The term “seron” is the Japanese translation of “public opinion.” Public opinion is one of the terms that reify an ideal of Western modern societies. Modernity in the West, particularly in countries such as England and France which first led modernity, meant “liberation from the magical thought,” “liberation from monarchy” or “liberation from the order of the Mediaeval Christianity.” In other words, modernity began with the idea that individual dignity should be guaranteed. The Western modernity began with the notion that each person is an intelligent rational “individual” as a unit that cannot be further divided, and that society is a collective of such individuals. Opinions of such “individuals” are considered to be intelligent and rational, and thus the opinions of their collective are also considered to be the same. “Public” refers to such a collective of individuals, and society is defined as a public entity, whose basic unit is individuals. Opinions of the public have become the principle for managing society and policy making. It is because there is a common recognition that there are least mistakes involved when policies are determined based upon intelligent and rational opinions of the publics even if this recognition has come to reflect a fictional reality today.

However, today we tend to think of a modern society as a mass society. The transformation from public societies to mass societies took place in the twentieth century. It is not the point of this paper to go into the issues related to this transformation; suffice to say that mass refers to a collective of people who are not only intelligent and rational but are at times emotional and irrational. Thus there is a possibility that a sum of their opinions no longer constitutes the public opinion. Nonetheless, currently we have no other alternatives that are less worse than using public opinion as the principle for managing society; most modern democratic societies thus rely on this principle. Given this situation, what we need is democracy based upon a system of constant improvement and surveillance, which will allow us to manage society based upon public opinion.

The demand for such a democratic system exists not only in Western societies but also in Japan. Because the mass has emotional and irrational aspects as well as intelligent and rational aspects, deliberate analysis is needed for the formation of public opinion in a mass society. What an individual relies upon when forming his/her opinion is knowledge and information. In modern societies, individuals learn knowledge through school education. The importance of school education is recognized in modern
societies regardless of their political systems because a modern society requires highly educated workers in order to actualize industrialization. Additionally, in democratic societies, the social system is legitimated through school education, where a certain range of knowledge that individuals need to participate in managing society is provided. In modern societies individuals form their opinions based upon the knowledge that they have acquired and thus what kind of knowledge is provided through education is an important issue. This principle also applies to the issue of nuclear power generation.

How people are taught about the issues regarding “nuclear power” and “nuclear power generation” in school is inevitably reflected in the opinions that they form. We must consider factors such as how people understood such information in school – or if they understood at all—before forming their opinions. Even if such information is provided, if people do not understand, naturally it does not lead to the formation or accumulation of knowledge. Thus, even if they are asked their opinions regarding the issue, their opinions might simply consist of arbitrary ideas, emotional reactions, or misguided assumptions. That is to say, the sum of the opinions formed based upon inappropriate information cannot be used as the guiding tool for managing society.

In this regard, it is important that we pay attention to the way in which information functions in our society. What kind of information is provided, and how to provide appropriate information are key issues to opinion formation both at the levels of individuals and the collective.

In sum, in a democratic society, whether it is a direct democracy system or indirect democracy system, society must be run by “public opinion” and “societal consensus” as a sum of the opinions of its members. Generally in the indirect democracy system, congressmen who represent the opinions of individual members are elected, to whom the policy decisions are entrusted. Furthermore, public administrators (usually governmental officials) are the ones who carry out the policies and manage society. However, with regards to an issue that has great relevance for society, both policy makers and public administrators must disclose all the necessary information for people so that they can form their own opinions. Otherwise, neither the members’ personal opinions nor public opinion can be said to be intelligent and rational. Ideally, there should be “information disclosure” and “transparency of disclosed information” for all the relevant information about the society. The information should be provided in the form that is easily understandable and accessible for all the members of the society.

Members form their own opinions, and subsequently, social consensus, in the following process. First information relevant to an issue is disclosed. People come

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1 Recently Professor Oyama discussed about the importance and effectiveness of direct democracy on the issue of the social conflict of nuclear power plant at Maki town in Niigata prefecture. The basic point of view of his paper is a political pluralism approach. Hiroshi Tanaka and Yutaka Oishi ed. Frontier of the Theory of Politics and Societies, keio Univ. Press P.P.113~140,
into contact with such information and understand the content. They decide, based upon their understanding, whether or not they agree. Then, they form their own opinions based upon their autonomous decision. This decision is presumably made on the basis of individual freedom as long as it is not forced by external pressure or induction. When this process is correctly carried out, then societal decision is made based upon societal consensus, which is expressed, as “public opinion.” The public opinion is a sum of individual opinions that have been freely expressed, and carries the weight of social responsibility in itself.

When we examine the case of Japan in the last half of the century, Japanese society has failed to live up to this conceptual model for the formation of public opinion and societal management required for a democratic society. Japanese have failed to publicly address the discrepancies between the ideal model of democracy and the reality of Japanese society, nor have they discussed why this has been the case. They have further neglected to have discussions amongst policy makers, public administrators and the members of society whether or not a Japanese-style democracy is possible at all. As shown in the expression “the disorganization of the Japanese social system,” it is apparent today that the Japanese superficial democratic system, which has continuously adjusted itself on a temporary basis, no longer works. And yet, Japanese are yet to fully recognize the gravity of the issue.

We now turn to the social acceptance of nuclear power generation in Japan, based upon the conceptual framework of the democratic society run on the basis of “public opinion” as discussed above. “Public Acceptance” has come to be frequently used in place of “social acceptance.” However, we will use the latter term because: 1) the notion of public society has been replaced by the notion of mass society in social sciences, as discussed above; and 2) one can sense the political intention of the people who insist on using the notion of “public” acceptance, as I discuss below. I will thus use the term social acceptance in this paper.

The public opinion regarding the sites of nuclear plants should have been based upon “social acceptance” (which can subsequently lead to “social consensus”) from the very beginning of the development of nuclear power generation. Needless to say, it is an issue that affects not only the local community in question but the nation as a whole. And yet, both critics and promoters of nuclear power plants point out that many of the fundamental problems have been properly addressed or simply ignored. This is because the social acceptance for nuclear power plants has not been shaped through sufficient information disclosure or people’s adequate understanding of the issue. Indeed, the enterprise, policy makers, and policy administrators have behaved in such a way as to suggest that they did not even consider that such fundamental social acceptance is necessary. When there was an opposition movement by local fishermen against the

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entry of the nuclear powered ship “Mutsu” into their port, Moriyama, the then-current director of the Science and Technology Agency, made a statement that further fueled the oppositional movement. He said, “There is no way that these fishermen can understand something so complicated as nuclear power. They should trust the state decision and follow it.” This statement clearly captures the government’s stance that “acceptance” simply means a coercive enforcement of the state policies imposed on the local residents. The idea is that “the citizens do not have to be informed; they should simply follow the government.” Although such an apparently anti-democratic style of management has not surfaced in recent years, there continues to be the idea of mobocracy expressed in different forms. One also that the word switch from social acceptance to public acceptance is in fact a way of the citizens by pretending to treat them as intelligent and rational beings. Social scientists have used the term social acceptance when referring to national consensus or social consensus or the disputes and processes by which members reach an agreement. However, the enterprise and the policy administrators are currently trying to replace the term social acceptance with public acceptance. There are Japan’s leading advertising agencies—which house sections specializing in public relations for policies—working for them. Electronic companies also have their own think tanks and are thus able to provide various survey data. Additionally, there are a number of government-related public relations agencies which support nuclear power sum of information they possess is tremendous, and yet such information is far from being accessible or disclosed. This situation leads us to speculate whether the switch from mass to public is in fact a way of manipulating information and concealing the fact that there is a lack of information disclosure.

If social acceptance is about “gaining the understanding and cooperation of citizens” (Nuclear Power White Paper 1993), and if the “understanding” is deemed important, then naturally, the premise of social acceptance is citizens are guaranteed “information disclosure” and “transparency of information.” And yet, even in the Nuclear Power Act that defines the fundamental rules for nuclear administration in Japan, there is only a passing reference for the obligation of information disclosure, as found in the sentence: “The accomplishments from research, development, and utilization shall be made public....” A number of serious accidents that have recently occurred are not considered “accomplishments” and are thus discussed separately. As well, the processes involved in research, development, and utilization are not subject to public disclosure. For instance, an analysis of the “critical accident” in the “J.C.R” Case of 1999 evidently shows that the major cause of the accident is the lack of information disclosure regarding the process of the technical development. In the nuclear policies in Japan, information disclosure is not merely used as a means for gaining. In such a situation P.A. do not function as social or public acceptance itself. It merely functions for a means to gain an agreement by local residents by presenting the information which is suitable for promotion of nuclear power plants. Therefore, in fact, we should consider P.A. as an canalized social agreement or Public Agreement by local residents.

Citizens cannot gain an understanding of nuclear power unless they are given
sufficient amount of adequate information. Without it, citizens cannot reach a public opinion that can form a social consensus. Thus they cannot—and do not have to—be held responsible for the decisions they make. The principle of self-responsibility requires that people are given sufficient amount of information and that the transparency of disclosed information is guaranteed before they can come to an autonomous decision. Thus, if this condition is not met, and if the provided information was inadequate or wrong, then individuals do not have to take responsibility for their own decisions.

The fact that the people involved in the public relations for nuclear power generation have failed to live up to this principle in the past is evident if we examine the limited range of things they list as the examples of information disclosure in “Nuclear Power Pocket Book 1998/9 edition” published in by Japan Atomic Industrial Forum Ime (Nihon genshiryoku sangyo kaigi). In Chapter 4 titled “Information disclosure and promotion of the understanding of citizens,” the book only lists three categories; i.e., the names of institutions related to nuclear power information, of nuclear power public relations institutions, and public opinion polls regarding nuclear power. What is apparent at least from this example is that their notion of “information disclosure” and social acceptance merely serve the purpose of their public relations activities aimed at the local residents or the mass media. In other words, these are only measures for canalization of opinions and not procedures needed for people to form democratic public opinions. This stance parallels the ways in which the government used to induce local residents to agree the construction of a dam by stressing the potential profits the residents could gain. However, as Hasegawa points out, “these old measures that are premised upon the “discrepancies among local communities” “the illusion of development” of the depopulated areas, and the local control by a few dominant families no longer work for obtaining new sites for nuclear plants in Japan.”

In June 2000, the Federal Government of Germany decided to abolish all the nuclear plants in the next 32 years. Germany was able to do this because the Green Party, which made the abolishment of nuclear plants one of its election promises, became part of the government. Thus there is a possibility that this policy can change in the future with a change of the government. But the fact that the party which was supported by people for its policy came into power shows that it is a public promise that the government is expected to realize. There is no doubt that the change in Germany took place because of the movement towards abolishing nuclear plants all over Europe. But the German government should be given credit for realizing the principle of democratic policy decision making. In France, the citizens are notified about the risks involved in nuclear plants and the residents who live near these sites are provided with the medication to take in case of an accident. If given sufficient information, societies can choose, based upon social consensus, what path to take, whether it is promotion of nuclear power generation with the recognition of the risks involved or it is to maintain the status quo. Japan, as well, can decide its own future regarding the nuclear power

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3 Koichi Hasegawa 1996 _A choice for Post-Nuclear society_ “Shinyosha, Tokyo P.261
generation, if the citizens are adequately informed and are thus able to reach their autonomous decisions.

However, in Japan, the state has often neglected to provide information about the energy sources—including the long-term vision of the energy planning and food planning and the level of self-sufficiency needed for maintaining the kind of industrial society that Japan is. Instead the information has been used as a way of convincing the local residents of the profits involved in having a nuclear power plant in their area, or of making light of the after effects of an accident. Citizens should instead have the opportunity to choose whether or not to support nuclear power generation after they are provided with the information about the state goals, energy policies, the current situation of the energy sources, as well as merits and demerits of using nuclear power generation. True, the media, governmental institutions, and electric companies have conducted opinion polls in the past. These results have been individually analyzed and discussed, and some of them have been made public. But the important question that is often forgotten is whether or not the people who were surveyed had been, prior to the surveys, given sufficient information in order to form their own opinions. Every year a tremendous amount of budget is requested and spent for nuclear power public relations by the government and the enterprise. And yet, the content of the expenditure for the PR, or their effects, are never disclosed freely to citizens. The expenditure planning fundamentally follows the same pattern as the previous year, and it is rarely exposed to outside criticisms. Consequently, similar surveys are conducted redundantly by several different institutions, and the results simply become accumulated without bearing much impact.

We already know that, after the Chernovyl Accident, the number of people who oppose nuclear power generation in Japan is higher than the number of those who support it. This pattern is consistently shown in many of the surveys conducted by various institutions including newspapers and the Prime Minister’s Office. With regards to the utilization of nuclear power in the future, about half the people support the idea of maintaining the status quo or abolishing nuclear power plants. This pattern in the public opinion can also be found in the fact that the concern for safety is usually expressed by half, or at times most, of the people surveyed even before a critical accident takes place at Tokai village in 1999. Behind this concern lies people’s frustration about, and mistrust in, the system of information disclosure. From the results of the surveys conducted in the past, we can come up with a hypothetical, analytical framework as follows: (see Fig1) The validity of this framework is confirmed by the response of the people and reaction of the government and enterprise after the critical accident in 1999.

The situation surrounding “information” and “public opinion” in Japan thus significantly differs from the principles of social acceptance, social consensus and public opinions discussed above. Furthermore, the information disclosure and transparency of disclosed information required for shaping autonomous decision and self-responsibility also fall short of the principles. Many Japanese citizens know, even if not so consciously, that they are not given the kind of information (in regard to its quantity, con-
tent, and transparency) they need to understand nuclear power generation. Given this situation, it is thus impossible to expect that citizens should have “social acceptance.” If “social acceptance” has to function literally, there has to be an open administration and open information as well as the media and the government that can be trusted.

Another important point about social acceptance is the fact that conflicts have become the normal state in modern societies. In mass societies today, there are multiple values and interests coexisting with each other in sub social systems (such as local communities and families). Moreover, a democratic society guarantees that multiple values coexist and that they are given the equal legitimacy. In an open society, people argue for the legitimacy and superiority of their values and interests each other in order to obtain more support. Society settles for the one that it deems most appropriate. In sociology, such a competition for values and interests is called “social conflict.” Fundamentally, social conflict is a necessary part of a mass democratic society. We should recognize that it is indeed abnormal not to have any conflicts. A society that lacks them is at a critical, pathological state, which means that it is controlled by one opinion or one will. In other words, the existence of conflicts is an indicator for measuring the health of a society. With this recognition, it is even dictatorial and autocratic to try to form only one understanding and a single opinion from all members of the society. Instead we must recognize that a healthy democratic society requires that there should be conflicts of opinions, and that the roles that policy makers and administrators must play is not only the function of decision-making and administration but rather a function of political mediation. In this regard, nuclear power promoters in Japan have acted as if they understood “social acceptance” merely as a way of forming a single opinion that will be favorable to their own party. It cannot be denied that the same tendency can be found in some of the people who oppose nuclear power. However, given the overwhelming power that the government and the nuclear power industry have had for collecting information, and given the infertility of the “social consensus” that is supposed to be based upon “social acceptance,” we must question the responsibility that the government and the industry have failed to met.

structure of the attitude to Nuclear power plants

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