

Ongoing Dismantlement of Associational Life and the Prospects for Social Innovation: A Network Analysis of Civic Movements in Contemporary Japan

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This study initiates a social network analysis of large-scale civic movements in contemporary Japan and provides a structural explanation to one of the most puzzling questions today: Why Japanese youth are not participating in civic movements? The fallout of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, coupled with the current government's reckless pursuit of the reactivation of nuclear plants, Japan once again became a seedbed for grassroots political activity. While there have been cases of youth-focused rallies and demonstrations, compared to events in the Middle East, South America, and also the United States, Japanese youth are very passive even when faced with serious threat to their lives.

To explain this passivity, I argue that there has been *systematic destruction of associational life* in Japan since the collapse of student movements in the late 1960s and 1970s. I corroborate processes of different “reforms,” which I call anti-associational policies, initiated by the Japanese state between the late 1970s and the 2000s and show how these policies were carried out. Among the policies, the two most significant are educational reforms and the dismantlement of labor unions. Introduction of the nuclear housing and family systems, competition-based evaluation of children, dismantlement of self-governing activities on university campuses, relocation of liberal arts educational curriculums to suburban areas, early entrance to the job market are also paralleled processes. These policies limited Japanese youth to have less associational lives with peers, neighbors, and even their own family.

In this presentation I show the network structure of the largest social movement organization in Japan today—the Article 9 Association, which was established in 2004 with the aim of preventing amendment of the Japanese Constitution and its Peace Clause Article 9. I chose this movement, as it is a nationwide network featuring 7,528 grassroots chapters that were voluntarily created between 2004 and 2012. Moreover, while receiving enthusiastic support from those who are older than sixty-five, this movement is scarcely recognized by those who are younger than fifty. Data from my fieldwork in Japan between September 2011 and May 2012 shows that almost all of the participants of the Article 9 Association movement have experienced either wartime mobilization, the student movements in the 1960s and the 1970s, and/or the labor union movements in the following decades. I thus argue that the extensive social network of these older generations, which was created through a multitude of mobilizations since the World War II, has been dismantled.

Understanding the above processes is fundamental for our discussion of social innovation. For

this I compare the Article 9 Association to the network and mobilization patterns of younger Japanese in current anti-nuclear, anti-poverty, and peace movements. The disconnection between the networks of the old and the young indicates that Japanese civil society has experienced structural and cultural sea change during the past three decades. Such a significant transformation in civil society calls for a regime shift. To counter the ongoing anti-associational policies of the current regime, Japanese citizens need new ways to recreate the spaces for civic activities. The Internet and social media platforms in particular hold a key to this transformational project. Reutilization of local knowledge and traditional cultures are also necessary. Along with such activities, Japanese people need to be better aware of their rights, and to utilize their rights. Being aware of their constitutional rights can help the currently separated movements to unite their superficially unrelated problems, which shares the same root cause—a consistent violation of citizen's constitutional rights.