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CIVIL SOCIETY AND JAPAN'S DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

Japan has long been described as a dysfunctional democracy due to the limited role of grassroots movements compared to other industrialized countries. This paper critiques the notion of an Asian path to democracy in Japan and outlines how industrial maturation and globalization have given rise to new forms of social activism there. The historical growth and development of Japan's grassroots movements is analyzed, with a focus on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in international development. The paper examines in detail the push and pull factors behind the growth and influence of these NGOs, and examines the new forms of state-society relations that have emerged as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NGOs begin to collaborate. Finally, the paper assesses significance of grassroots activism for democratic invigoration in Japan and beyond.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND JAPAN'S DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY

Japan's democracy is often described as dysfunctional. A single party has dominated the government for most of the last half-century, acting in close accord with an influential bureaucracy and the corporate sector. Corruption scandals have plagued the ruling elite for most of that half century, and have become pervasive in the last decade. One critic has gone so far as to lump Japan together with countries such as Malaysia and Thailand as semidemocratic countries featuring Confucianism, patron-client communitarianism, personalism, authority, dominant political party, and strong state (Neher and Marlay 1995).

Observers also point to the passivity of the Japanese public as both an effect and a cause of the country's democratic shortcomings. As evidence they point to the comparatively small size and influence of Japanese social movements compared to those in other developed countries.

The last point, however, deserves reconsideration. As some problems of Japanese democracy have deepened, critical citizens' movements have emerged. An emergent civil society in Japan has begun to question the existing political order, in the process broadening political participation through social activism. Grassroots movements may have an important long-term effect on Japanese politics, gradually transforming Japan's closed polity to encompass citizen-based pluralism. At the same time, the entrance of citizens' groups into formal decision-making processes can lead to new problems that can aggravate Japan's dysfunctional democracy.

This article examines citizen activism in foreign aid and development, a contentious and important area of Japanese politics. Unlike in the US, where, outside the

context of post-war expenditures, foreign aid is a relatively minor political issue, Tokyo's contributions to international aid and development are a major ongoing concern in the country (see Hirata 2002).[1] Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on aid and development issues thus play a prominent role in Japan's emerging civil society, and an analysis of this role can shed light on the development of democracy in Japan. I will discuss this role in the context of broader trends related to democracy and non-governmental activism in Japan.

Dysfunctional Democracy

Critics argue that democracy has never taken root in Japan. They correctly point out that the LDP has dominated the Japanese political scene since 1955, except for a few years of hiatus in the 1990s. Similarly, the bureaucracy—often called the architect of the Japanese "developmental state"—has exerted great influence in the country's policy making (see Johnson 1982). The LDP and bureaucracy have worked in tandem with the business sector to promote the country's principal objectives—rapid industrialization and economic growth—while excluding labor and the citizenry from the policy-making process.

The close alliance of the LDP, bureaucracy, and business has led to pervasive corruption (Bowen 2003; Allison 1988). "Money politics" intensified in Japan in the 1970s under the rule of Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, who was eventually arrested for receiving bribes from Lockheed Aircraft Corp in the United States. Tanaka established a "money-machine," through which he recklessly collected funds from big business and disbursed them to his faction members within the LDP and to key officials to maintain the "Tanaka Kingdom"(Bowen 2003; Allison 1988; Schlesinger 1999). After he resigned

from Parliament, his money machine was inherited and maintained by his faction members until the 1990s. Meanwhile, money politics spread throughout the Japanese political establishment, creating the "structural corruption" of the Japanese elite. Money politics engulfed not only politicians, but also bureaucrats in Tokyo's most powerful economic ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry.[2] Eventually, even ministries that were are more marginal to domestic politics, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), were rife with corruption scandals.

Disillusionment with corruption and scandals may have partially contributed to Japan's marked decline in voter participation in the 1990s. Japanese voter turnout for Lower House elections averaged 71.9% in 1946-1993. In the last three elections (1996, 2000, 2003), the turnout averaged only 59.9%. This decline may also be in part due to a new electoral system introduced in 1994, which reduced electoral competitiveness and thus hampered voter interest. Urbanization, accompanied by a weakening of community cohesion, may also be a contributing factor, as the traditional pattern of voter mobilization at the community level has all-but disappeared, thus lowering party support and political participation (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2000; "Three Ruling Parties" 2003).[3]

But data suggests that broader forms of citizen alienation are at work. According to the National Election Study, Japanese confidence in, and willingness to rely on, their political leaders fell sharply in the 1980s and 1990s (Pharr, Putnam and Dalton 2000). During these same decades, the percentage of Japanese who discuss politics rose sharply, from 46% in 1981 to 64% in 2000 (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002). As one Japanese

professor explained, "The low voter turnout in Japan is not because people are not interested in politics. . . . It's because they are turned off by the system"(Kakuchi 2000).[4]

Whatever the cause, few expect that the comparatively high voting rates that Japan previously enjoyed will return. But, as Pharr, Putnam, and Dalton note, voter disaffection with a dysfunctional political system may actually reflect "the *strengthening* of the cultural and sociological foundations of Japanese democracy "(Pharr, Putnam and Dalton 2000: 13; emphasis in original). This view is supported by evidence of the growing role of Japanese NGOs.

Japanese NGOs

Decreased participation in formal political institutions has occurred simultaneously with increased civic activism in informal politics in the United States and Europe (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). A similar phenomenon is now taking place in Japan, where grassroots activism has become more prominent during a time of declining voter turnouts. Like the people in other advanced industrialized states, Japanese citizens are increasingly involved in informal channels of political activism in spite of—or perhaps because of—their disaffection with formal representative democracy.

The proliferation of citizens groups is especially prominent in the area of international aid and development. In the 1950s, there were relatively few NGOs in Japan, and almost none were involved in international cooperation and assistance. By 1970, the number of development NGOs had reached 13. By 1980, the number had grown to 59. Then the total jumped to 117 in 1985, 200 in 1990, and 351 in 1995. By the early 2000s, approximately 400 have been identified as being engaged in international

aid projects and issues (Japanese NGO Center for International Cooperation 1998, 2002). (See Figure 1.)

[Insert Figure 1 here]

According to data compiled by Reimann (2001), the percentage growth of NGOs involved in development and human rights issues in Japan from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s was the most rapid in a selection of 12 OECD counties, including the US, Canada, France, UK, Germany, Belgium Sweden, Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, and Australia. This was in part because Japan started out from a very small number, and is mitigated by the fact that Japanese NGOs tend to be smaller and poorer than those in other countries, but nevertheless the trend indicates that Japan is catching up in NGO activism.

The expansion of NGO action is a new and, to many, surprising development, as citizens' movements in Japan have traditionally lacked national scope and power. For example, the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s failed to develop into a broad national movement. As in the US, many environmental groups sprung up during this time in response to industrially-related pollution or environmental hazards in local areas. In Japan, though, they remained "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) groups, focusing exclusively on parochial problems affecting local citizens' lives, and failing to address environmental or other social issues at a global or even national level (see McKean 1981; Schreurs 2002). As a result, many environmental groups quickly disappeared in the 1970s once their particular local disputes were settled. NGOs similar to Western environmental groups, such as Greenpeace and the Sierra Club, did not emerge in Japan in the 1970s.

Another major citizens' movement of that era—the students' protest movement against the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty—also died out in the 1970s because the visionary expectations promoted by students never materialized. These students wanted an abolition of the treaty but, failing to achieve such an ambitious goal, their movement lost spark. In addition, the students' violent protests alienated them from the general public and shut them off from possible alliances with the few politicians or bureaucrats who may have supported their objective.

Many attribute this lack of long-lasting grassroots organizations in Japan to government restrictions. For more than 100 years, civic organizations fell within the realm of Japan's Uniform Civil Code of 1896. According to its provisions, civic organizations applying for formal incorporation were required to first acquire permission from the responsible bureaucratic agencies. This requirement made it extremely difficult for civic groups, as their establishment depended solely upon the judgment of the very agencies whose policies they were challenging. In addition, under this law, applicant organizations were required to have a "sound financial basis," interpreted by government agencies to mean an endowment of at least three hundred million yen (about three million dollars) (Schwartz 2003; Yamamoto 1999b). Most organizations lacked such funds and were thus disqualified from getting legal status. Consequently, the majority of nonprofit organizations were legally non-existent and could not even open bank accounts, let alone enjoy the privilege of tax exemptions (Amemiya 1998). Those groups that did incorporated were subject to ongoing regulation and control by the agencies to which they reported, agencies that could terminate their legal status at any time.

These provisions were finally changed in 1998, when new legislation made it easier for nonprofit organizations to gain legal status. The NPO (nonprofit organization) law gives the governor of a prefecture where voluntary organizations are located the power to issue a certificate of incorporation. However, civic organizations that have become incorporated under this law are still not exempt from taxes.

In spite of this history, a growing national NGO movement emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, when these restrictions were still in place. (And it is likely due to the growth of this movement, and its national presence and demands, that state restrictions were subsequently eased.) What's more, this movement has begun to have a surprising level of influence over how aid and development policy is implemented and, in some cases, set. NGOs achieve this influence both through confrontation, for example, by organizing demonstrations and protests against government aid policies, and through collaboration with the state, for example, by serving as members of government committees on aid and development and as consultants or contractors for Tokyo's aid projects and programs. This incorporation of NGOs in policy-making and implementation is unprecedented in Japan. In the past, Japanese officials viewed NGOs as illegitimate, antigovernment, and a cause of social instability. To many NGO members, the bureaucracy represented the elite establishment, ignoring the needs of the socially disadvantaged in the developing world (see Yamaoka 1999). Today, while NGOs still protest against government decisions they disagree with, they are also willing to "work within the system" to achieve their goals. What has happened?

Broad economic, political, and cultural changes taking place in Japan and around the globe have contributed to both a push and a pull for greater influence of development

NGOs. The push comes from a sizable increase in NGO strength in Japanese society in the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting changes due to industrialization and globalization. The pull comes from changing attitudes towards NGOs by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the main actor in state aid decision-making, an agency whose approach has also been impacted by the effects of industrialization and globalization.

The Push Factor: The Rise of NGOs

We can identify two major sources for the rise of Japanese development NGOs: the maturation of Japan's industrialization, and the acceleration of globalization. First, as observed as early as the 1970s, Japan has become a post-industrial society and its people's values have changed accordingly (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki 1975; Inglehart 1997). Japan's economic boom began in the late 1950s; by the 1970s Japan had become an advanced industrial society and the second largest economy in the capitalist bloc, thus providing enough material comfort to allow people to address postmaterialist concerns of self-expression.

According to Inglehart's World Values Survey, the Japanese have become less materialistic and more concerned about the human condition. Today more Japanese people are interested in devoting their time and energy to humankind, rather to their own individual survival. As has occurred elsewhere, wealthier and more critical citizens are seizing opportunities for increased social participation through informal politics. The percentage of Japanese who signed a petition or attended a demonstration rose steadily in the 1980s and 1990s, matching upward trends in other industrialized countries around the world. Though Japanese are still within the lower end of elite-challenging activity as compared to other developed countries (e.g., in North America, Australasia, and Western

Europe), their participation patterns in these activities more closely match the rate in that group of countries than the much lesser rates of countries in Latin American and Eastern Europe (Inglehart 1997, 2002; Norris 2002).

To a certain extent these change of values reflect the greater wealth of the generation of citizens who have come of age in the 1980s and 1990s, as compared to the prior generation who grew up in the immediate postwar period. As with American youth in the 1960-70s, the Japanese youth who grew up in the post-boom era had sufficient material comfort to allow pursuit of meaning through social action and solidarity. In addition, the maturation and eventual stultification of Japanese industrial society brought about a worsening bureaucratization of state functions and a corresponding reduction of the state's ability to address citizens' needs. People have begun to realize that they cannot depend solely on the state for guidance and assistance to protect their well-being.

This new awareness of the state's limited capacities and of citizens' own sense of responsibility arose sharply in 1995, when the Kobe Earthquake took place, killing more than 6,000 people and leaving 30,000 people homeless. Despite the magnitude of this tragedy, the Japanese government, due to bureaucratic red tape, dithered in its response to the crisis and failed to mobilize domestic resources quickly or to allow international governments and organizations to deliver emergency assistance. In response, more than one million Japanese citizens rushed to Kobe to help the victims with much-needed food, medicine, and other supplies. The earthquake moved the public further away from the traditional dependence on a formal state system, making citizens realize that they must be directly involved in looking after the public interest through their own grassroots action.

This shift in thinking brought increased participation in a wide range of NGOs (see Yamamoto 1999a).

Second, the process of globalization has also had an impact on people's values as global norms diffuse more readily and rapidly. Historically, Western missionaries tried to propagate Christian-based humanitarianism in Japan, but with limited success, in part because the religious nature of the messenger and message were alien to Japanese culture and beliefs. Today, with greater access to global information via new technologies, more migration travel across national boundaries, and more access to overseas education, international norms, such as those based on respect for human rights, democracy, and humanitarian assistance, have gained greater credence in Japan.

The first expansion of Japanese development NGOs in the late 1970s and the early 1980s illustrates the impact of global media on popular opinion. During the Indochinese refuges crisis, the mass media flooded Japan with vivid images of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians desperately trying to escape their countries. The images of their suffering spurred Japanese individuals, mostly youth in their twenties, to take action to provide assistance. According to a Japanese journalist specializing in international governmental and non-governmental development assistance, it was a "historical experience" for ordinary citizens to cross the national border for the first time to offer volunteer assistance to another people (Matsui 1990: 215). From the Thai border camps emerged some of Japan's pioneer independent NGOs, which became highly critical of the Japanese government for not providing enough support to the refugees. Their members' new sense of responsibility as world citizens to provide humanitarian

support for those in need, regardless of their nationality, contributed to the rise and growth of Japanese NGOs that were independent from, and critical of, the government.

In addition, international communication networks have helped citizens become better political and social organizers. In the 1980s, fax machines were used to rapidly spread political announcements and action alerts. In the 1990s, the Internet spread quickly among both NGOs and society at large. Today Japan has more Internet users than any country but the US, and the youth who participate in NGO activity have disproportionate access to the computer and language skills needed for international online communication (Nua Internet Surveys 2003). Though enhanced communication with international NGOs, the gathering of information from international Websites, online discussion and organizing, and publication of online resources such as *Civil Society Monitor* and *GrassrootsNet*, Japanese NGOs exploit new technologies to organize and orchestrate their efforts.[5]

There is one more aspect of globalization that has had an indirect, though important, influence on the growth of NGOs. In the new globalized economy, major Japanese corporations such as Toyota, Honda, Sony, and Panasonic receive the bulk of their profits from, and thus direct most of their attention to, international markets. These titans of industry have pushed for more open trade regimes and greater deregulation of the Japanese economy, thus weakening the pillars of the Japanese developmental state. This denationalization of major components of Japanese industry and corresponding loosening of the business-bureaucracy alliance has both strengthened Japanese skepticism in their traditional leadership, as well as created more political space for new social

forces to influence policy-making.[6] NGOs have attempted to fill this space through greater participation in development and implementation of policy, as will be seen below.

The Pull Factor: Government Needs

Although the growth of NGOs has given them an important push toward greater involvement in decision making, there has also been a pull factor involved, as government bureaucracies have changed their views of NGOs and have demonstrated increasing need to involve NGOs in implementation and, to a lesser extent, policy making. This is illustrated by the changing attitude and needs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there was little cooperation or even contact between MOFA and NGOs. But in the 1990s, MOFA began channeling funds to NGOs to help implement aid projects, and even sought their cooperation and advice in project planning and policy development through a number of ad-hoc and permanent NGO-government policy councils and forums.

MOFA's increasing openness to NGOs stems in part from Japan's serious fiscal problems. With Japan's deficit spending and debt-to-GDP ratios at unsustainable levels, a prolonged fiscal crisis has caused intense competition within the bureaucracy for limited funds (see Katz 1998). In this climate, MOFA has reached out to NGOs with the dual goals of strengthening its political alliances and finding low-cost sub-contractors to help carry out its projects. (The growth of government funding to NGOs for aid work is seen in Figure 2.) In this sense, government support for, and channeling of funds to, NGOs can be seen as part of a privatization of state services that is common throughout the world.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Beyond this, though, the ministry has gone through an important change of attitude toward development over the last 15 years under the influence of the international aid regime. With a growing international consensus behind a paradigm of sustainable human development—based on projects that emphasize education, training, community organization, and capacity building rather than physical infrastructure—the ministry's earlier approach to aid has become outdated. In the sustainable development paradigm, NGOs are considered indispensable actors that can work closely with people in need and deliver public services and training to hard-to-reach populations. Thus through international socialization via the aid regime, MOFA has come to value the role of NGOs in aid and development and has attempted to reform Japanese aid by increasing grassroots aid projects and collaborating with NGOs to plan and deliver them Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999).[7]

NGO-State Relations

With Japanese politics dominated by elites for centuries, the non-profit sector has traditionally been restricted to welfare activities under tight government regulation. In contrast, the environmental protest movements in the 1960s and 70s represented a more confrontational mode of NGO-state relationship, with organizations voicing citizen demands but not directly engaging with the national bureaucracy.

As Japan's NGOs movement grows and matures, it has begun to take on more complex and nuanced forms of engagement with the state. This is seen in particular in relationship to MOFA, the agency most closely involved with NGO activity. Four modes of interaction are relevant to NGO-MOFA relations: *conflict*, *co-optation*, *critical cooperation* and *disengagement* (see Figure 3). Although many observers of civil society

tend to see NGO-state relationship in dichotomy—conflict or co-optation—a closer examination reveals that NGOs can be simultaneously highly critical and highly cooperative. Critical cooperation allows NGOs to work willingly with the government while maintaining autonomy and critical distance. In contrast, disengagement involves low conflict and low cooperation (Covey 1998).

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Of the four modes of interaction, critical cooperation best characterizes the relationship that most activist NGOs have with MOFA. NGOs engaged in critical cooperation are both ideological and pragmatic. They challenge government aid policies while simultaneously cooperating with MOFA officials via policy dialogues and operational collaboration. These NGOs use protest and advocacy when needed, but also carry out "soft advocacy" through policy dialogues.

An example of this kind of critical cooperation can be seen in the work of the Japanese International Volunteer Center (JVC), one of the oldest, largest, and most influential NGOs in Japan. JVC was established in 1980 in Bangkok to provide emergency relief to refugees. It has since become expanded into a wide range of aid and advocacy projects in the areas of develop, education, health, and environmental protection. JVC was instrumental in two important political victories of the Japanese NGO movement, each representing a different type of relationship with state actors.

In the first case, JVC led a successful effort to halt pesticide aid to Cambodia. The case represents a fascinating case of changing NGO-state-business relations in the era of globalization. Japanese chemical companies had lost domestic market share due to the liberalization of the rice market in Japan based on international trade agreements in

the early 1990s. (With the purchase of more foreign rice, less rice would be purchased at home, requiring less pesticide.) They aggressively promoted a pesticide aid program in Cambodia as a substitute market. In what until then had been standard practice, the pesticide companies sent their representatives to Phnom Penh to assist the Cambodian government in requesting their pesticides. In response, JVC brought together a broad coalition of Cambodian, Japanese, and international NGOs to protest the program, pointing out that the particular pesticides involved were highly toxic, restricted in many countries, and inappropriate for effective use in Cambodia's tropical climate. In the end, MOFA withdrew support for the program, representing one of the first cases in modern Japan where NGOs concerns so decisively triumphed over those of industry (Hirata 2002).

In the second case, JVC brought together more than 40 Japanese NGOs to launch the Japanese Campaign to Ban Landmines (JCBL, a coalition headed by JVC director Toshihiro Shimizu). JVC and JCBL partnered actively with sympathetic Japanese politicians to educate the public and advocate for the landmine treaty, until the Prime Minister, the Defense Agency, and MOFA were all persuaded that supporting the anti-landmine treaty was in Japan's best interest. Once again, Japanese NGOs played a role in shaping Japanese policy, this time in active coalition with progressive politicians.[8]

Today, JVC is a leading organization within JANIC, the Japanese NGO Center for International Cooperation, and, in that role, often represents the Japanese NGO community in government-NGO negotiations. JVC, like the emergent movement it represents, is vocal on behalf of polices it advocates, but is willing to dialogue and negotiation with the government to achieve its ends.

Japanese Civil Society and Democracy

Many observers of Japanese politics have emphasized the uniqueness of Japanese civil society, pointing out that its development has been severely hampered by a strong state with powerful regulatory functions unmatched in other advanced industrial states. And indeed, the Japanese state has shaped the growth of civil society through the imposition of the aforementioned strict civic law, determining which organizations should exist legally and which should not. This has resulted in a situation where most nongovernmental organizations remain small and outside the legal system, with few large, independent nonprofit groups in Japan (see for example, Pekkanen 2003).

Others have pointed to the passivity of the Japanese populous, and its cultural values that mitigate against militant advocacy and opposition to authority. And it is also true that Confucianist traditions have likely slowed the growth of civil society in Japan, especially when combined with strong state intervention,

However, it should also be recognized that neither the state nor culture are static entities, and, in Japan as elsewhere, both are changing due to post-industrial development and globalization (Castells 1996). As evidenced by the survey data and case studies discussed in this paper, these changes are giving rise to forms of social activism in Japan that are noteworthy not for their national uniqueness, but rather for their commonality with those experienced by most other advanced industrial countries a couple of decades previously.

What remains to be assessed is the contribution of these developments to democracy in Japan. Diamond (1994) refers to eight democracy-enhancing functions of voluntary associations, all of which are arguably connected to the role of NGOs in Japan,

but three of which seem particularly relevant.[9] First, civil society presents a way for those excluded from power to articulate, aggregate, and represent their interests. With Japanese politics dominated by a single party—and one that has historically been tightly aligned with the bureaucracy and business community—NGOs have allowed disaffected sectors of the population to find a way to make their opinions known and influence policy. This takes place through NGO-organized protests, as seen by the examples of the anti-pesticide and anti-landmine campaigns mentioned above, and also in less publicized fashion when NGO representatives meet with government officials to express their concerns about the direction and nature of aid and development policy.

Second, civil society serves as an instrument to contain the power of democratic governments by checking their potential abuses and violations of the law, and subjecting them to public scrutiny. Japanese NGOs have worked to expose and criticize corruption in the aid process, for example by uncovering bribery in the aid bidding process. More broadly, they have pressed for more transparent government practices. For example, Japanese NGOs struggled for nearly two decades to achieve passage of the Information Disclosure Law that was finally adopted in May 1999. The legislation mandates public release of a wide range of government documents upon citizen request.

Third, a rich associational life supplements the role of political parties in stimulating political participation and democratic culture. This is especially important in Japan, given the falling rate of participation in the electoral process, as well as the traditional acquiescence of the Japanese populous to government authority. The postindustrial era, with its networked forms of communication and social organizations, demands a greater degree of public participation in politics, economics, and society than

did the previous industrial era (Castells 1998). Such public engagement is emerging via Japanese NGOs, which tend to be relatively small, grassroots oriented, flexible, and participatory (Hirata 2002). They provide a means for youth to develop a new sense of Japanese identity, based on a commitment to take collective action for meaningful social change.

These positive contributions of the Japanese NGO movement, while certainly evident, should not be exaggerated in scope. Japanese NGOs, though larger in number and greater in strength than two decades ago, are still at an early stage, and cannot credibly claim to be radically transforming society.

Finally, if these are the contributions to democracy of Japan's nascent NGO movement, what possible challenges does the movement and its trajectory raise for democracy? Two issues come to mind.

The first is the possible co-optation by the government of grassroots movements. Japanese NGOs are small and relatively weak, and thus the financial support offered to them by the government can represent a substantial portion of their operating budgets. Though NGO-government collaboration has thus far proven positive, it is not impossible that uncritical cooperation could undermine NGO independence, divert NGOs from their original missions and goals, bureaucratize their organizations, and weaken their grassroots orientation. Also, in an attempt to strengthen relations with the state, NGOs could concentrate their energy on the upward link with the state but neglect to forge a strong downward linkage with the public. As it is, NGOs in Japan are relatively small, ordinarily including less than 3,000 members, so maintaining a connection to their base is

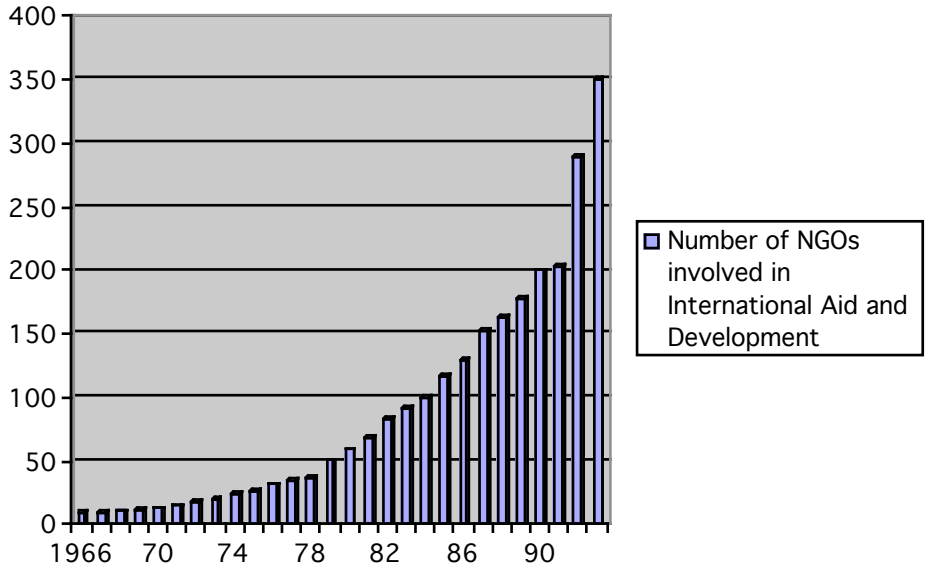
especially important. Co-optation of NGOs is a threat in any context, but is of special concern in Japan, given the history of state control of the non-corporate sector.

Finally, there remains the danger of partisanship. This paper has largely adopted the perspective that the growth of non-governmental organizations represents a positive trend, but not all see it that way. Some point out that the growth of NGOs could result in partisan battles among small groups at odds with majority views. This possibility can be checked by a healthy electoral system that provides an effective alternate process for people to have their voices heard. In that sense, a viable democracy requires both an active sphere of voluntary association and a pluralistic, open electoral process. The growth of NGOs has made, and should continue to make, a positive contribution to democracy in Japan, but the process of democratic invigoration will be held back until the political party system and electoral process are similarly revitalized.

Conclusion

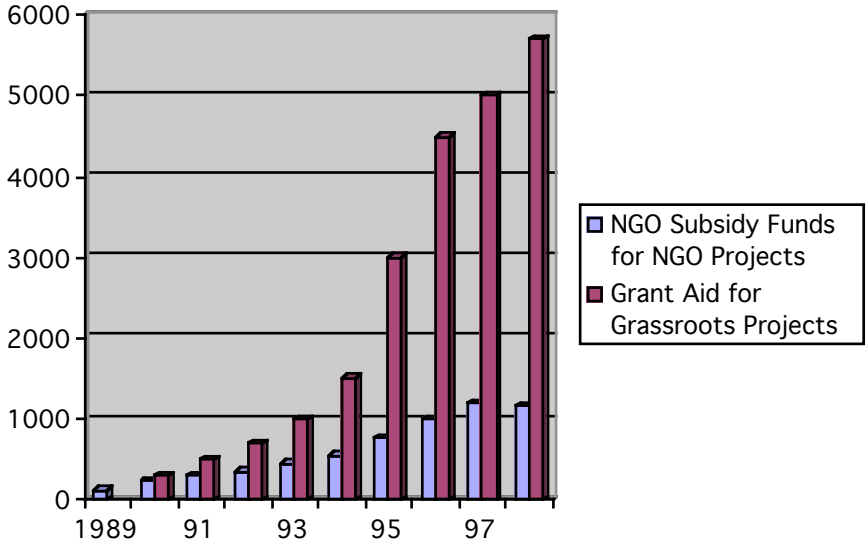
If Japanese democracy has long been dysfunctional, it is becoming slight less so now. Though voter turnout is down, growing numbers of Japanese citizens are recognizing their responsibility, and capacity, to make their voices heard in other ways, and this recognition is reflected in steadily increasing citizen activism. This increased social activism raises doubts about a unique Japanese civil society based on "Asian values," and instead suggests that the future of state-society relations in Japan may share much in common with that of other advanced capitalist countries.

Figure 1—Growth of Japanese NGOs Involved in International Aid and Development



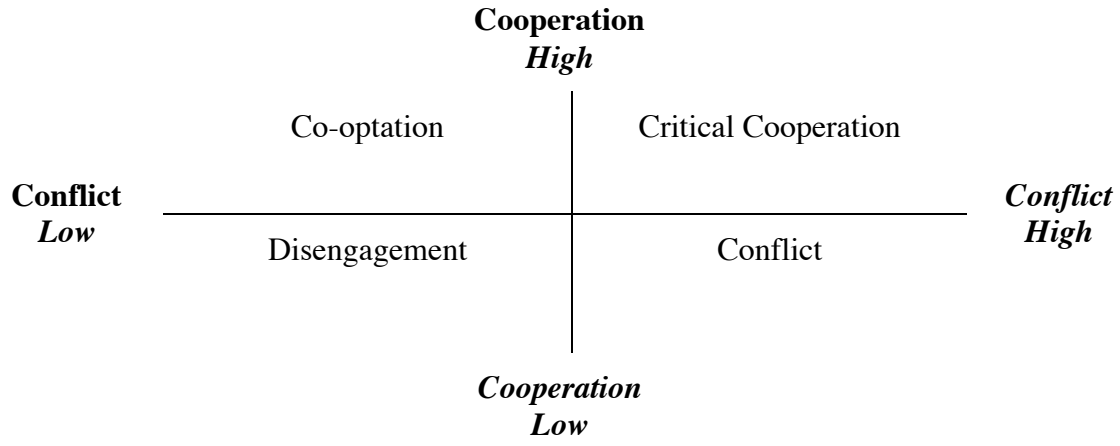
Source: Japanese NGO Center for International Cooperation (1998), Saotome (1999).

Figure 2—Growth of MOFA Funds to NGOs (¥ million)



Source: Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1999).

Figure 3—NGO-State Relations



Source: Covey (1998: 108).

NOTES

[1] Lacking military strength, Japan has used aid as its principal means of international influence, in many years outspending even the United States. Overseas aid thus became a central issue in Japanese foreign policy, attracting the kind of attention from the media and citizenry that military action receives in the United States.

[2] The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry was formerly called the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI).

[3] For a discussion on the relation between Japanese voter turnout and the electoral reform, see Kohno (1989). For the role of community in Japanese elections, see Curtis (1999).

[4] Also see Pharr (2000) for a discussion of the impact of corruption on dissatisfaction with politicians.

[5] See Japan Center for International Exchange, (http://www.jcie.or.jp/). For further discussion, see Rosenau (1997), Casetells (1997), and Lipschutz (1992).

[6] One result of the loosening of the business-bureaucracy alliance has been the end of "tied" aid loans, in which only Japanese companies can compete, and their replacement by open international bidding for aid contracts. With Japanese companies unable to win these open bids due to the high labor costs in Japan, these companies have shown markedly less interest in the aid program, creating more opportunities for other groups to step in and exert their influence. For a discussion of the deregulation of Japanese industry and the decline of the developmental state, see Castells (1998) and Pempel (1998).

[7] For arguments on international norm adoption by states, see for example, Sikkink (1991).

[8] Personal interview with Toshihiro Shimizu, JVC director and JCBL coordinator, October 11, 2000, Tokyo.

[9] The five not listed here include promoting tolerance and moderation; bringing diversity groups together and thus mitigating polarization; recruiting and training new political leaders; pursuing electoral, judicial, or legal reform; and disseminating information. For a critical response to Diamond, see Brysk (2000).

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