Civil Society and Voluntary Actions in Japan  

Instructor: Aya Okada

Mondays 1:10pm to 2:40pm and 2:55pm to 4:25pm

Email: aokada@mail.doshisha.ac.jp (valid until the end of February)  
Phone: 075-251-3564 (valid until the end of February)  
Office: Keisuikan #208 (Doshisha University Shinmachi Campus, until the end of February)

Course Overview

The significance of civil society and voluntary sector in Japan has never been greater than today. The longtime tradition of self-help groups and neighborhood associations has grown into more structured, institutionalized organizations in the recent decades. The number of citizens interested in taking voluntary actions – making financial donations, volunteering, and raising their voice through advocacy efforts – has also increased steadily.

Several events that took place in the recent years have particularly accelerated this trend. For example, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (or Kobe earthquake) of 1995 highlighted contributions that non-public, non-private organizations as well as individual volunteers make in responding to unexpected disasters. More recently, the triple disasters of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident in Northeastern Japan in 2011 became a momentum for the volunteer spirit of Japanese people to rise. Multiple surveys and reports find that more people in Japan today are interested in and are taking some sort of actions to help others. What Salamon¹ called the “Global Associational Revolution” has indeed taken place in Japan over the past three decades.

Civil society organizations are also now considered key actors in solving urgent social issues such as the rising need for elderly care, increasing demand to prepare for natural disasters that strike Japan frequently, and efforts to revitalize rural communities. In 2010, the Japanese government has announced an initiative called “New Public Commons (or Atarashi Kokyo)” to further facilitate the commitment of civil society organizations in dealing with these social problems.

This course provides students an opportunity to understand the Japanese society from the perspective of civil society and voluntary actions. In case a student is involved in voluntary or nonprofit efforts in Community Involvement Project (CIP), this course may complement the analyses and

understanding of their experience. The course does not require prior knowledge on the topic or related issues.

Course Objectives

1) Students will be able to understand contributions and challenges that civil society organizations face as they emerge as one of the key actors in solving social issues in Japan today.
2) Students will be able to contrast Japanese civil society with that of their home country, and discuss what they see as the unique characteristics of civil society and voluntary actions in Japan.

Assignments and Evaluation

1) Attendance and Class Participation (30%)
2) Mid-term project (30%)
   Pick a Japanese civil society organization that you find interesting and analyze its characteristics. The target organization can be anything that falls under the definition of civil society organizations studied in sessions 3 and 4. Students will make an oral presentation of their paper during class on sessions 11 and 12.
3) Final paper and presentation (40%)
   Students will analyze what they see as the unique characteristics of civil society and voluntary actions in Japan.

*Attendance policy: Missing two lectures without an appropriate reason will automatically drop your attendance grade by one full letter grade; egregious tardiness (three or more) will yield the same penalty. Four unexcused absences from lectures or recitations over the semester will result in the class participation grade turning to zero. I reserve the right to give pop quizzes or assign additional work if people are coming to class unprepared.

Textbook: Copies of all readings, including book chapters, journal articles, reports, and newspaper articles, will be distributed in PDF format to the students.
Schedule (subject to change depending on class size and guest lecture schedules)

**Session 1** (January 18 – Part I)

**Introduction: Civil Society and Voluntary Actions**

The session will provide an overview of the course, and highlight the significance of understanding Japanese society from the perspective of civil society and voluntary actions. The class will also review social issues that Japan face today, and discuss how civil society organizations contribute to solving the problems.

**Required Readings:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Session 2** (January 18 – Part II)

**“Big Picture” of Japanese Civil Society**

The class will draw a “big picture” of Japanese civil society with a comparative perspective. We will also explore different types of civil society organizations that are active in Japan.

**Required Readings:**

**Recommended Website to Explore:**
“Nonprofit Homepage” of Cabinet Office of Japan (Japanese only)
[https://www.npo-homepage.go.jp/](https://www.npo-homepage.go.jp/)
**Sessions 3 and 4** (January 25 – Part I and II)

**Building a Common Understanding: Definition of Civil Society and Voluntary Actions**

The class will build a common understanding of key concepts in this course: “civil society” and “voluntary actions.”

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Reading:**

**Recommended Website to Explore:**
Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies [http://ccss.jhu.edu/](http://ccss.jhu.edu/)

**Session 5** (February 1 – Part I)

**Historical Understanding of Civil Society and Voluntary Actions in Japan**

Japanese civil society is heavily influenced by history. The class will take a historical perspective in this session and read how the sector developed from Meiji, Taisho, Showa, to Heisei.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Session 6** (February 1 – Part II)

Class does not meet (Aya at Doshisha’s Entrance Exam Duty)

Spend the time preparing for the mid-term project
Sessions 7 and 8 (February 8 – Part I and II)

“Hot Topics” of Japanese Civil Society: Recent Changes and Rising Issues

Japanese civil society has undergone a tremendous change during the last two decades which centers on its relationship with the government and public sector organizations. In addition to the required reading, Aya will fill in with the most up-to-date information on relevant legal frameworks and government initiatives/policies.

Required Readings:

Recommended Reading:

Session 9 (February 15 – Part I)

The 2011 Japan Disasters and Civil Society

The number of organizations working on the four phases of disaster management – mitigation, prevention, response, and reconstruction – have rapidly increased after the 2011 disasters in Northeastern Japan. We will examine how civil society organizations contribute to dealing with disasters in Japan.

Required Reading:

Recommended Readings:
**Session 10** (February 15 – Part II)

Guest Speaker: Ms. Chika Sonehara (Program Coordinator of Benesse Corporation and founding member of a nonprofit MORIUMIUS in Ogatsu, Miyagi Prefecture)

**Sessions 11 and 12** (Thursday, February 11 or February 20)

**Field Trip**

Plan A: Wednesday, February 11 “Welfare Festival in Kyoto”
Plan B: Saturday, February 20 “Visit Kobe Earthquake Memorial Museum (人と防災未来センター)"

**Sessions 13 and 14** (February 22 – Part I and II)

**Student Presentations**

Each student will make a 15 minute presentation on their findings from the mid-term project, where students analyze the characteristics of a Japanese civil society organizations of their choice.

**MID-TERM PAPER DUE**

**Session 15 and 16** (March 7 – Part I and II)

**On-Campus Fieldtrip**

Visiting a nonprofit “Share Your Value Project” by Professor Yoko Uryuhara’s Seminar (Faculty of Commerce, Doshisha University)

**Session 17** (March 14 – Part I)

**Field-Focused Approach: Neighborhood Associations and Community Development**

The class will review how neighborhood associations - civil society organizations that are perhaps the most closest to people’s everyday lives - have developed and spread across Japan. We will also look at involvement of civil society organizations in community development or machi-zukuri.

**Required Readings:**


Recommended Readings:

**Session 18** (March 14 – Part II)
**Field-Focused Approach: Environmental Conservation**
The challenge of tackling environment destruction and pollution has been one key area in which we observe citizens’ active participations. We will review some of the recent movements as well as major advocacy campaigns.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

**Sessions 19 and 20** (March 28 – Part I and II)
**Giving and Volunteering in Japan - Guest Lecturer Shusaku Sasaki (Osaka University)**
Some people argue that Japan lacks a culture of giving. Is that true? How often do Japanese people make donations, and why? The class will explore these questions and discuss whether the students identify any characteristics unique to Japan.

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:
**Sessions 21 and 22** (April 4 – Part I and II)

**Unique Characteristics of Japanese Civil Society?**

Scholars have argued that civil society in Japan is unique in comparison to other societies. We will take a look at differences argued about the role civil society organizations play in Japan as well as how the voluntary sector developed in Japan.

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**Sessions 23 and 24** (April 11 – Part I and II)

**Student Presentations**

Each student will make a 15-20 minute presentation on their analysis of unique characteristics of civil society and voluntary actions in Japan.

**Monday, April 18: FINAL PAPER DUE**
Suggested Websites to Find Information about Civil Society Organizations in Kansai Region

*Aya will inform the class about specific events once they are announced in these sources. Most of them are only available in Japanese. Aya will provide language assistance if needed.

- 京都府社会福祉兼議会  http://www.kyoshakyo.or.jp/
- 京都府国際センター  http://www.kpic.or.jp/
- 京都 NPO センター  http://npo-net.or.jp/center/
- 京都ボランティア協会  http://www.kyoto-v.info/
- 京都府社会福祉兼議会  http://www.shiga-volunteer.net/
- 大阪 NPO センター  http://www.osakanpo-center.com/
- 大阪国際交流センター  http://www.ih-osaka.or.jp/
- 大阪ボランティア協会  http://www.osakavol.org/
- KVnet  http://www.kvnet.jp/
- 大阪ボランティアネット  http://www.shiga-volunteer.net/
- 滋賀 NPO センター  http://shiga-npo.la.coocan.jp/
- 滋賀ボランティアネット  http://www.shiga-volunteer.net/