Paper Title: Vernacularizing Democracy: Rising Symmetry in the trajectory of Civil Society in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract
The prevalent model of guided democracy with weak patterns of participation has been a defining feature of East Asian polities, particularly Japan. However, this picture is changing and a cursory glance over the last couple of decades in Japan will signify a clear shift in rigid democratic institutional mechanisms which off late have been inching towards (amidst heavy opposition from the state) a more inclusive and participatory flavor. The lynchpin of this shift resides in the resistance offered by the civil society movement and theorizing that has off late gained leverage in Asia on the whole. The paper would explore the hitherto unexplored discursive tradition of participation at the grassroot level of the society in the tradition of Neighborhood Associations in Japan as the key factor claiming robustness of social capital and in strengthening participatory democracy. It would be compared with the quantitative research done by Tsujinaka (1997-2008) in the case of neighborhood associations and community organizations functioning at the grassroots level all over Japan. The focus of this democracy/civil society project will be the Asian social capital argument found common to most Asian societies and not limited only to East Asia. This argument will be substantiated by the empirical findings of the Cross National Survey on Civil Society Organizations which has most recently compared the Japanese case with the Indian and Bangladeshi one. Using the data analyzed by this academic study, the paper will argue that the commonalities found in the tradition of people’s participation bear a striking resemblance in the case of these two regions i.e Japan and the Indian subcontinent. A lack of academic research on this binding feature that the larger Asian community shares, becomes necessary in times of democratic turbulence that Asia faces today. Hence, a collaborative study of the subaltern discourse of peoples’ participation to find space in the mainstream theorizing is needed and lessons from the Japanese experience can be learnt.

Key words: Civil Society, Participatory Democracy, Social Capital.