

## **Abstract**

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Returning to Relevance – The Resurgence in Climate Activism from Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations in Japan

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Japanese civil society has long been regarded as an absent and ineffective actor in terms of influencing policymaking in Japan. While there have been notable periods of successful advocacy and activism by Japanese civil society organisations, by and large they have been systematically excluded from positions of influence. In 1998 there was a legislative change that split civil society organisations into two groups, Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The former are more included within the auspices of the state; however, their ability to influence policy is legislatively restricted. Conversely, NGOs have the freedom to exert influence and engage in policy activism; however, they remain generally excluded by legislators and other wings of the national policymaking system.

Since 2015, however, there has been a growth in collaboration between NGOs, specifically Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOS), and the business sector, within the climate change space. With this has come an increase in scope for, and actual climate policy output.

The author questioned why civil society has experienced a boost in climate change activism since 2015, despite the prevailing view that civil society is politically a largely silent and inactive sector of Japan. The author hypothesised that there were two factors at play; namely the Paris Agreement and the paradigm shifts it produced in climate action, and the role of business in collaborating with ENGOS. To explore this hypothesis and get a more in-depth analysis, the

author interviewed 21 organisations to analyse change in the lead up to 2015, as well as looking into the future.

Common trends were businesses facing increasing pressures from a number of sources to improve their climate positions, and businesses regarding ENGOS as a valuable resource for assisting transitions in climate action. ENGOS are able to provide a number of services and connections which enable businesses to engage in climate initiatives. This in turn enables business to become a vehicle for ENGO policy advocacy into spaces that normally exclude civil society. Some policy activism has taken place under the auspices of business/ENGO collaboration, and it is expected this will increase in the future.

This research was extrapolated onto a model of Japanese civil society known as *Shimin*. By categorising the history of this model, a “wave” structure of rising and falling effectiveness was realised. The first wave, labelled as *Shimin 1.0*, is based on the civil movements around the Big Four Pollution cases between the 1950s and 1970s; most famous of which was Minamata Disease. The second wave, *Shimin 2.0*, is attached to the municipal-civil society collaboration that took place in several large cities throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Building on this model, the author extended this in the climate change space by contributing the current framework of business/ENGO collaboration into the model, representing a third wave of success propagated by *Shimin*. The author labels this as *Shimin 3.0*.

As businesses increasingly join in collaborative efforts with ENGOS to engage in climate action and policy advocacy, through the vehicle of business. ENGOS are able to inform and direct momentum in the Japanese system for change within the institutionalised frameworks of the Japanese political structure. The Japanese state is criticised for its stagnated progress in climate action, but the potential for *Shimin 3.0* to generate policy activism is demonstrated in this paper. It is currently in a period of establishment and growth, but as it attains a critical mass of business partners, the scope for concrete policy activism increases. This suggests the future will have more policy output under the rubric of *Shimin 3.0*.