

Introduction

On a warm sunny day in May, I was drawn out into the neighborhood streets by the sound of deep Taiko drumbeats followed by resounding cheers. As I followed the stream of people walking around the corner, I witnessed a hugely ornate *mikoshi* (portable shrine) making its way down my street – led by several dozen cheering people ranging in age from six weeks to eighty years. Half a dozen *happi*-coat clad youths were perched atop the large four-wheeled *mikoshi*, beating the Taiko drums, ringing bells, and chanting a call-and-response with those on the ground. I joined the spectators on the sidewalk for a while and smiled as the procession made its way through the small back streets of my community. Just as the small crowd on the roadside dispersed for people to continue with their weekend chores, resonant drumming could be heard again in the distance. Within ten minutes, another, equally ornate *mikoshi* could be seen rounding the corner a few blocks away, coming toward me. All day long the dozen or so *mikoshi* for the different shrines serving the community made their way through every street, blessing each road, each house, and each family for a prosperous year. Small volunteer fire trucks followed behind, keeping the peace and watching out for public safety.

As evening drew near, the entire neighborhood emerged to watch the festivities. Paper lanterns lit the sides of the roads, guiding residents toward the center of the neighborhood, a small square in front of the main Japan Railways train station. Many wore their favorite *yukata* (cotton kimono), and children laughed as they nibbled on cotton candy

or grilled squid-on-a-stick picked up by a parent or friend from a nearby food stand. Everyone chatted, sharing the local gossip. Residents laughed, offering *sake* and beer to neighbors, often poking fun at those who had already imbibed too much.

Under the glowing light of large paper lanterns announcing the Okamoto Festival in the center of the neighborhood and the dimmer glow from hundreds of smaller lanterns painted with the names of large contributors, the *mikoshi* began to convene. To the beat of the Taiko drums, the ringing of bells, and, what was most important, the loud encouragement of hundreds of spectators, the *mikoshi* teams proceeded to show off their tricks. One after another, the troops of drummers, middle school baton throwers, high school band players, and assorted dancers paraded by with their *mikoshi*, cheering and shouting as it stood up on end, rotated, and turned down the different streets. The teams competed to outdo each other in gymnastic feats and especially in the volume of noise generated from the crowd. After performing their tricks, each *mikoshi* would set out in a different direction, making its way back to its local shrine processing along the main and side streets, followed by a caravan of happy, tipsy neighbors. Eventually, community members headed home; parents carried sleeping toddlers; teenagers moaned about leaving their friends; and the rest of us strolled back to our apartments with smiles on our faces, looking forward to a good night's sleep.

All this did not take place in a small, rural Japanese village where traditions are maintained through the rhythm of agricultural life, but in Kobe, one of Japan's largest cities, with a population of more than 1.5 million people. The neighborhoods that were able to generate the hundreds of volunteers and thousands of volunteer hours necessary to put on this kind of event were not ones where everyone knows everyone else – nearly 200,000 people live in the Higashinada-ku district where the Okamoto neighborhood festival took place. The small volunteer fire department truck that followed the *mikoshi* throughout the day and the scores of volunteer firefighters who acted as street patrol for the evening festivities were not anomalies – Kobe city has 4,000 active volunteer firefighters (even Tokyo with a population of 12 million people has nearly 25,000 volunteer firefighters).

Daily life in Kobe provides a myriad of obvious and not-so-obvious examples of lively volunteering and civic participation in the community. Every month the community newsletter for the ward (jointly

sponsored by the government's city office and the volunteer neighborhood associations and hand-delivered by a member of the neighborhood association) would arrive in my mailbox. The newsletter detailed upcoming community events; provided important public announcements; issued volunteer recruitment drives; and listed the names, districts, and contact information for newly appointed volunteer welfare commissioners for the area.

Garbage is collected twice a week from each street corner by municipal sanitation trucks. If one did not observe carefully, one would assume that these same trucks pick up the recycling materials that must also be placed on the street corner. In fact, volunteers from the neighborhood associations, not city employees, are responsible for making sure that the recycling is sorted properly. During my frequent afternoon jogs in a park along a nearby stream, I would often encounter white-gloved residents wearing their neighborhood association t-shirts or sashes walking with garbage bag and tongs in hand, picking up litter along the path and stream bank as others walked and ran by, chatted, played with their dogs, or practiced musical instruments.

In the course of researching this book, I spent eighteen months in Kobe, nine months during the 1999–2000 academic year concentrating on language proficiency and preliminary research, and nine months during the 2001–2002 academic year conducting fieldwork. All told, I've spent approximately three years studying, working, and traveling in Japan. I have lived in homestay families, in dormitories, and on my own in cities from as far south as Hiroshima to as far north as Tokyo. Throughout my many stays, both before I was researching the topic of voluntarism directly and especially after I began concentrating my studies on civil society, I was astounded with the vibrant community life that bustled throughout Japan.

Anywhere in the country, I could walk by a community center and witness the civic involvement of the neighborhood. Bulletin boards are covered with carefully organized notices of upcoming events, meetings, and volunteer campaigns. In vibrant communities, I could stop by any time of day and find volunteers chatting with elderly residents, playing games, or doing crafts with them in organized day services. Although I did not witness the *bento* (lunch box) making directly, I could see the results of the flurried activity that must have occurred early in the morning: *bento* boxes stacked for delivery to housebound elderly, women rushing in and out of the buildings returning the empty boxes

for washing, and trash bags filled to the brim placed near entryways for pickup. Outside in the neighborhood parks, groups of retirees gather in the early mornings for festive (and competitive!) rounds of gate ball, and in the evenings couples and families meet together to play tennis, all of them taking advantage of organized clubs.

Yet all of these activities are occurring in a country widely described by social scientists as a volunteering laggard. Nearly every cross-national study of civic engagement and volunteering that has included Japan describes its civil society as “underdeveloped” or “weak” when compared with other advanced capitalist democracies (Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Salamon et al. 1999; Vosse 1999; Yamamoto 1999). This view suggests that “‘Civil society’, the part of the body politic outside the active Government and power system – is virtually unknown in Japan” (Wolferen 1991).

Universally, the weakness in Japan’s civil society is attributed to a dominant, omnipresent bureaucratic state. One scholar wrote as recently as 1999, “Japan has not yet fully developed into a civil society that can comprehensively be considered an effective counterbalance to the state and its bureaucracy-dominated system” (Vosse 1999, p. 32). Often, Japan’s centralized state is explained as a result of its “late development,” which has forced Japan’s government to focus on “catching up” with the advanced industrialized countries in Western Europe and North America (Dore 1973; Gerschenkron 1962; Huntington 1969; Samuels 1994; Woo-Cumings 1999). Historians have also examined the specific legal mechanisms through which the government has limited the growth of civil society and co-opted organizations into supporting national agendas (Garon 1997; Iokibe 1999; Schwartz 2002).

Yet, this anecdotal evidence suggests that Japan’s civil society is far more vibrant than scholars have credited. The groups responsible for organizing these activities are involved in a number of important aspects of civic life. Much of their time is spent purely socializing, which helps build social capital among neighbors and may involve more doing *with* rather than doing *for* other people (Putnam 2000, p. 117). Other aspects of their activities are essentially the provision of services; while firefighters might enjoy getting together for training, they are also providing protection for their communities. Finally, some of their actions fall squarely into traditional definitions of civic participation, such as contacting public officials, working with government

to develop policies, and debating public issues (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Civil society is multifaceted, and within it, volunteer organizations play three vital roles: they are the forum through which citizens meet one another to build trust and social capital; they act as a low-cost service provider, supplying necessary social services to meet the needs of community residents; and they act as a pipeline between society and the state, relaying citizen concerns to public officials and public policies to citizens. Although the research presented in this book touches on all three contributions of volunteer organizations, the emphasis is on their role as mediators between citizens and government officials.

Although the literature would suggest otherwise, Japan has extensive volunteer participation when viewed from a cross-national comparative perspective. Japan currently has nearly 1 million volunteer firefighters and 11 million parent-teacher association (PTA) members; measured on a per capita basis, this is more than twice as many volunteer firefighters and more than four times as many PTA members as in the United States, a country regularly ranked among the leaders in volunteer participation.¹ So, although Japan developed late and has a strong, centralized state, it also has a vibrant civil society. Comparatively speaking, its volunteer participation is equivalent to, or even exceeds, that found in other advanced capitalist countries. What accounts for the discrepancy between Japan's high level of actual volunteer participation and the low levels of civic engagement expected and reported by academics?

Japan may have high levels of civic engagement, but levels of participation are also not uniform across the country. The same neighborhood festival depicted here might receive a more lukewarm reception in a city

¹ The United States has 800,050 volunteer firefighters, according to the National Volunteer Fire Council Factsheet: <http://www.nvfc.org/pdf/2005-fact-sheet.pdf> (12/21/05), and about 6 million PTA members, according to the National PTA Web site: <http://www.pta.org/jp-why-join-pta.html> (12/21/05). Japan has 919,105 volunteer firefighters, according to the Volunteer Fire Department home page data: <http://www.fdma.go.jp/syobodan/whats/data.html> (12/21/05), and 11 million PTA members, according to the Nippon PTA Zenkoku Kyougikai (Japan's National PTA Council), Web site: http://www.nippon-pta.or.jp/jigyougaiyou/gaiyou_3.html (12/21/05). Population data from OECD figures are from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/38/35267227.pdf> (12/21/05). Dates in parentheses after Web sites indicating date of access are given as month, day, year.

outside Kobe, or even in a different district within the same city. Some communities have active populations that volunteer for any number of service activities, while others have much lower levels of involvement. Furthermore, the divisions are not easily explained by rural-urban locations, levels of education, or per capita income. The cities of Kashihara and Sanda both have populations of about 100,000 people, most of whom commute to nearby cities for work. Kashihara has only 258 volunteer firefighters, whereas Sanda has more than twice as many (703). Kashihara is not an uninvolved community, however. It has more than twice as many eldercare volunteers (3,546) as Sanda (1,289). Why do members of these two cities participate at such different rates and for such different activities?

This book demonstrates that local communities and even entire countries have different volunteering profiles and asks why such different profiles emerge in different communities and countries. Although cultural heritage and historical precedent certainly influence volunteer participation, I argue that differences in types and rates of volunteering can be explained by examining norms of civic responsibility and how such norms are produced and reinforced in a particular community.

In countries such as Japan, the norms of civic responsibility encourage involvement in volunteer organizations that have close, embedded relationships with the government. These organizations have frequent, habitual interactions with the bureaucracy and engage cooperatively in policy making and implementation processes with bureaucrats. In other countries such as the United States, the norms of civic responsibility encourage involvement in volunteer organizations that have more distant relationships with the government. These organizations tend to engage with politicians and the courts rather than with bureaucrats when they are advocating on behalf of a particular cause, and as a result their relations with the government are often confrontational. When these organizations are involved with the bureaucracy, they are likely to have highly structured, contract relationships that clearly stipulate the obligations of both sides and are centered around specific projects rather than on maintaining a long-term relationship.

Thus far, comparative research on civil society, demonstrating a strong bias toward U.S.-type volunteering, has ignored the importance of embedded organizations. Researchers examining Japan have also focused on the kinds of participation prevalent in the United States.

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In examining Japan, they have sought out advocacy groups that lobby politicians and incorporated nonprofits that contract with the government to provide social services and have found such organizations in short supply. As a result, these researchers have asked why volunteering and civic participation are lacking in Japan, not why they take on different patterns.²

In addition to explaining patterns in volunteer participation around the world – why some countries have more of one type of volunteering and fewer of another type of volunteering – this book is also concerned with explaining the rate of volunteer participation. Thus far, most studies of volunteer participation and civic engagement have looked to individual characteristics, such as education level, age, or propensity to watch television to explain national or even regional variation in levels of volunteering (Ladd 1999; Putnam 2000; Wuthnow 1998). As demonstrated in subsequent chapters, however, these individual-level factors do not account for variation between communities.

In contrast to prevailing approaches that focus on the characteristics of individuals, this book looks to the practices of state and social institutions to explain why some communities volunteer more than others with similar demographic characteristics. I argue that communities that traditionally support volunteers – by funding, organizing, and legitimizing them – will have higher rates of volunteer participation. Communities that do not support their volunteers with these practices will have lower rates of volunteer participation in all types of organizations, whether embedded or not.

The primary goal of this book is to predict and explain patterns in volunteer participation found in different communities. Why do some communities have more volunteers in organizations that have close, embedded relationships with the government and fewer volunteers in organizations with more distant relationships with the government (and vice versa)? Why do some communities have higher rates of volunteer participation than others?

Volunteer organizations lie at the heart of the state-society relationship, and understanding why volunteering patterns emerge as they do

² A notable exception to this rule is new work by Pekkanen 2002. He offers an institutional explanation for the low numbers of advocacy volunteers and high numbers of neighborhood association members.

provides clues about the health and operation of the dynamic relationship between democratic citizens and their governments. Therefore, understanding patterns of volunteer participation is vital not only for understanding and enhancing democratic development but also for enhancing social welfare.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The next chapter develops a theory of volunteer participation. I theorize that volunteer participation in a community is a function of that community's norms of civic responsibility. These norms are formed by the *ideas* that citizens have of governmental and individual responsibility for dealing with social problems and the *practices* of state and social institutions that support or inhibit volunteer organizations. The ideas citizens have of governmental and individual responsibility inform the content of a community's norms of civic responsibility, suggesting which *types* of organizations citizens should join. The practices of state and social institutions affect the strength of those norms, influencing citizens' participation *rates*. The chapter also reviews the relevant literature on civil society, explains my theory of volunteer participation, and develops hypotheses.

The second chapter begins by debunking the common understanding that Japanese citizens volunteer less than people in other advanced democracies. Next, through a cross-national analysis of membership in eight different voluntary organizations (Red Cross, volunteer fire departments, YMCA, etc.), using data gathered from sixty-eight countries around the world, the chapter demonstrates that citizen attitudes toward governmental and individual responsibility can account for volunteer participation patterns found in these countries. In countries such as Japan, where citizens think that the government should take responsibility for dealing with social problems, there is more participation in organizations that have close, embedded relationships with the government.

In contrast, in countries such as the United States, where citizens think that individuals should take responsibility for dealing with social problems, there is more participation in organizations that have more distant relationships with the government. Alternative explanations for volunteer participation (education, income, urbanization, etc.) are

also tested and found to have less explanatory power than citizen ideas about governmental and individual responsibility.

Turning from the question about different types of volunteer participation, Chapter 3 moves on to ask why rates of participation vary. The chapter uses data from Japan's forty-seven prefectures and 3,258 municipalities to show that current explanations (e.g., education, income, demographics) fail to account for variation in participation rates in similarly situated communities. Chapter 4 then seeks to discover the community-level processes that can explain variation in participation rates.

These community-level processes are explored in greater depth in detailed case studies of three Japanese cities with varying rates of volunteer participation. The experiences of volunteers in Kashiwara, Sakata, and Sanda, selected as "most similar" cases, demonstrate that governmental support and social support of volunteers through legitimization, organization, and funding are key to explaining variations in participation rates across communities. Even when demographic and other characteristics are similar, cities that had provided volunteer organizations with legitimizing support (through legal and symbolic means), organizational support (through public relations or other practices), and financial support (with direct or indirect funding) had much higher rates of participation than cities that had not provided volunteer organizations with these kinds of supports.

The fifth chapter combines the findings from Chapters 2, 3, and 4 to develop the Community Volunteerism Model. The model predicts that the types of volunteer organizations found in a community depend on the attitude that citizens have of governmental and individual responsibility for dealing with social problems, and the rates of volunteer participation depend on the extent to which communities legitimize, organize, and fund volunteers. The chapter then returns to the cases of Kashiwara, Sakata, and Sanda to illustrate how the model explains their patterns of volunteer participation and explores what the model can reveal about their possible future participation patterns.

Chapter 6 tests the Community Volunteerism Model cross-nationally using the cases of the United States, Japan, Finland, and Turkey, selected as "most different" cases because they have very different patterns of volunteer participation, both in terms of rate and type of participation. The chapter demonstrates how well the model works to

explain the types and rates of participation found in each of the four countries. Applying the model draws attention to aspects of civil society in the four countries that are often overlooked, particularly the prevalence and important role of embedded volunteer organizations. The model also highlights dynamic state-society interactions, showing the ways that changing citizen ideas and institutional practices are influencing patterns of volunteer participation.

I conclude the book by exploring some of the implications of this study. In particular, I discuss my empirical and theoretical claims and highlight how my findings give us new insight and help us to ask new questions about civil society, civic participation, and democracy around the world.