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Religion and Civil Society in Contemporary Japan

This essay examines the applicability of the concept of civil society to contemporary Japanese religions. The first section discusses the concept of civil society, addressing the potential advantages and pitfalls of considering religious organizations alongside civil society organizations. The second section addresses issues in the history of Japanese civil society and religion. Subsequent sections present the results of an attempt to align the founding of a variety of religious organizations with a chronology of the expansion of civil society, and to examine religions' peace activism from 1999 to 2003 in the context of civil society debate about peace, with an assessment of the results.

KEYWORDS: civil society – peace activism – new religions – religious corporations – NGO.

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ANYONE RESEARCHING modern and contemporary religion is familiar with problems arising from the assumption that religion is somehow an anomaly in the modern world. No one any longer actually voices or openly advocates this position, but the absence of a clear alternative permits it to linger. Likewise, the absence of a clear theoretical statement on religion in modernization theory facilitates perpetuation of the assumption of religion's inevitable demise. Secularization provides the rubrics for explaining religion's disappearance from most political discourse, but it does not suggest an explanation for the continued formation of religious organizations, their social activism, or for the continued salience of the older, established organizations referenced by "traditional Buddhism," Japanese Buddhist sects, their temples, priests, and parishioners. The rhetoric of decline hinders the development of a theoretical stance on modern religion that recognizes these empirical realities as normal and unexceptional.

The Concept of Civil Society

"Normal" and "unexceptional" accurately characterize traditional Buddhism. Buddhist sects have of course been a central element of Japanese history since the ancient period and constitute one of the most venerable features of Japanese society. That being the case, lack of conceptual paradigms that could facilitate analysis of their contemporary significance is a major problem for the study of Japanese religions. This conceptual vacuum probably accounts for the relative lack of research on contemporary Japanese Buddhism, which may be the least-studied aspect of modern religious life. This paucity of research contrasts sharply with actual religious practice in Japan, where traditional Buddhism is the religious affiliation of about half the population.

This paper is an experiment exploring whether religious organizations in Japan today might be understood as an element of civil society. If it could be established that religious groups share many of the characteristics of civil society organizations, this would establish new reasons to regard them as a normal part of the associational life of modern society, rather than as a vestige of premodern society, an anti-modern mentality, or as compensatory responses to the contradictions and disruptions inherent in modernization. If in spite of those characteristics that

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distinguish religious groups as “religious,” these associations can be shown nevertheless to conform to significant patterns seen in other kinds of civil society groups, then that would facilitate displacing exceptionalism and replacing it with a more normalized understanding of religion in modern society. Any conceptual innovation that facilitates such a change would benefit studies of religion and society, and it is in that spirit that this experiment is presented.

Civil society exists between the state and the market, on the one hand, and above the family and individual, on the other. It is composed of organizations and a space of discourse; constituent groups debate questions of public interest and strive to contribute to the public good in a multitude of ways. Its space of discourse is the “public sphere.” Civil society groups are voluntary associations that seek neither power in the state nor profit in the market. They are devoted to a vast spectrum of causes, such as protection of the environment, social welfare, the improvement of education, eradication of political corruption, and many more. The organizations may take many forms, such as labor unions, trade associations, clubs, and lobbies. They bind people together to consider how to promote their version of the good society and to take action to realize that ideal. The ties formed in these groups strengthen local communities by enhancing solidarity and creating social capital for individual members. Contemporary society’s attitudes toward public issues are formed in dialogue with print, broadcast, and electronic media, which occupy most of the public sphere in modern society (HABERMAS 1989). The positions taken and activities organized by a particular group largely define its position in society.

Historically, the concept of civil society arose in part through reflections on the Protestant Reformation and the characteristically Western ideal of a separation of religion from state, yielding to toleration of a plurality of legitimate perspectives and interests, restraining the state from dictating an orthodoxy of thought (HALL 1995, pp. 3–7; GELLNER 1995, p. 46). It is clear that liberal, Western democracy represents a highly desirable goal in much civil society research. That civil society only truly exists where universal suffrage, periodic elections, a free press, an independent judiciary, freedoms of association, assembly, petition, religion, and academic freedom are found is a pervasive assumption (SHILS 1991, pp. 5–8).

In Japanese language civil society is either translated as *shimin shakai* 市民社会 or transliterated as *shibiru sosaeti*. Applying the concept of civil society to Asian societies raises various questions. Robert Weller found that there was no very satisfactory way to translate the term civil society into Chinese, producing unwieldy neologisms such as *wenmin shehui* 文民社会 (civilized society), *gongmin shehui* 公民社会 (society of citizens), *shimin shehui* 市民社会 (bourgeois or urban society), and *minjian shehui* 民間社会 (popular society). In societies strongly influenced by Confucianism, quite different understandings of the proper relation between the state and religion than those in the West inflect the development of civil society. Yet he writes further that, “None of this, however,

implies that China lacked the kinds of social capital that form the armature of Western civil society, particularly networks of horizontal ties that extended beyond the immediate family but were not themselves political." In fact, many of these networks were formed through religious organizations (WELLER 1998, p. 233).

Religion and Civil Society

Religion is directly or indirectly implicated in the concept of civil society and in its historical genesis. There is, however, no clear consensus on the question whether religious organizations should be considered a part of civil society, and some of the ambiguity stems from the distinctive qualities of religious organizations that distinguish them from other kinds of associations. In modern society, the pursuit of a path towards salvation, following a code of personal ethics, performance of religious ritual, and reflection upon the correct relation with deities or supernatural forces have come to be regarded as largely private matters lacking public significance.

Also, though membership in voluntary associations typically arises from a choice made by adults, the majority of religious affiliations arises from being born to parents already affiliated with a particular religion. This means that there is a significant overlap between kinship and religious ties, though it is of course true that other religious affiliations result from adult choices made as a result of conversion, making this type of affiliation more like that involved in voluntary associations. Beyond this difference, religions place obligations upon their members that are not generally regarded as matters of choice, such as belief in a deity (or supreme being[s]), commitment to a moral code or an ideal vision of community, or following some path toward salvation, however conceptualized. Here, too, there may be overlap with other civil society groups, but the fit is not perfect.

The nature of leadership also differs, and the often-found concentration of authority and power in religious leaders exceeds that typical of secular civil society groups, creating a strong emphasis on vertical ties, whereas horizontal ties are more prominent in secular civil society groups. So far as the membership is concerned, obedience to a leader may not be a matter of choice, or may be so only in the abstract, calling the "voluntary" nature of religious affiliation into question. Finally, it is significant that the very idea of religious affiliation as a matter of choice is a distinctly modern phenomenon, one that rests on the existence of a modern society, a separation between religion and state, and a pluralistic religious culture (HARDACRE 2003).

Focusing on religions' actual behavior yields another view. Larry Diamond notes that all groups, religious or otherwise, are incompatible with civil society if they "seek to encapsulate their members within a totalistic environment that isolates them from alternative views and ties, inculcates a rigid, comprehensive

ideological or philosophical belief system, and demands total obedience" (DIAMOND 1999, p. 222). But religious groups can be either inside or outside the sphere of civil society, depending upon their focus at any given time.

A religious congregation or establishment (a church or mosque or synagogue) may mainly function to cater to the spiritual needs of its members in parochial society. But when it becomes engaged in efforts to fight poverty, crime, and drug addiction, to improve human capital, to organize efforts for community self-improvement, or to lobby legislatures (or join constitutional cases) about public policies on abortion, sexuality, poverty, human rights, the legal treatment of religion, or a myriad of other issues, then the religious institution is acting in civil society. (DIAMOND 1999, p. 224)

José CASANOVA states bluntly that "... the church only becomes an institution of civil society when it ceases being a church in the Weberian sense of the term: when it gives up its monopolistic claims and recognizes religious freedom and freedom of conscience as universal and inviolable human rights" (2001, p. 1046).

Writing on Italian democracy, Robert Putnam and his co-researchers view Italian Catholicism since Vatican II as separate from and essentially antagonistic to civil society. Survey research allows them to make clear-cut distinctions in the social orientations of Catholics and non-Catholics.

Organized religion, at least in Catholic Italy, is an alternative to the civic community, not a part of it.... The Italian Church retains much of the heritage of the Counter-Reformation, including an emphasis on the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the traditional virtues of obedience and acceptance of one's station in life. Vertical bonds of authority are more characteristic of the Italian Church than horizontal bonds of fellowship. At the regional level, all manifestations of religiosity and clericalism—attendance at Mass, religious (as opposed to civil) marriages, rejection of divorce, expressions of religious identity in surveys—are negatively correlated with civic engagement.... At the individual level, too, religious sentiments and civic engagement seem to be mutually incompatible. Of those Italians who attend Mass more than once a week, 52 percent say they rarely read a newspaper, and 51 percent say they never discuss politics; among their avowedly irreligious compatriots, the equivalent figures are 13 percent and 17 percent.

(PUTNAM, LEONARDY, and NANETTI, 1993, p. 107)

In other words, the more engaged people are with Italian Catholicism, the less likely they are to become engaged in the kind of discussion of matters of public interest that characterize civil society.

Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina view the status of religion in American civil society as problematic, sometimes included and sometimes not, but they contest Putnam's findings and highly evaluate religions' roles in spreading

associational models that were later incorporated into a wide range of civil society organizations. Starting from the mid-nineteenth century, by which time all the states had cut their ties to churches, Skocpol and Fiorina write that evangelical movements had an unparalleled impact as they spread from state to state.

Early Methodist circuit-riding clergy, above all, pioneered new methods of associational organization...inspiring local leaders to found and sustain new congregations, and then tied those bodies together into federations espousing a shared world view and moral purposes. As the Methodists spread their word and founded tens of thousands of local congregations in even the tiniest places, other religious denominations had to reach out and organize too, lest they shrink and die. Through competitive emulation, a new model of association-spreading fanned across early America. (SKOCPOL and FIORINA 1999, p. 44)

Religion thus can be positioned in a variety of relations to civil society, sometimes outside it, engaged in concerns that are regarded in the modern world as essentially private. To the extent that religion imposes an all-encompassing world of thought and action upon its members and prevents them from associating with outsiders or engaging in civic activity, it may be antithetical to civil society. Religious groups may at other times be more closely aligned with groups typical of civil society, volunteering their labor and capital to social work, disaster relief, and education, and engaging along with other civil society groups in debate on public policy of all kinds.

Japanese Civil Society

The history of Japanese civil society is marked by determined state intervention. Sheldon Garon identifies a pattern in which the state tends to envelop and co-opt societal groups in ways that blunt their capacity to challenge it. At the end of the nineteenth century, the new middle class composed of lawyers, teachers, doctors, nurses, and civil servants, "defined by the progressive politics and Christian convictions of its prominent publicists," dominated the public sphere. They formed Japanese chapters of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Salvation Army, the Young Men's Christian Association, and other associations to advocate women's education, to oppose licensed prostitution and sexual enslavement, and other causes (GARON 2003, p. 48).

But after 1900, the former progressives of the middle class were mostly co-opted and took the position that their groups should work with the state, not be its adversary. They excluded non-property-owning men and all women from the franchise, and the 1900 Public Order Police Law (Chian Keisatsuhō 治安警察法) forbade women to attend any political meetings or join political groups. The Christians started working with the Home Ministry to relieve poverty and to further its other causes. Meanwhile, the state amalgamated agricultural and

industrial producers into semi-obligatory associations and established semi-obligatory Hōtoku 報徳 societies, reservists associations, women's associations, youth groups, chambers of commerce, and agricultural cooperative associations. Likewise, neighborhood associations (*chōnaikai* 町内会) were a major feature of Japanese society in the prewar decades. These state-mandated and state-controlled initiatives impeded the development of an autonomous civil society, both because membership in them was not truly voluntary and because they stifled the autonomous founding of voluntary associations (GARON 2003, pp. 48–54).

The Home Ministry took a major role in imposing a command structure on local life from 1940 to the defeat. The Ministry modeled the 1940 Imperial Rule Assistance Association (Taisei Yokusankai 大政翼賛会) on the Nazi Party, making it a mass organization that would absorb autonomous groups of all kinds. The media was completely uncritical of the state in promoting support for war. In wartime the new religions were deemed heterodox threats to the war effort (GARON 2003, pp. 54–56).

The Occupation tried to promote the growth of civil society by dissolving the Imperial Rule Assistance Association and the neighborhood associations, along with semiofficial women's and youth groups. Religious groups gained more autonomy. Nevertheless, the neighborhood associations could not be eliminated, and grassroots organizations like shrine support groups (which are closely linked to the neighborhood associations) and the Society of the Bereaved (Nihon Izokukai 日本遺族会) are frequently found supporting greater state oversight in public life (GARON 1997, pp. 3–22).

Research on postwar Japanese civil society identifies a continuation of the theme of heavy state intervention in civil society, but after 1945 the state's main mechanism changed to bureaucratic regulation. The concept of "public-interest corporations" (*kōeki hōjin* 公益法人), first developed in the Meiji Civil Code of 1896, article 34, continues to provide the main rubrics for government oversight of civil society groups. Separate laws have been developed for the administration of private school corporations (*gakkō hōjin* 学校法人), social welfare corporations (*shakai fukushi hōjin* 社会福祉法人), medical corporations (*iryō hōjin* 医療法人), and religious corporations (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人), but all of these groups are subtypes of public interest corporations. "Public interest" has been interpreted rather narrowly, to mean "for the benefit of society in general or of many and unspecified persons," which excludes business organizations, sports clubs, alumni associations, and many other groups which actually function as civil society groups (YAMAMOTO 1998; YAMAOKA 1998; AMEMIYA 1998).

Public-interest corporations have to report regularly to a government ministry, which can investigate a group or revoke its legal status. The corporations, including religious corporations, must submit lists of their annual activities, assets, accounts of changes of membership, financial statements, budget estimates,

planned activities, and other matters.¹ The agency can make on-site inspections and audits. These and similar regulations inhibit the autonomy of these civil society groups. Often there is a de facto agreement by public-interest corporations to employ ex-bureaucrats of the approving ministry, a practice called *amakudari* 天下り (literally “descending from heaven”), which give those individuals significant influence in how the group develops. This and other widely publicized problems regarding public interest corporations have led to current proposals to make them subject to taxation, a move that would have immense implications for religious groups (ARAI 2003). The Asia Foundation and other foreign groups purposefully remain outside Japanese government recognition just to avoid red tape and bureaucratic interference (PEKKANEN 2002).

Interest groups of all kinds proliferated during the first twenty years after World War II, continuing to grow after that time as well. In 1960, Japan had about eleven nonprofit associations for every ten thousand persons, versus almost thirty-five in the United States. But by 1991, Japan had more than 80 percent the density of the United States (29.2 v. 35.2). A new trend of volunteerism arose in response to the Indochinese Boat People in 1979, growing further since then. In effect, “the general public—and some leaders—in Japan have concluded that the state lacks the flexibility and resources to cope with increasingly complex socioeconomic issues, and more and more citizens have responded with their own initiatives” (SCHWARTZ 2002, pp. 201–212; quotation p. 206).

Nothing more dramatically demonstrated the limitations of excessive bureaucratic regulation of civil society than the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 17 January 1995. The huge earthquake killed over six thousand people and devastated the city of Kobe and parts of Osaka. Paralyzed by red tape and inter-agency turf wars, the government’s delayed and disorganized response was broadcast on television to a horrified nation. A huge outpouring of volunteers, including many religious groups, organized themselves to aid the victims in every possible way. Few of these groups had any legal status with the government to provide disaster relief, but the media lauded their efforts and poured scorn on the governmental response. While it may be too early to tell whether the earthquake has initiated a lasting trend, surveys in 1997 showed that 21.5 percent of Japanese adults and 40.7 percent of college students had engaged in volunteer activities (SCHWARTZ 2002, p. 211).

The government’s debacle in Kobe prepared the way for the 1998 Non-Profit Organization Law (Tokutei Hieiri Katsudō Sokushin Hō 特定非営利活動促進法, Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities). While bureaucrats remain largely skeptical of popular efforts to play a greater role, by the end of 2001, some

1. For an exact specification of the documents that religious corporations are required to maintain and submit periodically, see the website of the Agency of Cultural Affairs: www.bunka.go.jp/isukyo/frame.asp. Accessed 10 October 2003.

5,625 organizations had been granted NPO status under the new law. It remains to be seen whether the bureaucracy will adopt an attitude actively fostering the expansion of civil society, or whether it will revert to type and try to absorb or co-opt the new groups, or use them as “inexpensive means for delegating governmental responsibilities and quieting their critics” (SCHWARTZ 2002, p. 211).

This history of Japanese civil society’s development can be quantified according to a timeline of the number and nature of associations founded. Tsujinaka Yutaka, sociologist at Tsukuba University, has conducted the most comprehensive, empirical cross-cultural survey of civil society organizations in Japan, Korea, and the United States (TSUJINAKA 2002).

Tsujinaka divides the expansion of civil society in Japan into three periods. The first is the period 1921 to approximately 1933, which overlaps with “Taisho democracy” and the early years of Showa. During this time, elite professionals and business executives formed occupational associations and economic organizations. Somewhat later, around 1940, there was a secondary surge in the founding of similar organizations. The second period is 1945 to 1964, with the later 1950s, especially, showing a large growth in the founding of civil society organizations. This span saw both the largest number of organizations formed and the formation of the largest organizations, massive movements of industry associations and labor unions. During this period, civil society organizations’ political participation gained legitimacy. The third period is 1974 to the present, when a wide spectrum of students, women, consumers, and environmental activists spearheaded the expansion of pressure groups, citizens movements, lobbies, and public interest promoting organizations claiming the right to a role in the policy-making process. Especially since the passage of the NPO law, non-profits and NGOs have professionalized the business of advocacy and gained legitimacy (TSUJINAKA 2003, pp. 97–110).²

Japanese Religious Organizations and Civil Society

In order to establish comprehensively whether the civil society framework is useful in the study of religious organizations, ideally it would be necessary at minimum (1) to determine how the time of founding of religious organizations parallels the overall development of civil society; (2) to identify the range of civil society issues that religions engage with; (3) to determine how religions’ interventions are mediated by the public sphere, and the extent to which they are known in society as a whole; and (4) to assess how the positions taken by religious groups relate to the spectrum of opinion and interventions seen across society as a whole. Within the present study, I tried to address aspects of the first and fourth issues above.

2. For fuller exposition, see TSUJINAKA 2002.

In order to determine whether the timing of religious organizations founding bears any relation to the patterns seen broadly in the development of Japanese civil society, I collected data on the founding and number of three different types of religious organizations: (1) new religious organizations, (2) Christian organizations existing outside the churches, and (3) annual changes in the total number of religious corporations. I compiled the findings in accord with the chronology of the development of Japanese civil society organizations established by Tsujinaka.

Apparently it should be easy to develop a chronology of the founding of Japanese religious groups over the twentieth century and compare that to Tsujinaka's three periods, but in fact this is a more complicated task than one might think. Studies of Japanese new religions have accepted a rough outline in which a core group of religions was founded at the end of the Edo period, followed by a second "wave" made up largely of the so-called "Shinto sects" (*kyōha Shintō*) in the early-to-mid-Meiji period, with the next wave in the 1920s, and the largest number of new organizations emerging following the removal of state control after 1945. Another "wave," which some scholars identify as "new-new religions" appeared from roughly the mid-1970s and continues to the present (INOUE, SAKAMOTO et al., eds., 1996).³ Thus, accepted scholarship in this area has developed a periodization that agrees in outline with Tsujinaka's framework.

Going beyond this admittedly rather loose and "fuzzy" periodization to a more quantified presentation is difficult. Some religions identify a distinct date of "founding"; Kurozumikyō provides such an example. The group identifies its founder's first revelation in 1814 as its official founding. Other religions identify the date of their incorporation under the Religious Corporations Law as their official founding. Many others, however, show a much less clear-cut history, in which they do not necessarily pinpoint a particular foundation date. For these, one can only read the available data and try to identify when a core membership was assembled. Religions founded outside Japan pose another difficulty. The date of their founding in the home country is not nearly so significant to the question of Japanese civil society as the timing of their forming a Japanese following. In Table 1 below, I used the latter date. I identified a founding date for the religions treated in the most recent and comprehensive compendium of Japanese new religions, *Shinshūkyō kyōdan, jinbutsu jiten* [Dictionary of new religious organizations and persons; INOUE et al., eds. 1996], dividing them according to Tsujinaka's periodization. In all, the founding dates for about four hundred new religious organizations can be identified.⁴ It is certain that more groups than those represented here have existed over this period, but in the

3. For discussion of this periodization, see INOUE et al., eds. 1990, pp. 6–8.

4. This number includes organizations mentioned in charts and tables as well as dictionary entries.

TABLE 1 Founding of religious organizations in relation to the expansion of Japanese civil society.
Rows in gray represent Tsujinaka's three periods in the development of Japanese civil society.

Period	No. of new religious orgs. founded	Average no. of new religious orgs. founded per year, this period	No. of Christian orgs. founded	Average no. of Christian orgs. founded per year, this period	Number of religious corporations
1900–1920	16	0.76	43	2.05	x
1921–1933	23	1.77	23	1.77	x
1934–1939	13	2.17	9	1.50	x
1940	8	8.00	1	1.00	x
1941–1944	12	3.00	6	1.50	x
1945–1964	179	8.95	295	14.75	178,603→ 180,484 (1952)→(1964)
1965–1973	39	4.33	164	18.22	180,491→ 184,573 (1965)→(1973)
1974–present	68 (1974–1995)	3.09	426 (1974–2003)	14.20	181,629→ 182,627 (1974)→(2001)
Total = 358	Overall annual average = 3.73		Total = 967	Overall annual average = 9.30	Peak Years: 1973 = 184,573 1994 = 184,288

Sources: INOUE, SAKAMOTO Mitsugi et al., eds., 1996; BUNKACHŌ SHŪMUKA, 1947–2003; KIRISUTOKYŌ NENKAN HENSHŪBU, ed., 2003.

absence of a larger database, this source can be taken as representative of the present state of knowledge about Japanese new religions.

The annual rate of founding of new religious movements shows a close correspondence with Tsujinaka's periodization. The match is most visible in the column identifying the average number of organizations founded annually during each period. It can be seen that 1921 to 1933 represents a doubled rate of expansion over the previous two decades. The year 1940 represents a pre-1945 peak of eight groups founded, followed by a slump during the war years. The most intense period of expansion comes from 1945 to 1964. This is the period in which some new religions became true mass organizations, paralleling the

founding of mass labor organizations. It is notable, however, that some of the groups reaching a membership of a million or more (Sōka Gakkai, Reiyūkai Kyōdan, and Risshō Kōseikai, for example) were technically founded earlier, but prevented by state regulations from expanding until after 1945. There is a significant diminution from 1965 to 1973. The years 1974 to 1995 show a return of growth, but at a rate much smaller than immediately after 1945.

Besides religions themselves, another type of religious association directly relevant to the development of civil society is the secondary formation within religions of service groups of all kinds. The *Christian Yearbook* (Kirisuto Shinbun 2004) lists a huge variety of service, charitable, evangelical, and other organizations operating alongside Christian churches. From it I identified around one thousand organizations currently operating, along with the founding dates for nearly all of them. This work does not include data on earlier organizations that no longer exist, and in that sense it does not give a full accounting of the period 1900 to the present. It is, however, the most comprehensive source available.

Japanese Christianity shows a different pattern than new religious movements, having enjoyed significant growth before 1900, but closely scrutinized and regulated through the period of militarism. Thus from 1900 to 1945, we see a slight decline. This was followed by a major expansion in the period 1945 to 1964, with an annual rate of growth far exceeding that seen in the founding of new religions. As Tsujinaka's scheme would lead us to expect, the years 1965 to 1973 show a decline, with another period of expansion beginning in 1974, though at a lesser annual average than from 1945 to 1964. The overall increase is especially striking, given that Christians have never exceeded one percent of the total Japanese population. Christian organizations thus show the general trend toward expansion over the twentieth century that Tsujinaka's paradigm projects, but they do not follow its contours nearly so closely as new religious movements.

Changes in the number of religious corporations offer another kind of insight into religions' interactions with civil society. The number of religious corporations is not, however, identical with the number of religious organizations. Not all Japanese religious organizations are incorporated, and many of the incorporated groups were actually founded well before they incorporated. When the Religious Corporations Law first came into effect in 1951, the Religious Office (Shūmuka 宗務課) of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō 文化庁), charged with administration of the law, used to track unincorporated groups, and from 1947 to 1960 the number of unincorporated religions was published annually in the *Shūkyō nenkan* (宗教年鑑 *Religions Yearbook*). Over those years unincorporated groups grew from around 13,300 in 1947 to about 40,000 in 1960. Unfortunately, there is no ready way to determine the number of such groups today, though they undoubtedly exist.

The Religious Corporations Law was preceded by the Religious Organizations

Law (Shūkyō Dantai Hō 宗教団体法) of 1940. This law, which excluded shrines on the basis of the contemporary theory that they were not religious in character, allowed Buddhist temples, Christian churches, and new religions to incorporate. About 79,000 temples incorporated under this law, and when the 1951 Religious Corporations Law was implemented, 110,000 shrines were automatically given corporate status. It is for this reason that from the start of the Religious Corporations Law some 178,603 religious corporations were recorded.⁵

The *Religions Yearbook*, which includes temples, shrines, Christian churches, and new religions, shows the marks of a stable system from 1952, with the exception of a few years of data that are hard to credit.⁶ Data from 1952 to 1964 show that the number of religious corporations rose from 178,603 in 1952 to just over 180,484 in 1964. The period from 1965 through 1972 shows a gain of about 1,000 organizations, ending at about 181,400. The historic high came in 1973, at 184,573, with a somewhat smaller peak in 1994, when the number was 184,288. From 1995, the number begins to decline. The difference between the postwar high and low is around 6,000 groups, a shift of only around 3 percent of the total. The most recent statistics put the number of Japanese religious corporations in 2001 at 182,687.⁷

Because the Religious Corporations Law was instituted in 1951, and because shrines did not incorporate before that time, meaningful correspondence with Tsujinaka's framework cannot be drawn before the 1950s. The years 1952 to 1973 were marked by fairly consistent expansion rather than breaking at 1964, as Tsujinaka's scheme would lead us to expect. As with new religious movements, the declining number of religious corporations after 1995 identifies the Aum incident as a watershed event.

To provide a complete accounting of the expansions and contractions of the religious world in relation to civil society as a whole, it would unquestionably be necessary to provide comparable data on Shinto and Buddhist organizations. Unfortunately, however, that task proved insurmountable in the present research. The case of Buddhist civil society organizations is exceedingly complex. From the Meiji period on, a great many Buddhist organizations have been formed, some considering how to modernize traditional practices, others establishing contacts

5. For an overview of the Religious Organizations Law, the history of its drafting, and a summary of its differences from the succeeding Religious Corporations Law, see INOUE, KŌMOTO, et al., eds. 1990, pp. 477–81. For the text of the Religious Organizations Law and an exhaustive compendium of related religious law current during the war, see INOUE Egyō, 1941. Sample documents required for religious organizations to submit to the government are provided in pages 218–52. The process of transition from the Religious Organizations Law to the Religious Corporations Law is treated in UMEDA 1971, pp. 205–206.

6. The years 1954 and 1973 show huge increases over the previous year (nearly 17,000 in 1954), with 1955 and 1974 showing a decrease of a nearly equal number. These discrepancies suggest irregularities in accounting rather than an accurate reflection of real numbers.

7. BUNKACHŌ SHŪMUKA, 2003), p. 29, chart 1 (current as of 31 December 2001).

with Buddhists outside Japan, some engaging with socialism, liberalism, and other trends of political thought, while others sought to aid the poor, evangelize overseas, or encourage patriotism. In the *JJRS*'s special issue on Meiji Zen (1998, vol. 25/1–2), IKEDA Eishun's article documents the large number of teaching assemblies (*kyōkai* 教会) and lay societies (*kessha* 結社) formed from the mid-1880s.

Ikeda presents a chart showing how vast numbers of such groups were founded, but he also documents a simultaneous move to merge them, to bring them under the control of the sects. Meanwhile, the sects themselves were heavily supervised by the Home Ministry, which required them to seek approval for all significant projects or changes (IKEDA 1998). We could see in Ikeda's material the beginnings of civil society-like initiatives within traditional Buddhism, quickly co-opted by the sects themselves and then stifled under state supervision. Ikeda's work makes it clear that the young Buddhists of mid-Meiji sought to enter public debate on a range of topics of public interest but were usually squelched by sectarian hierarchies. There is a need to link this history to the postwar history of religious life within traditional Buddhism.

I was unable to locate a source that comprehensively lists all of these, or even all of those now extant. Preliminary research suggests that compilation of such a list would be an immense task, one more suitable to team- than to individual research. Nevertheless, it is clear that Buddhists have created significant new organizations during the period 1974 to the present, with the Buddhist NGO Network as a prime example. Established in 2002, the Network comprises some forty NGOs at present, and one of them, Japan Sōtōshū Relief Committee, is one of the larger NGOs in Japan today, with an annual budget of \$6.5 million dollars, a staff of one hundred and eighty-three people, and offices in three countries (REIMANN 2003, p. 299).

Like traditional Buddhism, no comprehensive source documenting the foundation of Shinto organizations is available. Up to 1945, the Shinto world was organized into three main organizations, the Kōten Kōkyūsho 皇典講究所 (Institute for the Study of the Classics), Dainihon Jingikai 大日本神祇会 (Great Japan Society for Divinity), earlier known as Zenkoku Shinshokukai 全国神職会 (National Association of Shrine Priests), and Jingū Hōsaikai 神宮奉斎会 (Society for Service to the Ise Shrines). The Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō 神社本庁) emerged from these to unify the Shinto world after the defeat. Six organizations (*shitei dantai* 指定団体) within the Jinja Honchō framework were established at the time of its founding in 1946.⁸ In addition,

8. (1) National Shinto Women's Association (Zenkoku Keishin Fujinkai 全国敬神婦人会), (2) National Shinto Youth Council (Shintō Seinen Zenkoku Kyōgikai 神道青年全国協議会), (3) Shrine Scouting Council (Jinja Sukauto Kyōgikai 神社スカウト協議会), (4) National Federation of Shrine Nursery Organizations (Zenkoku Jinja Hoiku Dantai Rengōkai 全国神社保育団体連合会), (5) National Council of Shinto Priest Educators (Zenkoku Kyōiku Kankeisha Shinshoku Kyōgikai 全国教育関係者神職協議会), (6) National Council of Ujiko Youth (Zenkoku Ujiko Seinen Kyōgikai 全国氏子青年協議会).

there are two organizations affiliated with Jinja Honchō, the National Council of Shrine Sōdai (Zenkokujinja Sōdaikai 全国神社総代会) and the Federation of Shinto Politicians (Shintō Seijirenmei 神道政治連盟), whose offices are within the Association's headquarters. Three Shinto associations are public interest corporations administered by the Ministry of Culture.⁹ There are no Shinto NPOs or NGOs at this time.¹⁰ There is an association of Shinto prison chaplains (*kyōkaishi* 教誨師) with one hundred and twenty-two members (SAKURAI 2001, p. 6). Preliminary research suggests that the shrines have always been constrained by the small size of the priesthood (around 8,000 at present) and a felt need to maintain unity even at the expense of expansion. A proliferation of autonomous initiatives by provincial priests to engage with the full range of civil issues might well be perceived as a threat to the centralizing authority of the Association of Shinto Shrines.

Summarizing the results of this experiment of aligning the religious world with the history of civil society as a whole, the following conclusions can be drawn. There is a general correspondence between the two that follows Tsujinaka's scheme, realized most fully in the founding of new religious movements. Japanese Christianity's expanding network of service organizations reached its height in the period 1946 to 1964, and while it declines after that time when measured by average number of organizations founded annually, the total number of associations is indeed remarkable when seen against the small number of people involved (1,132,344 persons, or 0.887 percent of the national population) (KIRISUTOKYŌ NENKAN HENSHŪBU 2003, *Tokushū, kiroku, tōkeishū* 特集記録統計集, p. 96). Statistical problems in the data regarding number of religious corporations make it difficult to draw firm conclusions on every point of correspondence, but an overall expansion from the system's beginning until the Aum Shinrikyō incident emerges clearly. The available data tend to confirm the hypothesis of a broad correspondence between the religious world and civil society as a whole. Lack of relevant data on Buddhism and Shinto, however, is a serious gap that would have to be addressed in order to develop this inquiry further.

Contemporary Japanese Religions' Engagement with Civil Society

To go beyond the finding that religious organizations have been founded following rhythms seen widely in Japan's associational life, it is important to be able to assess religions' positions on the issues discussed by civil society organizations.

9. They are the Association of Shikinaisha Shrines (Shikinaisha Kenshōkai 式内社顕彰会, founded 1975), Supporters of the Ise Shrines (Ise Jingū Sūkeikai 伊勢神宮崇敬会, founded 1953), and Fushimi Inari Shrine Association (Fushimi Inari Taisha Kōmu Honchō 伏見稻荷大社公務本庁, founded 1941).

10. Fujimoto Yorio, Interview, 20 November 2003. Mr. Fujimoto is an official of the Department of Doctrine (Kyōgaku Ka), Association of Shinto Shrines.

In order to address this question in a preliminary way, I limited research to the question of peace and used the Lark Database, maintained by the Religious Information Research Center (Shūkyō Jōhō Risāchi Sentā 宗教情報リサーチセンター; www.rirc.or.jp). The Lark Database indexes two hundred and twenty-one newspapers and magazines published in Japan, and classifies articles according to sixty-two search categories.¹¹ It covers the period 1984 to the present and is the most comprehensive database of print media on religious issues in Japan. I searched this source to retrieve articles from religious newspapers documenting religious organizations' views on and approaches to peace issues, and how these have changed over time, planning to emphasize responses to the Gulf War of 1991 and compare those to responses to the current military action in Iraq.

TABLE 2: Articles on peace issues from religious newspapers, February 1999 through October 2003. Retrieved from the Lark Database.

Year/ Periodical	1999	2000	2001, up to 9.11	2001, after 9.11	2002	2003, before 3.20 Iraq invasion	2003, from Iraq invasion through 10.26	Total
<i>Jinja Shinpō</i>	4	3	2	1	6	1	2	19
<i>Bukkyō Taimusu</i>	48	33	10	10	74	18	63	256
<i>Chūgai Nippō</i>	48	43	22	42	102	28	86	371
<i>Kirisuto Shinbun</i>	54	27	19	24	43	26	54	247
<i>Katorikku Shinbun</i>	54	27	25	21	74	23	48	272
<i>Kurisuchan Shinbun</i>	30	18	7	14	28	11	36	144
<i>Shinshūkyō Shinbun</i>	17	6	11	3	26	8	33	104
Other	0	3	3	1	1	3	2	13
Total	255	160	99	116	354	118	324	1426

11. For an enumeration of the search categories, see www.rirc.or.jp/faq/bunrui-hyo.html.

I searched the database under “peace issues” (*heiwa mondai* 平和問題) and recovered 15,094 articles, of which 1,426 were drawn from the religious papers, but the search also uncovered some quirks in the system. Coverage of the religious newspapers in Japan is a major feature of the database, but while nine of these are included, the largest of them, *Seikyō Shinbun* (聖教新聞), published by Sōka Gakkai as a nationally circulating daily newspaper, is not.¹² Also, although the entire database was searched, nothing at all was retrieved on peace issues for the years 1984 and 1985. Furthermore, the search retrieved no articles from any of the religious newspapers before February 1999. The explanation I received for this anomaly was that the database is gradually being expanded, extending back in time from the present.¹³ This means that it remains incomplete for years before 1999. Because the database is presently most useful in searches for very contemporary material, I focused on the period February 1999 through October 2003. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the content and sources of the 1,426 articles retrieved.

Table 2 shows that *Chūgai Nippō*, *Katorikku Shinbun*, *Bukkyō Taimusu*, and *Kirisuto Shinbun* have carried the most intense coverage of peace issues among the religions’ newspapers. By comparison, according to the database, *Shinshūkyō Shinbun* and *Jinja Shinpō* have devoted less space, by far, to the topic. As a subscriber to *Shinshūkyō Shinbun*, the database’s report of such a low yield of peace-related articles for this paper seemed odd to me, so I checked recent issues against the database index. I found in each case that several relevant articles had been omitted from the database, suggesting that it tends to miss or under-report relevant material, especially if the word “peace” is not in the article title.¹⁴

While the Lark Database is thus hardly a perfect instrument for the task, it is nevertheless the most comprehensive source for determining as accurately as possible how Japanese religions’ approaches to peace issues have changed over the period 1999 to late 2003. I leave Shinto out in the following account, since *Jinja Shinpō* so seldom carried articles on peace.

During 1999, opposition to the New Guidelines Bill (Shin gaidorain hōan

12. The religious newspapers included in the database are *Jinja Shinpō*, *Bukkyō Taimusu*, *Chūgai Nippō*, *Bunka Jihō*, *Kirisuto Shinbun*, *Katorikku Shinbun*, *Kurisuchan Shinbun*, *Saiten Shinbun*, and *Shinshūkyō Shinbun*. Among these, *Bunka Jihō* is the only one not published by a particular religious organization. It is published by the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

13. Satō Masahiro, staff member of the Religious Information Research Center, 14 November 2003.

14. *Shinshūkyō Shinbun* is published once a month. In issue 920, for 25 September 2003, I found the following relevant articles in the paper but omitted in the database: “A Report on the Situation in Iraq by NGOs” (p. 1), “A Prayer Before the American Embassy for the Vow Against Taking Life” (p. 1); “Jōdo Shinshū Honganjiha Vows Peace and a Prohibition on War in Memorial Rites at Chidorigafuchi” (p. 4). Examination of the next month’s issue, No. 921 (25 October 2003), showed that other peace-related articles had been overlooked, such as “Peace Forum 2003 in Asahikawa” (p. 2) and “Former Ambassador to the U. N. Lectures at the Buddhist NGO Network.”

新ガイドライン法案) was the clearest focus of new religions', Christian, and Buddhist peace activism. Under this law, which was ultimately passed on 23 May 1999, Japan would engage in logistic support and search-and-rescue operations for United States forces in cases of emergency in unspecified "areas surrounding Japan." Because the guidelines could be used to send the Self Defense Force into a war outside Japan, new religions, Japanese Buddhism and Christianity strenuously opposed the bill. The mainline papers questioned the ambiguities of the bill, and there were widespread, small-scale demonstrations both to oppose and to support it on Foundation Day (11 February 1999).¹⁵ The mainline press did not widely report on religious peace activism. There was no sustained, popular opposition to the law's passage, for example, in the form of large-scale demonstrations, campus activism, and the like. After passage of the New Guidelines, religious activism seemed to lose focus.

After the 9.11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, religious peace activism greatly intensified, as measured by the average number of peace-related articles published monthly by Japanese new religions, Buddhism, and Christianity and shown in Table 3. Religious associations, such as the World Council of Religious Persons, and the leaders of many religious organizations offered prayers for the dead and prayers for America in the days immediately following the attacks, some traveling to New York to pray at Ground Zero.

TABLE 3: Average number of articles on peace issues, per month, from religious newspapers, before and after 9.11

Periodical/ Year	<i>Bukkyō Taimusu</i>	<i>Chūgai Nippō</i>	<i>Kirisuto Shinbun</i>	<i>Katorikku Shinbun</i>	<i>Kurisuchan Shinbun</i>	<i>Shinshūkyō Shinbun</i>
February, 1999–September 10, 2001 (31.3 months)	2.91	3.61	3.19	3.39	1.76	1.09
September 11, 2001–October 26, 2003 (25.7 months)	6.42	10.4	5.72	6.46	3.46	2.72

15. See, for example, the following press coverage: "Datte Kenkoku kinenbi, Daigaku kyōju: 'Mada kanshin hiku'" だって建国記念日、大学教授:「まだ関心低い」 *Asahi Shinbun* (Toyama edition) 12 February 1999, p. 21; "Hantai, hōshuku ryōha ga shūkai" 反対、奉祝両派が集会 (Opposition and supporting groups both hold assemblies) *Ryūkyū Shinbun* (12 February 1999), p. 26; "Mondai ari: Kenkoku kinen no hi: igi ari, Matsuyama de shūkai, aikokushin, hokori o tashikameyo" 問題あり——建国祈念の日——意義あり、松山で集会、愛国心、誇りを確かめよう *Ehime Shinbun* (12 February 1999), p. 3.

Rhetoric changed in late September 2001, however, when it became apparent that the US would invade Afghanistan. Whereas the terrorist attacks elicited a great wave of sympathy for the US, that sentiment turned to opposition to what was perceived as a war of revenge. Religious organizations of all kinds except shrine Shinto issued proclamations against an Afghan invasion, and they held many mass prayer rallies. Unlike the situation in 1999, however, when Japan as a whole was divided on the issue of the New Guidelines, sentiment as expressed in the mainline press was entirely with the religious organizations protesting the war. This time the mainline press widely reported the peace activism of religious organizations.¹⁶

With the buildup to the U.S. invasion of Iraq on 20 March 2003, the Japanese religious world, with the exception of shrine Shinto, spoke out with rare clarity and near unanimity in opposition to the war in Iraq and the country's subsequent occupation. Drawing from the religious newspapers' coverage during the month of March 2003, we find the following.

On 1 March, a group of Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims organized themselves as the Religionists Network (Shūkyōsha Netto 宗教者ネット) to hold prayers that war might be avoided. On the same day, another ecumenical group of Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims, called Religionists Network to Build Peace (Heiwa o Tsukuridasu Shūkyōsha Netto 平和をつくり出す宗教者ネット), marched on the American embassy and delivered a message calling for a peaceful solution to the crisis. The same group joined with other civil society groups on 5 March in a Tokyo peace march that attracted 18,000 people. On 8 March, some 47 Christian organizations mobilized as the Christians for Peace Network (Heiwa o Jitsugen Suru Kirisutoshia Netto 平和を実現するキリスト者ネット) to hold a demonstration in Hibiya Park in Tokyo that attracted 40,000 people. Led by Christian minister Kimura Kōichi, a number of Japanese traveled to Iraq to serve as human shields. In *Bukkyō Times* it was reported (20 March 2003) that Risshō Kōseikai would donate 28,500,000 yen from its One Meal for Peace Fund (Isshoku Heiwa Kikin 一食平和基金) as emergency aid to Iraqi refugees.

The Christian newspapers published declarations opposing the war immediately, extending from the central to the local level. *Chūgai Nippō* reported that Buddhist groups of virtually all sects have promulgated declarations opposing the war. For example, Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha called for an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful resolution. In addition it criticized the Japanese government's support for the war as turning its back on the renunciation of war embodied in

16. The following citations are relevant: "Sensō hantai! Kami mo hotoke mo kirisuto mo—Shūheikyō ga senden shomei" 戰爭反対! 神も佛もキリストも——宗平協が宣言署名 *Shinbun Akahata* (3 October 2001), p. 15; "Tero de inoru shūkai" テロで祈る集会 *Niigata Nippō* (5 October 2001), p. 26; "Sekai heiwa o negai kome: Bei tero ikkagetsu: Tendaishū ga hōyō" 世界平和を願い込め——米テロ1か月——天台宗が法要 *Yomiuri Shinbun Shiga* edition (12 October 2001), p. 35; "Sekai heiwa inori: Seimeい: Isuramu kyōto mo sankai: Ken shūkyōsha taikai" 世界平和祈り——声明——イスラム教徒も参加——県宗教者大会 *Asahi Shinbun Okayama* edition (14 October 2001), p. 35.

the Japanese constitution. Sōtōshū held prayers for world peace on 8 March at Sōji-ji, at Eihei-ji on the 10th, and prayers for the war dead on the 15th. In celebrations honoring the 1200th anniversary of the founding of the Tendai sect, plans were made to incorporate a call for an immediate cease-fire and prayers for the dead. Sōka Gakkai and Ōmoto have published denunciations of the war.

From the war coverage of *Shinshūkyō Shinbun*, it is evident that new religions are interacting with secular NGOs and other civil society groups such as Green Peace, the Council of Japanese Scientists (Nihon Kagakusha Kaigi 日本科学者会議), Japan Council to Prohibit Atomic Bombing (Gensuibaku Kinshi Nihon Kyōgikai 原水爆禁止日本協議会), and others to demonstrate, to garner accurate information about the invasion, and to send aid. Nihonzan Myōhōji joined with labor unions and the ecumenical group mentioned above, Religionists Network to Build Peace, to march on the National Diet building in Tokyo on 15 March.

In debate over the 1999 New Guidelines bill, peace activism by religious groups was effectively ignored by the mainstream press. Perhaps because public opinion in opposition to the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is relatively unified, however, the mainstream papers now report on religious peace activism. Thus these U.S. wars have undoubtedly facilitated the religious world's engagement with civil society.

Pacifist activism presents Japanese religions with the opportunity to align with the mainstream of public opinion, which is strongly opposed to the Iraq war, according to surveys so far. On 14 January 2003 a *Mainichi Shinbun* poll found 80 percent opposed to war in Iraq. A survey by the publishing company Shōgakukan on 22 April 2003 found an 87 percent rate of opposition in Toyama, Ishikawa, and Fukui Prefectures, strongholds of Jōdo Shinshū. *Nikkei Shinbun* carried out a survey on 3 August 2003, which showed that 52 percent opposed sending the Self Defense Force to Iraq to participate in the occupation. An *Asahi Shinbun* survey of 28 September 2003 found 66 percent opposed to dispatching the SDF to Iraq.¹⁷

While no one could deny the nobility of this outpouring of pacifist sentiment, it must also be noted that this activism so far has not come at a cost. Indeed, peace activism that finds itself in agreement with the majority of the Japanese population is also a reassertion of religion's social relevance and moral authority. Pacifist activism in the present climate of opinion will attract only good publicity, both at home and abroad.

17. On 14 January 2003 a *Mainichi Shinbun* poll found 80 percent opposed to war in Iraq; see www.mainichi.co.jp/eye/feature/article/koizumi/200301/27-1.html. A Shōgakukan survey of 22 April 2003 found an 87 percent rate of opposition for Toyama, Ishikawa, and Fukui Prefectures; see home-page2.nifty.com/mekkie/peace/iraq/news/043html. *Nikkei Shinbun* carried out a survey on 3 August 2003, which showed that 52 percent oppose sending the Self Defense Force to Iraq; see www.nikkei.co.jp/sp/nt22/20030803ASIE0300E03082003html. An *Asahi Shinbun* survey of 28 September 2003 found 66 percent opposed to sending the Self Defense Force to Iraq; see www.tv-asahi.co.jp/n-station/research/030928/iraq.html. These sites were accessed on 3 December 2003.

Activism has continued to the present, with observances marking the second anniversary of 9.11, peaking around the Japanese government's decision (9 December 2003) to deploy the Self Defense Force to Iraq, and on the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq (20 March 2004). On 11 September 2003 the World Council of Religious Persons held a "Concert for Love and Hope," while Nihonzan Myōhōji demonstrated before the U.S. embassy in Tokyo for an immediate end to the occupation of Iraq (*Bukkyō Times* 11 September 2003; 18 September 2003). Higashi Honganji, Nishi Honganji, Shinshū Otani-ha, and the Japan Religion Peace Council (Nihon Shūkyōsha Heiwa Kyōgikai 日本宗教者平和協議会) all published declarations stating that the deployment violates article 9 of the constitution. Peace prayers, demonstrations, meetings, and petition drives were held through December and January, involving the Catholic Council for Peace and Justice (Katorikku Seiji to Heiwa Kyōgikai カトリック政治と平和協議会), Shinshūren 新宗連, Ōmoto 大本, Nichirenshū 日蓮宗, Rishshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, SVA (Shanti kokusai borantea kai シャンティ国際ボランティア会) and Japan Volunteer Center (Nihon kokusai borantea sentā 日本国際ボランティアセンター), and the Japan Buddhist Association (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai 全日本仏教會). The Religionists' Network for Peace, in concert with the Christian Network for Peace, has been especially active in petition drives in December 2003 and January 2004, calling on the prime minister to rescind the SDF deployment, and protesting to the Minister of Defense, collecting almost five thousand signatures.

Religious groups combined with labor and citizens' groups for demonstrations in Tokyo and Osaka on the anniversary of the Iraq war's beginning. Besides the groups mentioned above, Anti-war Konkōkyō (Konkōkyō Hisen 金光教非戦) and Buddhist Youth for Peace (Heiwa o Manabi, Kangae, Negau Seinen Bukkyōsha no Tsudoi 平和を学び、考え、願う青年仏教者の集い) also participated. Demonstrators in Tokyo numbered 30,000, or about a third less than a year previous.¹⁸

Meanwhile, new Buddhist groups are being founded. The Buddhist NGO Network has been founded to provide an ecumenical forum for international aid and cultural exchange (*Bukkyō Times*, 9 September 2003). An international Shingon association, called the Buddhi Sangha Assembly (ブッディサンガ アソシエイション) has been founded by forty priests from ten countries, as an international volunteer group (*Bukkyō Times*, 30 September 2003).

The Iraq war has galvanized a wide spectrum of religious organizations to intervene in civil society with more force and confidence than they have shown since the Aum incident.¹⁹ We see the formation of new, religiously-based civil society groups, the creation of ecumenical ties across the religious world, new

18. For coverage of these demonstrations see *Shinshūkyō Shinbun* 927 (25 March 2004), p. 4, "Iraku ni heiwa o: Kōgeki kara ichi nen kakuchi de kōdō イラクに平和を—攻撃から一年各地で行動."

19. All the activities mentioned here are documented in *Rāku taylori* 19 (25 July 2003), pp. 2–6. This publication represents a quarterly digest of items added during the period to the Lark Database.

alliances of religionists promoting a variety of progressive causes, stimulation of discussion, study, and social engagement, as well as the declaration of political positions by significant sectarian groups, such as those from Jōdo Shinshū named above.

While these developments are very significant within the religious world, however, it is doubtful that the general public is aware of them. For example, coverage of the demonstrations on 20 March 2004 in the mainstream papers has typically been relegated to the back page, and participants have generally been described merely as a collection of “citizens’ groups” (*shimin dantai* 市民団体). As in other countries, demonstrations in 2004 were markedly smaller than those leading up to the war. In Japan, although the public as a whole is not enthusiastic about the SDF’s deployment, and though doubts about its constitutionality remain, resignation is supplanting outrage.

As Buddhists join with members of other religions and secular groups in peace activism, Buddhism’s distinctive contribution becomes difficult to discern. In a recent interview published in the Newsletter of the International Institute for the Study of Religion, a Buddhist and a Christian representative of the Religionists’ Network for Peace spoke with noted scholar of contemporary Japanese religions, Usui Atsuko. The Buddhist representative, Mr. Takeda Takao of Nihonzan Myōhōji, related that Buddhists’ and Christians’ cooperation in activism dates only to 1999, and that since then it arises mainly in response to invitations from Christians rather than being initiated on the Buddhist side. He also stated that while the Network has about 400 members in total, only 120 to 160 of these are Buddhist; Christians make up 60 to 70 percent of the membership. He further stated:

Buddhism has historically been very significant, but it seldom takes action, and when it does, it is not in the form of official representatives from each sect, but always individuals participating on their own.... Individual Buddhists have a variety of opinions, but concrete activism is difficult without a priest’s support. Unless their priest has a high level of concern, parishioners find it difficult to act. But now we see some activism among priests of fifty to sixty years of age. I think we will see some changes with the succession of generations. We can be somewhat hopeful, but will the change come in time?

(USUI 2004)

Seen in the short term, the development of Buddhist peace activism from around 1999 to the present represents a significant increase and broadening of civil society engagement. Seen in the longer view of the history of Buddhist activism going back to the Meiji period, however, some of the same factors documented by Ikeda Eishun as limiting engagement then are still hindrances today: the centrality of the priesthood, the difficulties of whole sects adopting political positions, and the dependence on external stimulus. In that light, however, it is

highly significant that organizations as large as those participating from Jōdo Shinshū have entered the fray. We must also recognize that the fleeting attentions of the mainstream media are not currently producing wide public awareness of religious activism. Nevertheless, the experience of civil society activism is undoubtedly broadening for the participants and exposes them to a wider range of political dissent than they would otherwise encounter.

Conclusions

This study has presented an attempt to portray Japanese religious organizations as an aspect of Japanese civil society, based on the timing of their founding and on a sample study of their engagement with peace issues. We found that religious organizations have been founded parallel to civil society as a whole, although service organizations and religions incorporating show somewhat different patterns. The overall convergence in the founding of religious and secular civil society groups suggests the existence of a shared impetus and timing in forming organizations, and that there is little justification for seeing religious organizations as exceptional elements in modern social history. It will be useful for social scientists to consider religious groups as one kind of organization in civil society, and useful also for scholars of religion to view fluctuations in the religious world alongside changes in civil society as a whole. Looking for similarities in the founding or expansion of mass groups such as the postwar labor unions and postwar mass religious organizations could be illuminating on both sides. Similarly, the impetus to form smaller groups now, whether religious or secular, seems to distinguish the beginning of the twenty-first century from the middle of the twentieth. Exploring these and similar problems of religion and civil society will facilitate a better understanding of religion's position in society as a whole.

Our study of changes in religions' peace activism demonstrated how mainstream media attention can fluctuate, and that media coverage or lack of it is a major factor shaping ordinary society's knowledge and understanding of religion. Japanese religions' peace activism today is conducted with a new confidence that comes from being with the majority and from being able to assert confidently that peace is a central value both of religion and of society as a whole, a factor that both unites religion and society, and also qualifies religionists to assert their leadership.

In the course of the experiment, it became apparent that a lack of crucial sources of data on Japanese Buddhism and Shinto organizations impedes completion of a comprehensive study of religion and civil society. Problems with the Lark Database and with government statistics on religion are another kind of impediment. Nevertheless, the civil society framework is a promising concept for the study of religions and society in Japan, enriching both religious studies and social science research.

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