

The role of Voluntary Sector in the development of the postwar Japanese civil society

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Abstract: The article focuses on the transformation of the civil society in the postwar period. The rapid increase of voluntary sector began in the mid 1990's. Nevertheless, the Japanese civil society has a long history. In the postwar period Japanese civil society has undergone the transformation. What were the features of such transformation? What was the weakness of Japanese civil society? And how the volunteering influenced the development of civil society? The period of postwar reconstruction is an important part of Japan's history in general. It was marked by collaboration of civil society organizations and public authorities against the background of total recovery in every sphere of Japanese society. The author emphasizing, voluntary sector always was an important part of Japanese civil society. Japan in the postwar period had some level of social activism. In particular social and political participation were expressed in voluntary movements – like environmental and antiwar protest movements in 1960s and 1970s.

Keywords: civil society, postwar Japan, voluntary sector, NGOs, NPOs.

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pan in the postwar period had some level of social activism. In particular social and political participation were expressed in voluntary movements – like environmental and antiwar protest movements in 1960s and 1970s. These citizens' movements didn't lead to a vibrant civil society in Japan in the second half of the 20th century. Either they were individual or organizational, various factors might account for their failure. For example, these movements were focused on the single issues which lacked long-lasting relations to other broader questions. As soon as the problem which citizens' groups focused on was solved, the movement disappeared.

The concept of development and transformation of civil society has become a popular topic in Japan during the past few decades. Both Japanese and

Western researches analyzed the Civil Society of Japan, its collaboration with public authorities, the rapid increase of civil society organizations. Nevertheless, the definition of “civil society” was introduced into scientific use in mid 1990-s, just after the Great Hanshin Earthquake (Kobe, 1995). This event was accompanied by a surge of public participation, which was directed on the volunteer movement.

However, some of scientists emphasizing that development of civil society has began much earlier. Japan’s practice of community involvement has a long history. During the Edo period (1603-1868) mutual aid associations grew across the country, especially in the urban centers. Neighborhood associations called *machikaisho* were established as public-private organizations to perform three primary functions: store rice, provide financing, and aid the poor [3; 11]. The Meiji period (1868-1912) was characterized by formalization the voluntary and nonprofit sector through the establishment of the Civil Code (1896), which enabled the organization of public interest corporations.

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First of all, we should distinguish the definition of civil society and its peculiarities in the Japanese society. Oxford dictionary defines civil society as “society considered as a community of citizens linked by common interests and collective activity” [6]. Sometimes the term is used in more boarded sense: “the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens and are independent from government [1].

The term civil society is used with great ambiguity. Sometimes it means a society based on private property and individual rights. For example, Marx considered a civil society as the sphere of market relations. To Marx, the civil society was bourgeois and deserved to be abolished. On the other hand, Keiko Hirata explains that the term refers to the sum of all institutions between the family and the state, including not only NGOs but also any other organizations such as political parties. In addition to these characteristics – being voluntary, self-generating, rule abiding and distinct from parochial, economic, and political societies – civil society entails another important characteristic: it promotes pluralism and diversity [4, p. 9-10].

Chronologically some scientists define the frames of Japanese civil society researches from the mid 1990s, when the civic engagement rapidly increased. However, I suggest reviewing the postwar development of civil society and its cooperation

with **actors** of civil society, like NGO’s, NPO’s etc. The period of postwar reconstruction is an important part of Japan’s history in general. It was marked by collaboration of civil society organizations and public authorities against the background of total recovery in every sphere of Japanese society.

However, both Western – Pekkanen, Haadad, Thraenbardt [2; 3; 8], and Japanese scientists – Hirata, Tsujinaka, Kawashima, Yamamoto [4; 5; 9; 10], held researches in this sphere emphasizing the interaction between non-governmental, non-profit organizations of the volunteer sector and officialdom. But, the transformation of these sectors was hardly defined. That’s why postwar Japan is a hot topic in the frames of this research.

The voluntary sector has become one of the directions of the civil society development since the second half of the 20th century. The importance of volunteering is in pluralism and diversity. Otherwise, the activity of this area has been criticized by some scientists. They argue that the public participation in Japanese society activities is characterized by passivity in the public and social life. On the contrary, I assume that Japan in the postwar period had some level of social activism. In particular social and political participation were expressed in voluntary movements – like environmental and antiwar protest movements in 1960s and 1970s.

Nevertheless, Tadashi Yamamoto concludes: “in the early years after the end of World War II, Japan’s NGO movement was characterized by its antigovernment and anti corporate position. During that period, Japan was heavily influenced by the ideological conflict between the socialist-communist camp and the democratic-free market camp. Those who worked for the NGO movement, which was sometimes referred to as the “citizens’ movement,” were labeled as left-wing elements. This image has changed considerably, if not totally, in recent years, particularly with the end of the cold war. Many NGOs, now more commonly called NPOs, were formed to address the issues created by a complex and pluralistic society, such as home care for senior citizens, environmental protection, foreign labor, social welfare, and consumer protection. A pattern of partnership between NPOs and municipal governments to address social issues in their local communities began to emerge. NPOs have been particularly effective in areas where government bureaucracy does not have sufficient flexibility or resources to respond effectively. As social needs and values became more diverse and the government budget became more constrained, the space for NPOs widened” [10].

Keiko Hirata analyzes Japan’s postwar development of changing civil society-state relations. These changes brought economic, cultural and political

transformations of Japanese society in the age of globalization and post-industrialism. No single factor or incident can explain the changing state-Japanese civil society relations; they involve processes of complex, incremental social transformation. To understand the growth of Japanese civil society, it is necessary to take into account a variety of factors related to economic, cultural, and political changes in Japan and around the world [4, p. 9].

Researching the civil society in Japan and some of its weaknesses we can define factors of influence on the transformation, for example, cultural peculiarities. First of all, the Confucian tradition has had a great impact on the people's lives and also on their public and social behavior. It was reflected in respect to hierarchy and authority, superiority of collective interests over individual, observance of order and sustainability. That's why civic engagement was carefully undertaken, sometimes very slowly, but effectively.

Social hierarchy plays an important role in the Japanese society. Till the developmental state, there was the tendency to understanding bureaucracy as the one who has the right in decision making. Any attempts to break the boundary of social status or enter the field of State's activities were regarded as disrespect towards the state.

Thereby, the social conformism of Confucian ideology subordinated the Japanese civil society to the state. The social pressure ensured the silence of dissenters, and prevented individualism. That's one of the Japanese civil society weaknesses. The other ones were related to political and social sphere.

This is the example of a group of factors which influenced the Japanese civil society in politics. Japan entered the new stage of development after the defeat in the Second World War. In the process of transformation to democracy during the occupation of Allied Powers, Japan underwent reforming in the political sector. The new Constitution was ratified (1946). It enfranchised women, guaranteed fundamental human rights, and decentralized the local government.

Also, there appeared some tendencies in the social sphere especially in the voluntary sector. The important parts of civil society were the citizens' movements. In their increasing we can trace an interesting peculiarity. These citizens' movements didn't lead to a vibrant civil society in Japan in the second half of the 20th century. Either they were individual or organizational, various factors might account for their failure. For example, these movements were focused on the single issues which lacked long-lasting relations to other broader questions. As soon as the problem which citizens' groups focused on was solved, the movement disappeared. Also a lack of strong or charismatic leader-

ship may be one of the reasons that these movements eventually fizzled. In addition, at the societal and state levels, the then-strong Japanese developmental state imposed structural constraints on citizens' activism and fostered passivity, thus hindering the growth of long-lasting national movements or coalitions [4].

However, the voluntary sector and its actors were studied as a part of civil society in Japan. To Thraenbardt, there are four major types of volunteering in Japan. They were defined by employing to approaches: whether traditional or new and whether institutionalized or non-institutionalized. The first type of volunteering, 'traditional non-institutionalized', is connected to Neighborhood Associations. In the early decades of this century, households were placed in neighbourhood schemes, which were used by the authoritarian government of the 1930s and 1940s to police potential dissidents and detect attitudes which were seen as uncooperative for the war effort [8; 5, p. 19].

The second form – 'traditional institutionalized volunteers' – is associated with Appointed Community Welfare Commissioners. This is an institution originating from Germany in the 1910-20s, similar to 'friendly visitors' in Anglo-American countries, which was to provide counseling and help the poor and the destitute. In fact, this was again a governmental instrument for social control. After the War, the role of the Commissioners has become more that of an intermediary between those in need and professional social workers. One of the new forms of volunteering, the third type in Thraenbardt's typology, is however already institutionalized borantia-katsudo (the Japanese adaptation of volunteer activity). This seems to be closely related to what the Ministry of Health and Welfare describes as over four million volunteers who are 'registered or recognized by municipal councils of social welfare' [5, p. 19].

Thraenbardt finally mentions 'non-institutionalized volunteers and other alternative groups' by employing the word 'residential movement'. This was a civic movement decidedly 'anti-establishment', either critical of government policy or of the misuse of power by business which peaked in the 1970s [5, p. 20].

Thereby, the state always tries to mold and influence civil society organizations to its liking by means of state-recognized institutions. Society provides such organizations with the resources to hire employees and establish offices. Regardless of institutions and establishments, citizens in practice form groups, communicate with other groups, and lobby for public policies [9, p. 84].

In the postwar period Japan institutionalized and consolidated its civil society by enacting a demo-

cratic constitution (1947) and a variety of laws legitimizing labor unions, agricultural cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, small- and medium-sized business cooperatives, and business associations. Japan went through a period of mass movements that culminated in a number of watershed events during the late 1950s and 1960s. This period carved the highest and sharpest notch in the record of establishing civil society organizations [9, p. 98].

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the postwar transformation of the Japanese civil society and the gradual development of civil society organizations as a part of voluntary sector.

During the postwar period the Japanese society underwent some changes. The main features of those changes were cultural, political and social. Confucian traditions were saved even in the new stage of development. Superiority of collective interests over individual ones, observance of order and sustainability, hierarchy had a great impact on the transformation of the civil society in Japan. Any attempts to break the boundary of social status or enter the field of State's activities were regarded as disrespect towards the state. So citizens started some

civic engagement carefully and slowly. Social pressure ensured the silence of dissenters, and prevented individualism. That's one of the Japanese civil society weaknesses.

One more feature of the civil society development was the existence of great political changes, such as enacting a democratic constitution and the variety of laws legitimizing different spheres of social, political and civil life. Civil society organizations became actors not only in the independent or pseudo-independent, voluntary sector, but have entered the new stage of reorganization. Being the part of Japanese civil society these organizations held some social and political movements, solved public problems and tried to stay afloat. However, as soon as the problem was solved, the movement disappeared.

To sum up, the postwar period in the development of the Japanese civil society was efficient. At that time the new wave of reconstruction was started. Later it influenced the cooperation of all the actors of civil society and the state. Thanks to this, Japan had got an experience in decision making at the state level in the second half of the 20th century.

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Роль некоммерческого сектора в развитии гражданского общества послевоенной Японии

Аннотация: В статье автор обращает внимание на основные моменты трансформации гражданского общества именно в послевоенный период. Хотя всплеск развития некоммерческого сектора пришелся на вторую половину 90-х годов XX века, это не означает, что до тех пор гражданского общества в Японии не существовало. Истоки развития гражданского общества уходят корнями еще в период Эдо (1603-1868), когда начали возникать определенные организации, направленные на помощь нуждающимся. А период Реставрации Мэйдзи (1868-1912) характеризуется становлением некоммерческого сектора, деятельность которого регламентировалась Гражданским кодексом (1896). Некоммерческий сектор всегда был важной составляющей гражданского общества в Японии. Тем не менее, считалось, что японское гражданское общество имеет слабо выраженный характер, и низкий порог гражданской активности. В первую очередь, это связано с традиционно-культурными аспектами развития японского общества в целом. Дело в том, что даже в послевоенный период, когда страна взяла курс

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на демократизацию, население придерживалось постулатов Конфуцианской идеологии. Именно доверие власти, уважение иерархии и превалирование общественных интересов над индивидуальными стало одной из слабых сторон развития гражданского общества. Социальный конформизм подчинил гражданское общество государству. В политической сфере также произошли некие изменения, которые повлияли на трансформацию гражданского общества и некоммерческого сектора в послевоенный период. В первую очередь, это касалось принятием новой конституции (1947) и ряда законов, которые регламентировали экономическую, социальную и политическую активность граждан. Курс на демократизацию не мог не повлиять на развитие некоммерческого сектора в целом. Некоммерческий сектор в послевоенный период характеризовался, в основном, развитием разных течений, например, экологических и антивоенных движений. Деятельность этих движений сыграла значимую роль в развитии гражданского общества, но не смогла вывести его на новый, более активный уровень. Ведь, эти движения были ориентированы на конкретные проблемы. И как только проблема решалась, движение исчезало.

Ключевые слова: гражданское общество, послевоенная Япония, некоммерческий сектор, неправительственные организация, неприбыльные организации.