

Exploring the Realities of Japanese Civil Society through Comparison¹

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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

¹ 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.