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Completed July, 2013

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## Under pressure to be fair?

How attitudes and subjective norms affect fair trade  
consumption in Japan and the West

While sales of fair trade products have grown rapidly in several of the 'western' markets, in Europe and North America for instance, Japan lags far behind in terms of per capita sales. The theory of planned behavior, which has been commonly used in studies of fair trade consumerism, suggests that this is due to different attitudes, normative influences, and volitional control over purchasing fair trade products. Drawing on interviews with 15 students active in fair trade organizations in Japan, this study finds that several factors relating to their volitional control over purchasing fair trade products mimic those found in western studies, although attitudes and subjective norms differ. Addressing this, Japanese fair trade literature has pointed to qualities found in western fair trade markets that contribute to the success of fair trade: colonial histories, Christianity, and strong civil societies. However, this study first challenges the idea that colonial ties and Christianity have motivated consumers to purchase fair trade in the west, concluding instead that visible socioeconomic and ethnic inequalities in contemporary societies are more robust motivators. In Japan, where a high proportion of the population have considered themselves middle-class, such issues are arguably less pronounced. Thus there are arguably weaker normative forces acting on citizens in Japan to express empathy or sympathy with the disadvantaged.

Japanese fair trade literature also focuses much attention on the civil societies of western countries, with scant attention given to the evolution of

Japan's civil society. Given the bottom-up nature of several civil society organizations, and their role in diffusing fair trade, this might lead one to believe that Japanese are apathetic to the issues of fair trade. However, this paper rejects the idea that a weak fair trade movement is due to weak bottom-up interest, instead concluding that top-down government regulations have limited the development of Japan's civil society, and subsequently fair trade as well. Thus while there exists interest in fair trade in Japan, weak subjective norms stemming from a civil society that has been weakened through government regulation ultimately leads to lower motivation to consume fair trade over other products. This study finds that Japan's relatively weak civil society, combined with less severe issues of socioeconomic and ethnic inequality in Japan, arguably limits feelings of frustration, guilt, or anger, that appear to drive fair trade in western contexts. Interviews with Japanese students involved in fair trade also discovered that they take more casual, less committed, attitudes towards fair trade in Japan. This contrasts with several western studies suggesting that self-identity, social obligations, and conveying a personal image as an 'ethical consumer' are important.

**Keywords:** Fair trade, ethical consumerism, civil society, theory of planned behavior