

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345972046>

# Re-visiting political opportunity and mobilizing structures thesis: a comparative perspective on non-governmental organizations under diverse socio-political contexts in Tsujinaka...

Chapter · March 2015

---

CITATIONS

0

1 author:



**Murod Ismailov**

University of Tsukuba

10 PUBLICATIONS 4 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Telecollaboration as Inquire-based learning for enhancing Intercultural communications skills of Japanese students [View project](#)

CAJS MONOGRAPH

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN  
COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL, COMPARATIVE,  
AND ADVANCED JAPANESE STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF TSUKUBA

No.7

MARCH 2015



筑波大学人文社会科学研究所 国際比較日本研究センター

# CAJS MONOGRAPH

## CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

No. 7 MARCH 2015

EDITED BY YUTAKA TSUJINAKA AND WILLY JOU

HIROKAZU KIKUCHI AND YUTAKA TSUJINAKA PARTY SYSTEMS, ELECTORAL RULES, AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS: EVIDENCE FROM JAPAN INTEREST GROUP STUDY	7
MUROD ISMAILOV RE-VISITING POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY AND MOBILIZING STRUCTURES THESE: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS UNDER DIVERSE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXTS	37
WEI LIU CONFIGURATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS: A COMPARISON OF THE U.S.A, JAPAN AND CHINA	72
WILLY JOU DO INTEREST GROUP LEADERS REPRESENT THEIR MEMBERS? A PRELIMINARY COMPARATIVE STUDY	103
SHAKIL AHMED, YOHEI KOBASHI AND YUTAKA TSUJINAKA SERVICE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A CROSS NATIONAL ANALYSIS OF JAPAN INTEREST GROUP STUDY	122
SWASTI RAO CIVIL SOCIETY AS A RECONCILIATORY MECHANISM FOR ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY DILEMMAS OF DEMOCRACY THEORY	145

ISBN 978-4-902869-25-5

**Civil Society Organizations in  
Comparative Perspective**

Edited by Yutaka Tsujinaka and Willy Jou

CAJS Monograph Series No. 7

Center for International, Comparative, and  
Advanced Japanese Studies (CAJS)

University of Tsukuba

March 2015

**Re-visiting Political Opportunity and Mobilizing Structures Theses: a Comparative Perspective on Non-governmental Organisations under Diverse Socio-political Contexts**

Murod Ismailov

**Introduction**

The link between favourable political opportunity structures in a democratic country and the development of robust civil society organisations (CSOs) under such conditions is almost intuitive. But, to what extent is this proposition universally applicable? Is it possible to move beyond “favourable political opportunity-nascent civil society” nexus and look for answers elsewhere? For instance, comparably less attention so far has been directed toward mobilizing structures thesis to explain why CSOs flourish in one country and fail to deliver in others.

This theoretical essay aims at disclosing the key characteristics of both political opportunity and mobilizing structures theses to explain the emergence and development of civil society organisations – primarily the NGOs – in two Asian countries with comparably different structure of governance and political regime. The selection of country cases (Japan and China) are driven methodologically to follow the most different system design. To be specific, on the one hand we are looking at a country which has performed positively to insure political freedoms and civil liberties (Japan), and on the other, the one that has often been criticised for its poor performance in these areas (China). As

it will be seen later, this essay lies within a comparative dimension to the study of political opportunity and mobilizing structures.

Also, to comply with space constraints, this paper focuses primarily on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in various fields for the nature of activities and freedoms they enjoy is often an indicator of a healthy state of civil society in general. Amongst many forms of CSOs, perhaps with the exception of labour unions and political movements, the NGOs are capable more than others at engaging in political and non-political activities alike. Meanwhile, this essay recognises the existence of different forms that NGOs take in each country, and for purposes of analytic clarity it will not elaborate on each type separately, but will examine them in general terms.

Having observed the relevant literature in the field, the key proposition of this essay is that relying on political opportunity thesis as a sole facilitator behind the growth of NGOs and advocacy groups in democratic states and their limitations in non-democratic ones is too simplistic to explain their development and dynamic interaction with the rest of society. Though domestic political opportunity structures unquestionably play an important role in giving “the green light” to CSOs, by examining the case of both Japan and China, this essay further builds on the integrated approach which suggests the need for considering both political opportunity and mobilizing structures to facilitate CSO development and activities. The Japanese NGOs, especially until recently, are a good illustration to this argument. The question which is often asked is why despite being a procedural democracy, Japanese NGOs up until recently played a less vibrant role in the society as a whole. To be specific, even after

formal recognition of the Japanese NGOs as corporate entities and giving them unprecedented rights and freedoms as stipulated in the so-called NPO Law of 1998, these organisations continue to face a number of internal organisational challenges that are remotely related to the broader political environment, yet the ones that similarly prevent them from becoming dynamic organisations. On the other hand, as seen from both official and non-governmental sources, NGOs in comparably undemocratic China have in recent decades strengthened their position in the society (albeit under quasi-legal frameworks) and levelled up their broader involvement in non-political issues or those matters which do not directly challenge the image and authority of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its top leaders.

To explore these two varying trends in the Asian society and politics, I shall first bring to light some recent theoretical discussion of the role of political opportunities and mobilizing structures as regard to influencing the emergence and sustainable development of civic organisations, namely the NGOs. The essay will then characterise the peculiarities of NGO emergence and historico-political factors behind its development in Japan and China respectively. In the concluding section, this essay will examine some of the broader implications of comparing two different political regimes and their CSOs.

#### **A Theoretical Framework: How do Political Opportunity and Mobilizing Structures work?**

In their co-edited work *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* published almost two decades ago, Douglas McAdam, John McCarthy and

Mayer Zald carried out a comprehensive analysis of the voluminous literature on social movements and concluded that the central analytic foci of most scholarship in the area are on either one or the relationships between three factors to explain the emergence and development of social movements. Specifically, the scholars emphasised: (1) the structure of political environment which either facilitates or undermines the emergence of a social movement; (2) the internal capabilities, intentions and broader strategies which both informal and formal organisations exhibit; (3) the collective processes of interpretations and attribution that mediate between the previous two. These three factors were broadly referred to as *political opportunities*, *mobilizing structures* and *framing processes* (McAdam et al., 1996).

This essay will not discuss the third factor – the framing processes - in the main body of analysis for space constraints, yet this third factor may emerge briefly in the concluding paragraph because completely disregarding it would inevitably render this paper's propositions incomplete.

The original concept of *political opportunity structures* was introduced by Peter Eisinger (1973) who sought to explore the political conditions associated with incidence of political protest activities directed toward urban institutions, agencies, and officials in American cities. This work referred to the *political environment* capable of establishing a *context* within which a broader political process takes place. The relationships between such a context and the patterns of political behaviour become evident if the elements of the context are conceived as components of the particular structure of political opportunities of a community. Eisinger mentioned a number of such factors as the nature of



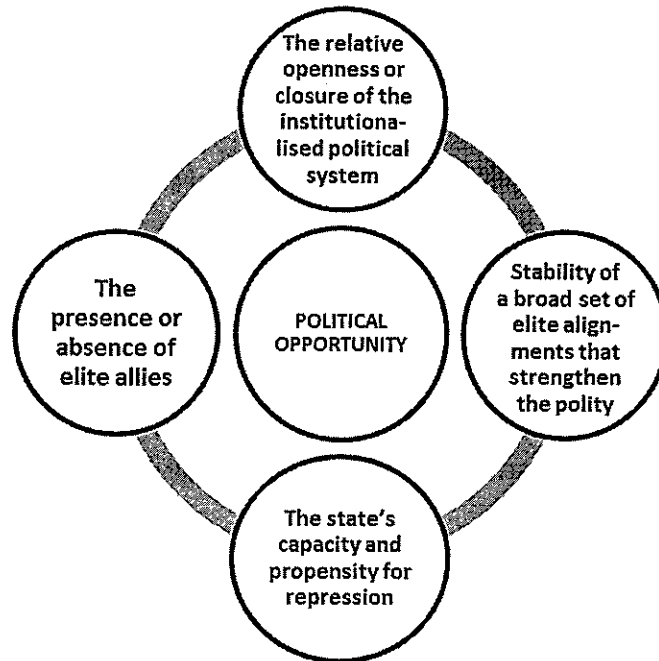
political authority, the electoral process, the distribution of social skills and status, and the degree of social disintegration, which individually or collectively serve to obstruct or facilitate citizen activity in pursuit of their social and political goals. Other factors, such as the climate of governmental responsiveness and the level of community resources are considered to increase the chances of success of citizen political activity. Political opportunity structures as seen in this way are about the broader environment which imposes certain constraints on political activity or opens avenues for it. The manner in which societal actors interact with/in the political system "is not simply a function of the resources they command but of the openings, weak spots, barriers, and resources of the political system itself" (Eisinger, 1973: 12).

In the subsequent years, the link between institutionalised politics and social movements was revisited and developed by political process theorists Douglas McAdam (1982) and Sidney Tarrow (1994). In the earlier mentioned work, McAdam and his colleagues seem to suggest that the development of the concept of political opportunity structure in North America and Europe did not differ considerably, apart from the fact that the American theorists looked at the emergence of social movements on the basis of "*changes in the institutional structure or informal power relations of a given national political system*", whereas European scholars (such as Kriesti, Koopmans, Duyvendak) pursued the goal of accounting for cross-national differences in the structure, extent, and success of comparable movements on the basis of "*differences in the political characteristics of the nation states in which they are embedded*" (McAdam et al., 1996; 3-10). The scholars representing both streams indeed appear to

endorse the vision that social movements (including NGOs) are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they operate.

The convergence of American and European scholarship devoted to the relationship between the political opportunity structure and the emergence of social movements is evident in the works by Brockett (1991), Kriesti et al (1992), Tarrow (1994) and McAdam (1996) who emphasised a number of conditions within a political system which influence the patterns of collective action. These four conditions or dimensions – openness of the political system, coherence within a broader political elite, the availability of elite structures that support the social movement, and a level of repressiveness by the state - make up a broader mechanism, which on the one hand includes the formal structure of political authority and people's access to the political system, and on the other hand, embraces informal and more contingent power relations with the political system (see, Figure 1.).

As suggested by McAdam et al (1996) each of these political opportunities play a certain role in facilitating the emergence of a particular form of collective action, and importantly, a change in any of the four opportunities may either boost or weaken this process. A cross national analysis is a useful tool to examine whether the differences in the institutional fabric of political systems have effects on the fate of particular social movements. For instance, the U.S. electoral traditions known as “winner takes all” and the traditions of partially proportional representation in Germany can clearly show



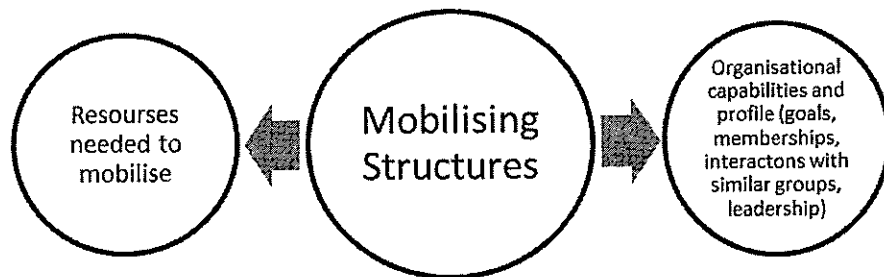
**Figure 1: Political opportunity structure and its dimensions (based on McAdam et al., 1996)**

the differences in the emergence and development of environmental movements, in that the latter has seen the environmental movement featuring a more systemic institutional character than its American counterpart (McAdam et al. 1996).

In the meantime, irrespective of the convenience that the political opportunity thesis offers to explain the growth and decline of social movements, these opportunities cannot be the only preconditions to collective action. As pointed by McAdam et al, if there is a lack of necessary organisation, such political opportunities can hardly be seized, if at all.

Thus this essay moves beyond the afore-mentioned concept and directs its focus on the second factor - *mobilizing structures*. Indeed, the institutional

processes within political systems can influence the prospects for collective action and the scope of such movements, and yet this process is also dependent on the nature of mobilising structures through which people build their collective action. Mobilising structures thesis is less complex than the political opportunity thesis and it appears to have developed around two issues: 1) availability of mobilising resources and 2) organisational profile of the group that seeks to represent the movement (Figure 2). Both of these elements work jointly for the same purpose to make the movement strong enough to adapt in and interact with the broader political and social environment.



**Figure 2: Mobilising Structures (based on McAdam et al., 1996)**

The contemporary focus on the mobilising structures was largely inspired by earlier works of resource mobilisation theorists who departed from the grievance-based foundations of social movements and went further to examine mobilization processes and their formal organisational manifestations (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). One example of the importance of movement's organisational capability could be seen in the way how it sets its goals. To interact effectively with the wider political and organisational environment, social movements rely on their goals, in the sense that the reactions of other

stakeholders (government, groups opposing the movement or the organisation, allies, etc.) are shaped to a considerable degree by the movement's stated goals. As noted by McAdam et al (1996), "encoded in those goals are perceived threats to the interests of some groups and opportunities for the realisation of others". Therefore, the level of antagonism and support extended to a particular social movement or organisation is derived from the perception of threat and opportunity embodied in the group's goals. Some studies have previously found that groups, whose goals required the challenging ("displacing") of their opponents were considerably less likely to succeed than those whose objectives were less antagonistic or "non-displacing" (Gamson, 1990).

In short, what the current essay is seeking to examine is that both factors – political opportunities and mobilising structures – are not independent from one another and that they converge to provide an important contexts behind the emergence and development of social organisations in Japan and China.

### **Political Opportunities and Mobilising Structures behind NGO development in Japan**

As it was noted earlier, Japan could provide a good case to show that political opportunity proposition alone may not be capable of explaining the factors behind the growth of NGOs, and that a serious attention should be devoted to the interaction with other factors, including organisational profile of such entities. In this section, I shall attempt to examine both political opportunities available for the creation of Japanese NGOs and the mobilizing structures which they employ to organise and work with other societal actors.

Again, for analytic clarity we shall employ the term “NGOs” as opposed to “Non-Profit Organisations” (NPOs) which is a widely-used term by local scholars, politicians and social organisations since the latter appears to highlight the voluntary, non-commercial essence of this organisation, and to some degree removes the sense of anti-governmental agenda.

If one returns to Eisinger’s original concept of political opportunity structures suggesting the broader environment that imposes certain constraints on political activity or opens avenues for it (1973: 12), then the recent history of NGO development in Japan can prove both of these outcomes relevant. In this regard, the perception of the Japanese NGO policy has been shaped by the broader context of occasionally appearing controversies in Japan’s political system.

On the one hand, both Western and domestic scholars have argued that Japan when compared to many other non-Western countries is indeed a dynamic democracy in which political elites and parties are accountable to the public and respond to citizen’s concerns and the media (Kabashima & Steel, 2010; Mouer & Sugimoto, 2003, others). On the other hand, it is also mentioned that the Japanese society despite formally endorsing a democratic process represents a stagnant set of entrenched interests in addition to a daily occurrence of basic rights violations which could hardly be labelled democratic (Yoneyama, 1999; Gill, 2001; Yanase, 2000). In a purely political context and somewhat reverberating this assumption, Stockwin (1999) suggested that the Japanese public itself bears responsibility for the failure of the democratic process, and moves further to refer to the notion of “spectator democracy” in which

uninvolved and apathetic voters do not choose parties or candidates according to policy preferences or ideological commitments but simply deliver their vote as a procedural (if not moral) obligation. Based on aforementioned assumptions it could be the case that to evaluate the genuine nature of a political process in Japan one has to account for the convergence of both formal democratic institutions and older - perhaps culturally and socially-specific - informal arrangements continuing to persist in modern day Japan.

If so, what implications do these tendencies have for the emergence and activities of the Japanese NGOs? In other words, do the domestic political environment and the opportunity structures represent a major advantage or obstacle for NGO activity? To answer these questions, I return to the analytic framework developed by the Euro-American consortium of political process theorists (see, Figure 1) who emphasised a number of dimensions within a political system which shapes the patterns of collective action, including:

1. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system;
2. Stability of a broad set of elite alignments that strengthen the polity;
3. The presence or absence of elite allies;
4. The state's capacity and propensity for repression.

If one examines the political processes that swept across Japan since the establishment of the 1955 system of the LDP-dominated democracy up to the point in mid 1990s when the Diet had passed the ground-breaking NPO Law, then it becomes clear that not all four dimensions have had equally direct relationship to the slow process of NGO crystallisation. For example, we can

hardly consider state repression as a relevant issue if applied to the case of the post-war Japan up to modern days. Regardless of the controversies that Japanese-style democracy reflects, the Japanese political authorities have never resorted to repressive measures vis-à-vis political opponents, movements or the general public. Similarly, one could find it hard to link the overall performance of the Japanese NGOs to political patronage. Indeed, it has been very hard for NGOs in Japan to cultivate elite allies at the national level, largely due to antagonistic and paternalistic stance of the bureaucrats toward them (Reimann, 2002; Yonemoto, 1994). While accepting that further research should be done on this subject matter, it is stressed that compared to political movements, labour unions and business corporations, an average Japanese NGO by definition can interact with various echelons of the political establishment under various welfare and environmental project without necessarily retaining tacit support from above.

In this respect, the analysis of the impact of political opportunity structure on the formation of NGO activity in Japan should be seen through the lens of a broader access to the institutionalised political system (item 1) and to a slightly lesser extent in the context of the stability of elite alignments that in theory strengthens the state (item 2). Both of these dimensions interplay closely to explain why Japan was the last among the industrialised nations to allow for the free and legitimate activities of non-governmental organisations.

It has to be noted that prior to passing of the 1998 NPO Law, post-war Japan had witnessed a varying degree of civic participation on both political and non-political matters starting with the controversy over the revision of the US-



Japan Security Treaty in 1959-1960, which had split the Japanese public opinion into two political camps. The progressive camp represented by the active citizens showed its opposition to retaining close ties with the U.S., but it was comparatively weaker than the conservative block which resulted in the defeat of the former. Importantly, these events had catalysed the emergences of a new civic movement driven not by the political parties or labour unions, but by the citizens themselves (Hasegawa, 2005). In the years that followed such civic movements became increasingly involved in a broad range of activities such as anti-pollution (1960s) and “No nuclear plants” campaigns (1970s). Despite the growing public awareness about the positive outcomes of such movements and a steady growth of their social base, the politico-bureaucratic system was highly unfavourable toward such movements, partly due to prevailing “citizen as supplicant” psychology, an expression coined by Campbell (1989).

This prevalent paternalism of the bureaucrat-driven state – also perceived to be the key side-effect of the LDP system – did not allow for the “institutionalisation of NGOs” and their activities. Based on Hasegawa’s understanding of the process (2005, 117), up until the beginning of 1990s the Japanese political establishment did not consider NGOs and similar social advocacy groups as organisations capable of addressing issues effectively apart from perpetrating societal havoc through direct action and demonstrations. Yet, after easing of the legal constraints and changing politicians’ attitudes toward NGOs in late 1990s, it became apparent that the latter could employ more credible means of civic participation, including through ordinances, petitions, assembly deliberations, elections or creating new institutional frameworks.

Such a dramatic shift in attitudes toward NGOs and recognition of their wider societal role was due to a major catalyst event – the Kobe earthquake of 1995 – which killed thousands of people and destroyed almost half a million buildings. This tragic event has also uncovered serious deficiencies in government's crisis management and contingency planning policies and prompted an unprecedented public response when thousands of people and communities took the initiative and organised rescue and relief operations. Thus, the Kobe earthquake had not only humanitarian impact but also socio-political consequences eventually paving the way to the parliamentary deliberations culminating in passing of a new NGO-friendly legislation.

To suggest that the Kobe earthquake was the key driver behind shifting of the attitudes toward CSOs would be a slight underestimation of the broader processes that appeared on the Japanese political horizons some time before the Kobe event. These processes are usually associated with the steady descent of once-powerful LDP system which embraced political elite, bureaucrats and the CEOs of huge business conglomerates (all-together known as “the Iron triangle”) as a result of numerous corruption scandals involving the members of all three groups. For the same reason, these processes were triggered by the apparent internal fragmentations of the LDP in 1993 which caused the dissolution of the lower house of Diet and the defeat of LDP in the general elections that followed.

By the beginning of the 1990s as a result of continuing public outcry, the political circles took serious initiatives to reform the current system which not only strengthened their own policy-making tools but in the meantime enlarged

citizen's control over politicians' actions (Kabashima and Steel, 2010). In this regard, the 1998 NPO Law which created the favourable political opportunity structure for fostering NGOs sector should be considered in close connection to a wider package of administrative, public accountability and parliamentary reforms enacted in the first half of 1990s. These included Administrative Procedural Law (1993), The Revised Political Funds Regulation Law (1994), Decentralisation Law (1995) and Information Disclosure Law (1998) among other legislative initiatives.

As the thorny path of Japanese NGO development demonstrates, the political opportunity structure appears to be a complex set of interactions between various sub-factors. On the one hand, it is the unfavourable legal environment that blocked the development of NGO sector for a long time, and facilitated its relative backwardness when compared to other developed democracies. On the other hand, the legal framework that prevailed for many years appears to have been the reflection of a much broader environment in which citizens restrained themselves from displaying a strong sense of independence and a robust capacity for criticism. As Hasegawa notes (2005, 116), that is why the LDP politicians and government bureaucrats up until the last moment had avoided the inclusion of the word "citizen" into the 1998 NPO legislation. In addition to all these, the stability of a broad set of elite alignments (which according to the political process theorists should strengthen the state) as seen in the demise of the LDP structures, has also played one of the crucial parts.

The evolutionary process of the Japanese NGO formation before and after the passing of the NPO Law reveals another interesting trend: though the

creation of favourable political opportunity certainly has had a positive impact on increasing the number of organisations – e.g. the government had received 9,427 applications for certification in 2002 and approved 8,679 (Hasegawa, 2005) – the key challenge is their poor organisational profile, insufficient human and financial resources and lack of dynamism compared to other industrialised democracies. Japan’s “dual civil society” – expression coined by Robert Pekkanen (2006) – is perhaps the most appropriate illustration to the argument that even the creation of a sympathetic political environment cannot boost the dynamism in social organisations unless the appropriate mobilizing structures are in place. Mobilising structures thesis with its emphasis on both mobilising resources and organisational profile (membership, leadership, stated goals, public relations, etc.) is therefore a necessary addition to the political opportunities thesis to explain the factors why Japanese NGOs lag behind their counterparts found elsewhere in the democratic world.

Pekkanen’s work appears to have put a big emphasis on the role of legal, regulatory, and financial instruments of the state in Japan to shape the organisation of civil society, which the author calls the “political institutional” argument, and yet he admits that the state-induced regulatory framework did not only push Japan’s large social movements toward institutional failure, but also negatively affected their ability to attract resources and human capital (2006: 7-8).

Thus, in terms of mobilising structures, the key obstacle for the sustainable and effective functioning of social organisations, such as NGOs, and importantly for their capacity to influence the public sphere is their weak

internal organisation, especially lack of professionals who have the expertise to raise funds, attract more members, propose innovative ideas to reach out the public and political forces and so on. By looking comparatively just at one case – the Japanese seniors clubs (*rojinkai*) and the American Association of the Retired Persons of the United States (AARP), Pekkanen admits that the latter with its annual budget of almost \$700 million and 2,000 employees of whom about 150 being professional policy and legislative staffers, is much more institutionally fit to influence policy outcomes than its Japanese counterpart. Hasegawa (2005: 110) provides another interesting comparison between Greenpeace Netherlands and Greenpeace Japan which have 600,000 and 4,500 members respectively, considering that the population of Japan is eight times larger than that of the Netherlands.

Notably, both of the afore-mentioned authors explain this situation not just by the political-institutional arguments, but also by the existence non-political aspects, such as the existence of “inward-looking consumer-identity focused groups” (Pekkanen, 2006: 8) or “progressively apolitical new generations who regards themselves as the blessed beneficiaries of the affluent culture and the leading actors in the consumer society” (Hasegawa, 2005: 112). These factors both directly and indirectly highlight the increasing integration of political opportunity and mobilising structures as a more fitting explanations of the deficiencies in the Japanese civil society in general.

### **The driving forces behind the emergence of NGO sector in China**

In 2013 *China Daily* cited the Chinese minister of Civil Affairs

suggesting that as of the beginning of that year closer to 500,000 NGOs employing almost 12 million people had registered with civil affairs authorities at different levels. Though these figures seem to be unimaginable in a country with an embryonic state of its democratic institutions and low levels of political rights (especially, compared to our previous case – Japan), the examination of relevant sources and literature appears to be supporting the official rhetoric. However, there remains a number of puzzling questions, including: What exactly constitutes a social organisation, or generally the NGO sector in China? Is it as vibrant and widespread as the Chinese official rhetoric suggests? In this paragraph, the essay will look through the recent evolution of state/society relations in China and will again bring to light the political opportunity and mobilising structures propositions to examine their shared impact on the emergence and development of a specific type of civil society in the country.

Some of the recently published works note that NGOs as a new phenomenon in the Chinese socio-political landscape are gradually becoming an independent sector that is distinctive from the state and businesses, and that they strive to retain their non-governmental characteristics in their organizational operations (e.g. Ma, 2006; Chan, 2005; Lu, 2009). The same cohort of authors also argued that the current state of NGO sphere in China is heavily intertwined with and influenced by domestic political culture, the party-state's continuing intervention in the private sector, and the influence of globalisation which shapes the nature of associational life in numerous ways. For example, Ma points out that the "complicated identities, unstable growth, and ambiguous autonomy of NGOs are very much a part of their emergence from a society that

is still under the control of a party-state and that historically lacks a strong civil society tradition” (2006: 77). It is also worth noting that the question of autonomy – perhaps the most crucial element in the Western conceptualisation of civil society – does not often appear in the list of conditions that characterize the effectiveness of such entities in China’s broader societal setting. As such, NGOs in China do not always struggle for autonomy from the state, quite contrary, they may strategically turn to the state to secure the political and economic resource required for their mobilisation (Chan, 2005: 20).

This kind of “political adaptation” function that a significant number of NGOs exhibit in contemporary China, on the one hand creates an analytic puzzle for the application of the political opportunity structure proposition because these organisations seem to have successfully adjusted to the formal requirements of the state while pursuing their strategic goals; on the other hand, the Chinese political establishment since 1989 has continued to reinforce its selective political, legal and regulatory control making it difficult for an average social organisation to survive and advance its cause.

A quick look at the dimensions that constitute the core of political opportunity proposition forces one to bring and apply all of them to the Chinese case, whereas we only used two dimensions to examine NGO development dynamics in Japan. Also, for China, it would be appropriate to change the order of priority in which these dimensions are listed, namely: 1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system; 2) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression; 3) the presence or absence of elite allies; 4) stability of a broad set of elite alignments that strengthen the polity.

We start with the nature of the institutional political system in China and its transformation in the past several decades which has undoubtedly shaped the domestic opportunity structures and facilitated both the emergence and decline of country's NGOs. In this regard, a caveat should be added that the key challenge of "researching Chinese politics is that models of political change are more visible than models of political regime itself" (Kukubu, cited in Hongwei, 2002: 8). In other words, the massive and unprecedented economic reforms designed to undo the negative effects of Mao's Cultural Revolution since late 1970s with their broader political and societal implications do not necessarily translate in the dramatic change of the nature of CCP-controlled political regime, but rather in the approach it had adopted to ensure the system's survival.

The key argument here is that the consequences of the Cultural Revolution in which case the ideology of communism and personality cult had undermined the social stability, and eventually prompted the new generation of communist leaders re-evaluate both the grand-strategy of economic revitalisation and the mechanisms of state control over the public life, ended up creating a relatively favourable opportunity structure to foster associational life of the Chinese citizens. This process of change had been pushed forward first and foremost by the market forces. The CCP's decision to expand the role of markets in the economy triggered the establishment of micro market structures in rural China along with the expansion of enterprises' autonomy from the state in urban settings. Walder (1991) notes that the change in the speed and scope of nation-wide market liberalisation which allowed workers to move freely for the search of jobs and services meant that the CCP could no longer control people



politically via the work unit system.

As the proportion of industrial productivity by the Chinese state-run enterprises fell from 80.8 percent in 1978 to 26 percent in 1997, it signified a considerable loss of state's monopoly over economic activity and in Chan's view (2005: 20) the rise of the second economy created a middle class comprised of private entrepreneurs, managers and professionals. Also, in the beginning of 1990s a number of official conferences had widely discussed a new format of political reforms to be conducted under "small government, big society" idea. By the time of the 9<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress, the government had announced that along with decreasing the state intervention into the economic sphere and gradually cutting the size of government, social organisations to mediate between households/individuals and the state were to be promoted to advance the concept of market socialism (ibid).

Based on Chan's analysis (1999) one can suggest that the government's grand-strategy to boost economic activity and facilitate vibrant market relations had an unprecedented effect on the "NGOisation" (to use McMichael's term) of the Chinese society, yet this complex process involved both "causal" and "consequential" conditions. On the causal side, the new opportunity structure for the growth of NGOs or similar kinds of social organisations emerged due to the two factors. One, non-state enterprises could no longer count on government's planning departments to advance their productivity and sales, and therefore, business organisations, industry associations and research societies were rapidly established to resolve main challenges of the new market system. Second, as I mentioned earlier, the economic reforms had created large private-sector

enterprises which employed a mass of professionals and workers who could hardly be controlled by the political authorities and be subject to the welfare provisions of the old-style work units. Chan suggests that new forms of organisation, such as professional associations, were required to connect to the state and seek its support when needed (foreign contracts, visa applications, etc).

On the consequential part, Chan's study suggests the existence of two issues. First, the economic reforms could not be implemented without creating a number of social challenges, environmental degradation, poverty, inequality, unemployment, and yet in the meantime reducing the government's welfare commitment to workers through the old methods. These problems necessitated the emergence of non-state organisations that could deliberate and resolve them. Secondly, and somewhat interestingly, the emergence of more leisure time because of the reduced work week from six to five days resulted in expanding people's participation in cultural, religious, sports and friendship groups, which often grew larger and acquired organisational characteristics.

Thus, the above mentioned could be seen as a set of highly positive steps that boosted the emergence and strengthening of the Chinese non-governmental organisations. But, compared to Japan, dealing with the peculiarities of the Chinese NGOs policy proves more problematic due to the existing pressures from state on almost all actors that can or potentially could challenge the legitimacy of the CCP and the central government. China after all is a leading headlines maker when it comes to a crackdown on opposition, human rights and separatism movements. Chinese political regime continues to employ repressive measures against the political descent, and for that reason it is considered, if not

totalitarian, but certainly an authoritarian regime.

With the inevitable liberalisation of the society made possible by the market reforms, the changing nature of the political regime is often a matter of discussions among scholars. Hongwei argues that the contemporary political regime in China is neither authoritarian, nor is it moving in that direction. Marketization of the society and weakening of the political control over provincial populations meant that the central government could no longer maintain the same power structures as before, which turned it into the “Multi-layered Centralised Regime” (Hongwei, 2002: 215). In a similar vein, Chan (2005: 22) employs Linz’s definition and argues that the contemporary China which started to see a limited social and economic pluralism with the growth of its second economy, looks very much like “a post-totalitarian” state.

Regardless of the changing institutional dynamics in China, its society is still miles away from the triumph of political pluralism. This means that along with being relatively favourable vis-à-vis certain forms of associations, the Chinese government remains highly suspicious of those organisations that advance anti-government agendas. Holding the right balance between “good guys” and “bad guys” in the NGO sector have proven almost impossible task, and as such, the legal and procedural restrictions imposed by the government are generally non-discriminatory and apply equally to both pro-governmental and “underground” NGOs. In this respect, studying the political opportunity structure for NGO sector in China turns out to be quite a complex subject.

Following the Tiananmen student protest in the summer of 1989 the Chinese government had tightened its control of various civil associations which

culminated in the adoption of the Regulations Governing Registration and Administration of Social Organisations. This regulation was further amended in 1998. The cumulative effect of these regulations is widely considered to be threefold: First, the government-induced measures had made it a norm that only one non-governmental organisation was allowed to register in the same administrative region. Secondly, hidden under the slogan of advancing the “state corporatism”, both the old and the amended regulations have made it obligatory for social organisations to be formally attached to the government unit or department working in the same field, as the latter became known as “official sponsors” (Baogang, 2003: 127). Thirdly, and as part of a final stage of registration process, the social organisations were required to obtain formal approval by registering with the appropriate Department of Civil Affairs. This practice of “dual supervision” has certainly created a serious impediment for the emergence of new NGOs, and it has also affected the autonomy of such social organisations because the supervising bodies were obliged to inspect their activities, relationships and finances (Chan, 2005: 25).

Interestingly, the practice of “dual supervision” is crucial in highlighting the role of available elite allies – one the four dimensions of political opportunity proposition. This dimension appears to have several manifestations. First, the regulatory practice requiring official sponsorship by a relevant government unit had created opportunities for those organisations that had personal connections and made it near impossible to obtain registration for those who lacked such connections. As noted by Chan assuming the responsibility for the activities and misdoings by a protégé meant that government departments

considered this whole process as “a burden discouraging them to sponsor any registration applications unless there are material interests or personal connections involved” (2005:25).

Secondly, there are numerous field studies which found that the practice of “dual supervision” had made the newly established Chinese NGOs highly susceptible to the decisions of their supervising sponsors on matters of leadership. One study showed that more than 70 per cent of social organisations were actually run by party-state officials assisted by people who have previously transferred from those government departments (White *et al*, 1996). In addition, beyond material interests and formal connections, what made some social organisations less vulnerable to the party-state’s regulatory pressures were kinship structures and family relationships. Baogang argues that the children of party-state officials have seized opportunities created by the reforms to establish their companies and entities designed to advance the development of enterprises with little risk or effort. In Baogang’s view, this has become an inevitable feature of China’s civil society which was manifested in some degree of overlap with the party-state (2003: 130).

The final question remains as to the extent the structural and institutional changes within the Communist Party and elite alliances might have affected the political opportunity structures for the growth of NGOs. It has to be noted that the initiation and subsequent implementation of massive economic reforms with apparently liberalizing effects on the society could not be possible without some degree of bargaining between conservative-hardliners and soft-liner elements of the CCP elite. In the apparent success of the soft-liners’ camp supported by

Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese politics had transformed dramatically, and to some degree allowed easing of ideological standards, criticism of the Maoist political models and a strengthening of provincial governments. Thus, the interplay of various intra-party coalitions resulting in the strengthening of the reformist forces had an indirect, but nonetheless a powerful impact on the dynamics of civil society development in 1980s and 1990s.

As this essay's key argument was explained in the introductory paragraph, to understand why NGOs grow and fail in different societal settings, one has to look beyond a single explanation and where possible search for answers in a broader analytic context. China too, despite its colossal differences when compared to Japan, presents a case where political opportunity structures alone cannot explain the growth of those social organisations that do not directly challenge the legitimacy of the CCP and the central government. Regardless of the political and regulatory pressures imposed by the party-state on NGOs, it appears that the Chinese NGOs have learnt in recent decades how to adapt their mobilising structures and be part of country's "legitimate" civil society. There are several aspects which are worth pointing out.

First, compared to the static nature of most Japanese NGO's Chinese NGOs have learnt how to turn obstacles into opportunities. As it was already mentioned, the legal framework created by the state makes thousands of organisations unable to meet the requirements for registering with the Civil Affairs Department, often because similar organisations already exist in this administrative area. Under such a situation, many organisations opt for avoiding this rules and routine government inspections. Chan calls these NGOs

“patronised intermediate organisations” which seek shelter under government units, private enterprises or even registered social organisations (Chan, 2005: 28). These quasi-legitimate organisations, unless they do not intentionally involve in illegal or politically sensitive activities can operate under the patronage of those formal institutions continuously and with no inspection by the state authorities. Chan mentions Goa’s study suggesting that private enterprises and universities are the most frequent patrons for these “intermediary organisations” (Gao, cited in Chan, 2005: 28).

Secondly, in the context of authoritarian political system of China one should expect that it will permit the activities of those which do not pose the challenge to the authority of party-state, but will be hostile toward those organisations that openly advocate anti-government policies. Studies suggest that there are certain types of NGOs that will have better chances of success, such as those working in environmental, social welfare and educational spheres, and therefore these “non-threatening” organisations often have much more robust mobilising structures. In addition, Guobin notes that these forms of organisations in China not only adapt to political environment, but also seize opportunities offered by media, the internet and foreign NGOs (Guobin, 2005). In that sense, the NGOs are dependent on the interaction between what Guobin calls “organisational entrepreneurs” who play a key part in resource mobilization, and “enthusiast individuals” who strengthen the organisation while pursuing self-fulfilment and personal growth.

Thirdly, almost all scholars focusing on China’s civil society mentioned in this essay admit that the key impediment for the growth of existing NGOs is

insufficient funding. Even the official conferences held in early 1990s with aim to promote the idea of “state corporatism” reiterated that under new economic conditions, social organisations should be given more autonomy in order to achieve “the three selves” – self-governance, self-management, and self-support. In the subsequent years, it became clear that the last condition was problematic because the government has been cutting its financial aid to these organisations. This problem in the mobilising structure has pushed almost all NGOs (both registered and “patronised intermediate” ones) toward resource-driven agenda. As Chan’s study suggested, the NGOs needing political and even minimal economic resources from the state have sought to become semi-official, while official and semi-official groups which want resources from foreign agencies and their communities, opted for becoming non-governmental (Chan, 2005: 34).

These aspects highlight that the Chinese NGO sector has both opportunities and problems as regard to the mobilising resources. There should be no illusion that because of their “adaptability” the Chinese NGOs are more effective than those in Japan. The paradox of the NGO dynamic in China is that when they are effective at “getting things resolved” and are successful in ensuring their organisational existence, this creates their disfunctionality or ineffectiveness in helping the disadvantaged and serving the interests of their members (Lu, 2009). Overall, the last two paragraphs sought to examine more the interdependence between political-institutional and intra-organisational conditions for the development of NGOs in Japan and China, rather than highlighting the individual characteristics of each propositions.



**In lieu of conclusion: Implications for NGO development in Asia's diverse socio-political landscape**

The previous sections have shown that notwithstanding the differences in the character of their political regimes the growth and decline of social organisations in contemporary Japan and China seem to rest on a multi-layered set of factors none of which alone can claim the analytic dominance over another. This essay argues that the success of social organisations in both countries was possible due to their ability to manoeuvre and find the right balance between the available political opportunities and mobilising structures. As the case of China demonstrates, non-democratic setting is not necessarily an impassable hurdle when it comes to ensuring the NGO dynamism, and that organisations with robust mobilising structures and clear strategies can find their niche in society. Contrary to this, the recent trend in NGO development in Japan indicates that *de jure* democratic system may not automatically facilitate the activities of social organisations unless they do not professionalise and strengthen their organisational structure and operational methods.

To be specific, the selection and subsequent examination of these two country cases reveals a number of similarities in the manner in which the NGOs have developed. These similarities equally relate to both political opportunity and mobilizing structures.

To highlight the political opportunities field, this essay argues that a steady positive transformation of the NGO policy in both countries became possible due to dramatic structural and politico-institutional change which created a comparatively more fertile ground for cultivating social organisations.

In China, the number and the quality of NGOs increased as an upshot of market liberalisation and due to lessening of the state intervention in private and social life. Japan too had witnessed the major political crises which delegitimised the image of once-dominant LDP strongmen and their affiliates from business corporations and bureaucracy. These crises in Japan had a profound impact on the mobilisation of politically conscious groups under numerous social organisations which was lately recognised by the conservative political elite and bureaucrats. Importantly, in both cases, the improvement of the political opportunity structure has been accompanied by a number of important legislative initiatives related either to the NGOs (Japan) or to the civil law (China). The latter case is of course highly arguable because of the adoption of tight NGO regulations in 1989 and 1998. And yet, the adaptability of China's social organisations under tough legal environment and their ability to circumvent government-imposed regulations should nevertheless be considered a positive trend.

In addition, both Japan and China, though at different chronological periods, had experienced catalyst events which not only emboldened such groups' resolve and confidence in the collective action, but also have sent a clear signal to the governments that collective action (only if non-politicized, as seen in China's case) could in fact lay a foundation for self-governance at the local level. In Japan, it was the Kobe earthquake of 1995, where as in China the 2008 earthquake in the Sichuan Province have played such a triggering role.

On the question of mobilising structures, the majority of both Japanese and Chinese NGOs seem to be facing an analogous set of problems which

directly concern their organisational mobility and operational effectiveness. Among these challenges are insufficient funding and lack of professionals who keep playing the most crucial role in the advancement of NGOs in Western Europe and North America. Both of these challenges were meant to be resolved by the social organisations themselves as part of decreasing state intervention. And yet, one can observe that for the majority organisations the issues of mobilising resources, staffing their offices, expanding their membership circles, organising fund-raising campaigns and improving their management styles have proven to be even more challenging than working under a tough regulatory framework.

In any case, as numerous field studies show, the difficulties of resource mobilisation have produced opportunities to some, and constraints to others. For example a lot of social organisations both in Japan and China are currently broadening their foreign or community-oriented fund-raising campaigns. Those organisations that lack the minimal resource pool and capable staff to do such work either vanish, or as the China's example demonstrates, turn to the state for funding opportunity to become semi-official organisations but lose their non-governmental status.

Overall, this essay confirms the most recent research (e.g. Pekkanen *et al*, 2014) that social organisations are more likely to succeed when they seize political opportunities and have effective mobilizing structures in which the organisational profile and innovativeness is particularly appreciated. The chosen case studies have also demonstrated that despite existing problems, there is a realisation, as put by Babb (2001), that NGOs will continue to represent a "new

way of doing politics” and a new vision of “political culture” which will generate practices of good governance and incorporate the voices of different societal actors.

Intentionally, this essay did not examine the third stream of scholarly research on social organisations – the framing processes – which David Snow had initially defined as “the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the worlds and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action” (Snow *et al*, 1986). We did not touch on the framing processes for, as its definition shows, it constitutes a separate and not least interesting field deserving special analytic attention.

## References

- Babb, F. 2001. *After Revolution: Mapping Gender and Cultural Politics in Neoliberal Nicaragua*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Baogang, H. 2003. "The Making of a Nascent Civil Society in China." In D.C. Schak and Wayne Hudson (eds.), *Civil Society in Asia*. Ashgate.
- Brockett, C.D. 2005. *Political Movements and Violence in Central America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, J.C. 1989. "Democracy and Bureaucracy in Japan." In T. Ishida and E. Krauss (eds.), *Democracy in Japan*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Chan, K.-M. 1999. "Intermediate Organisations and Civil Society: The Case of Guangzhou." In C.-C. Lau and X. Geng (eds.), *China Review 1999*. Honk Kong: Chinese University Press 1999, pages 259-284.
- Chan, K.-M. 2005. "The development of NGOs under a post-totalitarian regime. The Case of China." In R.P. Weller (ed.), *Civil Life, Globalisation, and Political Change in Asia: Organising between Family and State*. Routledge, London.
- Eisinger, P. 1973. 'The Conditions of Protest Behaviour in American Cities', *American Political Science Review* 67: 11-28.
- Gamson, W. 1990. *Strategy of Social Protest*. Second Edition. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Gill, T. 2000. *Men of Uncertainty: The Social Organisation of Day Labourers in Contemporary Japan*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Guobin, Y. 2005. Environmental NGOs and Institutional Dynamics in China. *The China Quarterly*, 181: 46-66.
- Hasegawa, K. 2005. "The Development of NGO activities in Japan: A new civil culture and institutionalisation of civic action." In R.P. Weller (ed.), *Civil Life, Globalisation, and Political Change in Asia: Organising between Family and State*. Routledge, London.
- Hongwei, Z. 2002. *Political Regime of Contemporary China*. University Press of America.
- Ito, S. and R. Yanase. 2000, *Coming Out in Japan*, Trans Pacific Press, Melbourne.
- Kabashima, I. and G. Steel. 2010. *Changing Politics in Japan*. Ithaca and London: Cornell

University Press.

- Kriesi, H, R. Koopmans, J.W. Duyvendak, and G. Giugni. 1992. 'New social movements and political opportunities in Western Europe', *European Journal of Political Research* 22: 219-244.
- Lu, Y. 2009. *Non-Governmental Organisations in China: The rise of dependent autonomy*. China Policy Series. Routledge, London
- Ma, Q. 2006. *Non-Governmental Organizations in Contemporary China: paving the way to a civil society?* Routledge contemporary China series. Routledge, London
- McAdam, D. 1982. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- McAdam, D., J.D. McCarthy, and M.N. Zald (eds.). 1996. *Comparative perspectives on social movements: Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, J.D. and M.N. Zald. 1977. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 82:1212-41
- McMichael, P. 2000. *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Mouer, R.E. and Y. Sugimoto. 2003. "Civil Society in Japan" in David C. Schak and Wayne Hudson (eds.), *Civil Society in Asia*. Ashgate.
- Pekkanen, R. 2006. *Japan's Dual Civil Society: Members Without Advocates*. Stanford University Press.
- Pekkanen, R.J., S.R. Smith, and Y. Tsujinaka (eds.). 2014. *Nonprofits and Advocacy: Engaging Community and Governance in an Era of Retrenchment*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Reimann, K.D. 2002. "Building Networks from the Outside In: Japanese NGOs and the Kyoto Climate Change Conference. *Political Science Faculty Publications*. Georgia State University. Paper 6.
- Snow, D.A., R.B. Rochford, Jr., S.K. Worden, and R.D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51: 464-481.
- Stockwin, J.A.A. 1999. *Japan: Divided Politics in a Growth Economy*. New York: W.W.Norton
- Tarrow, S. 1994. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Walder, G.A. 1991. "Workers, Managers, and the State: The Reform Era and the Political Crisis of 1989." *China Quarterly* 127: 467-492.

White, G., J. Howell, and X. Shang. 1996. *In Search of Civil Society: Market Reform and Social Change in Contemporary China*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Yonemoto, S. 1994. *Chikyu kankyo mondai to wa nana ka*. (Explaining global environmental problems). Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho.

Yoneyama, S. 2000. *Japanese High School: Silence and Resistance*, Routledge. London