

The Establishment of Citizen Activities and its Place in Japanese Society, with a focus on Activist Organizations Founded during the 1970s to 80s.

Abstract

This paper will clarify the concept of Citizen Activities (*shimin-katsudou*) through examining activism's role and function within Japanese society. Furthermore, the paper will examine how Citizen Activities developed into the current not for profit sector in Japan, and how it lead to demands to create systems such as NPO legislation. Through this examination, this paper will enable understanding of the origins of the Japanese not for profit sector, which has suffered from criticisms ranging from the notion that it is overblown activism or, conversely, that it has been co-opted by the establishment, to the argument that the sector exists merely as a subcontractor for the authorities.

The paper shall examine activist organizations from the 70s to the 80s (when Citizen Activities started becoming prominent within Japanese society) to the late-90s, when NPO legislation was enacted. It will present case studies of eight organizations, including four environmental organizations and four welfare organizations. These two areas are the main areas of Citizen Activities in Japan, and examining organizations from the two areas will make a comparative study possible.

Compared with studies on social movements or NPOs, there has not been much research conducted on Citizen Activities. This may be because, before the enactment of NPO legislation, organizations were legally informal voluntary groups, and many of them did not keep detailed records of their activities.

This paper presents the first research of its kind in Japan, in that it provides not only a clear theoretical definition of Citizen Activities and it social roles, but also conclusions drawn from analyses of records of actual activities of activist organizations as well as of interviews of leaders of these organizations.

This paper consists of seven chapters, besides the introduction and the conclusion. Chapters 1 to 3 make up Part I, in which Citizen Activities has been examined from a "macroscopic viewpoint."

In Chapter 1, the paper examines the function and role of Citizen Activities as collective

activities, and the not for profit sector as an intermediary.

Firstly, the paper compares the concept of “sector” and its peculiarities in Japan with the concept in the West. It then uses sociological theory to examine the circumstances in which Citizen Activities evolved into the not for profit, paying particular attention to the function and social positioning of Citizen Activities.

The paper shows that within Japanese society, “not for profit sector” is understood to be the same as “third sector” (*san-seku*), i.e. a sector that essentially performs an auxiliary function of the public and private sectors. In order to maintain competitive complementarity with other sectors, the not for profit sector must utilize both the functions of advocacy and of being a service provider efficiently.

In conclusion, Citizen Activities in Japan developed into the not for profit sector through becoming an intermediate media that acted as a bridge between the private domain and the public sphere, in addition to the function of social movements highlighting social questions. Furthermore, the fact that Citizen Activities strengthened its unique function as a service provider encouraged the continuity of activities, becoming the core of the current not for profit sector.

In Chapter 2, the paper examines previous research and source material, so as to clarify the concept of Citizen Activities through a comparison with other, related terms. The analysis shows that there is continuity between social movements, Citizen Activities, and NPOs, while at the same showing that the widely held view that social movements evolved into Citizen Activities or NPOs is contradictory.

Moreover, the paper shows that the concept of Citizen Activities is used as a comprehensive one, encompassing activities with various activities (with the common trait that the activities are all undertaken by common citizens), and that this concept prevails within the concept of the citizen sector.

Noting that the key traits of Citizen Activities are “continuity” and a “relationship with authorities”, the paper argues that NPO legislation was required to ensure maintenance of the function (or the business model) of a service provider. Social activist organizations generally required to engage in negotiations with authorities, insofar as they were concerned with public interest issues.

In Chapter 3, quantitative data of social activist organizations was used to analyze the interconnections between Citizen Activities, social movements, and NPOs. Furthermore, the paper examines changes in the fields of Citizen Activities. Using data on 310 social activist organizations that had received the support from the Toyota Foundation, I analyzed the changes in activist fields, interrelations between those fields, and changes in forms of incorporation.

Using the result of this analysis, this paper confirms the interrelations between Citizen Activities, social movements, and NPOs was verified. In particular, many common traits can be observed between social activist organizations and "new social movements", such as social backgrounds, particular issues, and membership. The paper therefore concludes that Citizen Activities in Japan is a variation of the "new social movement."

In addition to conventional Citizen Activities (environment or welfare), organizations that work in several fields on an ad hoc basis also increased, and Citizen Activities was diversified in the mid-80s, through the introduction of "networking" and "new volunteerism".

Chapter 4 to Chapter 7 comprises Part II, which presents case studies of eight social activist organizations established during the 70s or 80s that continue to be active. In Chapters 4 and 5, the activity records of environmental organizations and welfare organizations are analyzed, with a comparative analysis in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, results of interviews of organizational leaders are analyzed, with analytic re-verification of the results. The case studies further clarify the characteristics of Citizen Activities and the importance of continuity.

In Chapters 4 and 5, qualitative analysis is conducted of the publications of environmental and welfare organizations that had been issued with the assistance of the Toyota Foundation. Environmental organizations are examined in Chapter 4, and welfare organizations in Chapter 5. The publications examined were all published around 1990, and provide vital records of Citizen Activities, as it is possible to view both the subjective opinions of the membership and objective or historical facts.

The paper focuses on the fields of environment and welfare because they were, and remain, the main fields of Citizen Activities. The paper verifies the general view that the former comprises mainly of "advocacy organizations" and the latter of "enterprise organizations".

A comparative analysis of the results of Chapter 4 and 5 is conducted in Chapter 6.

"The characteristics of Citizen Activities" and "the importance of continuity in activities" are defined as follows.

1. The characteristics of Citizen Activities

Elements common to both fields can be observed, indicating common characteristics of Citizen Activities.

(1) Members are predominantly common citizens, such as students and housewives, with a small group of highly specialized "brains", such as professors and experts in the field.

(2) Activism is generally begun by leaders through a chance encounter. A particular social issue then becomes the target of concern, and an organization is formed posing a framework for both the expression of concern and the provision of solutions.

(3) Organizations are generally not based on a particular ideology, and they have rational relations with the authorities.

We can therefore conclude that social activist organizations have different characteristics from old forms of Citizen Activities, as well as conventional social movements. On the other hand, there are many common characteristics with "new social movements" and the present not for profit sector.

2. The meaning and importance of continuity

In order to pursue solution of a particular social issue, and the philosophy inherent in their activity, social activist organizations explored a business model that aims at maintaining continuity, and which developed methods of collaboration with other sectors and resulted in the enactment of NPO legislation.

For environmental organizations, activities continued as a result of the expansion of the issue and the development of the underlying philosophy of the activity. On the other hand, with welfare organizations, the continuing care of beneficiaries becomes a purpose in itself, resulting in continuity of activities. It can be noted that criticism sometimes arises when activities become a purpose upon themselves, and not a means to an end.

In Chapter 7, interviews of leaders of seven organizations are analyzed, so as to examine the importance of the particular social issue that the organization focuses on, as well as the role of the philosophy of the organization, and how these affect the continuity of the organization's activities. The Chapter concludes that social activist organizations that remain faithful to their

original goals and philosophy are able to continue their activities over the longer term.

In the last chapter, each chapter is summarized, and in conclusion, the concept of Citizen Activities and the meaning of institutionalization of Citizen Activities are summarized as follows.

Citizen Activities actualize and highlight particular social issues, address that issue, and characteristically aim at posing a solution. Citizen Activities therefore has the functions of both actualizing social problems and then aiming towards solutions.

Citizen Activities also have common traits with "new social movements", in that they both focus on similar social issues of broad public interest. These issues are also unable of being responded to adequately by either the public or private sectors.

Citizen Activities required systems, such as NPO legislation, so as to ensure the continuity of its activities. The not for profit sector subsequently became established as a medium responding to issues of public interest.

The not for profit sector can utilize its characteristics of being able to engage in advocacy and service provision, so as to maintain competitive complimentary with both the public sector, which gives priority to broad public welfare, and the private sector, which gives priority to economic earnings.