

## Exploring the Realities of Japanese Civil Society through Comparison<sup>1</sup>

Yutaka Tsujinaka, Jae-Young Choe, Takafumi Ohtomo

### Summary

Has an “associational revolution” taken place in Japan’s civil society? Is civil society in Japan “robust?” We try to provide an answer to these interesting questions by drawing on data we have accumulated from a comparative survey of civil society organizations conducted between 1997 and 2007 in ten countries, including Japan, South Korea, the United States, Germany, China, Turkey, Russia, the Philippines, Brazil and Bangladesh. In addition to the data from the ten-country survey, we used about 40,000 items of data from the 2006-07 Japan Interest Group Survey 2 (or JIGS2), which examined neighbourhood associations, social associations and NPOs in Japan. With the exception of NPOs, our analysis suggests that an “associational revolution”, defined as a rapid increase in associations, does not seem to be taking place across the nation. We can confirm such a revolution at a prefectural level, however, as is the case in Hyogo. Moreover, we find that associations closely tied to the profit sector still make up the majority of the social associations that exist and are also orientated towards economic development. As we expand our focus to include neighbourhood associations and NPOs, though, we find a Japanese civil society that has a strong grass-roots foundation.

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### Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, it has become common in Japan to use terms such as “civil society”, “NGOs” (non-governmental organizations) and “NPOs” (non-profit organizations). Before these terms were popularized in Japan, civil society had become an important subject in the field of social sciences in other countries around the world. If we only study the civil society of our own country, we will often fail to understand the meaning and importance of civil society in a global context. In this

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is primarily based on articles and books by Tsujinaka et al. In particular, it relies on Tsujinaka et al. (2007) [*Leviathan* article], and some parts of this essay are directly quoted from this source. Due to the nature of this essay, the number of footnotes and quotes used has been kept to a minimum.

essay, we therefore try to explore the characteristics and the realities of Japanese civil society from a comparative perspective.<sup>2</sup>

## 1 The meaning and connotation of civil society in Japan

It is said that the term “citizen” was first translated and used by Yukichi Fukuzawa in the Meiji Era. A film genre called “small citizen” (“petit bourgeoisie”) was also created by the Shochiku Film Company during the 1930s. This series depicted ordinary citizens’ lives in detail and became an instant hit. During the post-war democratization period, people argued that civil society would be the foundation of a new democracy in Japan. In the 1960s and 70s, civic movements became widespread and contributed to the birth of progressive municipalities.

Over the years, we have witnessed several waves of democratization in Japan. These include the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, Taisho (Showa) Democracy, post-war democratization and the era of balanced conservative and progressive strengths. Civil society appeared in one form or another in Japanese history whenever there were such movements. In fact, as we shall discuss later in this essay, the origins of certain Japanese civil society organizations can be traced back to the Edo Era and medieval times. Despite these movements from below, however, the term “civil society” did not thoroughly take root in Japan until very recently.

In the 1980s, the government and local autonomies began to appreciate these civic activities. Moreover, the mass media legitimized the expression “NGO” in the 1980s and “NPO” in the 1990s. The terms “volunteer” and “civil society” have been widely used since the mid-1990s as the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995 brought about a rapid increase in volunteer activities. The enactment of the NPO Law was another reason for this popularity. Since then, the term “civil society” has come to be used by the media to describe a society in which citizens from all walks of life co-operate and help each other for the public good. Thus, the term has a complex history – one that cannot be found in Europe or America, where it is taken for granted that civil society means various associations organized by citizens. In other non-Western countries, we sometimes see major dilemmas concerning the definition and understanding of the term, as was the case in Japan.

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<sup>2</sup> From 1997 to 2004, we conducted surveys in Japan, South Korea, the United States, Germany, China, Turkey, Russia, the Philippines, Brazil and Bangladesh using a basic common framework in each capital city and one or more cities in each country (JIGS1, Japan Interest Group Survey 1). For surveys in Japan, South Korea and the United States, see Tsujinaka (2002), Tsujinaka and Yeom (2004) and Tsujinaka (2003). See Tsujinaka et al. (2007) [AAS paper] for details about the analyses of surveys completed in eight countries (from Japan to the Philippines). We created codebooks for nine countries (from Japan to Brazil). From 2006 to 2007, we conducted three new surveys covering the entire state of Japan. These included neighbourhood associations, all social associations listed in the phonebook and all registered non-profit organizations in Japan. We have used two sets of data in this essay, JIGS1 and JIGS2.

## 2 Why civil society is important: the global background

Why has civil society gained attention around the world again and become such an important issue since the 1990s? We believe this is due to two factors: one is the problem of democratization and the other is the issue of publicness. Let us discuss each of these points in turn.

The first issue is the trend towards global democratization. As Samuel Huntington (1991) argued, the world has been witnessing the third wave of democratization since 1974. In addition to that, the liberalization of Eastern European countries, the independence of the former Soviet Republics and the democratization that followed have all greatly changed the political map of the world. However, the problem has remained as to how to stabilize and strengthen such free and democratic systems in developing countries and the former Soviet Republics. What gained attention was the role of associations and organizations created by citizens. In other words, what became crucial was the *quality* of civil society and the *number* of civil organizations that support politics. In fact, this is also a problem for developed countries. The quality and “quantity” of civil society affect the success and failure of various issues such as the democratization of political parties, the political participation of citizens and the creation of a responsive and transparent government.

The second factor is the problem of who is going to bear the responsibility of “publicness” in today’s society. Since the 1990s, many governments have begun to retreat from public policy due to the influence of neoliberal policies and severe financial conditions. With the spread of globalization, large companies began to abandon responsibilities that they used to bear themselves, such as welfare and sports activities for their employees. This was an inevitable step in order to survive global competition.

How about families? We are aware that family relations have been changing over the years. However, a rapidly growing number of families are no longer able to ensure adequate welfare, education and safety for their members as they used to.

Every country has its own specific problems, but this century, civil society has become crucially important for the governance<sup>3</sup> of the state, firms, families and the social system as a whole.

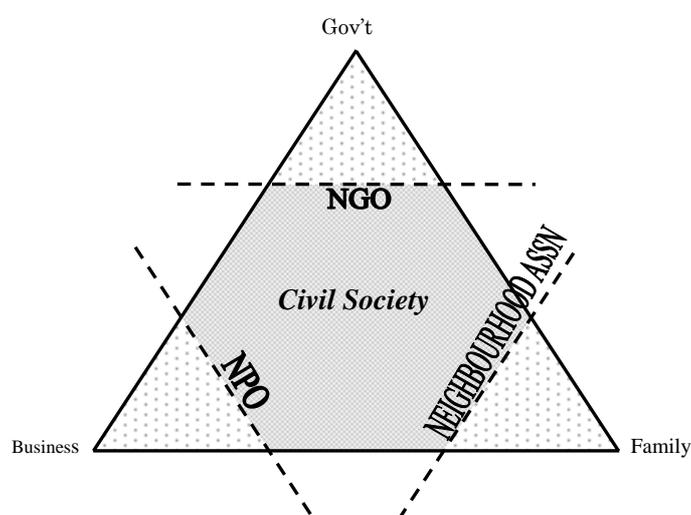
Figure 1 does not reveal anything new, but it is helpful in understanding civil society’s place in today’s society. To put it simply, we can observe that the state, large companies and families are all retreating from their public roles (each resulting in a

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<sup>3</sup> The definition of governance varies greatly. There are inductive as well as deductive definitions. Many understandings exist, but what is common to all of them is that the trend is shifting from government to governance. The issue involves the functions of actors other than the governing organ (the state, entrepreneurs, etc.) and the norms of those stakeholders concerning how to make the present social situation better and how to maintain that situation. A phrase like “family governance” is not commonly used, but most people would agree that diminishing functions of families negatively affect the social system as a whole.

smaller triangle). As such, the role that civil society plays is becoming increasingly important to cover such public responsibilities. The significance of civil society is not limited to the roles it plays to replace some of those functions, however. What is also important is that it provides society with behavioural norms. It is not just civil society itself, but also the way it influences the state, companies and families that is important. And the core organizational form of civil society is associations.

**Figure 1: Civil society: government, businesses and families**



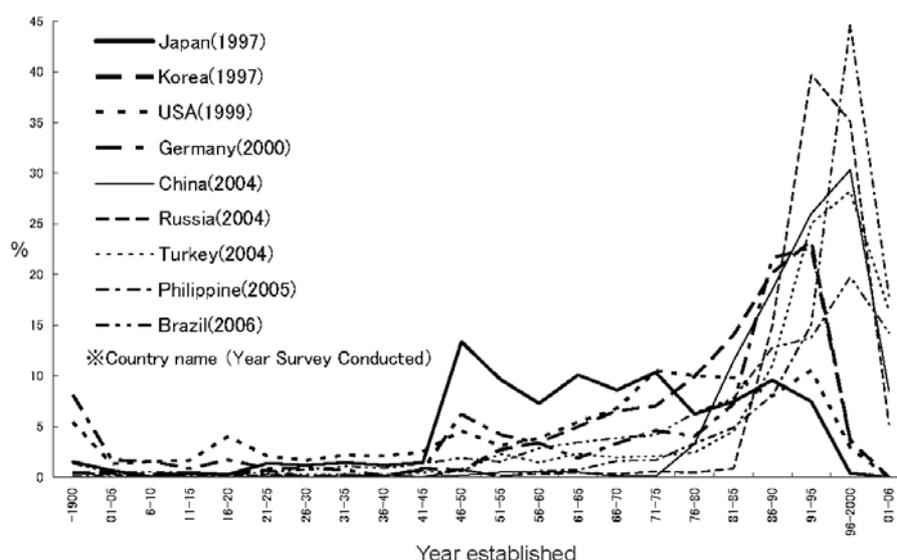
### 3 The global “associational revolution” and Japan

In 1972, only about 300 NGOs participated in the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (the Stockholm Conference). However, 1,400 NGOs officially participated in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992 (18,000 if unofficial ones are also included). According to the Union of International Associations, which compiles a list of international and domestic NGOs in collaboration with the UN Economic and Social Council, there were only 985 NGOs in 1956, which was when Japan joined the UN. Twenty years later, in 1976, there were 6,222 and in 1986 there were 21,529 (14,518 of which were internationally active INGOs, or International NGOs). The number stagnated at one point, but has grown very rapidly again since the end of the Cold War. There were 38,423 NGOs in 1996 (15,108 INGOs) and 52,763 in 2005 (21,026 INGOs). As the media reports, some international NGOs are quite powerful – the budget of Greenpeace International is larger than that of the United Nations Environment Programme, for instance.

Basing his views on a comparative study of the non-profit sector, Lester Salamon argued in 1994 that a “global associational revolution” was taking place at the time. He claimed that associations were replacing the functions of the declining “welfare state”. Although subsequent large-scale comparative studies directed by Salamon and the Johns Hopkins University are important, they primarily study the size of an organization’s budget, the size of its staff and the amount of donations it receives by using existing statistics. In other words, they do not examine the size and establishment of actual civil society associations themselves. Although they talk about an associational revolution, their research does not capture the trend of civil society associations in terms of their growing numbers.

It is therefore important to examine whether a global associational revolution actually took place in the 1980s and 90s. What is meant by “revolution” here is not a revolution as used in social science; it merely suggests a large rise in the number of associations that exist.

**Figure 2: The global associational revolution and Japan: the year that associations were established (JIGS1, nine-country survey)**



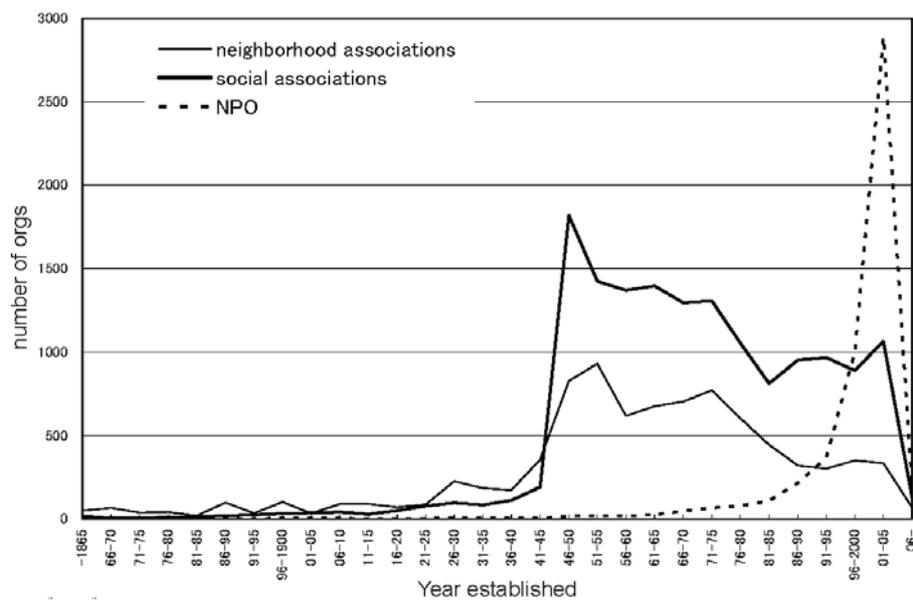
Note: The number of associations established in every five-year period was totalled..

Figure 2 shows the percentage of civil society organizations established in countries where we conducted JIGS1 surveys. (Data is available for nine countries that we have surveyed so far in JIGS 1. We comprehensively covered most organizations that have a telephone line. See Tsujinaka et al. 2007 [AAS paper] for further discussion.) We need to bear in mind that the surveys were conducted between 1997 and 2006, thus

they are not strictly comparable. Moreover, the number of samples ranges from 442 to 2,588, i.e. the gap is a wide one. However, we can confirm an “associational revolution” in a limited sense in most countries between the late 1980s and 2000 as we find that the number of associations has, indeed, risen. To put it more precisely, *the number of associations established hit the highest point during the 1990s in all countries surveyed with the exception of Japan.*

In 2006–2007, we conducted a nationwide survey on civil society organizations in Japan (JIGS2; see footnote 1). In this survey, we conducted surveys on all of the social associations that have a phone line, NPOs that are registered and ten per cent of all neighbourhood associations. Figure 3 shows the results. The graph would reflect the actual number if one increased the number of neighbourhood associations by a factor of three and reduced the number of NPOs by 80 per cent.

**Figure 3: The year that associations were established in the JIGS2 survey (neighbourhood associations, social associations, NPOs)**



Note: The number of associations established in every five-year period was totalled; “-1865” = total number of associations established before 1865.

What can we see from figure 3? Overall, we cannot confirm that social associations experienced a revolution after the 1990s. The shape of the wave is quite similar to the results of JIGS1. Although they are quite different from other categories of associations, even neighbourhood associations show an almost identical trend. Unlike social associations and neighbourhood associations, the number of NPOs has

skyrocketed since 1999 when the NPO law was enacted: in the seven years since the law was introduced, about 70 per cent of the NPOs were established. This clearly justifies the use of the term “revolution”.

Interestingly, the rapid increase in the number of NPOs did not positively contribute to the increase in the number of social associations listed in the phonebook. We can assume that the associations created between 1945 and the era of rapid economic growth continue to exist to this day and that they are quantitatively still dominant compared to other categories of organizations.<sup>4</sup>

Didn't an associational revolution occur in Japan then?

#### **4 Japanese civil society from a comparative perspective**

Let us briefly outline the main characteristics of civil society organizations in Japan.

The first of these is their institutional foundation. The legal system surrounding Japanese civil society is quite complex. As a result, we can find numerous categories of organizations. Despite the reform of public service companies in the spring of 2006, which aimed to make the system less complicated, there are still over 180 non-profit corporation systems and intricate NPO law. It is, therefore, difficult to grasp the overall picture. The percentage of private organizations and voluntary associations has not been high even after the NPO law has been enacted. Of those social organizations that we surveyed across the country in JIGS2, 60 per cent of them had a legal status. As for neighbourhood associations, only ten per cent of these had a legal status. Unlike the case of Japan, in the ten countries we surveyed, it was not considered natural for civil society organizations to have such a status.

We cannot provide a detailed comparison of each system here, but we believe that the Japanese government is still suspicious of civil society itself. This is because the Liberal Democratic Party refused to include the word “citizen” in the official name of the NPO law, the process of acquiring a legal status is still complex and there are no tax breaks for NPOs.

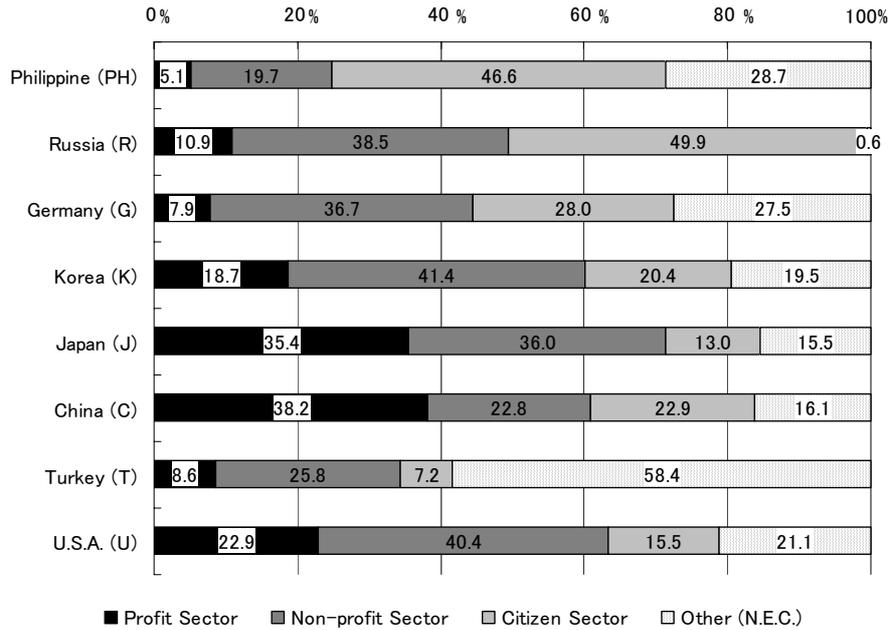
Let us now look at the composition of civil society organizations. History and path dependence affect the organizational composition of civil society and the percentage composition of various categories of organizations. In our Japanese survey in JIGS1, we got our respondents to choose one of ten categories that matched their type of organization best. In the following international surveys, we tailored this particular question to the situation in each country we surveyed. As a result, the number of choices ranged from four in China to 32 in Russia. We created the questionnaire in such a way that a comparison is possible between different countries, however. For the purpose of easy comparison, we shall divide the associations into four different

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<sup>4</sup> For more comparisons and hypotheses, see Tsujinaka (2002: 285), Tsujinaka and Yeom (2004: 133) and Tsujinaka et al. (2007) [AAS paper].

types here: “profit”, “non-profit”, “citizen” and “other” (see figure 4, Tsujinaka et al. 2007).

**Figure 4: Proportion of sectors in each country**



The profit sector does not include corporate firms. It includes trade associations that have close economic ties with the forestry and fishery industries, as well as trade unions and economic organizations. The non-profit sector includes organizations related to such specialized fields as law, accounting, education, research, welfare, medicine and administration. The citizen sector includes organizations where citizens can become involved in various activities related to politics, religion, sports or hobbies. The “other” category is a miscellaneous one that includes organizations that did not fit in anywhere else or those that voluntarily chose to be listed in this group.<sup>5</sup>

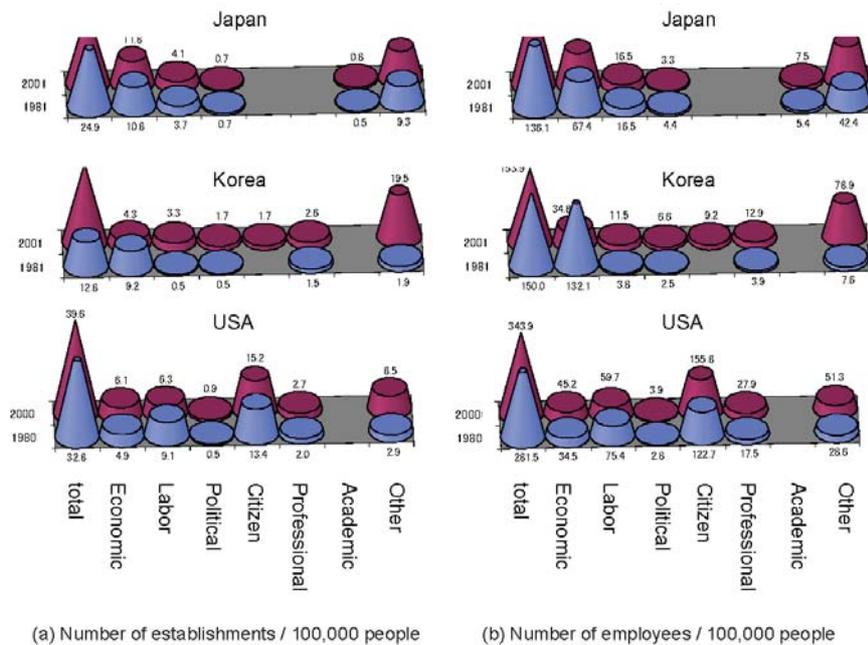
In these four major categories, Japan and China have the largest proportion of organizations in the profit sector among the nine countries surveyed. The non-profit sector is fairly large, while the citizen sector is the second-smallest (after Turkey).

Now we shall examine the composition of various organizations by turning to some other data: establishment census. These figures relate to all business organizations that have employees. Classification headings apply here. Thus, we are able to

<sup>5</sup> In China, we focused on social groups and used somewhat different categories: “business”, “professional”, “academic” and “federation”. In this essay, we matched each category to “profit”, “non-profit”, “citizen” and “other”, thus not perfectly comparable.

compare similarities and differences between Japan, the United States and South Korea (see figure 5). The diagram shows the number of establishments and employees per hundred thousand people in three countries in the early 1980s and early 2000s. Since some classifications are not entirely identical, we cannot say anything definite, but in all three countries, the densities of businesses are generally similar. We also find the majority of civic organizations in the United States, a shifting majority from economic organizations to “other” organizations in South Korea, and a preponderance of economic organizations and other bodies in Japan (Tsujinaka and Yeom 2004).

**Figure 5: Density of establishments and employees in Japan, Korea and the US**



Finally, we would like to discuss what we discovered about the classifications of social associations in JIGS2, which extensively surveyed civil society organizations (see table 1). In one of the questions, we asked the respondents to choose one classification that best applied to them. On a nationwide scale, we found 25.7 per cent were economic/business organizations, 17.8 per cent were forestry and fishery trade associations, 7.6 per cent were welfare organizations, 7.5 per cent were trade unions, 5.5 per cent were professional associations, 5.4 per cent were administrative organizations, 4.5 per cent were civic organizations, 3.6 per cent were educational organizations, 2.9 per cent were hobby-related organizations, 2.1 per cent were

political organizations, 0.9 per cent were religious organizations and 12.7 per cent were put in the miscellaneous “other” category. Once again, we found that a high percentage of social associations were profit-orientated and industry-related.

As we can see from the JIGS1 international comparison, the JIGS2 national survey and business statistics, the for-profit sector is strong in Japan. This clearly illustrates the “developmental state” of civil society organizations in this country.

**Table 1: Types of organizations (in capital cities in 7 countries, %)**

Type of org.	Japan <sup>1)</sup>	Korea	USA	Germany	Turkey <sup>2)</sup>	Russia <sup>2)</sup>	Philippines
Forestry/fishery	5.9 (17.8)	4.6	1.3	0.5	0.4	1.3	1.1
Economic	27.7 (25.7)	9.3	13.9	5.5	1.0	5.2	4.0
Labour	5.9 (7.5)	4.6	3.6	1.1	3.0	8.4	1.0
Education	5.8 (3.6)	7.2	13.8	10.2	11.7	27.3	5.6
Administration	5.5 (5.4)	4.6	1.9	-	0.5	23.8	1.7
Welfare	5.8 (7.6)	16.3	12.8	15.1	26.9	25.2	7.3
Professional	6.6 (5.5)	12.2	14.0	10.2	10.3	10.0	5.4
Political	1.4 (2.1)	2.2	3.9	4.0	1.0	2.4	1.0
Citizen	4.3 (4.5)	10.0	2.0	-	3.6	12.7	-
Religion	0.5 (0.9)	11.1	5.3	-	3.9	0.7	15.1
Other <sup>3)</sup>	30.6 (19.4)	18.0	27.6	53.5	49.1	-	57.3
N	1,819 (15,462)	460	1,431	817	841	711	999

Notes: 1) Japan JIGS2 2006-7 data. The number in parentheses is the national percentage. See figure 2 for the year surveys were conducted in other countries.

2) The total is not 100% in Turkey and Russia since more than one category could be chosen.

3) The “other” category includes “sports/hobbies” in Germany (28.0%) and “people’s organizations” (26.3%) in the Philippines. We did not calculate the percentage, but in Turkey, there were a great deal of regional solidarity associations.

Those economic- and industry-related associations built up close relationships with related administrative departments and worked hard to develop Japan’s economy. At the same time, they did not forget to make a profit themselves.

Table 2 shows the results of the JIGS1 comparative study regarding how effective the lobbying target was in achieving a certain goal. Here again, the ratio (absolute ratio) of choosing the administration is high in Japan (close to Korea and China).

Finally, what do Japanese organizations think about their ability to influence policy?

Let us look at the comparative results of social organizations that have a phone line in the JIGS1 survey. This question asks “How much influence does your organization think it has when policy issues arise in the geographical area in which it is active?”

**Table 2: Effective lobbying target (in capital cities, %) <sup>1)</sup>**

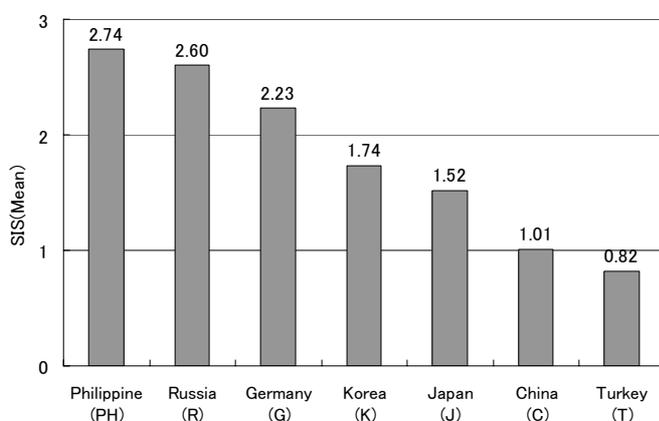
	Legislature <sup>2)</sup> /Congress	Administration	Court
Japan	14.8	36.1	6.3
Korea	14.8	58.6	3.7
USA	40.1	16.5	4.9
Germany	9.0	15.4	8.0
China	13.5	45.2	6.2
Turkey <sup>3)</sup>	11.9	30.1	57.4
Russia	9.4	9.7	10.1
The Philippines	14.9	38.6	6.5

Notes: 1) Percentage of the first choice

2) In China, this is the National People's Congress.

3) In Turkey, we asked whether these areas are effective as a lobbying target. The respondents were allowed to choose more than one area.

It may be inappropriate to compare countries with different political histories, different levels of social development and different political systems. Acknowledging this caveat, figure 6 provides a quick summary. Japan ranks sixth out of eight countries.

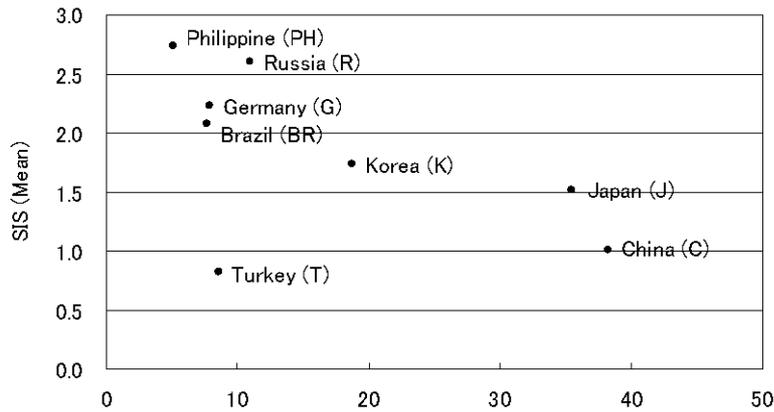
**Figure 6: Subjective influence score (mean value) by country**

Note: SIS = subjective influence score

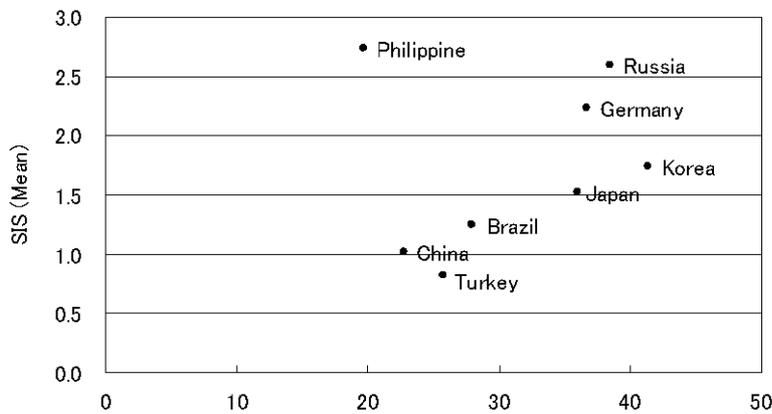
Figure 7 shows the relationship between the average score of how organizations in each country evaluate their own influence and the percentage composition of four categories of organizations in each country. Interestingly, in a country where the civic sector shows a high percentage composition, the average score on self-evaluated influence is also high. However, in a country like Japan and China where there are a host of organizations in the profit sector, the average score is lower. This does not mean that the civic sector's influence is necessarily strong. In fact, relatively

speaking, it isn't. However, in a country where the percentage composition of the civic sector is high, the self-evaluating influence score in all four sectors combined happens to be higher. This is all subjective, but it may suggest that civil society in such countries is vibrant.

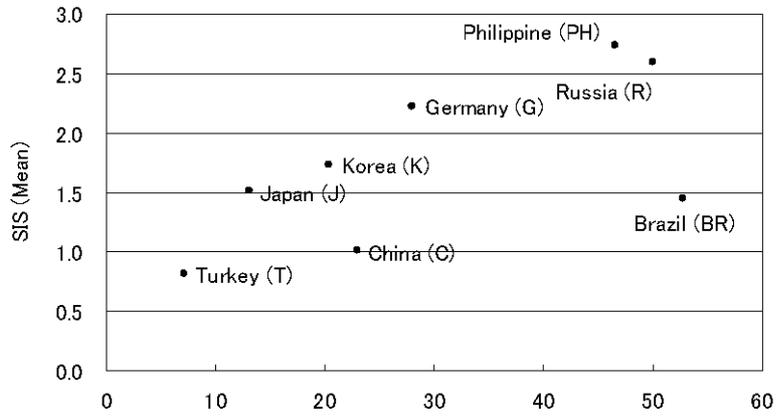
**Figure 7: The citizen sector and the influence that organizations have**



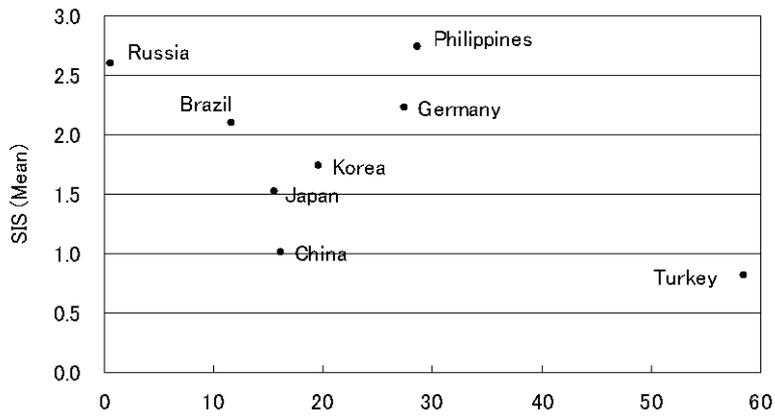
(a) Profit sector %



(b) Nonprofit Sector %



(c) Citizen Sector %



(d) Other %

## 5 Conclusion

In this essay, we have attempted to shed some light on Japan's civil society by means of an international comparison. We found that an associational revolution has not taken place in Japan yet. There are still a large number of organizations related to the profit sector that pursue the goal of economic development and that value a

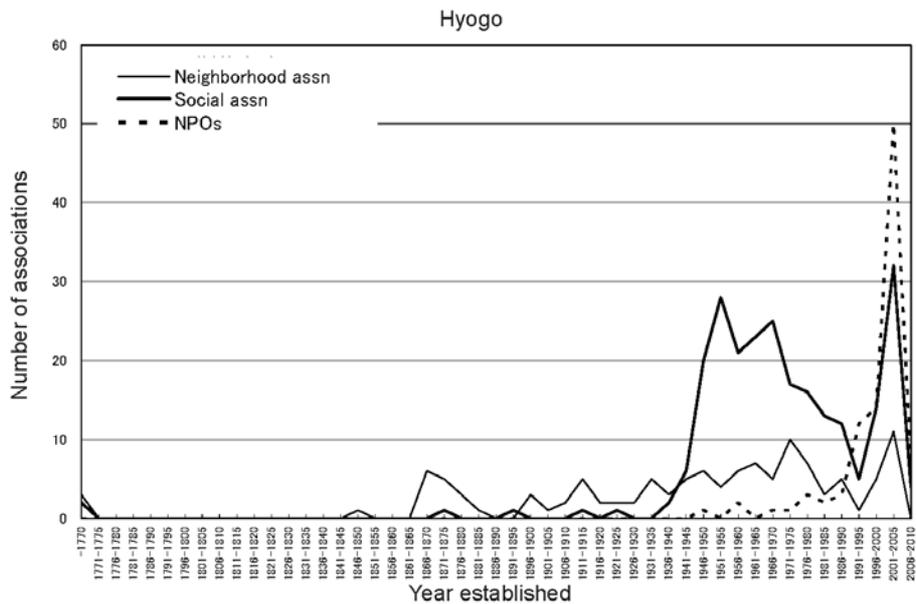
relationship with the state administration, but these do not appear to be very powerful or influential.

This is certainly one aspect of Japan, but if we examine the data more carefully, we can begin to see other facets of the nation as well. We have only just begun our analysis, but we already have some initial findings.

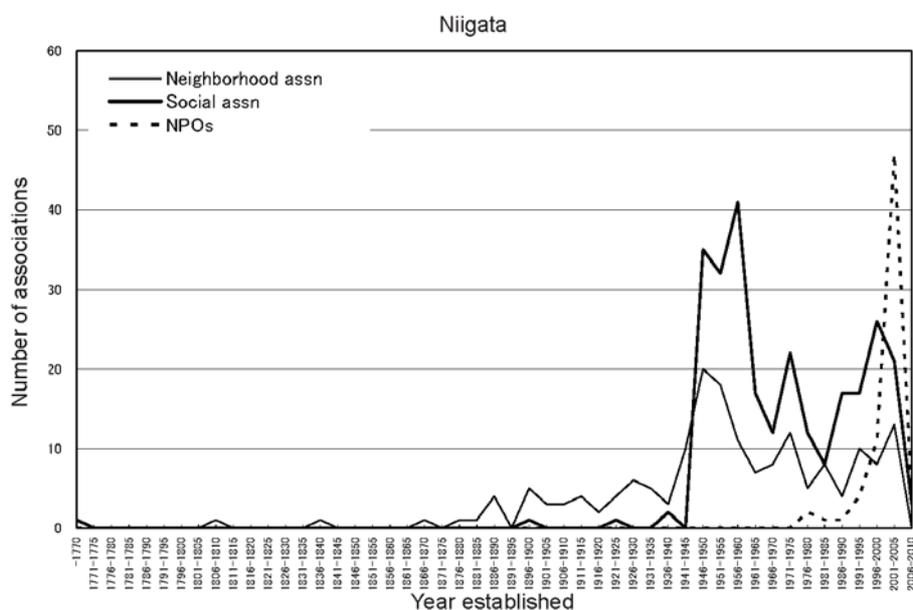
First, let us think about the associational revolution again. Did it happen in Japan? On the previous pages, we looked at data on Tokyo (JIGS1) and the whole country (JIGS2). We may not have fully grasped Japan’s diversity in these studies, however. For example, the number of associations established differs among the 47 prefectures. Take Hyogo and Niigata, for instance (figure 8). As we can see in the diagram, the number of civil society organizations increased noticeably after 1998 – when the NPO law was enacted – and also after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995.

Although it is not as high as in Hyogo and Niigata, we can also see an increase in the number of associations in Saitama, Akita, Iwate, Miyagi, Tochigi, Chiba, Toyama, Ishikawa, Fukui, Gifu and Mie since the late 1990s. We therefore suspect that an associational revolution took place at a regional level.

**Figure 8: Associations established in Hyogo and Niigata**



Note: “-1770” = the total of associations established before 1770.



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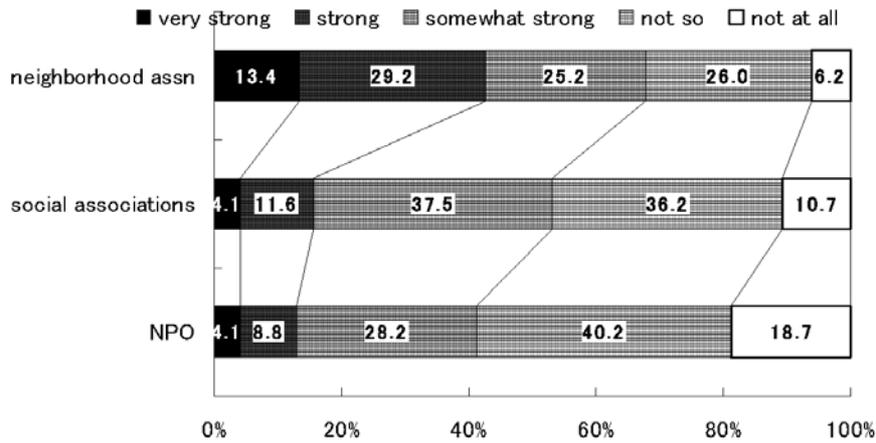
We shall now turn to grass-roots associations in Japan.

Although it was less than one per cent of all the organizations that responded, certain neighbourhood associations<sup>6</sup> and social organizations<sup>7</sup> claimed their roots went back to medieval or early modern times. Obviously, it would not be very surprising to find ten or so such organizations, considering the fact that we received 40,000 responses in all. However, in general, the history of civil society organizations in Japan may be a longer one than that in other countries as twenty per cent of all neighbourhood associations (~1944: 17.2%; ~1945: 20.0%) and five per cent of the social organizations (~1944: 4.9%; ~1945: 5.4 %) were established before WWII.

The last issue is about influence (see figure 9). So far, we have only looked at social associations that have a telephone line. In our JIGS2 survey, we also included NPOs and neighbourhood associations, which have not been examined extensively.

<sup>6</sup> There were two in 1183, one in 1250, 1300, 1372, 1421, two in 1500, one in 1539, 1560 and three in 1600. All in all, there were 53 organizations established before the Meiji Era.

<sup>7</sup> 1200, 1370, 1450, 1467, 1500, 1573 and 1600. In all, fifteen organizations were established before the Meiji Era.

**Figure 9: Subjective influence of neighbourhood associations, social associations and NPOs at the city, town and village level**

In the JIGS 2 survey, we sent out questionnaires to about ten per cent of the 300,000 neighbourhood associations and had about 20,000 responses. Due to the limited space here, we cannot go into any great detail, but one of the main findings was that neighbourhood associations are assertive, active and influential in policy-related activities. They are also quite satisfied with and trusting of the administration. The percentage of organizations that evaluated themselves as being “somewhat influential” or more influential than that was 67.8 per cent in neighbourhood associations, 52.3 per cent in social associations and 41.1 per cent in NPOs. Similarly, 42.6 per cent of neighbourhood associations, 15.7 per cent of social associations and 12.9 per cent of NPOs said they were relatively influential. Compared to other categories of organizations, neighbourhood associations clearly think they have a fairly high degree of influence.

We have examined Japanese civil society from a comparative perspective here. To be sure, the structure and function of Japanese civil society have been primarily related to economic development until now. Not enough attention has been paid to citizens’ neighbourhood associations so far, but such grass-roots organizations are still much more significant than we had expected. They are not merely conservative grass-roots organizations that simply provide social services to the community at the request of the local government. It is true that the phenomenon of “members without advocates” can be found in Japanese civil society and that there is a dual structure, as pointed out by R. Pekkanen (2007). The expertise and financial resources of neighbourhood associations need to be strengthened (through tax breaks for donations, etc.). As we can see, however, the grass-root foundation of neighbourhood associations is a solid

one, and these bodies are also full of potential. Once they take the initiative to advocate some policy agendas and begin co-operating with other civil society organizations, civil society in Japan will expand. Hopefully, there will be more pluralism and greater co-existence. Signs of this happening are already evident in various parts of Japan, as we found in Hyogo prefecture.

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