs; individual rooms; and the elimination of communal dining halls—would, “abandon the purpose of dormitories as a welfare facility where students can live cheaply and, by destroying the shared space of dormitory students, deny free communication between students. At the same time, it [would] arbitrarily expel those who are critical of the university or society, aiming for thorough separation and control while cutting off the economically disadvantaged.”⁷⁰ Rather than let the university demolish Yoshida and construct an entirely new dormitory under the “four conditions,” Yoshida residents decided that they would prioritize the acquisition of a new dormitory building under their own design, including the elements that were central to Yoshida: a cafeteria, which as used as an organizing space, and shared rooms, which led to critical discussions among residents, fostered a sense of community and helped structure the self-governance system.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ 吉田寮5-108 Yoshida and All Dormitory Report. 1994年7月28日（木）

⁷⁰ 吉田寮自治会／熊野寮自治会／室町寮自治会. 1985. 「在寮期限粉碎！新自治寮獲得！全学集会基調（案）」

The shift in strategy coincided with the establishment of a new university president, Nishijima Yasunori.⁷¹ As protests continued on campus against the closure of Yoshida Dormitory, Nishijima addressed the conflict in an interview with the Kyoto University Newspaper in December 1985, stating that, unlike the previous president, he did not necessarily want the residents to be forcibly evicted from the dormitory.⁷² Three months later, on March 31st, 1986, the official expiration date of the dormitory, the university issued a statement, calling for students to leave the dormitory “as soon as possible after April 1st.”⁷³ However, the university committed to avoiding the use of “coercive measures” to force students to leave the dormitory, and instead called on them to “make rational decisions and act sensibly in the spirit of self-governance.”⁷⁴ The administration promised the residents that it was “ready to do everything we can to help the students who are leaving the dormitories,” including arranging alternative accommodations.⁷⁵ School officials also stipulated that if students did not comply and evacuate the dormitory, they were “prepared to do what we can to reduce or even suspend the functions of Yoshida Dormitory, which would reduce the capacity of the dormitory and cause inconvenience to our students.”⁷⁶

Despite the call for students to exit the dormitory, as of April, 140 students refused to leave.⁷⁷ In response, the administration closed down the dormitory cafeteria, reassigned staff members, and suspended dormitory recruitment. Yoshida Dormitory’s residents continued to recruit students on their own initiative. The university began conducting land surveys in late April in preparation for the construction of a new dormitory.⁷⁸ In June, the administration proposed a new dormitory plan. In response, Yoshida residents submitted their own alternative plan.

In September 1986, the university administration released another report on the

⁷¹ Ibid, 15.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 京都大学学生部長朝尾直弘, 「吉田寮問題の現状」1986年9月, 吉田寮9-6, 1-2/2-2-5/吉田寮39, 京都大学大学文書館 (Naohiro Asao, Dean of Student Affairs, Kyoto University, “The Current Status of the Yoshida Dormitory Issue,” September 1986, Kyoto University Archives) .

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ 学生部長朝尾直弘, 「吉田寮の在寮期限到来にあたって」1986年3月, 吉田寮9-5, 51-2/2-2-5/吉田寮39京都大学大学文書館 (Dean of Students Naohiro Asao, “On the Occasion of the Expiration of Yoshida Dormitory’s Tenure,” March 1986, Kyoto University Archives) .

⁷⁸ Ibid.

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situation of Yoshida Dormitory.⁷⁹ With students still refusing to evacuate the dormitory, the university had to reconsider how best to handle the “dormitory situation” without evicting the students by force.⁸⁰ The September 1986 report, written by Asao Naohiro, Dean of Student Affairs, reiterated to students that the newly constructed dormitory would “be operated in a way that respects the traditions of the university”:

The need for dormitories and their significance as welfare facilities has not diminished in the slightest. For this reason, the university has consistently made efforts to construct new dormitories. The new dormitory is to be built at government expense. Since the new dormitory is to be built with government funds, it is only natural that the conditions set by the government will apply to its management and operation, cost sharing, and private rooms. However, we would like to ensure that the new dormitory will be operated in a way that respects the traditions of the university.⁸¹

This report, despite acknowledging the importance of dormitories as welfare facilities, was aimed at discouraging Yoshida’s hope of proposing their own dormitory plan. Asao asserted the university’s commitment to rebuilding a dormitory in accordance with conditions set by the government, which meant that the new building would lack many of the features that allowed Yoshida to serve as a space for student organizing, support, and autonomy.⁸² Asao called once again for students to evacuate the dormitory, pointing out that they were now six months past the residence expiration deadline, and that their continued occupation of the old dormitory was preventing the new one from being constructed. However, the university abided by its decision not to take drastic measures to remove the students from the dormitory. Yoshida residents continued to occupy the dormitory, in increasingly tough conditions.

By November 7th, 1988, with residents showing no signs of leaving Yoshida, university authorities finally agreed to hold a collective bargaining session with the dormitory for the first time in almost six years.⁸³ At the meeting, the university gave in to the calls from students against abolishing Yoshida. The dean of students, Kawai Hayao, proposed a compromise: if Yoshida residents agreed to demolish Yoshida West Dormitory—one of

⁷⁹ 学生部長朝尾直弘、「吉田寮の在寮期限到来にあたって」1986年3月、吉田寮9-5, 51-2/2-2-5/吉田寮39京都大学大学文書館

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ 吉田寮5-97情報局月報号外 号外第2号「管理強化反対」から「再編との対決へ」—同時代史としての『吉田寮資料集』刊行によせて—吉田寮自治会文化部情報局1993年7月5日

the buildings in the worst state of disrepair—and committed to submitting a resident list and paying dormitory fees, then the university would repair the remaining buildings, permit students to continue living there, and allow residents to maintain their system of self-governance, including their authority over recruiting new members.⁸⁴ After a period of negotiation, Yoshida Dormitory residents decided to accept this compromise at a meeting held on January 22nd, 1989.⁸⁵ On March 25th, the removal of the West Dormitory began, and on March 27th, the suspension of the dormitory's recruitment was lifted. On April 14th, Yoshida Dormitory submitted a list of dorm residents and paid the dormitory fee. At a council meeting on April 18th, it was confirmed that “a series of measures related to setting the deadline for residence in the dormitory have been completed.”⁸⁶

Through tracing Yoshida's campaign to defend their dormitory, it becomes evident a series of unique circumstances allowed the movement to succeed. Yoshida's connection to the postwar dormitory expansion movement and its role in battles over student autonomy in the 1960s—particularly in the 1968–69 protests—meant that, by the time the Ministry of Education intensified “normalization” policies, Yoshida had decades of organizational experience and a strong identity as a center of student activism. This, combined with the fact that Kyoto University itself was a center for New Left protest, allowed dormitory residents to frame their struggle as a defense of Kyoto University's broader culture of student freedom, helping them to build a coalition of support across the university. Although the dormitory residents accepted the compromise of the demolition of the West Dormitory, in the negotiation process, they were able to preserve the most fundamental aspect of the autonomous dormitory system: their self governance. By protecting the central institution of the dormitory, even at the cost of demolishing part of the original dormitory structure, Yoshida was able to survive the Ministry of Education's normalization campaign, and preserve its future.

Even after the compromise was reached in 1989, Yoshida residents continued to advocate against the closure of autonomous dormitories across the country. In December 1986, the administration at the Osaka City University announced that they would be closing Sugimoto Dormitory, a Meiji-era autonomous dormitory. In January 1987, Yoshida students joined a strike by the Osaka City University Liberal Arts Department against the closure of the dormitory.⁸⁷ In March 1990, before the official closure of Sugimoto

⁸⁴ 学生部長朝尾直弘, 「吉田寮の在寮期限到来にあたって」1988年11月, 吉田寮I-95, 吉田寮京都大学大学文書館

⁸⁵ 吉田寮5-97

⁸⁶ 連載第六回 吉田寮百年物語, 京都大学新聞, 2019 ([Sixth series] Yoshida Dormitory 100 Years Story, *Kyoto University Newspaper*, 2019) .

⁸⁷ Ibid.

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Dormitory, Yoshida students put on a theatrical performance at the dormitory’s last ever festival.⁸⁸ Yoshida participated in rallies and attended court hearings for Yamagata University’s Gakujo Dormitory, which was forced to stop accepting dormitory applications in 1999, leading to a court trial between the dormitory and the university.⁸⁹ In February 2001, Gakujo Dormitory was closed by forced execution.

On November 14 1994, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts of the University of Tokyo notified residents at the university’s Komaba Dormitory, which was the oldest and one of the most well-known Meiji-era autonomous dormitories in Japan, that they would not be allowed to accept new students starting in 1995 and would be closed in March 1996.⁹⁰ Yoshida Dormitory became actively involved in the struggle to save Komaba Dormitory, leading efforts including the passage of resolutions in support of the struggle at dormitory student conventions, participation in local actions, collection of signatures, and the holding of joint meetings. Unfortunately, the fight to save Komaba Dormitory was ultimately unsuccessful. The dormitory was closed by court order on August 22, 2001.⁹¹ The closure of Komaba was seen as a final victory for the Ministry of Education in its goal to eliminate campus radicalism. With the closure of Komaba, Yoshida was left as the oldest student dormitory in Japan.

4. Conclusion

The conflicts surrounding autonomous dormitories in the 1970s and 1980s reveal that the disappearance of autonomous dormitories across the country was not simply an administrative response to aging facilities but part of a broader effort by the Ministry of Education to suppress student activism. As this article has shown, the policies formulated by the Ministry of Education and implemented through university administrations were incredibly successful at limiting student autonomy by targeting the spaces in which it was materially reproduced. The state’s campaign to regulate and demolish dormitories in the aftermath of the 1968–69 protests demonstrates the extent to which the government saw student autonomy as a challenge to maintaining the social order.

However, the success of Kyoto University’s Yoshida Dormitory is evidence that student activism did not disappear after 1969, despite the best efforts by the Ministry of Education to introduce legislation that would contain it. Instead, it persisted in alterna-

⁸⁸ Ibid, 18.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ 東京大学教養学部駒場寮委員長, 吉田寮5-114, 平成6年11月14日, 吉田寮京都大学大学文書館

⁹¹ Susan Pavloska, “Kyoto University’s Yoshida Dormitory”, *Kyoto Journal* 97, 2020.

tive forms, focused instead on localized battles for student autonomy rather than large-scale societal change. For Yoshida residents, the fight to save the dormitory was about something much larger than simply a battle to save an old building; it was about the future of student autonomy, which, through the closure of autonomous dormitories across the country, was under threat. In preserving both their building and self-governance, the success of Yoshida's movement marks a significant triumph against the government's campaign to eliminate autonomous dormitories.

To this day, the fight to save Yoshida has continued. Since 2015, Kyoto University has once again been in conflict with Yoshida to close the dormitory permanently. The university administration has been demanding that students evacuate the building over claims that Yoshida's wooden structure is a safety risk, particularly with the persistent threat of earthquakes in Japan. In December 2017, the university issued the "Basic Policy for Ensuring the Safety of Yoshida Dormitory Students," calling for the dormitory to stop accepting residents and for residents to move out by September 2018. In response, the Yoshida Dormitory Residents' Association issued a statement of protest, demanding the withdrawal of the "Basic Policy." The residents claimed that the university was not truly worried about their safety and was instead using the structural issues of the building as an excuse to demolish the dormitory, and with it, its self-governance. After a series of protests against this order, on April 26th, 2019, the university filed a lawsuit against the students for illegal occupation.

On February 16th, 2024, after years of protest from Yoshida and the surrounding Kyoto community, an initial court decision was reached in favor of the students, determining that 14 of the 17 students still living in the dorm did not have to leave, as they had entered the dormitory before the expiration date set by the university.⁹² On August 25, 2025, Yoshida Dormitory and Kyoto University reached a settlement, in which the university has agreed to carry out earthquake-proofing work on the building. For now, the future of Yoshida Dormitory as a student-run, autonomous residence is secured.

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⁹² Ibid, 19.

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