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THE INTERRELATION OF STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN JAPAN

A CASE STUDY OF TWO CONTEMPORARY NGOS, *JAPAN*
PLATFORM AND IMADR

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the type of relations existing between the state and civil society in Japan. The main concern of the researcher was to discover particular cases where NGOs have been successful in influencing governmental policies. The paper presents a case study of two contemporary organizations, Japan Platform and IMADR, which have similar spheres of activities but can be distinguished by their different relations with the Japanese government. The data has been collected through interviews with NGO representatives and government officials, as well as literature reviews.

The results of the study show that the state of civil society, though still being rather fragile, has made a shift towards becoming more active and less dependent on the government in certain issues. It has been found out that the spheres of activities of the NGOs play a significant role in either success or failure to influence the governmental policies. Cooperation with the government, despite giving advantages in terms of funding and freer access to different areas of activity, also represents obstacles such as the limitation of autonomy and mistrust from other non-governmental organizations. Religious and racial neutrality and non-involvement in conflicts are the main advantages of the Japanese civil sector, which will allow it to preserve their impartial stand and relative independence from the state.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, when the world is shattered by urgent calls to join the ‘war’ against terrorism, many countries are changing their policies and indirectly fuelling militarization in their states. Japan, which, irrespective of its written pacifist Constitution, is taking steps towards militarization, is not an exception. Being the third largest country in the world or so in terms of military expenditures, Japan had the idea of max 1% of the GDP for military purposes, but surpassed it, what, considering its economy, is a huge sum. As Japanese government made a decision to send its self-defense (SDF) troops to Iraq with the purposes of reconstruction and rehabilitation, the reaction of the Japanese society to it has been divided between ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ positions. Numerous demonstrations, held in different Japanese cities by some NGOs and social movements, meant to protest such a governmental decision. The summer 2004 events in Iraq, when several Japanese were taken hostage, brought another upheaval of protests from the side of the peace activists, demanding a withdrawal of Japanese troops from Iraq. However, the Japanese government seems to be of different views regarding the issue.

After making a more thorough investigation of the issue, I have started to wonder how the civil society in Japan relates itself to the government, what its functions are when it concerns an issue of protest to the governmental decision, or else – a definite step which is opposed to the steps taken by the government? Here the civil society should not be observed as a dependent variable vis-à-vis the state. Both the accountability of the Japan’s state and the voice of its civil society should be taken into consideration, and none should be ignored.

This is especially interesting because historically it has developed so, that the civil society and the state in Japan have become closely intertwined. From the turn of the twentieth century, certain groups of the society, such as lawyers, doctors, teachers, civil servants, etc, organized themselves into professional associations that wished to cooperate with the state to realize their objectives. The governmental officials themselves were willing to mobilize the society through chambers of commerce, agriculture cooperatives and the like, to further the state

policies.¹ Thus, the autonomous civil society was hardly to exist for the reason of officially imposed and organized associations. However, these associations certainly differed from the state.

There are numerous debates taking place in academic circles, about whether civil society exists in Japan at all, or it is just an illusionary and temporary phenomenon. The significant amount of literature is devoted to the thorough study of democracy in Asian societies versus the West, and respectively – the difference of the civil society in those parts of the world. One thing is clear – the cultural, political, social, historical and many other aspects of each country and nation leave a huge influence on the way its civil society will develop. It is of no necessity, that Japan will be similar to the USA in the organization of its civil sector, the functioning of its NGOs, and the like. While certain terms have similar definitions, the underlying significant factors should be brought to surface. Such are Japanese conservatism, respect of tradition, collectivistic nature of its society, which can still serve as a fruitful ground for a Japanese way of a civil sector without a luxury of pluralism and autonomy which are considered essential for the civil society.

1.1 Background

The relationship between civil society and the state in Japan has recently begun to present an interest among the scholars and people in general. It can be explained by the fact that Japan is gradually moving away from its long-established pacifist stand, which has reflected on its passivity in military affairs. However, with dispatch of its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to Iraq in 2004, Japanese government has shown the world its changing position towards the pacifism in the country and its shift towards militarism and support of the United States.

The reaction of the civil society is of an interest, since it has divided between for and against positions. Some NGOs and social movements have shown their negative attitude towards the governmental decision, and fear that Japan might again be involved in wars, the fact of which goes against the article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and signifies an end to the

¹ Garon, Sheldon (2002) 'From Meiji to Heisei: The State and Civil Society in Japan', in Frank Schwartz, *Civil Society in Japan Reconsidered*, Japanese Journal of Political Science 3 (2) 195-215, Cambridge University Press

pacifism established in the country since the WWII. Other, more nationalistic groups, support the idea of the SDF dispatch to Iraq, positioning themselves among those who wish to see a militarily strong and powerful Japan. The civil society and state relationship in Japan is characterized by a 'shift from the strictest of all advanced industrial democracies in regulating the incorporation of nongovernmental organizations to enabling thousands of organizations to win legal status without subjecting themselves to stifling state regulation'². This means that the power that the government has always shared with the business sector has been challenged by a number of nongovernmental organizations which struggle for acquiring a legal status.

Although the concept of civil society has much longer roots in Japan than it is usual to think, according to Hugo Dobson, over the recent years there has been a noticeable increase in the number of social movements, NGOs and NPOs attempting to show an active participation in fields such as security, environmental and gender issues.³ The first two of these three constituted very pressing political and developmental issues faced by the Japanese state and its people. With the end of the Cold War the third has also risen in importance. However, with the flow of time, the environmental, gender, child-care and other 'non-political' organizations have been more successful on the Japanese domestic arena, than the ones dealing with security, human rights and international development issues. Since security NGOs have mostly campaigned for a reduction in the American military presence in Okinawa and strategy to combat landmines, they have been trying to place pressure on the Japanese government to sign the 1997 Ottawa Landmine Ban Treaty, which was going against the governmental ideas.⁴ It is worth mentioning, that the civic and interest groups began working on human security issues in Japan at many levels before the government had even set human security as a priority issue in its foreign policy. However, during Japan's high-speed economic growth, the efforts of the civil society towards security issues somehow faded, and were more directed towards environmental protection due to the country's industrialism and the society's high consumerism. There are certain positive

² Schwartz, Frank (2002) *Civil Society in Japan Reconsidered*, Japanese Journal of Political Science 3, Cambridge University Press

³ Dobson, Hugo (2002) *Social Movements, Civil Society and Democracy in Japan*, in "Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity", ed. by Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson, Routledge

⁴ Ibid., p. 141

examples achieved by the environmental NGOs or social movements, and some of them receive a great support from the government. One of the examples when a grass-roots movement reshaped city politics and administration, is the citizens' groups which emerged in a small seaside city of Zushi. "Citizens have challenged a decision of the central government and also worked to make the city government more responsive to citizens. Today in Zushi no decision, whether concerning school construction or river control, is implemented before city bureaucrats, often in consultation with citizens committees, consider its environmental impact".⁵ Together with the environmental groups, there appeared a rapid growth of women groups as well. In 1970 a new women's movement appeared which startled all other existing women organizations. It was appealing to women's sexual liberation, suppression of which was the concealed and tabooed base of women and in fact, human oppression in general.⁶ This was the Woman Lib movement, which marked the reemergence of feminism in Japan after the 1910 first radical feminist Seito (Blue Stocking) movement, and created the base for gender NGOs.

The development of state and civil society relationships represents a challenge to the understanding and analysis of civil society in Japan. How this relationship will proceed and which changes, if any, will take place are important issues to be studied and analyzed. One fact remains undeniable: civil society in Japan has emerged on the scene, and although there are disagreements as to its current size and prominence, it is widely assumed that it will continue to grow and play a more prominent role in the future.

1.2 Current Research

As outlines above, the civil society in Japan is passing through a process of transformation. As a consequence new legitimate roles for the civil sector in Japan need to be established. How the change will proceed remains to be seen, although there are certain factors which are apt to slow down the process. These factors include the historically developed situation of the government and the civil sector, as well as the cultural and ethnic peculiarities

⁵ Kenneth J. Ruoff (1997) *Mr. Tomino Goes to City Hall: Grass-Roots Democracy in Zushi City, Japan*, p.333, in "The Other Japan: Conflict, Compromise and Resistance", ed. Joe Moore, M.E. Sharpe

⁶ Ichiyo, Muto (1997) *The Birth of the Women's Liberation Movement in 1970s*, p. 147, in "The Other Japan: Conflict, Compromise and Resistance", ed. Joe Moore, M.E. Sharpe

distinguishing one nation from another. Such are Japanese conservatism versus Western liberalism, as well as Japanese collectivism versus Western individualism.

With regards to the civil society, numerous scholars agree upon the truth that the civil society in Japan is in the stage of gradual growth⁷. Some studies discuss the civil society in Japan, its weak and strong points and the role some NGOs play on the local and international arenas⁸. The governmental interference and its certain influence on the activities of some NGOs is also a matter of concern.

In her book, Keiko Hirata thoroughly examines the situation of the civil society in Japan, its precondition for growth, as well as national and psychological features of the Japanese people which help to distinguish the Japanese civil society from the Western ones. The author argues that ‘no single factor or incident can explain the changing state-Japanese civil society relations; they involve processes of complex, incremental social transformation’⁹. In Hirata’s opinion, 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.¹⁰

Frank Schwartz discusses the cultural specificity of civil society and presents some cases against and for the civil society in Japan. The author asks whether the non-state actors will step in to fill the opening space that the Japanese state is hesitantly opening for the civil society.¹¹ Japanese volunteerism, despite having grown to a considerable degree after the Kobe earthquake of 1995, still needs to be developed.

Hugo Dobson examines Japanese democracy as a top-down phenomenon, with the preponderant power of the government over its people. Although Japanese democracy is undeniably represented by the civil society’s progress and a number of active citizens’

⁷ See Hugo Dobson (2002), Keiko Hirata (2002), Frank Shwartz (2002)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Hirata, Keiko (2002) *Civil Society in Japan: The Growing Role of the NGOs in Tokyo’s Aid and Development Policy*, p. 9, Palgrave Macmillan

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Schwartz, Frank (2002) *Civil Society in Japan Reconsidered*, Japanese Journal of Political Science 3, Cambridge University Press

movements beginning to take growth, however, as he points out, those NGOs and citizens' movements are often approved from and supervised by the government, what predetermines their symptoms of fatigue and rigidity the same as traditional structures of government in their response to the demands of globalization¹².

Some literature on democracy in Japan discusses whether the roots of democratic ideology have been inherent to the Japanese people even before the so-called civil society started to form itself. David Apter and Nagayo Sawa¹³ tell about the mass rally held on March 28, 1982, in Sanrizuka Park by farmers of the Sanrizuka-Shibayama Rengo Kuko Hantai Domei (The Sanrizuka-Shibayama Farmers' League Against the New Tokyo International Airport), their militant allies, and supporting groups, and discuss how it all has served as a lightning rod for protest movements all over Japan: anti-nuclear, environmental, and peace groups, groups protesting discrimination against Koreans in Japan and those protesting discrimination against a pariah caste like the Burakumin. The authors argue that although opposition is a distrustful notion in Japan, there are signs of social attempts to achieve certain goals by rejecting terrorism, while at the same time challenging the government's legitimacy, to mobilize public support for its position.

Patricia G. Steinhoff suggests that protest has helped to develop democratic institutions in post-war Japan by encouraging the expression of diverse opinions, yet the protest sometimes reached the extremes of violence which could threaten those institutions of democracy¹⁴. Democracy in Japan, in her opinion, is still young and has to be balanced with the majority rule and minority rights.

This study is a contribution to the already existing debates around civil society in Japan, its strong and weak aspects, and prospects for the future. A point of departure for this study are two observations, firstly, that the Japanese civil sector still is fragile and in need of further

¹² Dobson, Hugo (2002) *Social Movements, Civil Society and Democracy in Japan*, p. 147, in "Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity", ed. by Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson, Routledge

¹³ Apter, David and Sawa, Nagayo (1984) *Against the State: Politics and Social Protest in Japan*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press

¹⁴ Steinhoff, Patricia G. (1989) *Protest and Democracy*, in "Democracy in Japan", ed. Takeshi Ishida and Ellis S. Krauss, University of Pittsburgh Press

development, and secondly the undeniable fact of the specific cultural, historical, political and social realities that distinguish the civil society in Japan from the one in the West.

1.3 Design of the Study and Formulation of the research problem

As stated above the overall aim of the study is to contribute to the debate of the civil sector in Japan by examining the influence of NGOs on foreign policies in Japan and the obstacles which still need to be overcome. For this purpose, the inductive method has been used to investigate the case, test the already predicted assumptions and raise new questions. The choice of the inductive method over the deductive one can be explained by the qualitative nature of the research, made mainly through observation, literature review and interviews held during the field study.

The research consists of a case study of two prominent, contemporary organizations which are based in Japan and work primarily overseas: *Japan Platform* and *International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)*. A comparative analysis of the NGOs will be made by use of a set of criteria which will be presented in section 1.4. The main research question is:

To which extent, if at all, have these NGOs influenced state policies in Japan?

The following sub questions arise out of the main question:

1. Can spheres of activity and types of relation to the government be considered factors which contribute to variations in NGO influence on state policies?
2. Does the cooperation with the government create a platform for furthering and promoting the NGO's activities, or, on the contrary, create obstacles for independent actions?

A basic assumption of this study is that the NGOs in Japan do not possess much power and cannot influence the government to the extent that it becomes inclined to change its policies. However, there are cases when the spheres of activity of the NGOs and types of relation

with the government play a decisive role in challenging the governmental authorities and even gaining a certain influence over the governmental policies. Finally, the case study will be used as a point of departure for a discussion on the role of the civil sector in Japan, and how the Japanese - with their particular way of thinking about conflicts and harmony, having different historical epochs of militarism and peace, discuss these matters and interpret the words in the Constitution and in the day-to-day policies, as well as to understand, how people in non-Western (and semi-Western) cultures look upon the issue of conflict within the society in general and how they reconcile what the others would see as quite incompatible elements. The study concludes by offering some suggestions for further research.

1.4 Method and selection

The theoretical framework of the present research draws upon the study of civil society in general¹⁵ and in Japan¹⁶. The methodology section of the study is divided into two parts: field method and analytical method.

1.4.1 Field Method – Both primary and secondary material have been used for the present research. The primary material includes the data collected during a one-month field study conducted in Tokyo, Japan, with the aim of meeting several representatives from Japanese NGOs, interviewing them, getting acquainted with the situation of NGOs in Japan in general, and gaining more information through direct respondents. Besides the formal interviews, informal conversations with both NGO representatives and governmental officials have been held, as well as information from Japanese up-to-date newspapers and magazines has been collected. Personal observations have also been considered.

¹⁵ Hann, Chris, and Dunn, Elizabeth (1996) eds., *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, Routledge; Hossain, Farhad, and Myllyla, Susanna (1998) eds., *NGOs Under Challenge: Dynamics and Drawbacks in Development*, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Department for International Cooperation, Helsinki; Goodwin, Jeff and Jasper, M. James (2004) *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning and Emotion*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

¹⁶ Schwartz, J. Frank, Pharr, J. Susan (2003) *The State of Civil Society in Japan*, Cambridge University Press; Hirata, Keiko (2002) *Civil Society in Japan: The Growing Role of NGOs in Tokyo's Aid and Development Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan; Sasaki-Uemura, Wesley (2001) *Organizing the Spontaneous: Citizen Protest in Postwar Japan*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu

Secondary data were collected through reviews of the relevant literature. The literature reviews were conducted both in Japan, Sweden, and also in Denmark, at the NIAS (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies) library, where I have been granted a scholarship to spend two weeks with the purpose of making research and collecting the necessary material. A reference to a more detailed description of the field method can be found in the field report.

1.4.2 Analytical Method - Since the study consists of a case study of two NGOs it is necessary to establish a set of criteria for the comparative analysis of these two organizations. The areas to be focused on in the analysis are the activities of the organizations, the obstacles they meet on the path of their activities, as well as support and assistance either from the state or from the cooperation with the NGO network both within Japan and overseas. Japan Platform and IMADR have been chosen for the case study because these two NGOs have *similar* spheres of activity and *different* relations with the Japanese government. Both Japan Platform and IMADR are active in humanitarian aid, reconstruction and rehabilitation in post-conflict societies, struggle against discrimination and violation of minority rights. However, Japan Platform is cooperating closely with the Japanese government, while IMADR is strongly critical of it. The criteria for the comparative analysis are the following:

1. The *location of the activities* of each organization, i.e. whether they take place either inside or outside Japan
2. The *sphere of interest and focus of the activities*
3. *Types of relationships with the government.* These relationships will also be explored in terms of the obstacles and disappointments experienced during the work and their underlying reasons

The first and the second criteria have been selected from two studies¹⁷, while the third criterion has been developed by myself. The *first* criterion is significant for the following reasons: a. the location of the activities of the organization presupposes its certain freedoms,

¹⁷ Hirata, Keiko (2002) *Civil Society in Japan: The Growing Role of NGOs in Tokyo's Aid and Development Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan; Kuroda, Kaori (2003) *Japan-Based Non-Governmental Organizations in Pursuit of Human Security*, Japan Forum 15 (2), p. 238, Routledge

i.e. the possibility to carry out actions which might turn out impossible in another area, or vice versa; b. the interest of the organization in performing its activities in certain location. Several studies¹⁸ suggest that Japanese NGOs can more easily handle certain issues, e.g. problem of refugees or minorities, overseas than in Japan. Accordingly, the location of the NGO activities, whether these take place in Japan or overseas, must be considered when discussing the power and influence of Japanese NGOs. The issue of location will be further discussed in section 2.3.

This criterion has been defined according to a formulation given by Keiko Hirata, according to which the Japanese NGOs are illustrated to be having a much narrower description than the general vague one accepted elsewhere, as non-for-profit groups not directly affiliated with the government. Thus, 'NGOs refer to nonprofit organizations in Japan engaged in overseas aid programs, such as development assistance and emergency relief. They are voluntary, nonprofit, self-governing, non-political and nonproselytizing organizations engaged in international affairs. By a standard Political Science definition, there groups are International NGOs'.¹⁹ Both Japan Platform and IMADR, like many other non-profit organizations based in Japan are engaged primarily in overseas assistance and secondarily – in domestic activity. These mainly include organizations, the sphere of activities of which is related to the developmental issues, as well as conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, anti-discrimination and human rights violation problems.

The issue of the location is important for several reasons which will be described in the comparative analysis of the NGOs. Primarily, the assumption that the NGOs in Japan do not possess sufficient power rests on the question of the location these NGOs choose for their activities. Several studies and investigations done before²⁰ prove that certain issues, e.g. problem of refugees or minorities, are easier to tackle with overseas than in Japan.

With regards to the *second* criterion, which is the sphere of interest and focus of the NGOs' activities, both Japan Platform and IMADR have been chosen as a case study for being

¹⁸ Osa, Yukie (2003) *The Role of Japanese NGOs in the Pursuit of Humans Security: Limits and Possibilities in the Field of Refugees*, Japan Forum 15 (2), Routledge

¹⁹ Hirata, Keiko (2002) *Civil Society in Japan: The Growing Role of the NGOs in Tokyo's Aid and Development Policy*, p. 12, Palgrave Macmillan

²⁰ Osa, Yukie (2003) *The Role of Japanese NGOs in the Pursuit of Humans Security: Limits and Possibilities in the Field of Refugees*, Japan Forum 15 (2), Routledge

involved in international aid, anti-discrimination and human rights violation, as well as post-conflict reconstruction and similar fields of activities. These, and not other, spheres are of a particular interest since they present a more challenging issue for the NGOs to find ways of dealing with, than certain 'easier and softer' issues which are more readily supported and funded by the government. The sphere of the NGO's activity might present an obstacle for achieving its goals. Such spheres as child-care, education, environment, agricultural and rural development, in Kaori Kuroda's words, are extensively funded by the Japanese government. Kuroda also mentions the fact, that, while a system was launched by the government to provide Japanese NGOs (one of which has been Japan Platform) with more opportunities to act in the international arena, e.g. in the sphere of humanitarian relief, however, the emphasis on 'all Japan' and 'aid with a Japanese face' has made some NGOs hesitate to join the Japan Platform for fear that their neutrality might be impaired in favour of the national interest.²¹

Hugo Dobson's study on social movements and civil society in Japan discusses the spheres of activities that the NGOs have involved themselves with over the recent years, and which constituted some of the most pressing political and developmental issues faced by the Japanese state and its people²². Thus, the sphere of activities has been selected as a criterion for this particular study with the same purpose: to see how the rather pressing issues can be worked at in the atmosphere of either collaboration and approval or criticism and restrictions from the government, and what kind of influence, if any, can be exerted by these organizations on the state policies.

The *third* criterion concerns the type of relationship these organizations have with the state. By use of this criterion I will analyze the obstacles these organizations have encountered during their work and the reasons behind them. The analysis touches upon the points of the NGOs' cooperation with the government and the advantages or disadvantages that arise out of it. The analysis also compares and contrasts both NGOs with regard to their either cooperative relation with or a strong criticism of the government. This criterion is based on the two previous ones, for it is closely connected to the area where the activities are taking

²¹ Kuroda, Kaori (2003) *Japan-Based Non-Governmental Organizations in Pursuit of Human Security*, Japan Forum 15 (2), p. 238, Routledge

²² Dobson, Hugo (2002) *Social Movements, Civil Society and Democracy in Japan*, p. 140, in "Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity", ed. by Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson, Routledge

place and the type of activities these organizations are carrying out. Since the aim of the research is to find out how powerful the civil sector of Japan is and what obstacles need to be overcome, the third criterion can be considered the most important in the light of answering the proposed questions. The analysis of both organizations will show how the cooperation with the government in one case (Japan Platform) and criticism of certain governmental policies in another (IMADR) influence the activities of these organizations.

1.5 Disposition

The results of the thesis are presented in the following way: the introductions of the two organizations, their structure and activities are followed by short discussions on each of them. The comparison of the two organizations based on the already presented criteria forms the analysis of the paper, which is followed by a chapter discussing the role of the civil society in Japan in general and based on the example of the case studies. The conclusion reflects on the questions already asked and puts forward some new suggestions.

2. The Civil Sector in Japan

2.1 Case One: Japan Platform

The Japan Platform is a Non-Profit Organization. It was founded in August 2000 on the initiative of the Peace Winds Japan NGO, which felt strongly the need to form a network of Japanese NGOs in order to reach emergency sites at the same speed as other large Western NGOs. Japan Platform is a system to provide emergency relief in natural disasters and refugee situations more effectively and quickly. This is realized through an equal partnership of NGOs, business and government. Each constituent is supposed to make full use of its resources and characteristics. Thus, Japan Platform constitutes a new system of cooperation for international emergency assistance involving NGOs, business and government. While it will be wrong to characterize Japan Platform as a non-governmental organization, for it is in a close cooperation with the government, at the same time, in order to raise its public support and accountability, it encourages relevant actors in the media, private foundation,

and academic society to participate in international emergency assistance. In summary, Japan Platform's initiative is to further develop the civil society in Japan²³.

2.1.1 Organizational Structure

Although Japan Platform cannot be called a hundred percent NGO, since it is an organization comprised of a complicated structure including NGOs as a part of the whole, nevertheless it will be analyzed in this paper as an organization belonging to the civil sector and cooperating with the government. Despite the fact that the NGO presupposes an autonomous, non-government related organization, in Japanese case this phenomenon is somewhat different. The fact does not imply the absence of fully independent NGOs acting with no support or supervision from the state. However, unlike the general codes of the civil society and non-governmental organizations in other societies, particularly in the Western ones, some Japanese NGOs can successfully exist in cooperation with the state.

Japan Platform has a complex structure. It is comprised of the multileveled membership as well as the relations existing between the cooperating members of the organization. The NGO unit represents the interests of the member NGOs, which are about 17 in number. The role of the member NGOs is to propose plans for emergency, operations and implementations of those plans, as well as emergency assistance. The government is responsible for rearing human resources for NGOs, as well as for assisting in their capacity-building. The academic society, as well as observers/advisors like UN and others are in charge of information sharing and advice. Japan Platform is funded by the government and private foundations, which are also responsible for offering information on resources. The technology, equipment, human resources, funds and information are provided as well by the business sector. Media's role is in providing information and promoting publicity. All the above mentioned sectors comprise a council or a decision making body, which designs guidelines for the enforcement of emergency assistance.

²³ The Japan Platform web site: www.japanplatform.org

2.1.2 Activities

Japan Platform's activities include an extensive assistance to the Iraqi people in the process of recovery from the war. It provided a prompt humanitarian relief to refugees and internally displaced persons. Also, an emergency medical assistance project was organized in January 2003 – a Japan Platform Iraq Crisis Response Team made of NGO members, which was responsible for procurement of materials, preparation of humanitarian aid, provision of medical assistance around the Jordan-Iraq border where an office was launched.

Japan Platform is widely involved in a reconstruction and rehabilitation process in Afghanistan. In September 2001, the Japan Platform Council made a decision to launch ten projects for humanitarian assistance for the refugees and the internally displaced persons in Afghanistan. The NGO members have been engaged in various operations, such as medical services, water supply, distribution of foods and commodities, and education for mine accident prevention. Japan Platform took part in Afghani agricultural reconstruction, repairs of schools, as well as organized a conference in Tokyo, where representatives from 27 Afghanistan local NGOs were invited. Thus, Japan Platform managed to create concrete recommendations aimed at the international community on proper assistance to Afghanistan. Japan Platform is also quick in its response to natural disasters, such as earthquakes, droughts, floods, for example assistance for snow damage in Mongolia in 2001, a response to Western India earthquake in January 2001m agricultural reconstruction in Zambia after a severe food shortage due to drought in 2002, and others.

To summarize, Japan Platform is one of the organizations existing in Japan, which activities are strongly coordinated with the government, are focused towards the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of the developing countries. The membership of NGOs makes the scope of the organization more open to the public.

2.1.3 Discussion

Case one presents an interesting example of an extensively composed organization which plays rather an influential role in Japanese civil sector. Although Japan Platform unites and

assists a number of NGOs in providing emergency relief in natural disasters and refugee situations, some NGOs are still reluctant to join Japan Platform for the fear of becoming too dependent on the government. With all the advantages Japan Platform enjoys over other NGOs for being in cooperation with the governmental bodies and receiving funding from them, it nevertheless faces certain obstacles when considering an activity which is independent or disapproved from the governmental side. As has been stated by Koji Takamatsu, 'Being in cooperation with the government has both its pluses and minuses. However, it is very unlikely that the activities of the NGOs or any other organizations might influence the governmental decisions either on regional or international levels. If the initiatives originate from Japan, there are few possibilities to change governmental policies, but if they originate from the US, then a change is probable. It greatly depends on the organization and on the purpose of the activity.'

In Japan the influence of NGOs on the government has not developed yet, especially in the political and economic matters.²⁴

Therefore, Japan Platform can be considered a good example when the civil, business, academic sectors and the government merge for the sake of joint action. Despite the problems that can arise in the process of communication and interaction with other organizations, 'the member bodies have managed to achieve', in the words of Koji Takamatsu, 'a relatively smooth way of cooperation'²⁵.

2.2 Case Two: International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism

International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR) is an international non-profit non-governmental organization devoted to the elimination of all forms of discrimination, as well as the protection against the violation of the human rights of minority groups. IMADR was founded in Japan in 1988 and afterwards grew into a global network of concerned citizens and minority groups with regional communities in Asia, North and Latin America, and Europe.

²⁴ Interview with Koji Takamatsu, Acting Secretary General of Japan Platform, 22.07.2004, Tokyo, Japan

²⁵ Interview with Koji Takamatsu, Acting Secretary General of Japan Platform, 22.07.2004, Tokyo, Japan

2.2.1 Organizational Structure

IMADR is composed of a multi-level structure, comprising an honorary president, a president, several vice-presidents, a group of directors, inspectors, a secretary-general and several under-secretaries general, as well as an advisory panel, consisting of representative from different organizations and institutions. The structure of IMADR is widely international and multidimensional, i.e. it is represented by people involved in a broad range of activities.

2.2.2 Activities

IMADR is largely engaged in several projects in five main areas²⁶:

- Elimination of racism and racial discrimination
- International protection of minority rights
- Empowerment of victims of multiple discrimination
- Facilitation of indigenous people's development
- Advancement of migrants' rights

The central theme and objective of IMADR's mission is elimination of racism and racial discrimination. IMADR considers it most important to highlight the forms of discrimination that have been perennial and persistent but often ignored, such as the discrimination against Burakumin in Japan, Dalits in South Asia and Sinti/Roma in Europe.

Since 1994 IMADR, in cooperation with international and local NGOs, sponsored a joint research/action project on trafficking in women and children. It now engages in organizing sub-regional, regional and UN seminars focusing on the ways to enhance the sub-regional, regional and international mechanisms to prevent and eliminate trafficking in women and children.

²⁶ IMADR web-site: www.imadr.org

IMADR was also involved in several projects promoting legal literacy, education, income-generation, disease-control and land-rights for Tharu people of Nepal, Mapuche people of Latin America, as well as it started a new project in Guatemala aiming at empowering the indigenous people in the peace process.

IMADR undertakes a number of other activities, including information network and appeal campaigns, where it tries to promote information-sharing and joint actions/campaigns of organizations active in issues of racism and discrimination. IMADR also lobbies on specific issues at UN meetings and major world conferences, undertakes different research activities for the purpose of international and national advocacy, as well as offers internships and training courses in Geneva during the sessions of relevant UN committees.

2.2.3 Discussion

Although IMADR has a widespread range of activities in different parts of the world, with a particular emphasis on developing countries, there is still a lack of activism in the Japanese setting. The question of Japanese marginalized groups such as Burakumin, as well as ethnic groups such as Ainu and Koreans, who still face certain kind of discrimination, is not fully resolved. Ryo Onoyama, a representative of IMADR maintained that the lack of funding for the activities with the Japanese marginalized groups results in a. the fact that while choosing among most urgent issues, the developing and post-conflict countries are considered a priority; b. the growth of nationalism in Japan is an obstacle to the open solution of problems which, although supported by the majority, are still considered to be among the tabooed and not desirable to tackle with²⁷. Thus, the Burakumin, the historically outcasts of Japan, although in a better situation now, are still labeled as ‘others’.

Since IMADR neither receives funding from nor cooperates with the government, it enjoys certain advantages over government-related organizations in terms of being free to disagree with governmental decisions and act more independently, as well as disadvantages that relate to the lack of funding and support on the national level. IMADR has criticized the government for sending its Self-Defense Forces to Iraq, thus supporting the USA in its Iraq

²⁷ Interview with Ryo Onoyama, Under-Secretary-General of IMADR, 02.08. 2004, Tokyo, Japan

occupation activities. IMADR considers that by doing so, the state of Japan creates a background for human insecurity and lays prospects for militarization of the country.

Hence, it is possible to conclude that Japanese model of an ‘international’ NGO represents a partly independent organization with rather tight links with the state or enjoys a relative freedom and autonomy with another kind of limitations.

2.3 Comparison of the NGOs

Both Japan Platform and IMADR have things in common and things that are different. The comparative analysis of the organizations is based on the previously discussed criteria.

1. The location (domestic and overseas) of the organizations’ activities.

Both Japan Platform and IMADR are performing the most part of their activities outside Japan. Japan Platform, as opposed to IMADR, is involved mainly overseas with the humanitarian agenda, while IMADR, like some other organizations, holds activities in both international and domestic settings. The activities of IMADR, besides being directed to the elimination of racial discrimination, struggle for minority and women rights, as well as tackling refugee problems overseas, are also directed towards the issues of ethnic minorities in Japan, like Ainu and Koreans, as well as other discriminated and marginalized groups such as Burakumin²⁸.

While Japan Platform is primarily focused on post-war /conflict prevention and reconstruction works in such countries as Iraq and Afghanistan, provides assistance to countries that have suffered from natural disasters, as well as assists for refugees,

²⁸ Buraku people are one of minority groups in Japan. According to the 1993 survey, which was conducted by the Japanese Government Policy Office of Regional Improvement of the Management Projects, the population of Buraku people is counted at 892,751 people with a total number of 298,385 households. These figures, however, only present Buraku households and population that have been designated as special measured areas by the Government. The Buraku Liberation League believes that the number of Buraku people would be as high as 3 million peoples within 6,000 communities. According to some scholars who have researched the origin of discrimination against Buraku people, it can be traced back to the Middle Ages of Japanese history. In those days, there were some people were regarded as impure because of their occupations. Those people were imposed certain occupations such as butchers and tanners, and entertainment and crafts. Some of those who were engaged in occupations in relation to the dead were targets of discrimination. <http://www.imadr.org/tokyo/ishikawareport.html>

reconstruction and disaster relief overseas, IMADR is carrying out extensive works on education for elimination of violence and discrimination towards minority groups, women and other marginalized members of the society both in developing countries as well as inside Japan. Still, the work carried out in Japan is considerably smaller in scale compared to the work overseas. This may be the result of the IMADR being an independent organization and not receiving the ideological support from the state regarding certain issues.

To quote Ryo Onoyama, the Under-Secretary-General of IMADR, “Most of the Japanese NGOs are independent, but they have limited power, and the growing NGO sector (Japan Platform, Japan Peace Winds) have more power, but still are influenced by the government.”²⁹ According to Ryo Onoyama, those certain activities which IMADR has not been able to perform yet, while other organizations succeeded in, are due to the fact that IMADR has never had any cooperation with the government and has never been funded by it. In fact, even the activities carried out abroad, are monitored and supervised by the state in some degree. A proof to this is Japan Platform’s presence in Iraq due to the governmental support and extensive funding. To quote Koji Takamatsu, the Acting Secretary General of Japan Platform, “The funding of Japan Platform comes from the government. For example, the money for this year (2004) was 9 mln. US \$ = 1 bln. Yen. So, the relationship between the Japan Platform and the government is very close.”³⁰ At the same time, many other NGOs, which are independent from the government, have not been approved from trying to enter Iraq with reconstruction or aid purposes for the reasons of human security. In case of IMADR, there has been a strong criticism towards the government concerning the issue of the Self Defense Forces (SDF) dispatch to Iraq after the war. The respondents from both organizations have expressed the opinion that the choice of the setting for their activities has required governmental approval in the cases where the state itself has been involved in those countries. However, the location of activities has to be taken into account: while the organizations might be experiencing certain problems with politically fragile issues, they generally are free to act with the issues requiring developmental assistance. With regards to the problems of refugees and human rights, according to the IMADR representative, ‘the

²⁹ Interview with Ryo Onoyama, Under-Secretary-General of IMADR, 02.08. 2004, Tokyo, Japan

³⁰ Interview with Koji Takamatsu, Acting Secretary General of Japan Platform, 22.07.2004, Tokyo, Japan

organization has more success overseas than in Japan”³¹. The representative of the Japan Platform has stated that since the organization is involved in humanitarian activities, ‘it is only natural that they are taking place overseas, mainly in developing countries’³².

2. The sphere of interest and the focus of activities.

Since the organizations being discussed are more closely related to such delicate issues as international development, assistance to refugees, violation of human rights within ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups, i.e. the spheres where the state is involved as one of the leading actors, the researcher’s interest has been to find out how much of influence, if any, these organizations can exert on the state policies, or at least be able to act independently. As has already been mentioned in the discussion of the second criterion, the ‘soft’ issues easily gain governmental support. Among them are problems related with child care, gender and environmental movements, etc.

The interviews held with the representatives of Japan Platform and IMADR have shown that both organizations have not experienced any big success in influencing the state policies whatsoever. However, the cases are rather different. Japan Platform, being in cooperation with the government, enjoys certain privileges as to the choice of both location and type of activity, for it receives funding from the state, while at the same time it has to coordinate its decisions with the governmental officials, and remain relatively dependent on them. When asked about the organization’s position regarding the new nationalistic moods and the possible militarization of Japan, and how the civil society in general, and Japan Platform in particular, can influence the state and support the Constitution by opposing the militarization, the response of the Japan Platform representative was the following: ‘The Constitution is the philosophy of governance. However, the nature of the NGO activities is different from the Constitution. When it comes to the reality of Japanese NGOs, they (especially those involved in humanitarian fields) enjoy this Constitution. Humanitarian activities seem to be separated from political or military affairs. As long as Japan maintains the non-military constitution, the Japanese NGOs will not feel the need to contribute to the

³¹ Interview with Ryo Onoyama, Under-Secretary-General of IMADR, 02.08. 2004, Tokyo, Japan

³² Interview with Koji Takamatsu, Acting Secretary General of Japan Platform, 22.07.2004, Tokyo, Japan

militarization of the country. On the basis of the western-created 'peace constitution' Japan might create its own good governance, and philosophy.³³ The same question, asked to the representative of IMADR, received the following response: "The Pacifist Constitution creates great advantages. It allows the peace and human rights NGOs to work according to their own beliefs and principles. For example, in case of Iraq, there exists a difference between the activities of the NGOs and the governmental structures. When Japan sends its Self Defence Forces to Iraq, it acts against its Constitution. Some NGOs, including our organization, do not approve of it. By sending its military to Iraq, our government creates obstacles for the peace workers to go there and carry out humanitarian activities. People outside Japan think that Japan is a peace-oriented country, and when NGOs go to Iraq, they can be perceived as enemies, like SDF. The case of the recent hostage crisis in Iraq has created mistrust towards Japanese among the Iraqi people, as well as internationally"³⁴.

Both the Japan Platform and IMADR representatives expressed the opinion, that the environmental, gender, child-care and volunteer organizations are much more successful in gaining the governmental support both in ideological and material terms, than the organizations which are dealing with either international or politically delicate issues.

3. The obstacles experienced by the organizations during their activities.

Most of the Japanese NGOs are independent, but they possess limited power. The growing NGO sector (Japan Platform, Japan Peace Winds) possesses relatively more power but not the autonomy needed for the NGOs, since they are cooperating with and influenced by the government. The limitation of the autonomy mostly occurs because of the insufficient funding. According to Ryo Onoyama (IMADR), "an obstacle to becoming more independent is the lack of energy and time. It requires changing the Japanese people's minds. In relation to 'soft' issues, e.g. child problems, environment, the NGOs get funding easily, but in politics and international relations, it is difficult to persuade the people or change their minds, besides, the governmental influence is very strong"³⁵.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Interview with Ryo Onoyama, Under-Secretary-General of IMADR, 02.08. 2004, Tokyo, Japan

³⁵ Ibid.

One of the obstacles that the NGOs in Japan encounter is the apolitical attitude of the population. The lack of volunteerism is another problem. However, at present a lot of things are changing. The Kobe earthquake of January 1995 has resulted in more deaths than could be avoided due to the lack of organized and quick volunteer response. Since then, the government realized the necessity of volunteering organizations and in March 1998 the Law to Promote Specified Non-Profit Activities (the NPO Law) was passed in the Japanese Diet with the objective of simplifying the system for voluntary organizations to gain recognition as corporate status.³⁶ With Japan's sending SDF troops to Iraq in winter-spring 2004, the population, and especially the youth of Japan became more concerned about the political situation in the country and overseas, and the government's policies were even being criticised by means of organized social movements. The IMADR representative has confessed that since they have never cooperated with the Japanese government in any of their activities, he cannot speak about the effects or shortcomings of the governmental support; however, in terms of funding, those NGOs which are cooperating with the state are much better off and have more power³⁷.

Another obstacle to the further development of the civil society which has to be considered is the almost total dependence of some organizations like Japan Platform on the government. According to Koji Takamatsu, 'those organizations which cooperate with the state try never to criticise any of the state policies or representatives for the fear of losing the governmental funding'.³⁸ Thus, there is a concern that the distance between the government and the Japanese NGOs is narrow, and unless the NGOs maintain autonomy, they may become co-opted by the government. However, this phenomenon is not unique to Japanese NGOs. Even in the Western societies, the NGOs do not have the utter autonomy and the vital thing for them is to remain within international cooperation.

³⁶ Dobson, Hugo (2002) *Social Movements, Civil Society and Democracy in Japan*, in "Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity", p. 145, ed. by Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson, Routledge

³⁷ Interview with Ryo Onoyama, Under-Secretary-General of IMADR, 02.08. 2004, Tokyo, Japan

³⁸ Interview with Koji Takamatsu, Acting Secretary General of Japan Platform, 22.07.2004, Tokyo, Japan

2.3.1 Conclusive remarks

The comparative study of both NGOs shows that despite certain differences they have both in the structural and organizational aspects, there are both possibilities and limitations that seem to be quite natural in the setting of the Japanese civil sector. Although it is hard to prove that the Japanese NGOs have any certain power over the state in terms of influencing the governmental policies, nevertheless the experiences brought above prove that some activities are widely encouraged by the state and funded more than the politically delicate ones. Even though the cooperation with the state gives more priorities, it still has its definite downsides such as limited autonomy and restricted freedom.

2.4 The role of the Japanese civil sector as illustrated by these two case studies

A common argument in the academic literature is that the Japanese civil society is either weak or does not exist at all. This argument is based on the assumption that the Japanese are still a traditional and conservative society with Confucian values which underline 'respect for authority, emphasis on conformity with the group interests rather than individual needs and emphasis on order and stability'³⁹. This argument has its weak points, as will be discussed in the following, where I will argue that the civil society in Japan is rapidly growing. On the basis of the two case studies which have been presented earlier, I will in this context also discuss why the NGOs which are cooperating with the state are more successful than those which maintain more distant relations with the government.

Japan has recently witnessed a vast flow of civil society activism, especially by transnational NGOs working on international development and foreign aid issues. Keiko Hirata writes that 'there has been an explosion of such groups in the last two decades in Japan, as seen in their rapid growth in number and size and their increased interaction with and influence over state policy'⁴⁰. These NGOs have benefited from exposure to and cooperation with foreign organizations at home and abroad, and Japan's NGO movement gained a new force as a

³⁹ Hirata, Keiko (2002) *Civil Society in Japan: The Growing Role of the NGOs in Tokyo's Aid and Development Policy*, p. 23, Palgrave Macmillan

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.2

result of several UN conferences organized in the 1990s. Japanese officials could not but admit that these organizations were playing a substantive role in international affairs, which were generally considered purely the affairs of the state. However, the NGOs representatives were even invited to participate in state delegations.⁴¹

Although the increase in NGO activities has occurred later in comparison with Western societies, the NGO growth in Japan has significant implications for world politics. Being a highly developed country, and integrated into the global economy, Japan nevertheless neither geographically nor culturally is part of the “West”. With a huge rise in its economic development in the 1950s-70s, Japan transformed from a devastated, war-torn nation into the world’s second largest economy. However, in the early 1990s, the economy began to disintegrate, what has been followed by a prominent growth of the NGOs on the Japanese political scene. Hence, Japan represents a very interesting case of the intersection of non-Western culture, rapid industrialization, subsequent economic recession, and the rise of civil society. This growing NGO movement has been the changing point in the relations between the state and civil society in Japan. As the authority of the Japanese developmental state has started to weaken, the relationship between the state and the population has changed. Japanese citizens no longer feel threatened to protest state policies or demand social justice. Numerous NGOs are being formed to involve people who wish to push forward their demands, and the state in turn has started paying more attention to the views of NGOs. So, the weakening of the developmental state and the simultaneous growth of civil society mark the beginning of a new era of a more horizontal relationship between the state and civil society in Japan.⁴²

Numerous Japanese NGOs and NPOs have a certain privilege over some Western ones in terms of their impartiality. One of the most positive sides of Japan Platform that can probably be attributed to the most Japanese NGOs is its neutrality towards the country or region it is working with. Since Japanese society is religiously rather unbiased and free, the Japanese NGOs also have no religious or racial connotations. According to Yukie Osa,

⁴¹ Schwartz, Frank (2002) *Civil Society in Japan Reconsidered*, p. 211, Japanese Journal of Political Science 3, Cambridge University Press

⁴² Hirata, Keiko (2002) *Civil Society in Japan: The Growing Role of the NGOs in Tokyo’s Aid and Development Policy*, p. 5, Palgrave Macmillan

Japanese NGOs are often viewed on the ground as being neutral vis-à-vis the different sides of any conflict.⁴³ Japanese NGOs are rather distanced from many developmentally endangered countries, however the example of Afghanistan proves that there can be exceptions. However, the case of Japanese involvement in Afghanistan is due to the fact that Japan, unlike neighboring countries, does not have geographical interests in Afghanistan. Since the US and Russia have proved to be not appropriate mediators for peace, Japan, on the contrary, could take there neutral positions and be rather successful, what is proved by the Japan Platform experience.

This study shows that it is misleading to think that Asia and civil society are incongruent notions and the Asians (in present case the Japanese), cannot develop a civil society that will be critical of the state and its totalitarian power. One of the most dramatic cases which showed the limitations of the state and the potential of the civil society was the Kobe earthquake of 1995. Disappointed by the disorganization of the government's efforts, about 1.3 million volunteers organized themselves spontaneously to help in the disaster area. In the face of that horrible disaster which took more than 6,000 people, people began to imagine the potential of the civil society.⁴⁴ However, one cannot ignore the fact, that the state has a strong influence over Japanese civil society, as can be seen from the cases illustrated in the previous chapters. The influence of the state is obviously one of the points cited against the real existence of civil society in Japan. The present situation of Japanese involvement in post-war Iraq and its support of the USA poses certain threats to human security in Japan. The established situation of non-militarism and relative peace are also under a threat. While Japanese government continues disregarding the role of NGOs and NPOs, their involvement in human security is unrealistic. Gilson and Purvis write that 'the means by which the form of human security is to be attained remains the state, as long as NGOs/NPOs within Japan remain in a marginalized position'⁴⁵. Unless the state's influence over the civil sector is minimized and the Japanese government is prepared to fully embrace the potential of the NGOs, there will continue tensions between the relationship of the state

⁴³ Osa, Yukie (2003) *The Role of Japanese NGOs in the Pursuit of Human Security: Limits and Possibilities in the Field of Refugees*, p. 262, Japan Forum 15 (2), Routledge

⁴⁴ Schwartz, Frank (2002) *Civil Society in Japan Reconsidered*, p. 207, Japanese Journal of Political Science 3, Cambridge University Press

⁴⁵ Gilson, Julie and Purvis, Phillida (2003) *Japan's Pursuit of Human Security: Humanitarian Agenda or Political Pragmatism?*, p. 199, Japan Forum 15 (2), Routledge

and civil society. In Garon's words, 'the Japanese state has intervened in civil society in an unusually profound way'.⁴⁶

An issue worth being discussed is whether the strong influence of the state is a surprising thing at all. Although it can commonly be argued that 'the stronger the state the weaker the civil society', it is important to make a more context-sensitive analysis and take the concerned country into consideration. As has already been mentioned, Japan, even though the second largest world economy, is neither geographically nor culturally a part of the West, and it should be judged accordingly. In a definition, given to the Japanese society by Keiko Hirata, one can clearly see the mentioning of individualism as something rather negative than positive, unlike the Western concept of it: "Like many other East Asian societies, Japanese society stresses group conformity and consensus-building, as well as the importance of individual responsibilities for the welfare of community vis-à-vis individual rights. The individual is subordinate to the community"⁴⁷. Even in conformist societies which do not tend to tolerate minority views, there are cases of courageous individuals who dare to deviate from the social norms. The first social movements and NGOs have been formed by such individuals, who, apart from being more politically conscious than the major part of the Japanese society, have also considered it important to do something for the public good. Civil courage was, for instance, demonstrated by Oku Mumeo, 'one of the principle leaders and most dynamic personalities in the Japanese feminist movement'⁴⁸, who became the founder and organizer of the New Women's Association.

While Confucian values, strong family traditions, and rather conservative views preside in Japan, the country's civil society has reached the point when the government has to count with it. In addition to the factors which have already been mentioned the rise of individualism in Japanese urban areas is also significant. The NGOs, according to Hugo

⁴⁶ Garon, Sheldon (1997) *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

⁴⁷ Hirata, Keiko (2002) *Civil Society in Japan: The Growing Role of the NGOs in Tokyo's Aid and Development Policy*, p. 24, Palgrave Macmillan

⁴⁸ Tokuza, Akiko (2000) *The Rise of the Feminist Movement in Japan*, p. 147, Keio University Press

Dobson, 'are needed to focus the individual interests and initiatives'⁴⁹, i.e. to unite people of the same interests in an organized way. The problem that remains is how to reduce the influence of the state and increase the accountability of the NGOs involved in the international affairs. Here a distinction should be made between the organizations that are everything that governmental agencies are not, i.e. 'effective, non-bureaucratic, flexible, innovative, non-corruptive, non-politicized, participatory and more reflective on the needs of the poor'⁵⁰, and organizations which are not purely nongovernmental, like Japan Platform, although their activities are focused primarily on developmental issues. While the former ones are usually independent from the government, the latter ones can be a part of the bureaucratic sector or exist in cooperation with and due to the governmental support.

It would be possible to speak about some kind of a balance in the relationship between the state and society in Japan nowadays, if not certain underlying reasons for rejecting it. These are the growth of Japanese nationalism and strive towards militarism that ignites protests from some part of the population and nongovernmental organizations. With the dispatch of the Self-Defense Troops to Iraq, despite the numerous movements of the population against it, the Japanese government has shown its ultimate power over the civil society. According to Eugene A. Matthews, 'Japan's Self-Defense Forces are increasing dramatically their expenditures on missile defense, requesting \$ 1.2 billion for it in 2004, nine times more than the total spent from 1999 to 2003'⁵¹. It can already be seen that the Article 9's prohibitions have started to erode. Matthews suggests, that this process began in 1987, when, for the first time since WWII, Japan's SDF budget exceeded one percent of GDP, long considered the country's unofficial limit for defense spending⁵². This so-called 'new nationalism' of Japan poses certain obstacles for the activities of the civil sector, and especially that part of it which opposes militarization of the country. While the government takes its official stands on

⁴⁹ Dobson, Hugo (2002) *Social Movements, Civil Society and Democracy in Japan*, p. 147, in "Globalization and Democratization in Asia: The Construction of Identity", ed. By Catarina Kinnvall and Kristina Jonsson, Routledge

⁵⁰ Malkia, Matti and Hossain, Farhad (1998) *Changing Patterns of Development Cooperation: Conceptualizing Non-Governmental Organizations in Development*, in 'NGOs Under Challenge: Dynamics and Drawbacks in Development', p. 32, ed. by Hossain, Farhad and Myllyla, Susanna, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Department for International Cooperation, Helsinki

⁵¹ Matthews, Eugene A. (2003) *Japan's New Nationalism*, Foreign Affairs, volume 82, number 6, November-December

⁵² Ibid.

supporting the USA's involvement in the war in Iraq, the civil sector's response to it, be it negative or positive, as the numerous demonstrations have shown, remains an unanswered challenge. As Edstrom suggests, 'a highly attractive perspective for Japanese foreign policy decision makers is that the pursuit of human security will enable Japan to pursue policies that are devised in Tokyo, not Washington'⁵³. The IMADR has been expressing its strong criticism of the governmental policies with regards to the SDF dispatch to Iraq, while receiving no resolution from the government's side. Japan Platform's initiative to be present in war-torn Iraq with developmental assistance would not be possible without the governmental approval. Hence, the state's influence on the civil sector, while seemingly soft and unpretentious, remains an undeniable fact in modern Japan.

Brauman mentions, that 'If NGOs want to be independent from their government or donors, they have to acquire a 'political will' of their own, while all the time acknowledging the national base of their donors with their own expectations'⁵⁴. Therefore, a total independence from the government can lead the Japanese NGOs to becoming too weak and uninfluential, or rather fragile to political conflicts. On the other hand, a very close relationship with the government may pose a danger of losing its autonomy and turning an NGO into a tool in governmental hands, i.e. making it totally dependant on the political moods and games.

3. Conclusion

The aim of the study has been to find out to which extent the Japanese NGOs influence the state policies in Japan, and what type of relationship exists between the state and the civil sector. The sub-questions arising from the main question have touched 1. the spheres of activity of the NGOs as possible factors of influence on the state policies, as well as 2. the cooperation with the state as a contributing factor or an obstacle to the promotion of the NGOs activities.

⁵³ Edstrom, Bert (2003) *Japan's Foreign Policy and Human Security*, Japan Forum 15 (2), Routledge

⁵⁴ Brauman, Rony (1996) *Humanitaire, le dilemme*, Paris: TEXTUEL

The research has shown that the civil sector in Japan is in a process of transition, which means that time and certain efforts are required to strengthen its role and make its voice more heard in the traditional setting of a powerful state. However, the research has also shown that the civil sector in Japan is not as weak as it is often perceived from the outside; numerous social movements organized throughout the 20th century in the spheres of environment, gender, peace and anti-nuclear ideology have underlined the shift from a passive to a rather active and concerned civil society. Despite the fact that the state is playing the most important role in almost any decision-making, often leaving the demands of the society both of Japan and the neighboring states unanswered, there have been cases of positive influence on the state policies. As the field research has shown, the spheres of NGOs' activity play a significant part in either success or failure of the NGOs' attempt to influence the state in funding this or that activity, or at least causing no obstacles for it. Such spheres appeared to be the 'soft' issues like child care, volunteerism in environmental issues, gender and feminism movements, while more 'hard' issues like international involvement in developmental assistance, struggle for human rights, and involvement in minority and discrimination issues appeared to cause more concern among the governmental officials. The case studies show, that while cooperation with the state, as in the case of Japan Platform, has certain advantages, such as an extensive funding and a freer access to more problematic areas, it also creates the following limitations such as dependence on the state in decision-making, as well as some degree of mistrust from other NGOs.

The possibilities for the Japanese NGOs can stem out of the fact that they enjoy neutrality positions having no religious or racial connotations and Japan being not involved in any particular conflict. In case the NGOs manage to preserve their impartiality and remain neither too close to the government nor too critical of it, they can be rather successful in mediating in conflicts, providing humanitarian relief and helping the marginalized and discriminated people irrespective of their national or religious affinity.

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Onoyama, Ryo (Under-Secretary-General of IMADR). Notes taken during the interview, August 08, 2004, Tokyo, Japan

Appendix

List of Questions Asked During the Interviews

1. What is the relationship between the Japanese NGOs and the government? How free are the NGOs to act according to their own strategies?
2. What is the relationship among the NGOs which are working in similar spheres (how do they manage to act within the network)?
3. Does the pacifist Constitution of Japan pose hindrances or, on the contrary, creates advantages for the activities of the NGOs in the sphere of conflict resolution, security and development?
4. Do the changes, taking place in political decision-making, find response in Japanese society? If yes, what is the reaction of the society towards there changes?
5. Is it possible, that the activities of the NGOs (probably more radical ones) can influence the governmental decisions on regional or international levels?
6. What obstacles, if any, need to be overcome in order to direct the NGOs or social movements to the more independent sphere of activities?
7. Can you describe the Japanese NGOs due to any national characteristics? Is there any difference between Japanese or other Asian, or Western NGOs? What social, historical, or ethnic factors differentiate them from the others?