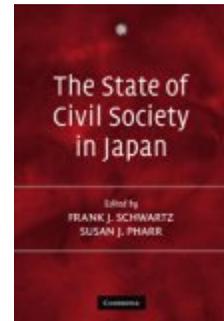


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Civil Society Outside the West: Betwixt and Between the Market and the State in Japan

For years many Anglophone political studies of Japan have been informed by rational choice (methodologically reductionistic and unpersuasive) or party- and politician-centered accounts (taking the American party system as if it were the universal model). Therefore, we should welcome more sophisticated works that are empirically grounded and address topics that resonate inside as well as outside Japan. The volume under review is timely because its topic—civil society—has recently emerged as a key concept in political science, sociology, and comparative research for different area studies specialists. Relying on the portable notion of civil society allows researchers to place Japan in global context. Nevertheless, at the same time many contributors are sensitive to the specificity of history and civic life: Sheldon Garon contends that though civil society has played an important role in modern Japanese history, he warns that “we must first consider the limitations of ahistorically applying ‘civil society’ to Japan” (p. 42). Indeed, one strength of this collection is how many chapters provide a useful historical perspective. Chapters 2 and 3—Sheldon Garon’s “From Meiji to Heisei: The State of Civil Society in Japan” and Andrew Barshay’s “Capitalism and Civil Society in Postwar Japan: Perspectives from Intellectual History”—explicitly historicize Japan’s civil society. Barshay explains how a Marxist-inspired discourse centering on the emergence of Japanese capitalism has been integral to discussions about civil society in Japan.

This edited volume has three missions: to trace the emergence of Japan’s civil society; to explore the state’s

role in configuring civil society; and to attempt to clarify the very concept of civil society. The book is divided into five parts: Context; The Associational Sphere; The Non-market Activities of Economic Actors; State-Civil Society Linkages; and Globalization and Value Change. The volume affords a descriptively rich account of political life in Japan, with contributors exploring civil society from the angles of economic organizations, unions, consumerism, intellectual history, mass media, prosecutors, religious groups, the welfare state, international NGOs, and officialdom.

Two of the strongest and most informative chapters are Tsujinaka Yutaka’s “From Developmentalism to Maturity: Japan’s Civil Society Organizations in Comparative Perspective” (chapter 4), and Robert Pekkanen’s “Molding Japanese Civil Society: State-Structured Incentives and the Patterning of Civil Society” (chapter 5). These particular chapters are sound treatments because they directly engage the very nature and institutional fabric of Japan’s civil society organizations. Both chapters provide nitty-gritty details of the administrative-legal environment in associational organizations, and discuss how particular environments discourage certain types of civil society formations from emerging. Moreover, both illustrate why any discussion of civil society is inseparable from an understanding of state projects. Tsujinaka’s sophisticated analysis approaches the problem of civil society from the three angles of state-organized institutions, social establishments, and active groups. His contribution allows the reader to appreciate the contours

of Japan's civil society by comparing it to similar organizations in the United States and Korea. Pekkanen's chapter explains why small local groups "such as neighborhood associations are promoted by the government" while "it is hard for autonomous groups to become large and hard for large groups to be autonomous" (p. 133).

A central theme of this book is the actual meaning of "civil society." The close attention to the problem of definition is a strength of many chapters. Indeed, the more sophisticated contributions to this volume grapple with definitional issues, while the less sophisticated ones accept civil society as a given. In the Preface, Susan Pharr offers a definition of civil society that remarkably is more or less adopted by most contributors: a social sphere that "consists of sustained, organized social activity that occurs in groups that are formed outside the state, the market, and the family" (p. xiii). In "What Is Civil Society?" (chapter 1) Frank Schwartz provides a judicious intellectual backdrop and explains why civil society has re-emerged as a core concept in political studies. He notes that appreciating civil society involves more than just drawing boundaries between state and society. In order to come to intellectual grips with civil society, he suggests that we may want to view it from the perspective of the "nation," "cultural dispositions," "limited state," "market economy," "associations," "public sphere," and the global level.

Any attempt to define civil society inevitably implicates the state, but many contributors pointedly argue that the relationship between state and civil society is not as simplistic as many might assume. For example, in the last chapter Pharr writes how recent interest in civil society can be traced to the 1980s, when political developments in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the USSR highlighted civic activities and organizations as counterweights to authoritarian states on both the left and right. Consequently, the state was cast in the role of "antagonist to civil society" and the idea that the state might actually foster civil life was not adequately acknowledged (p. 323). Many contributors rectify this view, and show how the state not only impacts civil society, but may actually also create and then utilize civil society groups for its own agenda. The question, then, "is not *whether* the state plays a role in the evolution of civil society, but *which* role it plays" (p. 323). The state may inspire, enable, constrain, or sponsor civic associations. Sheldon Garon uses examples to illustrate how ironically, "had Japan possessed a less vigorous civil society, its state would have remained an ineffective autocratic regime, unable to manufacture consent" (p. 61). He also makes the point that we should

not assume that public-oriented individuals or groups may not want to work with the state to solve society's problems. Robert Pekkanen notes that rather than "a simplistic, oppositional relationship, the state's influence has typically been to shape, not suppress, civil society" (p. 116). In her chapter on the relation between the state and international development NGOs, Kim Reimann discusses "state-society symbiosis" and warns against making sharp distinctions between officialdom and societal groupings by adopting "society versus state," "society instead of the state," or "society autonomous from the state" approaches (p. 312). In chapter 7 ("State-Society Partnerships in the Japanese Welfare State"), Margirat Estevez-Abe explores the "societal partners" of the Japanese state and asks if participation of intermediate associations "in affairs of state affect government effectiveness and economic performance? Does it contribute to democracy?" (p. 155).

In "The Death of Unions' Associational Life? Political and Cultural Aspects of Enterprises Unions" (chapter 9), Suzuki Akira offers a concise but informative history of unions and asks why a union culture "autonomous from the hegemonic ideas of the state and corporations" (p. 198) did not develop in Japan. He shows how the market (as well as a successful economy) can undermine the role of unions in civil society, and contends that in Japan unions failed to develop their own democratic culture distinct from corporate life. Consequently, workers have been integrated into corporate communities rather than into Japan's political system as citizens.

Patricia Maclachlan, in "The Struggle for an Independent Consumer Society: Consumer Activism and the State's Response in Postwar Japan" (chapter 10), looks at "consumer identity" vis-a-vis the state. She explains why consumerist movements are important because they create civic spaces where economic as well as political liberties intersect; in other words, such movements highlight how individuals possess rights as both consumers and citizens.

In "Mobilizing and Demobilizing the Japanese Public Sphere: Mass Media and the Internet in Japan" (chapter 11), Laurie Freeman asks "can the Internet mobilize and empower the political public sphere in Japan?" To answer this question, she explores Japan's "information cartels" which are comprised of press clubs, newspaper industry trade associations, and media business groups. Japan's "collaborative news-management process" produces five outcomes: (1) credentialing facts; (2) weakening the political auditing function; (3) limiting the

agenda-setting process; (4) marginalizing alternative media; and (5) homogenizing news and opinion. She concludes that it remains to be seen whether civic potential will be realized in Japan.

In “Building Global Civil Society from the Outside In? Japanese International Development NGOs, the State and International Norms” (chapter 14), Kim Reimann explains why international development NGOs were officially discouraged but beginning in the early 1990s, the Japanese state started to support them. Most would assume that the state’s about-face was in response to domestic pressures. However, Reimann contends that the real source of policy change can be traced to official attempts at gaining legitimacy in the international arena, conforming to international practices and standards, and “esteem concerns.”

In the last chapter (“Conclusion: Targeting by an Activist State: Japan as Civil Society Model”), Susan Pharr offers some final thoughts and conclusions, and compares Japan to Western Europe and the US. She notes that during the imperial period, Japan’s activist state was similar to state socialist and hard authoritarian systems (e.g. China, Vietnam, Laos, with extreme examples represented by Myanmar and North Korea) as it sought to “guide” and utilize civic organizations (rather than obliterate them, as in Eastern Europe and the USSR). Pharr examines “state orientations toward civil society”: activists versus permissive states and broad versus targeted policies. From these types she constructs a taxonomy of four categories: activist state plus broadly applied policies (nineteenth-century France, state socialist systems, United States since 1970s); activist state plus targeted policies (twentieth-century Japan, interwar Germany and Italy); permissive state plus broadly applied policies (nineteenth-century Britain, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States); permissive state plus targeted policies (19th century Germany, Meiji Japan until around 1900).

For many of us, civil society has sanguine associations: courageous anti-government protesters, improving the lot of the oppressed, and spontaneous grassroots organizing. These impressions concern the question of whether civil society is morally prescriptive or social-scientifically descriptive “democracy” has had a similar problem in much political scientific writing, with researchers sometimes importing their own understandings of democracy into their work). This collection fortunately avoids confusing the normative with the explanatory, though some contributors sound a hopeful tone for

the prospects of Japan’s civil society and seem to believe that as an autonomous sphere, neither defined by state or market, it is expanding and intensifying. For example, in “Trust and Social Intelligence in Japan” (chapter 13), Yamagishi Toshio uses survey results to show how Japan is moving away from a “security-based” to a “trust-based” society, thereby becoming more pluralistic.

Though it is perhaps unfair to take a book to task for what it did not do, it is hard to overlook salient subjects that were not treated. Some crucial topics that directly implicate civil society but were not explored include gender, refugees, non-citizen residents, and immigrants (legal and illegal). Also, despite their overall quality, the chapters more or less afford a treatment of formal institutions and their collective behavior. A careful examination of the issues from the ethnographically described “inside” of a civil society organization, underscored with the voices of actual activists or participants, would have added more texture and color. Related to this is the lack of an exploration of everyday theorizing at the street level, commonplace expressions, and the ubiquitous idiom that average Japanese use in their daily discourse about what might be labeled civil society (e.g. *hitome, hitomae, seken*).

Another problem: several contributors, while offering solid treatments of their own specializations, do not actually deal with the book’s topic: e.g. Helen Hardacre, “After Aum: Religion and Civil Society in Japan” (chapter 6); Robert Bullock, “Redefining the Conservative Coalition: Agriculture and Small Business in 1990s Japan” (chapter 8); and David Johnson, “A Tale of Two Systems: Prosecuting Corruption in Japan and Italy” (chapter 12). In some chapters, the term “civil society” merely pops up in a few places, and no direct analytic assault or informative linkages to civil society are made. To be fair, such a failing may have something to do with the admittedly ambiguous nature of civil society itself. This raises a key problematic that is more or less woven throughout the book: is civil society an epiphenomenon, emerging from the interactions of other sociopolitical institutions? Or is it a phenomenon in its own right, an autonomous sphere that, like the state, deserves careful scrutiny despite its complexity and integration with other institutional actors? On the other hand, the failure to adequately address the book’s subject in some chapters may be because certain contributors, in pursuit of their primary research interest, veered off course and simply did not connect their particular research concerns with the book’s purpose: an analysis of Japan’s civil society.

Despite these weaknesses, any serious researcher of Japanese politics should adopt this volume, whether or not he or she is specifically interested in civil society. This is because the contributors have demonstrated that by coming to terms with a contested yet key concept such as civil society, we can actually obtain a clearer picture of an entire array of other issues in Japan's sociopolitical and economic life. Indeed, exploring civil society in Japan raises issues for political studies in general. For example, there is a strong assumption that liberalism has sought to clearly demarcate the boundaries between state and society. However, in the case of Japan (as well as many other places), the lines dividing state from soci-

ety are arguably more blurred than what textbook "liberalism" dictates. This should cause pause for those of us who glibly describe postimperial Japan as a "liberal democracy." Japan is certainly democratic of sorts, and *broadly speaking*, liberal. However, it is highly debatable whether Japan is liberal in the more specific sense of Anglo-American political thought. By ascertaining the incarnations of civil society outside the Western political tradition, other oft-used terms, such as democracy, capitalism, unions, labor, and national identity, may be better put in conceptual focus. This volume provides an indispensably valuable and informative foundation for such intellectual endeavors.

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