3 The Politics of an Emerging Consumer Movement: The Occupation Period

> Our pioneering leaders exclaimed: "Capitalism is a double-edged sword! We are exploited both as workers and consumers!" The battle to abolish the exploitation of workers has progressed; the trickery of exploiting consumers, however, has been taken to the extremes of ingenuity and it threatens the livelihood of the masses. . . . The social responsibilities of consumers, particularly of women, are extremely great. . . . Let us raise our voices and assert the consumer position.
>
> —Consumer declaration, February 1957

So proclaimed Oku Mumeo, the founder of Shufuren (Japan Federation of Housewives' Associations), before an assembly of 700 consumer advocates from around the country at the first annual National Consumer Rally (Zen nihon shōhisha taikai) in Tōkyō. Resonating with the incendiary rhetoric of the times, Oku's words expressed a deep-seated frustration among consumer representatives with the pro-business policies of the early postwar conservative establishment, the failure of both business and government to respect consumer interests, and the lack of consumer representation in the decision-making processes of both business and government. At the turn of the twenty-first century, this sense of moral outrage still lingers as the postwar movement celebrates more than fifty years of economic and political activism.

My purpose in this and the next chapter is to survey the early postwar history of one of Japan's most enduring social movements before the institutionalization of the post-1968 consumer protection policymaking system. In this chapter, I explore the structural and strategic evolution of consumer organizations from war's end to 1955, when the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) first came to power. This was an important period for our purposes, not only because it witnessed the formation of several of Japan's flagship consumer advocacy organizations, but also because it spawned many of the characteristics of Japanese consumerism that still are present today. As a

period of rapid political transformation, moreover, the decade exemplifies the effects of policy change, institutional developments, and broad political alignments on the evolution of social movements. Of particular significance, as we shall see, was the so-called Reverse Course,[1] a reorientation of Occupation priorities toward conservative, pro-business goals that in some cases changed the opportunities for consumer activism.

From Bamboo Shoots to Blooming Flowers: The Socioeconomic and Political Context of Early Postwar Consumerism

Whereas the contemporary American and British consumer movements were largely the products of firmly entrenched democratic systems and the economic affluence of the 1960s, the most formative years of the Japanese consumer movement were those of the immediate postwar period, an era of economic chaos, political and institutional instability, and unprecedented opportunities for citizen activism.

From Japan's defeat in World War II until 1950, when the advent of the Korean War finally put the country on the road to economic recovery, Japanese citizens faced triple-digit inflation and severe food and product shortages, problems caused in many instances by a draconian rationing system and a burgeoning black market. To stem the ravages of malnutrition, many Japanese were reduced to trading their possessions for food on the black market and foraging for provisions in the countryside. In the words of those who lived through the period, it was a "bamboo shoot lifestyle" (*takenoko seikatsu*), a metaphor for life below the subsistence line.[2]

In a manner similar to that of the environmental citizens' movement two decades later, Japanese consumers mobilized quickly and spontaneously at the local level against this economic backdrop in pursuit of a life-and-death objective: the restoration of the supply of basic necessities to the marketplace at affordable prices. It was, quite simply, a time of mass participation in pursuit of consumer goals—a rare occurrence when compared with the postwar histories of the U.S. and British movements.

In contrast to both environmental groups, with their relatively affluent middle-class members (see McKean 1981), and to their American, male-dominated counterparts, Japan's early postwar consumer organs were composed primarily of impoverished women from diverse social backgrounds.

They compensated for their lack of resources with a newly found sense of political efficacy that emerged from a common political wellspring: the democratic policies and institutions introduced by the Allied Occupation of Japan.

Shortly after arriving in Japan, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) lifted the authoritarian controls of the prewar and wartime eras and granted citizens a number of basic democratic rights and freedoms that paved the way for a veritable explosion of interest-group and citizen-group activity (Tsujinaka 1988:73). Among those who took full advantage of these developments were the country's newly enfranchised women, many of whom lost no time jumping into the political fray. Indeed, some women got involved in democratic politics even before the Occupation forces set foot on Japanese soil. Ichikawa Fusae, for example, one of Japan's best-known feminist activists, formed the first of many postwar women's groups only ten days after the surrender.[3] Legend has it that she was inspired by flyers hinting at the democratic changes to come that had been dropped by American airmen onto the fields surrounding her home (KSS 1997:5). During the final months of 1945 and throughout the next year, women around the country swelled the ranks of the unions and the political parties (Garon 1997:181), organized for welfare rights for mothers and children and the elevation of the status of women, and campaigned for lower prices, an end to black marketeering, a more efficient rationing system, and other consumer-related issues. Although many of these groups were short lived, the degree of activism among Japanese women during this period was unprecedented. It was, as Oku Mumeo's daughter Nakamura Kii recounted a half century later, "a time when women jumped into action like flowers blooming all at once" (K. Nakamura 1996:10).

It was also a time when economic and political circumstances contributed to a qualitative and structural overlap of the consumer and women's movements. In this context of economic scarcity, many of the problems that plagued women-as-consumers were closely intertwined with their roles as mothers and housewives. One of the most important tasks performed by housewives during the early Occupation years was to line up each day—sometimes for hours at a time—to collect their families' daily rations (Garon 1997:181; K. Kobayashi, April 1994:41). When the rationing system did not work properly (which was often the case during the Occupation), the housewives had trouble meeting their families' nutritional needs. Thus it was no accident that many of the organizations that we now associate with the

women's movement, like Ichikawa's League of Women Voters (Fujin yūken-sha dōmei), became involved in consumer-related campaigns during the Occupation. This practice continues to this day, although to a lesser degree. Meanwhile, organizations like Shufuren, which made their mark after World War II mainly as consumer advocates, have simultaneously pursued objectives designed to eliminate prostitution, promote the status and protection of women, and so on. In contrast to the U.S. and British movements during the early postwar period, virtually no organs focused exclusively on consumer issues.

While the newly institutionalized democratic rights and freedoms of the Occupation period were instrumental in spurring Japan's nascent consumer organs into action, those rights and freedoms were not accompanied by routinized participation in the mainstream decision-making processes of government. This was particularly true from 1947/48, when a reorientation of Occupation policy led to the introduction of pro-growth policies that both enhanced the influence of business spokespersons in the policy process and weakened the legitimacy of nonbusiness interests like labor and consumers. Accordingly, consumer activists, along with most other citizen groups at the time, pursued the tactics of the politically dispossessed: noisy street demonstrations, the petitioning of bureaucratic officials, boycotts, direct confrontation with local businessmen, and other forms of overt political protest. In keeping with their lack of financial resources and political and economic expertise, many activists also resorted to publicly berating those in authority for abusing the public trust.[4]

Although consumer protest may not have yielded the policy results that more established interest groups might expect to obtain in the mainstream political process, it was important as a form of citizen participation in politics for at least two reasons. First, the noisy, iconoclastic nature of consumer activism helped educate otherwise passive citizens about their identities as consumers, the extent of consumer abuses in the postwar marketplace, and, finally, the legitimacy of standing up to the vaunted producer on behalf of consumer protection. It was, in many ways, an early postwar example of what Susan Pharr termed "status-based conflict" (Pharr 1990:5)—of efforts by consumers to assert their identities and to challenge the authority of political and economic leaders who had suppressed them in the past. Second, consumer activists in many instances successfully used protest tactics to shame the perpetrators of egregious consumer abuses into changing their business practices. Their successes, in turn, encouraged many activists to

establish formal organizations, some of which went on to become part of the nucleus of the contemporary consumer advocacy movement.

Japan's Flagship Consumer Organizations

Kansai shufuren

One such group was the forerunner of one of the most influential consumer organizations in western Japan: the Kansai shufuren (or Kansai shufurengōkai, Kansai Federation of Housewives' Associations). In October 1945, Higa Masako, a Christian activist and educator, led a group of fifteen women from a suburb of Ōsaka to the offices of the local rationing authorities to protest the persistent and lengthy delays in the supply of rice rations (K. Kobayashi, April 1994:38–41). Armed with empty *furoshiki*,[5] the women arrived at the rationing station just as the attending officials were sitting down to a midday meal complete with ample portions of freshly cooked rice—enough, in fact, for a "week's supply of rice gruel" (K. Kobayashi, April 1994:41). The women immediately took the officials to task for pilfering the public rice supply and clamored for the timely resumption of rations to the neighborhood. Miraculously, supplies were restored later that very same day. The incident was one of the first examples of what was later dubbed the "Give us back our rice *furoshiki* movement" (Kome yokose furoshiki undō),[6] a campaign that attracted consumers from all over Japan.[7]

Spurred on by her unexpected victory, Higa and her cash-strapped followers decided to form a small women's group that eventually expanded into the Ōsaka shufu no kai (Ōsaka Housewives' Association), a small organization that survived on the meager donations of its members. In 1949, the association merged with twenty-nine other local women's groups to form the Kansai shufuren. A nonpartisan organization consisting of both individual members and independent women's groups, the Kansai shufuren promoted international peace, an end to black marketeering and inflation, the reform of the rationing system, and a number of other issues that symbolized the association's origins in the wake of wartime destruction.

Among the organization's most successful programs was the "housewives' shop" (*shufu no mise*) designation for exemplary local retailers. Comparable to the "white list" issued by the Consumers League of New York at the end of the nineteenth century,[8] the designation was awarded through democratic

balloting procedures to retailers who avoided black market practices, sold their products at reasonable prices, and treated their customers with courtesy and respect (KSS 1997:17). Over time, retail practices improved markedly in a number of Ōsaka neighborhoods as shopkeepers began competing for the designation as a way to attract customers. The women who chose the designations, meanwhile, acquired an unprecedented sense of power over a distribution system that had long been viewed as immune to consumer control (K. Kobayashi, November 1994:50). The "housewives' shop" campaign quickly spread to other parts of the country and was widely regarded as one the movement's most effective market-oriented tactics for changing the behavior of business.

Nihon shufurengōkai

Consumer protest against the rationing system also included efforts to restore to the marketplace the supply of potatoes, sugar, vegetables, kerosene, and a number of other staples (Nomura 1990:3). These campaigns, together with protests against inflationary price hikes, were fittingly referred to as the Movement to Defend Livelihoods (*seikatsu bōei no undō*). Although the tactics often varied according to locality, the most common were direct confrontation with those deemed responsible for the shortages—the tactic of choice for the politically weak and financially destitute who eschewed the use of violence.

Among the better-known campaigns in the movement to protect and improve livelihoods was a rally organized by Tōkyō housewives to demand the removal of defective matches from the marketplace (Furyō matchi tsuihō taikai). The brainchild of Oku Mumeo, who had been inspired by the protests of the Ōsaka shufu no kai (K. Nakamura 1996:8), the rally is widely touted as one of the most symbolic events in the postwar history of the organized movement.

During the early postwar period, when electricity was in short supply, matches were an indispensable household commodity controlled by the rationing system. Since rations often fell short of their specified allotments, however, consumers were frequently reduced to purchasing them at highly inflated prices on the black market (Takada 1979:60). Matches were not only expensive and hard to come by, but many of them would not even light when struck.[9] After failing to extract a promise from manufacturers and local

authorities to rectify the problem (Shufurengōkai 1973:12), Oku and a small group of supporters arranged for consumers to exchange their defective matches for good ones at a rally scheduled for September 3, 1948, in the Shibuya ward of Tōkyō (NHSK 1980:22).

The event, which was widely covered by the media, was an enormous success (Oku 1988:177). The organizers collected an entire truckload of defective matches (*Shufuren dayori*, December 1948:2), obtained a public apology from the manufacturers in attendance, and extracted an agreement from officials representing the Daily Necessities Department (Nichiyōhinka) of the Ministry of Commerce (Shōkōshō) and the Economic Stabilization Board (Keizai anteihonbu) to regulate the quality of matches in the future (Takada 1979). Heartened by the effectiveness of the campaign, Oku and her expanding circle of supporters organized Shufuren (Nihon shufurengōkai, Japan Federation of Housewives' Associations) in October 1948, arguably Japan's leading consumer organization. By 1949, Shufuren was estimating a membership of more than 500,000 in the Tōkyō metropolitan area alone (*Shufuren dayori*, May 1949). By the early 1990s, it consisted of about 500 individual members and roughly 400 local organizations from around the country (Keizaikikakuchō 1991c:26).

Oku Mumeo's political philosophy has heavily influenced Shufuren in its efforts to protect the rights of both women and consumers.[10] A feminist and labor activist who had associated in the past with such prominent figures as Ichikawa Fusae and the socialist leader Osugi Sakae, Oku believed strongly in the advancement of consumer and women's rights through both education and political activism, and she was a major figure in the establishment of prewar women's and cooperative organizations. Oku was also one of a small handful of postwar consumer activists to obtain public office. In 1947, she was elected to the Upper House for the first of three consecutive terms as a member of the People's Cooperative Party. Throughout her tenure, she used her platform to articulate the problems specific to both women and consumers and to press (unsuccessfully) for the establishment of a consumer agency at the national level. Oku also served as a member of several governmental *shingikai* (government advisory councils) during these early years and publicized some of the contents of the proceedings—which were officially closed to the public—in the organization's monthly newsletter, *Shufuren dayori*. Although she had very little power compared with that of her male counterparts in the conservative parties, Oku was, in effect, the movement's most prominent voice in the mainstream political system.

When she finally relinquished her seat, Shufuren experienced a drop in direct political influence (interview, Shimizu, July 1999) that it was never able to recover.

With the rice paddle (*oshamoji*) as its symbol,[11] Shufuren engaged in a number of activities during the late 1940s and early 1950s to advance the status of consumers, including product testing, consumer advising and education; the designation of "housewives' shops" (*shufu no mise*) in the Tōkyō area (*Shufuren dayori*, April 1949); rallies; and signature drives. Like its Kansai counterpart, the organization viewed itself as nonpartisan and politically independent. Oku's association with prewar feminist and labor organizations and her pursuit of progressive policies as a member of the Upper House, however, gave the organization a slightly left-of-center political hue.

The fujinkai *and Chifuren*

Another important player in the contemporary consumer movement that formed during the early postwar period was the National Federation of Regional Women's Organizations (Zen nihon chiiki fujinkai rengōkai), or Chifuren, an association of regional women's organizations and their constituent local women's groups (*fujinkai*).

The *fujinkai* had a controversial prewar history—a product, in large part, of the nature of their relationships with national and local authorities. Although many groups formed spontaneously and independently from the late nineteenth century through mid-1945 (Zenchifuren 1973:13), others were mobilized from above or became the target of local governmental interference in support of state-sponsored goals. During the 1930s and the early 1940s, for example, *fujinkai* were established to participate in national defense training, campaigns to promote savings, and other programs designed to facilitate the execution of national wartime policies (NHSK 1980:25; see also Garon 1997). In some instances, groups were organized into national federations; the Women's Patriotic Association (Aikoku fujinkai), which was supervised by the Home Ministry, and the Women's Association for the Defense of Japan (Dai nihon kokubō fujinkai), organized by the War Ministry, were two of the best-known examples (K. Kobayashi, July 1995:48).

The *fujinkai* were disbanded by the Occupation forces in 1945 as inherently undemocratic, only to reappear in semialtered form shortly thereafter. The extension of the franchise to women in late 1945, combined with of-

ficial Occupation policies designed to promote the free and democratic association of Japanese citizens at the local level, helped spark a mushrooming of these groups around the country. In many instances, however, there was nothing voluntary about the mobilization process at all; in fact, existing evidence suggests that many women were still steeped in the social mores of prewar Japan and joined the *fujinkai* only out of a sense of obligation to their communities (K. Kobayashi, November 1995:45).

As Garon notes, although SCAP prohibited governmental interference in the formation and maintenance of these groups, many *fujinkai* received funding from local authorities who were eager to use the groups as "subcontractors" for local governmental projects (Garon 1997:189). In blatant disregard for the spirit of democracy, moreover, some localities offered guidance to the *fujinkai* on how to organize and conduct themselves "democratically" (NHSK 1980:26). Not surprisingly, many of the postwar *fujinkai* looked strikingly like their prewar predecessors in regard to both the gap between their leaders and rank-and-file members and their close relations with governmental organs—a testament, so to speak, to the resilience of prewar and wartime organizational customs even in the midst of expanding opportunities for democratic change (Garon 1997:188; K. Kobayashi, November 1995:188).

The *fujinkai* were interested in a much wider range of social and political issues than were the women's groups that participated in the Kansai shufuren and Shufuren. The 1948 schedule of activities of the Federation of Women's Associations of Shizuoka Prefecture illustrates this point. Throughout much of the year, the organization focused on reforming marriage customs, relieving earthquake victims, and commemorating the anniversary of a visit to Japan by Helen Keller (K. Kobayashi, November 1995:46). By contrast, lowering prices and attacking black market practices encompassed a relatively small portion of the group's energies.

By 1951, the *fujinkai* had formed regional federations in more than 70 percent of the prefectures (K. Kobayashi, November 1995:47). SCAP forbade them, however, from establishing a national federation for fear that it would interfere with the democratic participation of women at the local level (KSS 1997:69). With the end of the Occupation in 1952, these restrictions were lifted and the National Federation of Regional Women's Associations—Chifuren—was duly established under the leadership of Yamataka Shigeri, a leading activist in the prewar *fujinkai* and a suffragist associated with Ichikawa Fusae. Today, Chifuren has about 6 million members (Keizaikikakuchō 1993a:62).

Chifuren differs from Shufuren in several ways. First, whereas Shufuren often focuses on political activism at the national level, Chifuren has a more regional outlook. Second, although Shufuren is involved in a number of issues relating to politics and women, the organization is known primarily as a consumer organization that engages in both education and advocacy. Chifuren, on the other hand, has embraced a much wider range of political and social issues, including the promotion of clean elections, the prevention of juvenile delinquency, a ban on prostitution, the promotion of welfare programs and gender equality,[12] and opposition to nuclear weapons (NHSK 1980:45).[13] Over the past three decades or so, however, Chifuren has been increasingly recognized as one of the country's leading consumer advocacy organizations.[14] Third, Chifuren is much more closely aligned with conservative, pro-business forces in Japanese politics than Shufuren is. Although it is not formally allied with any political party, Chifuren is politically conservative and often referred to derogatorily as the *fujinkai* of the Liberal Democratic Party, an image that is partly attributable to the fact that many *fujinkai* members are wives of locally prominent, upper-middle-class personages. As a result of its conservative political leanings, Chifuren often conflicts with other consumer organizations over the choice of appropriate tactics and slogans during political campaigns (interview, consumer activist, April 1994).

The Consumer Cooperatives

Like Chifuren, the history of the Japanese consumer cooperative[15] movement extends back to the Meiji era, although it was not until the Taishō period (1912–1925) that the movement came into its own (Katsube 1979:54). Small in size and often very short lived, many of the early co-ops were organized by the workers of large corporations and had strong ties to the Communist Party. Others, particularly in the Kansai area, were heavily influenced by the Christian Socialist thinking of such well-known evangelists as Kagawa Toyohiko. No matter what their political orientation, all were formed as a consumer-controlled counterbalance to the increasing power of big business interests during a period of rapid industrialization.

Unlike their postwar counterparts, the prewar cooperatives consisted primarily of men. Many of the leaders of these groups were very progressive in their views of women, however, and actively supported female suffrage (Uchida 1983). The co-op movement consequently attracted the participation of

such leading female activists and educators as Hiratsuka Raichō, the founder of the Taishō feminist journal *Bluestocking* (*Seito*); Oku Mumeo; Nomura Katsuko, a prominent postwar consumer activist; and Hani Motoko, a Christian socialist educator and the founder of the Jiyū gakuen school in Tōkyō. Many of these women embraced the socialist cooperative principles established in 1844 by England's Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers: open membership, democratic control, education, and cooperation among cooperatives (Iwadare 1991:430–31), features that social scientists now associate with new social movements.

These early feminist and consumer pioneers looked to the cooperatives as democratic fora in which women-as-consumers could interact with men on an equal basis in the hopes of building a more just and equitable society (K. Kobayashi, September 1993:40–44). But as a result of their leftist orientations and the introduction of a rationing system and other state-led controls over the economy that negated their economic usefulness, the co-ops were suppressed by the state following the outbreak of hostilities with China (Nomura 1973:3).

The consumer cooperatives quickly reappeared during the Occupation period with the blessing of SCAP. From SCAP's point of view, these organizations performed useful functions in the local distribution of scarce goods and services and served as vehicles, together with the agricultural cooperatives, for the democratization of Japanese society (Nomura 1973:3). The co-ops also helped educate consumers in coping with economic scarcity. By 1947, the roughly 6,500 small co-ops around the country boasted a combined membership of about 3 million people (KSS 1997:48). The late 1940s also witnessed the formation of what later became Seikyōren (Nihon seikatsu kyōdō kumiai rengōkai, Japan Consumer Cooperatives Union, or JCCU), a nonpartisan national umbrella organization and the foremost political representative of the cooperative movement at the national level (Iwadare 1991:429).[16]

The Japanese consumer cooperative movement, now one of the largest in the world with roughly 44 million members (Keizaikikakuchō 1997:3), is as varied as the organized consumer movement is as a whole. While many of the larger prefectural cooperatives provide myriad services for their members in settings that rival those of sophisticated Japanese department stores, others consist primarily of *han:* small groups of residents who gather regularly to place orders and receive deliveries from a local cooperative distribution center. The political preferences of the cooperatives also run the gamut of

the political spectrum, from the highly politicized and progressive Seikatsu Club[17] of the Kantō area to the small and largely apolitical joint buying clubs that deal directly with local farmers. All of them, however, are imbued to varying degrees with qualities often associated with new social movements, including democratic participation in decision making, environmentalism, and equality of the sexes. The fact that the co-ops have adopted these organizational principles and the *fujinkai* have not is due primarily to their democratic prewar history and emulation of British cooperative norms.

Although the consumer cooperative movement eventually managed to become one of the largest and most economically resilient wings of the postwar consumer movement, its future was very uncertain during the early postwar years. Following the upsurge of cooperative mobilization during the democratization phase of the Occupation, the movement fell on hard times with the introduction of economic austerity measures during the politically conservative Reverse Course years (1947/48–1952). For example, many co-ops succumbed to bankruptcy as the government took steps to increase the level of competition in the market. By October 1950, only 130 or so of the roughly 6,000 co-ops that had been active in June 1947 were still in existence (KSS 1997:49).

The economic problems of the early postwar co-ops were further compounded by the stipulations of the 1948 Consumers' Lifestyle Cooperative Law (Shōhi seikatsu kyōdō kumiai hō), or Co-op Law. Before the war, consumer cooperatives—or "buyers' cooperatives" (*kōbai kumiai*), as they were often referred to at the time—were subject to heavy governmental regulation under the 1900 Industrial Association Law (Sangyō kumiai hō), a law that was intended to protect the interests of farmers and small and medium enterprises (KSS 1997:50). In 1947, SCAP and Japan's first socialist government began drafting a law designed exclusively for the consumer co-ops. With SCAP's backing, co-op representatives were directly involved in the drafting process, an unprecedented opportunity in the history of the co-op movement that attests to the relatively open political atmosphere of the first few years of the Occupation. Activists took advantage of this opportunity to press for legislation that would prevent the kind of arbitrary governmental interference that had culminated in the suppression of the co-ops during the 1930s and to lay the groundwork for the movement's long-term growth.

As luck would have it, shifts in the political alliances that governed the formal legislative process eventually shunted the co-op representatives to the sidelines of that process. It all began around late 1947 when many of

the movement's New Deal allies in SCAP headquarters returned to the United States and the pro-growth stage of the Occupation gathered steam (KSS 1997:52). These personnel and policy developments not only reduced the number of political opportunities for co-op participation in policymaking, but they also led to the co-optation of the legislative process by a tightly knit coalition of conservative politicians and small business representatives who felt economically threatened by the co-ops (NHSK 1980:31–32).

The Co-op Law met most of the demands of small businessmen and their political sponsors. The law forbade, for example, the amalgamation of prefectural cooperatives,[18] thereby preventing the formation of powerful, nationwide chains. It also restricted co-op sales to members only, a stipulation that led to the direct monitoring of cooperative business practices by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (interview, Hiwasa, February 1994), the ministry in charge of implementing the law. Finally, the law failed to meet many of the co-ops' specific demands, including access to special tax exemptions and the right to deal in credit and insurance transactions. All in all, the law was designed to promote free competition between the cooperatives and mainstream businesses on the basis of equality between the two (KSS 1997:53), much to the chagrin of co-op activists who had pressed for the legal recognition of consumer cooperatives as nonprofit organizations. For cooperatives that were struggling to stay afloat, the new law sounded a death knell. Today, restrictions on the size and activities of the co-ops explain in part why they account for only 2.5 percent of the Japanese retail market.[19]

Ironically, even though the Co-op Law was originally designed to contain the growth of the consumer cooperative movement, it presented the co-ops with a good excuse to get involved in consumer advocacy politics.[20] No sooner was the law enacted than co-op leaders mobilized both themselves and their members to pressure the government for amendments.[21] The law was also an incentive for the co-ops to cooperate with other consumer organizations in support of strong consumer protection measures and an end to collusive business practices in both the small and big business communities, practices that were weakening even further the co-ops' vulnerable economic position.

Despite their financial problems during the Occupation, the consumer cooperatives distinguished themselves in subsequent years as the most financially secure of consumer-related organizations. Their financial security in turn strengthened the political independence of the co-ops, a few of which—including the Seikatsu Club (see Gelb and Estevez-Abe 1998;

LeBlanc 1999)—have fielded candidates in local and prefectural elections. Most co-ops tend not to become involved in electoral affairs, however, particularly those, like Seikyōren, that have played a leading role in national legislative and regulatory campaigns. But regardless of the extent of their involvement in legislative activities, the cooperatives have the potential to mobilize virtually millions of consumers behind consumer-related goals—even though only a tiny portion of cooperative members join for political purposes[22]—and are therefore key components of the contemporary consumer advocacy movement.

The Early Postwar Strategic Repertoire

Indoctrinated for generations to rely passively on governmental authorities to take the initiative in setting the nation's political agenda and solving its problems, Japanese citizens during the early years of the Occupation were suddenly confronted with a whole new array of opportunities for democratic participation in politics. Now, the name of the game was liberal democracy, and for the first time in their history the Japanese were openly encouraged by higher-ups to exercise their new rights at the local PTA and as members of unions and citizens' groups. As might be expected in a country that had had little exposure to democratic practices in the past, many Japanese citizens reverted to their old political behavior by functioning as passive players in hierarchically structured groups, much to the frustration of the Occupation authorities (see, e.g., van Staaveren 1994). Others, however, took full advantage of these new political opportunities and pursued more democratic styles of internal decision making.

The forces of continuity and change were evident not only in the structure and internal behavior of consumer organizations but also in the strategic behavior of those organizations vis-à-vis their governmental and business adversaries. From the repertoire of the impoverished and politically weak, consumer organizations for the first decade of their postwar existence relied heavily on protest strategies designed to shame recalcitrant businesses into fulfilling their responsibilities to consumers. The adaptation of prewar strategies to postwar contingencies was hardly a matter of choice for consumer organizations, given their almost complete exclusion from mainstream political processes. Consumer organizations simply did not have the resources or the formal and informal links to bureaucrats and politicians that would

have enabled them to work through formal institutionalized channels to bring industrywide pressure on business.

In a few short years, however, some consumer organizations managed to partially transcend their peripheral position in Japanese politics by developing new ways of getting their points across to both the public and those in positions of authority. The "housewives' shops" movement was certainly one example of this. So, too, were the market-displacing transactions carried out by the consumer cooperatives. A third example of consumer innovation that we have yet to examine was product testing.

In 1950, Shufuren established the Basic Commodities Research Department (Nichiyōhin shinsabu), the first of its kind in Japan. Under the leadership of Takada Yuri, a certified pharmacist and leading figure in the organization, the department armed Shufuren with scientifically derived information that helped legitimize the organization's political demands and discredit the arguments of its opponents. Product testing marked an important step forward in Shufuren's efforts to strengthen its power of persuasion, a power, as we have seen in the case of the American and British movements, that enhances the effectiveness of public-interest groups in both the marketplace and the policy process.[23]

Some of the early findings of Shufuren's testing facilities had a major impact on public opinion. In 1951, for instance, Shufuren publicized the use of a potentially carcinogenic yellow food dye in *takuan*, a popular pickled radish. Following a public backlash, the Ministry of Health and Welfare launched its own investigation and in 1953 banned further use of the dye. Comparable results were achieved following the subsequent discovery of dangerous substances in plastic food containers (see, e.g., Takada 1996:82–83). In other cases, Shufuren had a more direct impact on business practices. The publicity surrounding its discoveries that manufacturers were falsely representing the contents of products like margarine, beef, soy sauce, soap, and milk, for instance, was all it took to prod those manufacturers into changing their labeling practices. These early victories led to subsequent expansions of Shufuren's testing facilities and helped stem the flood of defective products into the marketplace. The *takuan* incident, moreover, proved to be a flagship case in the campaign to promote food safety (NHSK 1980:37–38), the consumer movement's top political priority throughout the postwar era.

That the market-oriented strategies of consumer organizations occasionally succeeded in changing the behavior of industry and prompting regula-

tory responses from officials is in part a reflection of the issues in question. In most cases, consumer organizations were tackling problems that were easy to understand and widely regarded as blatant abuses of the safety and economic well-being of consumers. As we shall see in later chapters, direct confrontation with business adversaries and the dissemination of data produced by product-testing facilities proved far less effective once consumer issues became mired in legal jargon and the complexities of contemporary politics.

Relations with Government Authorities

The forces of change and continuity also permeated the relationships between consumer organs and governmental authorities. Sometimes those relationships were highly cooperative and reminiscent of prewar norms, but at other times, conflict was the norm. One notable example of close cooperation was the formation of a "consumer federation" to oppose black market practices, particularly those that raised consumer prices. Led on the government side by regional branches of the Price Agency (Bukkachō) and the Economic Stabilization Board (Keizai antei honbu), the federation included the Ōsaka shufu no kai (predecessor of the Kansai shufuren), Sōdōmei (All-Japan General Federation of Trade Unions), and Sanbetsu kaigi (Congress of Industrial Organizations)—a rather unlikely quintet of players given the potential for conflict among them. Higa Masako, the head of the Ōsaka shufu no kai, balked at first at the idea of linking up with these groups for fear of the corrupting influence that such an association might have on her organization (K. Kobayashi, May 1994:40). But she eventually changed her mind on the grounds that refusing to cooperate would have appeared chauvinistic and "petty" (*chachi*) (KSS 1997:18). She was also impressed by the manner in which bureaucrats had humbly asked for her assistance in these matters, a sign, she believed, of the changing times (K. Kobayashi, May 1994:40). Finally, Higa was aware that SCAP had encouraged governmental initiatives to combat inflation and the black market with the cooperation of citizens' groups (KSS 1997:18–19).

Cooperation among consumers, governmental authorities, labor, and business representatives included boycotts of goods sold on the black market, the dissemination of consumer information in partnership with the media, joint supervision of local business practices, and the like (K. Kobayashi, May

1994:40). In addition, Ōsaka shufu no kai and its successor, Kansai shufuren, embarked on a number of independent campaigns aimed at destroying black-market practices and lowering consumer prices that met with either tacit or overt governmental approval—the "housewives' shop" campaign being the most significant case in point. We should note that the federation did not last long; after only a few months, it disbanded following a conflict between Ōsaka shufu no kai and the labor organizations over leadership tactics (KSS 1997:17).

One of the most controversial examples of cooperation between consumer organizations and governmental authorities was the New Life movement (Shin seikatsu undō). The movement, which had historical precedents in the prewar Daily Life Improvement and wartime Renovation of Daily Life campaigns (Garon 2000:75), was begun in part by newly formed citizen groups in rural areas and then spread to other parts of the country with the explicit endorsement of Katayama Tetsu's socialist government. Although the movement's specific themes varied from region to region, the ultimate aim as eventually envisioned by government authorities was the democratization of daily life and the promotion of modernization through the free association of citizens at the local level, an end to the hold of tradition on the lives of individuals in the household and local community, and the encouragement of a strong work ethic (NHSK 1980:45). The movement, in short, covered a dizzying array of social and economic issues and was supported by a wide range of groups, including the *fujinkai*, Chifuren, Shufuren, and, to a lesser extent, the consumer cooperatives.

The government-sponsored movement was a boon to the long-standing efforts of the housewives' organizations to educate citizens about "rationalizing lifestyles" (*seikatsu no gōrika*) (*Shufuren dayori*, January 1955). Accordingly, these organizations were most conspicuous in programs designed to improve access to quality food, clothing, and housing, to teach household accounting and child-rearing methods, to promote household savings,[24] and the like. There were even campaigns to curb the incidence of disease by reducing the production of household garbage and eliminating flies and mosquitoes in local communities (*Shufuren dayori*, August 1955). These and other programs often entailed cooperation among the housewives' organizations and served as platforms for activists to promote other pet projects not directly related to the New Life movement, such as the promotion of female politicians (*Shufuren dayori*, June 1955).

The state's involvement in the movement escalated under Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichirō, who in 1954 established the Special New Life Movement

Committee (Shin seikatsu undō tokubetsu iinkai) to provide advice and financial aid to affiliated groups. The committee was immediately branded by the media as a front for governmental control over grassroots groups, an accusation that was categorically denied by many of the *fujinkai*, some of which had apparently gone to great lengths to resist governmental interference in their affairs (KSS 1997:82). To ward off further criticisms, in 1955 the government established an independent organization called the New Life Movement Association (Zaidan hōjin shin seikatsu undō kyōkai), with regional branches at the prefectural level, which was ostensibly designed to help affiliated organizations help themselves. As might be expected, there was nothing independent about the associations at all, given their near total dependence on government for both funding and personnel (KSS 1997:82).

Although it lingered well into the 1970s and 1980s, the New Life movement entered a period of decline by the end of the 1960s. As urbanization and economic affluence accomplished much of what the movement was originally supposed to achieve, namely, the modernization of lifestyles at the local level, many of the *fujinkai*, youth groups, and other affiliated organizations disintegrated. Between 1962 and 1965, the New Life movement associations tried to reinvigorate the movement by promoting regional economic development, but their efforts were largely unsuccessful (NHSK 1980:47). Meanwhile, many of the movement's issues were taken up by local lifestyle schools (*seikatsu gakko*) as governmental involvement in the movement decreased.[25]

For every instance of cooperation between consumer activists and governmental authorities, one can find an equally compelling example of confrontation. In August 1948, for instance, the Ōsaka shufu no kai—the Price Agency's partner in the Movement to Promote Price Stability—took action against high beef prices in the area and the Price Agency's refusal to take appropriate countermeasures. Activists organized an extensive boycott of the product, bombarded the agency with petitions, and even sent Higa Masako to appeal personally to agency higher-ups at their headquarters in Tōkyō. The boycott was the first of its kind in postwar Japan and received nationwide coverage from the media. It did not, however, result in victory for the consumer side. Although activists managed to extract a promise from the Price Agency to consult more regularly with consumers, the boycott failed to bring down prices (KSS 1997:22–26).

Another example of confrontation was the Movement to Oppose Increases in Public Bath Fees (Furodai neage hantai undō), organized in Tōkyō by Shufuren with the participation of the consumer co-ops (Oku

1988:189). In August 1948, the adult admission to public bathhouses in Tōkyō rose from six to ten yen—a huge increase for poverty-stricken Japanese families who had no bathing facilities of their own. A few months later, the bathhouses applied to the Price Agency for permission to raise their fees to twenty yen in order to accommodate "rising energy costs." Shufuren promptly lodged a protest with the agency, a move that provoked the bath owners into lowering their request by five yen (K. Kobayashi, September 1994:44). After failing to persuade the agency to block the increase altogether, Shufuren proceeded to discredit the bath owners by conducting a few "scientific" surveys of its own. Over the space of a few days, the organization dispatched teams of women disguised as ordinary bathers to facilities around the city and, on the basis of their observations, made rough calculations of the overhead costs incurred by the average bath owner. At an open meeting with Tōkyō governmental officials and bathhouse representatives, they announced their findings: the bathhouses were already faring quite well economically compared with other small businesses, and the proposed fee hike was actually greater than projected increases in the price of coal (NHSK 1980:33). The Price Agency responded by banning any further fee increases for ten months (K. Kobayashi, September 1994:45).

In an interesting and in some ways typical turn of events, Shufuren then joined forces with the bath owners in pursuit of a common goal. During their public meeting with the Price Agency and the bathhouse owners, the women displayed samples of murky brown water that they had surreptitiously taken from the baths during their inspection tours and rebuked the owners for their low hygienic standards. The bath owners retorted that no matter how much fresh water they added to the baths, they could not keep them clean when their customers refused to soap up before entering the tubs. In a show of sympathy with the owners' predicament, Shufuren mounted posters on the walls of the bathhouses to alert patrons to proper bathing conduct: "Soap up and rinse off before you enter the baths!" "Don't put your towel into the water!" "Treat the water as if it were in your own home!" (K. Kobayashi, September 1994:45). The so-called Bathing Etiquette campaign (Nyūyoku echiketto undō) eventually achieved its desired results and, in the process, restored a modicum of civility to the relationship between Shufuren and Tōkyō's public bathhouses.

These four cases highlight several important features of early postwar consumer organizations and their relationship to governmental authorities and business, not the least of which was the persistence of maternalistic tendencies to shape and supervise consumer behavior on even the most

intimate level. It was a classic case of moral suasion (*kyōka*).[26] Second, the cases illustrate the fact that cooperation was carried out on an ad hoc basis and, as in the case of Ōsaka shufu no kai's association with the Price Agency, was often preceded by intense discussions about the terms of cooperation. Such preliminaries were not surprising given the absence at that time of regular channels of cooperation between the two sides.

Third, the cases underscore a relationship among consumer activists and business and governmental actors that was cooperative on some issues but combative on others. The criterion for cooperation was a commonality of interests. When those interests coincided, as they did during the Movement to Promote Price Stability, the New Life movement, and the Bathing Etiquette campaign, many—but by no means all—consumer activists communicated frequently with governmental authorities (or, in the case of the bathing campaign, with business) and sometimes received official financial aid. But when those interests conflicted, Japan's large consumer organizations were quick to disassociate themselves from the government.

Fourth, the cases highlight the lack of unity in both the consumer and governmental camps. Some consumer organs, for example, cooperated frequently with government, but others did not. Among those that did cooperate, many, like Shufuren, did so very selectively and often criticized the authorities when their interests conflicted. Nor did the government speak with a unified voice when working with consumer organizations. The Price Agency, for instance, cooperated with consumer representatives for very pragmatic reasons and with SCAP's overt encouragement. Prime Minister Hatoyama, on the other hand, seemed as interested in controlling the activities of grassroots groups as he was in achieving social and economic goals, and he frequently clashed with officials in the Finance Ministry who opposed such interference (NHSK 1980).

These observations defy the often stereotypical views of many Western and Japanese commentators that the organized consumer movement was beholden to either government authorities or business interests. In reality, the relationship between consumer advocates and these other interests was marked by both cooperation and conflict. The relationship was, in short, as varied as the consumer movement itself.

The question that then arises is, why would consumer activists cooperate with the government at all, particularly if they were so concerned about preserving their organizational integrity? The severe economic crisis of the immediate postwar period was certainly one reason the two sides came together. As Higa Masako's experiences show, cooperating with the govern-

ment on some issues was viewed by many activists as a logical and efficient way to solve problems pertaining to both consumption and public health that these activists would have tackled anyway on their own. Once the consensus between consumer representatives and the government began to break down, however, as it did by the mid-1950s, instances of cooperation were much less frequent.

Second, since consumer activism was a new phenomenon in early postwar Japan, cooperating with the government on issues espoused by both sides served to legitimize consumer organs in the eyes of a population still influenced by conservative traditions. Third, cooperation with government authorities often provided consumer activists with scarce financial resources. It is no accident that the organs that have cooperated the most with governmental authorities since World War II were those with the fewest resources. Shufuren, for example, has constantly struggled to stay afloat financially and consequently has depended on occasional governmental assistance in the form of subsidies for product testing, consumer-related surveys, and the like (interview, Takada, April 1994).[27] The consumer cooperatives, by contrast, with their independent financial base, have worked far less frequently with officials. Although it would be a gross overstatement to assert that Japan's consumer movement was manufactured by the government, it is fair to say that were it not for occasional governmental support for the activities of Shufuren and other cash-strapped organizations, the organized movement would never have advanced as far as it did (K. Kobayashi, November 1994:48).

Finally, and perhaps most important, consumer organizations recognized that in order to make a difference in consumer protection, they needed inroads into the political system. Despite the introduction of democratic principles and institutions during the early stages of the Occupation, consumer representatives lacked routinized representation in those institutions, particularly at the national level. Accordingly, consumer activists sometimes regarded ad hoc and informal cooperation with the government as their only avenue into the decision-making process, an avenue that was all the more attractive when it resulted in access to sorely needed financial resources.

An Emerging Consumer Identity

If there is one overriding image that emerges from the first decade of the consumer movement's postwar history, it is an image of diversity. Consumer organizations differed markedly in their internal structure, goals, access to financial resources, and relations with both business and government.

These differences made it difficult for many consumer organizations to cooperate with one another. Despite the professed commitment of many of them to joint action, examples of intramovement cooperation were actually quite rare. In fact, the early history of these organizations is peppered with stories of interorganizational strife, personal animosities between rival leaders,[28] and even conflicts within organizations.

These differences notwithstanding, citizens' organs in their consumer capacity were motivated by a common socioeconomic goal during the first decade of the postwar period: the elevation of the economic status of Japanese citizens in the wake of wartime destruction. While pursuing this objective, consumer organizations fashioned a loose consensus on what it meant to be a consumer (*shōhisha*), a consensus that reflected the organizations' economic and political experiences and that had an impact on their goals and relations with other groups in society in later years. This process of defining the interests of consumers in a changing socioeconomic context resembled what social movement theorists refer to as "framing": the fashioning by social movement activists of "shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action" (McAdam et al. 1996b:6). Framing is particularly important to our purposes because it highlights some of the political and cultural forces that influenced the strategic choices of individual activists.

At the root of Japan's emerging consumer identity during the early postwar period were negative attitudes toward the purely economic conceptualizations of "consumer" and "consumption" (*shōhi*).[29] These attitudes were certainly not without historical precedent. During the 1920s, for instance, consumer cooperativists were struck by the adverse reactions of ordinary consumers to phrases like "buyers' cooperative" (*kōbai kumiai*) and "consumer cooperative" (*shōhisha kumiai*). Many citizens seemed to dislike the term *consumption* because of its passive and allegedly antiproducer overtones that were in no small part conveyed by the very linguistic makeup of the term: *shō*, after all, means "to extinguish," and *hi* means "waste." In a similar vein, many people distrusted the seemingly innocuous expression "buyers' cooperative" on the grounds that it implied not-for-profit economic activities that were of benefit to self-seeking consumers rather than to the economy as a whole (Yamamoto 1982:674).

During the mid- to late 1940s, the use of the term *consumer* as a category of individuals in their consuming and, by logical extension, nonproductive capacities struck many activists as particularly inappropriate in the context of sweeping economic destruction. Recognizing that Japanese citizens had

been stricken by economic adversity not only as consumers but also as farmers, laborers, and small businessmen, many of these activists stood up for all these groups against the harmful activities of big business and governmental negligence.

In response to the economic contingencies of the times, the concept of consumer was, in effect, stretched by many in the movement to reflect the overlap between the consumer and other competing identities and in a way that took advantage of the new political opportunities of the early postwar period. Thus, consumers were not just users of the fruits of production, they were also human beings struggling to survive in a context of economic scarcity, as the Movement to Defend Livelihoods succinctly illustrated. In many cases, consumers were also producers or laborers or the spouses and dependents of such individuals. This aspect of the emerging consumer gestalt, if we can refer to it as such, was significant, since most so-called consumer activists were women married to workers or small businessmen. Finally, and as Oku Mumeo often pointed out on the floor of the Diet, consumers were citizens not only of a particular country (*kokumin*) but also of civil society (*shimin*).

A multifaceted approach to the consumer's place in the polity and the economy was in and of itself a tacit recognition of the mutually reinforcing features of these various identities. One had to consume, for example, in order to survive and produce (or obtain sustenance from someone who did) in order to consume. One's identity as a citizen (*shimin*), in turn, entitled one to the basic rights and freedoms stipulated by the 1946 constitution, not least of which was the right to life or survival. Needless to say, conflict is also inherent in this conceptual approach to consumption. The protection of one's position as a producer, for instance, could prove detrimental to one's consumer identity, and vice versa. In more recent years, and as American trade officials are eager to point out, one's identity as a citizen of Japan (*kokumin*), which often entails support for economic protectionism, can run counter to one's interests as a price-conscious consumer. When all is said and done, this emerging consumer gestalt stressed the need for a workable balance among these different identities.

This informal juxtaposition of producer, citizen, and consumer identities under a single conceptual banner bears a striking resemblance to more contemporary definitions of the term *seikatsusha* (lit. "lifestyle person"). A vague concept that defies precise translation, a *seikatsusha* connotes for some users and theorists a consumer-as-citizen, while for others it incorporates the

worker identity as well.[30] Although the term has prewar origins and was circulating during the early postwar period in various guises, there is little evidence that it was widely used by consumer activists outside the consumer cooperative movement.[31] Nevertheless, given the broad similarities between the early postwar consumer gestalt as fashioned by consumer activists and more contemporary usages of the term *seikatsusha*, for the sake of simplicity, I will henceforth refer to the former as "the early *seikatsusha* identity."

The early *seikatsusha* identity symbolizes an important difference between the Japanese and many Western consumer movements insofar as it collapses elements of the consumer, producer, and citizen identities into a single concept. During the heyday of the U.S. movement, the consumer and producer identities were manufactured as almost polar opposites by consumer advocates intent on distinguishing themselves from producers and forging a sense of solidarity in the consumer camp. As we saw in the last chapter, however, American activists have stretched the concept in recent years to more fully embrace the notion of citizenship, particularly as the movement's political fortunes decline and the issues confronting consumers spill outside the confines of mere consumption. The experiences of both the American and Japanese movements suggest that definitions of consumer and other related terms reflect much more than just the idiosyncrasies of the authors of those definitions. They also are symbolic of the socioeconomic and political contexts in which they are used.

This early *seikatsusha* identity was politically correct in many circles as well as conceptually appealing. Take, for example, housewives. As mentioned earlier, those who took the brunt of inflation, the black market, and an inefficient rationing system during the Occupation were housewives responsible for shopping, raising children, and managing family finances. In the context of economic scarcity, consumption evolved into much more than just the passive act of purchasing and consuming goods and services; it also became an important prerequisite for the survival of the family and, therefore, for the ability of women to perform their various functions as housewives. Shufuren and Chifuren members consequently took to the political stage as women, mothers, and the wives of producers or laborers as well as consumers—as newly enfranchised female citizens, in other words, who felt compelled by unprecedented economic circumstances to take an integrative and mutually compatible approach to consumption and production.[32]

Seikatsusha and its root noun *seikatsu* ("lifestyle" or "livelihood") also provided the consumer cooperatives with an avenue out of the historical

controversies inherent in the terms *consumer* and *consumption*. As the co-ops regrouped in the wake of defeat, many adopted names like "livelihood cooperative society" (*seikatsu kyōdō kumiai*, or *seikyō*)—names that implied consumption not for its own sake but, rather, for the purpose of improving one's livelihood or lifestyle (Oku 1988:167). In this way, the rather innocuous expression enabled the emerging co-op movement to appeal to consumers without overtly offending small retailers while simultaneously recognizing the producer and consumer functions inherent in co-op membership. It was, in short, an ideal response to the challenges of building up a movement for consumers in a context of economic stagnation, not to mention an ingenious way to attract members from the labor unions and agricultural and fisheries cooperatives.

The emerging *seikatsusha* identity can be viewed as both a source and a reflection of some of the priorities—or lack thereof—and strategic choices of early consumer advocates. It gives added meaning, for instance, to the movement's willingness during the Occupation to ally with labor, small business, and government to work toward common objectives. It also makes sense of the movement's seemingly irrational support for agricultural protectionism over the years and of its willingness to ally with rice farmers toward that goal. As noted earlier, protectionism has been an integral component of the citizenship (*kokumin*) dimension of the early *seikatsusha* identity, as well as a reflection of the movement's determination to promote self-sufficiency in food production. The *seikatsusha* identity also helps explain aspects of movement behavior at the end of the twentieth century: opposition to the imposition of a 3 percent consumption tax during the late 1980s, which brought advocates into alliance with small business; and cooperation with local merchants' associations against the loosening of the Large-Scale Retail Store Law, a development that ostensibly threatened the culture of local shopping districts and the livelihoods of small retailers.

Although the Japanese consumer movement has clearly taken a more holistic approach to consumption and production than has its Anglo-American counterparts,[33] this should by no means suggest that consumer activists have been reluctant to criticize producers when the specific interests of consumers are abused. To the contrary, and as the long-standing attack by consumer organizations and the co-ops on collusive behavior in the small business community attests, most consumer activists are all too willing to go on the offensive when that balance between the consumer and contending identities is upset. Thus, many of the more combative advocates in the contemporary movement have avoided the term *seikatsusha* altogether in their

efforts to clarify the nature of their ongoing conflict with business interests (interview, Hara, July 1999).

Conclusion: Consumer Organizations in Comparative Perspective

As the organizational expressions of an emerging social movement, consumer organs during the early postwar period resembled the environmental citizens' movements (*shimin undō*) of the 1960s and 1970s in regard to their nonideological political orientation and attention to issues that affected the livelihoods of average citizens (see, e.g., Krauss and Simcock 1980:190; McKean 1981:8). Unlike the citizens' groups of later years, however, the issues espoused by consumer organs were not the "quality-of-life" concerns of an affluent population but, rather, those of a society living well below the poverty line.

The early organized consumer movement also differed from the environmental citizens' groups of the 1960s and 1970s in that it quickly manifested itself at the prefectural and national levels. This discrepancy can be partly explained by the nature of the issues and objectives adopted by the two movements. While environmentalists tended to focus on eradicating pollution on a local case-by-case basis (Broadbent 1998:183), many consumer activists concentrated on reforming consumer-producer relations at a much broader, more systemic level. A more persuasive explanation, however, has to do with the institutional and political contexts of the two movements' formative years. Many of Japan's flagship consumer organizations were established in a relatively fluid institutional context and progressive policy environment, at least for the first few years of the Occupation period. As a result, consumer leaders encountered comparatively few obstacles as they flexed their democratic muscles and set up shop at the prefectural and national levels. Environmental groups, on the other hand, appeared on the scene when an unsympathetic government-business alliance was firmly in command of the political system. As Jeffrey Broadbent observed, these "political institutions . . . encouraged local [environmental] protest movements to stay local, rather than joining hands and maturing into a powerful national interest group presence" (Broadbent 1998:184).

This is not to say that the consumer presence at the national and prefectural governmental levels was a particularly powerful one during the early postwar period. Although the movement did manage to organize and score

a few victories in the marketplace, it failed to gain a meaningful foothold in a policy process that was increasingly dominated by pro-business interests, as the cooperative movement's attempts to influence the content of the 1948 Co-op Law so clearly illustrates. As a result of the movement's position on the periphery of decision-making power, advocates were left with a menu of strategic choices that consisted of protest, the dissemination of information, and cooperation with erstwhile adversaries—the strategies of the politically disenfranchised. As the next chapter shows, the strategic choices of consumer organizations were to remain more or less unchanged between 1955 and the late 1960s, with the advent of conservative party dominance and the institutionalization of a strong government-business alliance.