

Acknowledgments

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1 Introduction

State-linked associational life – illuminating blind spots of existing paradigms¹

Benjamin L. Read

The state and the grassroots

The term “grassroots” refers to the local level of politics and society, indeed the most local level of all: the realm of individuals within the communities where they live, of face-to-face relationships, of meetings so small that most people in the room know one another’s names. The image of a field of grass, each blade tightly interwoven with those around it, connotes close proximity and embeddedness in dense networks. Often, though, the term also implies a kind of authenticity or purity: ideas and demands and action coming directly from the people, without adulteration from outside forces or powerful institutions. When considering the role of associational life in politics, our attention tends to be drawn to citizens’ organizations that are untainted in these ways, and separate from government in particular. David Horton Smith, for instance, limits his eloquent study of grassroots associations to those that are “significantly autonomous of other groups (even if formally affiliated)” (Smith 2000: 9). In Manuel Castells’ landmark work of urban sociology, local neighborhoods and communities constitute a fertile source of protest movements that can well up and transform the status quo – but only if (among other conditions) they maintain their independence (Castells 1983: 322).

Yet not all forms of local organization emerge in such a spontaneous and autonomous fashion. Indeed, in some parts of the world they are not even typical. Particularly in East and Southeast Asia, large swaths of the grassroots do not grow in unchecked profusion like a wild prairie, but rather are cultivated and tended, more like a garden. Here governments actively shape their citizens’ associational energies in ways that are unfamiliar to Western readers. The purpose of this book is to examine several cases of these organizations, which we loosely call “straddlers” for their spanning of the state–society divide.² These are groups that have extensive presence at the grassroots and that engage widespread participation, yet are institutionally linked to the state rather than independent of it.

There are many ways in which associations can be said to straddle the realms of state and society. An extreme version is when government officials actually run local organizations themselves. Much more commonly, of course, states provide at least partial *funding* for groups; even many organizations that are otherwise independent and self-governing bid for public grants and contracts. As Lester Salamon

reminds us, 36 percent of the funding of the U.S. nonprofit sector comes from government (Salamon 1999: 36).³ States also sometimes get associations to *do things* for them: collecting information, publicizing state policies, distributing coupons for subsidized food, and so forth. In other settings, groups may form a part of electoral-machine politics, they may receive special access to decision-making, or they may merely register with the government or otherwise obtain its imprimatur. While researchers are aware of these phenomena, there has been little study of how the political and social properties of associations themselves change when they take on these functions (but see Smith and Lipsky 1993; Brown 1998; Coston 1998; Foster 2001).

James Scott memorably characterized modern states as yearning to take the impenetrable complexity of natural and social ecologies and render it "legible" – measurable, taxable, and regimented (Scott 1998). Security and revenue remain two of the powerful imperatives that drive public authorities to reach down into the warp and woof of local life. Yet today's states look to the grassroots for a great variety of purposes. As it turns out, local organizations provide a tremendously convenient platform for projects of just about every stripe. These include disseminating and collecting information, gathering input from constituents, and facilitating administrative programs concerning welfare, infrastructure, and public health. In many cases the groups in question obtain government resources such as stipends, office space, and budgets, but they also receive less tangible though no less important support in the form of prestige, legitimation, and access to officialdom. States systematically propagate such organizations, giving them a widespread presence throughout society and greatly magnifying their impact. Some of these groups are meant to embody (or impose) a form of local community that is integrated with the nation as a whole. At the same time, they typically provide a channel through which ordinary people can articulate demands, address local issues, and sometimes vote for representatives.

Cases of straddler organizations appear in many parts of the world, but are particularly abundant in the countries lining the western edge of the Pacific. As discussed below, some descend from imperial or colonial institutions of social control and taxation, while others have origins in societal initiatives. Though they have generally been conceptualized along totalitarian lines (to the extent that they have attracted theoretical attention at all), this volume confronts the striking fact that such organizations exist in democracies and authoritarian systems alike. Similarly, the groups range from those tightly linked to – indeed almost part of – local government, to those with a considerable degree of formal autonomy.

Researchers have published a scattering of English-language case studies on such groups, some of them deftly executed, painting their subjects in vivid colors (Guinness 1986; Bestor 1989). Yet the social sciences remain without a convincing understanding of them. This can in part be attributed to the tendency for Asia to remain marginal in theory-building. More fundamentally, the attention of scholars steeped in the liberal tradition tends to be drawn to independent citizen initiatives, whether in the form of social movements or less contentious types of

association. State-backed institutions, conversely, are often seen not only as delinquent but also as uninteresting, inherently stale.

Why then do straddlers deserve careful study? To begin with, the associations in question have a sprawling presence throughout this region. As Robert Pekkanen points out in Chapter 2, Japan boasts as many as 300,000 neighborhood and village groups, which work closely with local government.⁴ The Indonesian network of community organizations that Aiko Kurasawa discusses in Chapter 3 was found by a World Bank study to figure prominently in the lives of the urban and rural poor, and indeed it is widely considered to be "a very important, effective, and trusted institution" (Mukherjee 1999: 94). In Taiwan, my own study (Chapter 6) explains, some 146,000 citizen volunteers serve as *linzhang* or block captains, components of a finely grained system of ultra-local administration. While non-state associations (whether religious, clan-based, recreational, charitable, or oriented toward social change) also flourish in many parts of Asia, to ignore this quasi-public sector is to miss an immense part of the picture.

Their pervasiveness alone suggests that they ought to be understood, but they also deserve attention because of the practical uses to which many of these institutions are put. Some of these purposes – such as reporting information on dissidents to authoritarian regimes – many readers will find deeply troubling. Other institutions work to further policy goals rather than repression. For example, in both China and Indonesia, local women's associations are enlisted by the state to popularize family planning programs.⁵ Straddlers form an essential component of the social security infrastructure in many cases, helping connect disadvantaged populations with government agencies whose purpose is to provide assistance. Whatever their flaws, these networks of organizations constitute a potential resource for just about any developmental or governance-related undertaking.

The most central reasons for this book, though, are theoretical in nature. There exist four broadly recognized frameworks within which associations are understood in political terms. The first is civil society theory, which focuses on citizens' groups that are autonomous from government. Second are theories of mass organizations as found in state socialist and fascist regimes. The third are accounts of corporatism, which can be defined broadly as state structuring of the representation of societal interests. Finally, the concept of state–society synergy offers a template for understanding cooperative partnerships between governments and communities. Each of these provides a salient framework for thinking about at least some of the straddlers found in Asia, yet each contains important lacunae that these hybrid organizations speak to and in some ways fill.

The civil society paradigm dominates current discussions about citizen associations in the world of politics. Contemporary theories within this long tradition isolate a specific class of organization – voluntary groups that stand independent of government – as distinct, possessing special properties.⁶ They assert that civil society groups contribute to a host of salutary outcomes, and that this happens partly in unintended ways, through action that is only incidental to the organizations' primary purposes. More specifically, such groups are said to have internal

effects on members, making them better citizens by encouraging political participation and providing practice in democratic self-governance, as well as external effects on the state, making it more accountable by asserting interests and exerting pressure.⁷ Certain theories of social capital take these claims another step, arguing that dense interpersonal connections among people who join such associations serve to multiply and propagate these beneficial effects. The networks are said to undergird the commitment of community members to civic norms and drive them to more insistently demand responsiveness from the government (see Chapter 6 for citations and further discussion). In short, civil society enhances politics both by enriching the practice of electoral democracy and also by supplementing electoral mechanisms with direct forms of action.

If one were asked to think of the exact opposite of an independent civil society organization, the ultimate in government control, then theories of mass organization would surely come to mind. Accounts of communism, fascism, and totalitarianism all highlight such organizations as a means through which ruling parties extend their grasp to dominate specific sectors of society, with groups for youth, workers, women, neighborhoods, and so forth (Linz 1975; Linz and Stepan 1996). Many of the goals that regimes strive to accomplish through these institutions are fairly straightforward: spreading official beliefs, values, and doctrines; exercising surveillance over political threats or opposition; and drawing the population out of passivity and into active displays of loyalty. In his survey of what he terms “administered mass organizations” in dozens of authoritarian states, Gregory Kasza also points out several other functions: preempting autonomous groups, consuming members’ time through many kinds of diversions, and throwing up an illusion of mass democracy through “pseudopolitical” activities (Kasza 1995). Some research on postcommunist systems builds on this by emphasizing the blight that such Leninist structures may leave behind on the civic landscape even after the regimes that created them collapse (Howard 2002, 2003). To be sure, some studies have cast these organizations in a more benign or at least neutral light (Townsend 1967: chap. 6; Fagen 1969; Friedgut 1979). Even so, few scholars would take issue with the fact that mass organizations are tools of control, “transmission belts” that powerfully extend the authoritarian ruling party’s reach throughout society.

At least one step removed from these stifling, wholly top-down institutions, corporatist arrangements constitute another fashion in which states intervene in the associational sphere. To paraphrase Philippe C. Schmitter’s classic definition, the term refers to interest groups that accept constraints on the leadership they choose and the demands they make in exchange for receiving a representational monopoly in their category of activity (Schmitter 1979: 13). He distinguishes two variants: societal corporatism, where interest groups form at their own initiative and acquire exclusivity and special treatment largely through their own power, and state corporatism, where controls are imposed from above and groups exist in a highly dependent relationship to the state (Schmitter 1979: 20–22; Collier 1995). The concept of corporatism grows from deep roots in a number of political philosophy traditions, resonating with what is called the

“organic statist” perspective, whether in Catholic, fascist, Confucian, or other value systems (Stepan 1978: 26–45). Particularly in the rubric of state corporatism, it has clearly applied widely in East and Southeast Asia, whether to state controls on labor in the authoritarian period of South Korea and Taiwan, or to the organization of Indonesian society under Suharto, or to business groups in today’s China.⁸

While corporatist institutions are often imposed by the government, other institutional forms involve what are more like equal partnerships between state and society. Distinguished scholars in the field of development such as Peter Evans, Elinor Ostrom, and others have delineated what they call “synergy,” in which “active government and mobilized communities can enhance each other’s developmental efforts” (Evans 1996b: 1119; see also Evans 1996a; Ostrom 1996; Warner 1999; Das Gupta *et al.* 2000; World Bank 2004). Specific examples describe community groups cooperating with government agencies to facilitate infrastructure programs. For instance, according to Wai Fung Lam, the Taiwanese agricultural bureaucracy works closely with local farmers through irrigation groups and particularly “water guards,” who draw upon their local knowledge and community seniority to help allocate water and resolve disputes (Lam 1996).

The synergy idea and related formulations call attention to the fact that although the resources, reach, and authority of the state are too important to neglect in development efforts, local networks and participation can help to extend these efforts, while also disciplining them and holding them accountable. This embodies an optimistic perspective, in explicit contrast with theories that highlight the dysfunctional aspects of public institutions. Yet it is also seen as an ideal or felicitous condition that is difficult to bring about. In practice, many state agencies remain more prone to smother local initiatives than to engage them as partners. As Evans acknowledges, “Communities need capable public institutions desperately, but, unfortunately, they need states quite different from the ones that currently confront them” (Evans 2002: 236). This raises a raft of questions about the synergy idea. What about cases where governments actively shape communities rather than treating them as equal partners? What happens when the purposes of the collaboration are not merely developmental in nature, but include broader programs of administration or policing?

Indeed, the understanding that all four of these basic frameworks provide us of human associations and their role in politics is highly incomplete, foundational though these frameworks are. In the case of civil society theory, for example, although its close connection to democracy is often boldly asserted, much of the evidence concerning this relationship is mixed. Studies have found that civil society helps create or improve democratic governance only under certain conditions (Berman 1997; Bermeo and Nord 2000; Kaufman 2002; Alagappa 2004b; Sampson *et al.* 2005). We are only beginning to gather the kind of empirical data that can constitute real flesh on the hypothesized bones of these bodies of theory.

Even more fundamentally, the existing paradigms are geared toward analyzing relatively clear-cut empirical phenomena, rather than instances that blur the

lines set by pat definitions. We may have sound intuitions and evidence concerning cases that *typify* concepts like civil society or mass organizations, such as Czechoslovakia's Charter 77 or the Soviet Union's Komsomol. But we are not well equipped to understand cases, such as those considered in this book, that lie on the boundaries of these concepts, involving a great deal of nuance and profound tradeoffs. For example, in studies of corporatism, arrangements in the economic realm in which the government shapes negotiations between business and labor groups have attracted the most scholarly attention (reviewed in Molina and Rhodes 2002). The concept is less commonly theorized in other, non-economic fields of association. But also, relatively little is known about cases that fall between the extremes of societal and state corporatism – situations involving more than the state merely presiding over the table at which self-organizing groups sit, yet less than the bottling up of public constituencies in bodies that suppress their interests in the guise of speaking for them. Thus, for all the familiarity and broad relevance of this concept, its explanatory power remains limited.

In all of these concepts, the crucial element of stateness – or its opposite, non-stateness or autonomy – remains inadequately explored, understood, or justified. A more complete understanding of the world's associational life would grapple with the full spectrum of configurations that relationships between (ostensibly) horizontal communities and vertical public authority can take. It would carefully unpack the multiple mechanisms involved. To be sure, there are reasonable theoretical grounds for the expectation – and certainly ample empirical examples of it – that heavy-handed government control nullifies the beneficial aspects of citizen groups. An organization whose direction is steered entirely by the state can hardly be expected to inculcate democratic practices through its internal operations; nor could the same group be expected to serve as a vehicle for bottom-up influence. All this may be true at extreme or heavy degrees of state control, but we do not know *what kind* of connections to the state prevent an organization from playing a healthy civic role, or *how extensive* state sponsorship can be before a deadening effect sets in. For example, partial funding from government sources may be enough to breathe life into an organization but not enough to declaw it. And what seem to be tame organizations embedded within powerful states – such as research institutions in late 1980s China – can in fact slip their moorings and undertake feisty activities that their sponsors never intended (Ding 1994; see also Kerkvliet *et al.* 2003).

Could there even be ways in which state involvement encourages rather than dampens organizations' civic qualities? At least in principle, yes. To begin with, there is no guarantee that non-state citizen organizations automatically adopt democratic modes of operation. In fact, doing so can be difficult and inconvenient. Associations' leaders or most active members, having invested a great deal of personal time and effort, may neglect to hold the kind of open meetings or internal votes that give rank-and-file members veto authority. Sometimes, factional strife within an organization can paralyze all participation and decision-making (see Read 2008 for one set of examples). But well-functioning democratic states have the knowledge, infrastructure, and authority to run fair

elections, and can extend this competency to associations outside the government proper.

Moreover, while state corporatism generally works in such a way as to shut the door to citizen pressure, other kinds of structured ties between public institutions and grassroots-level organizations can provide channels of access into the halls of government. This is the fundamental claim of books like *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy*, which investigated U.S. cities like Dayton and St. Paul to understand how they "reach out to their neighborhoods and successfully incorporate the participation of average citizens into public policymaking" (Berry *et al.* 1993: 1). It is even possible that the aegis of the state might make local organizations more rather than less attractive as an outlet for voluntary participation, adding prestige and cachet.

In short, a full understanding of the associational universe requires looking at phenomena existing on or outside the fat, blurry margins of existing frameworks. The task presented to this project's contributors was therefore to explore several puzzles posed by this ambiguous realm, and to bring it into dialogue with the theories mentioned above. First, we sought to understand how straddler groups interact with their members or constituents. Most basically, do people consider them helpful or oppressive? At a more abstract level, in what ways do these groups enhance civic engagement and citizen consciousness, and in what ways do they discourage or thwart popular initiative? How do vertical imperatives interact with horizontal solidarities? What is the impact of these associations on the type of interpersonal connections referred to as social capital? Do they stifle social interaction and reinforce patterns of dependence, clientelism, and distrust? Or is it possible that straddlers may contribute to thick community networks in spite of – or perhaps in part because of – links to the state?

Second, in what ways do these local organizations exert an impact on the broader political system? What kinds of political participation do they encourage? Do they enhance the practice of democracy or detract from it? In authoritarian systems, do they serve as a force promoting greater openness and accountability or do they undermine pressures for change? Do they compete with independent civil society or encourage it?

Third, do straddler groups facilitate good governance, and if so in what ways? Building on previous studies, these chapters look at the mechanisms through which these organizations assist with policy implementation, for instance in welfare, policing, and family planning. In what areas are such efforts most effective, and how, precisely, do they work?

Cases

The seven contributors to this volume bring a variety of methodological approaches to bear in addressing these questions. From the outset of this project, it was clear that to understand straddler organizations requires finely grained and up-close observation. Thus contributors were chosen largely for their ability to write about their subjects with the kind of comprehension that can only come from solid

empirical study. Kurasawa, for example, harvests the insights acquired through many years of residence in a suburb of Jakarta, employing techniques of participant observation as well as historical analysis. Pekkanen makes use of an extensive collection of work by Japanese scholars along with government reports and his own inquiries. Interviews and on-the-ground observation of local organizations drive most of the chapters, supplemented in some cases by survey data.

This book examines a diverse array of cases across seven countries, selected in such a way that the precise relationship between state and grassroots organization varies among them. The reader might picture a spectrum of statism. On one end of this continuum we find heavily statist institutions, in which local associations come close to forming a part of the government itself. These elevate community leaders almost to the status of a permanent functionary, subject to higher-level supervision in nearly the same way that formal state employees would be. Farther down the continuum are organizations that cooperate with government and depend on its sponsorship, but are free from direct control. The least statist end of the spectrum considered here comprises groups that are highly self-constituting yet undertake partnerships with government in order to further their aims and to receive the benefits of state sanctioning.

The neighborhood organizations in urban China and in Singapore lie at the most statist point on this continuum. Whether by coincidence or not, they are both called Residents' Committees (RCs) in English and are the most government-dominated of the institutions considered in this book. Their members are effectively chosen and directly managed by higher levels of city administration. In both cases, they also are subject to control through parallel systems running all the way up to the monistic parties that dominate political life: the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Action Party, respectively.

In both these cases, the grassroots organization in question centers on a *committee* of people, essentially a team of staff who, though not formally employed by the government, must answer to it in something close to an employee relationship. In China, these individuals receive stipends and are "elected" to their positions in what for the most part are heavily constrained vetting and balloting procedures, designed so that the great majority of committee members are acceptable to the authorities and can be relied upon for support. In Singapore, Ooi Giok Ling's Chapter 8 explains, they are more or less appointed from above. As committees, these bodies differ from associations that recruit a broad base of members who populate the organization. Yet they have extensive associative functions, serving as an important nexus of neighborhood life.

Three other cases considered here – in Japan, Taiwan, and Indonesia – once looked substantially like their counterparts in Singapore and China, and likewise served as grassroots buttresses for authoritarian systems. Since the democratization of each of these countries, however, they have evolved in ways that set them apart. Japan's neighborhood associations possess considerable autonomy; they are not subject to any formal levers of control by city governments. Their degree of independence is such that Pekkanen, in his chapter here, discusses them as a form of civil society, indeed as a characteristic and central form of

civil society organization in Japan. Yet, with few exceptions, they work hand in hand with local authorities, mainly in ways that oblige local government rather than resist or pressure it. For example, many regularly collect fees, publicize announcements, and perform other tasks for the city bureaucracy.

Taiwan's network of neighborhood heads and block captains was once intended to mobilize and incorporate the local citizenry under the externally imposed rule of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party. Yet in the past two decades it has been transformed into what is in many ways the most democratic of the institutions considered in this book. Indeed, in terms of the rigor of the elections, the neighborhood heads, or *lizhang*, may be the most democratically chosen leaders of their type in the world. Each comes to his or her position through formal processes of campaigns and balloting, often sharply competitive. As a result, these leaders face pressure to answer to their constituents, for instance by lobbying for grants and services. Yet they are paid stipends by the state and, as in Japan, work closely with civil servants from municipal government while also representing their neighborhood's interests.

In Indonesia, the micro-level organization of society takes the form of the RT, or *rukun tetangga*. As Kurasawa observes, in cities like Jakarta each RT corresponds to a small segment of a neighborhood, containing just a few hundred residents. Several RTs, in turn, are clustered together to form larger units called RW. Once dominated by the Suharto regime, the RT/RW have become politically pluralized, much like Taiwan's *lizhang*. They remain, however, closely tied to the wards, the next-higher rung on the urban administrative ladder.

As discussed below, all five of the above cases have roots that extend back in time for generations if not centuries, whereas Thailand's Cooperative Community Groups (CCGs) were born only in the late 1980s. In Chapter 5, Chandra Mahakijana explains that although they do not cover every area of Thailand's cities, they nonetheless have a large footprint, numbering some 11,000 in total. Each is composed of a chairperson, officers, and as many as 15 committee members, all serving on an unpaid basis. As in the Japanese case, we see here wide variation in the degree to which leadership is constituted through democratic means. The CCGs emerged in a relatively liberal political context, and never had social control or surveillance functions. Thai bureaucrats had other motives for bringing them into existence, such as reducing burdens arising from constituent demands. The author argues that they have nonetheless served as important new focal points for participation in an environment that previously did not encourage such involvement. Looking at examples from four Thai municipalities, the chapter documents the efforts of these organizations to tackle local challenges of many kinds.

Lan Chu, in Chapter 7, analyzes the Catholic Church in Vietnam as an organization that is obliged to straddle the state-society border. Representing some eight million Vietnamese Catholics, the church has an extensive local presence despite the generally dim view of it taken by the ruling Communist Party. The country's nearly 3,000 priests operate on a tense fault line, with the state-sponsored Committee for the Solidarity of Patriotic Vietnamese Catholics

(CSPVC) attempting to rein them in and assert Party control. Yet the priests also have their own, more independent organization, the Vietnamese Catholic Bishops' Conference. Their position is bolstered by authority and resources deriving from the Vatican as well as from the grassroots, where churchgoers and their charitable and other activities often win tacit approval or even overt welcome from local authorities.

Similar patterns of tension and cooperation stand out in Chapter 4, also on Vietnam, by Joseph Hannah. The subject here is organizations that aim to address needs related to social welfare; the three specific cases under study concern female workers, garbage workers, and homeless children. Hannah refers to them using the term NGO, and their purposes and the styles in which they approach their tasks are similar to those of comparable non-government groups elsewhere. They have ties to international nonprofits, and receive little by way of public funding. Yet in order to survive and to pursue their social missions, these groups partner closely with the Vietnamese state through processes the author dubs "mutual colonization." In all cases, the organizations carry out their work in collaboration with government agencies, and one of them has an overseeing board in which current or retired officials figure prominently.

Why are these various kinds of institutions so prominent in East and Southeast Asia? No simple answer to this question will suffice. After all, state-sponsored organizations are hardly unique to this region. Corporatism as a concept was first theorized in Europe, and Latin America has provided many cases as well. China's and Vietnam's straddlers have counterparts in current and former state socialist regimes elsewhere, from Cuba to the former Soviet Union. And as noted above, the general questions of government's relationship to associational life are even relevant in liberal democracies like the United States. Precisely because there are so many ways in which local organizations can be valuable for state programs, these institutions are found in many places.

The chapters on China, Indonesia, Japan, and Taiwan trace the origins of grassroots institutions in those countries far back into history. Readers may refer to those chapters for details and citations; here I merely mention a few major antecedents. For purposes of social control and taxation, imperial China employed a strategy of organizing society on the ultra-local level into units known as *jia* (theoretically formed of 100 households) and *bao* (formed of ten *jia*). A headman was appointed for each such collectivity, and he was held responsible for order and good behavior on the part of the whole group. Japan and Korea developed similar bodies, as well as their own organizational forms. Twentieth-century states then picked up on these historical models and propagated them. Thus, China's Nationalist Party set up *bao-jia* systems in city and countryside during the 1930s, and Japan employed them in Asian territories it colonized and occupied, notably Formosa, Korea, and Java. Some of today's straddler organizations are at least loosely descended from these ancestors.

Scouring through the deep past can only take us so far, the chapters on Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam make little or no reference to early precedents. Still, all the states under consideration here have certain general properties in

common. The "East Asian model" is usually invoked to discuss patterns of industrialization and economic development, or sometimes labor or human rights (Arnsden 1989; Onis 1991; Wade 1992; Kohli 1994; Evans 1995; Peerenboom 2007). Yet many of the qualities that underpinned the region's approach to economic development and civil liberties also influenced the evolution of local associations.

Most of these states shared internal or external security concerns in the post-World War II era. Whether in socialist systems like China or Vietnam, fearing threats to the revolution, or under conservative regimes like Chiang's Republic of China or Suharto's Indonesia, wary of communist expansion, officials were driven to construct organizational networks capable of monitoring the populace and co-opting dissent. Moreover, the doctrines of liberalism found little resonance in the corridors of power here. Just as bureaucrats largely shunned the idea of a *laissez-faire* approach to building the economy, they also did not believe that societal organization should be left alone to grow haphazardly from the grassroots up. Instead, corporatist intervention, the active shaping of organizations, made just as much sense to them in overseeing urban and village governance as it did in guiding firms or labor groups.

These considerations speak to the "supply side," if you will, helping to explain why states in the region have persistently turned to such institutions. A further question concerns the "demand side" – whether publics in East and Southeast Asia are particularly receptive to the kind of state-society partnership that these organizations represent. Prominent Asia scholars have provided arguments in the affirmative. The late Benjamin I. Schwartz, in an essay titled "The primacy of the political order in East Asian societies," argued that "the conception of the supreme jurisdiction of the political order in all domains of social and political life" has been "a more or less enduring dominant cultural orientation" in China through the ages and in countries influenced by Chinese civilization, such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. He clarifies that this refers not to totalitarian control but rather to an assumption that the political order, or state, has special "centrality and weight," that it appropriately claims jurisdiction over and intermingles with the religious, economic, intellectual, and social spheres rather than remaining clearly delineated from them (Schwartz 1996: 114–115).⁹ In a similar vein, anthropologist Robert P. Weller writes that customarily in China and Taiwan, "state and society are not thought about as separate entities in tension with each other," although he notes that this is evolving as ideas from other parts of the world are borrowed and adapted (Weller 1999: 139).

The chapters here provide considerable support for the possibility that political culture helps explain the prevalence of straddler institutions, as well as giving reasons to refrain from over-emphasizing this factor. The authors' empirical research unearths ample evidence of collectivist traditions and the embracing of state-society fusion. At the same time, we also see highly divergent attitudes toward these institutions on the part of different kinds of individuals. By no means does just any form of government oversight and intermediation receive welcome; Vietnamese Catholics, for example, seem to regard the government's supervisory body largely as a nuisance. In many cases it appears that in order to

win whatever public acceptance they might enjoy, straddlers must continually prove their worth by providing services, leisure activities, or other benefits. This indicates that they cannot rely on any timeless cultural values for legitimization.¹⁰

Engaging the questions

What do they do and whom do they benefit?

From a state's perspective, cooperative links with local organizations are useful in several basic ways, all stemming from the human presence and interpersonal networks that they embody. Rather than trample on local knowledge à la Scott's (1998) "high modernism," they instead afford access to it, making it possible to gather information that would otherwise be impossible or costly for far-away bureaucrats to obtain. They also allow for information flows in the other direction, providing a way for the state to disseminate messages rapidly. This propagating of information can be used merely to inform – for instance, telling parents where to take their children for vaccinations. The same function also can be used to persuade: to blunt local resistance to redevelopment plans or to convince people to adopt new forms of trash disposal and recycling. Straddlers are employed to address conflict locally, relieving burdens from higher levels of the state. Moreover, they often are consciously intended to fill a space that could be occupied by other, perhaps unruly, organizations.

The essays here bear witness to the remarkable diversity of tasks that governments give to grassroots associations, all drawing on these basic functions. Thus there can be little question that states themselves find that straddlers repay the resources invested in them. As the chapters on China, Indonesia (pre-1998), Vietnam, and Singapore remind us, in authoritarian contexts a primary purpose of state-fostered organizations is to maintain the grip of a ruling party. They can do this by keeping a lookout for political dissent and reporting illicit behavior, just as in another region Cuba's Committees for the Defense of the Revolution have done by exercising "revolutionary vigilance" (Dominguez 1978; Colomer 2000). Or regime support can take more subtle forms, such as inculcating loyalty to Suharto's "New Order," building national unity, or identifying and recruiting leadership talent.

The cases of Japan, Taiwan, and Indonesia (post-Suharto) also teach us that these organizations can shed their more intrusive, control-oriented functions. In these countries, democratic governments still find myriad uses for them that do not involve violations of civil liberties. But even here, the question arises: To what extent do these functions merely provide a tool for the convenience of the bureaucracy and to what extent do they genuinely benefit their constituents?

The case of Thailand's Cooperative Community Groups addresses this issue. As Mahakajana makes abundantly clear – and as is true of straddlers generally – these local groups, created at the behest of the Interior Ministry, unquestionably serve the interests of government authorities. They were founded as a means of encouraging communities to "depend on themselves in solving their own problems." Local

politicians have pounced on them as channels through which to win the goodwill of voters and secure their own reelection. They also provide forums through which city governments can try to build cooperation for projects that they want to implement. Yet in the author's judgment, CCGs also serve their neighborhoods as well. The organizations do so, she asserts, by building cohesion among residents; providing a channel for communication with authorities and thus enhancing their accountability; and promoting mutual aid.

Kurasawa's account of Indonesia's official neighborhood and village groups, the RT/RW, uses ethnographic techniques to show just how tightly such organizations can fuse with local society. Having lived in one RT during the final years of the New Order regime as well as through the first decade after the restoration of democracy, the author is keenly aware of the important role these bodies played in monitoring and controlling society under Suharto. But as she concludes, they have much greater significance than that. The RT serves as a hub of neighborhood sociability and organization, not just convening its own meetings but also sponsoring the local branch of the women's association, the youth association, and the Koran-chanting association. Among their endeavors are mutual aid activities like rotating credit groups (*arisan*), which have been seen as emblematic of the ability of social capital to surmount problems of collective action (Putnam 1993: 167–169). The various associations engage the energies of roughly a third of the neighborhood, with long-time residents and homeowners particularly well represented. Clearly, at least in this locality, they are not a detested holdover from the authoritarian past but an integral part of the community. Kurasawa also points out, however, that residents whose lives intersect less regularly with their residential surroundings (due to, for instance, transience or the pressures of work) remain marginal to the RT structure and may not be well served by it. This underscores the fact that networks exclude as well as include, and systems of governance that rely upon networks may have strong built-in biases.

Straddlers thus carry out a highly diverse range of functions. In repressive contexts, these clearly center on state security. But states also use these organizational platforms for delivering services, gathering popular input, stimulating voluntary activity, and otherwise performing liaison work that is congruent, rather than at odds, with residents' interests and needs. Simultaneously, community networks often build themselves around the nucleus that is established by government structuring. It is characteristic of straddlers to meld together all these conceptually distinct functions, so that the boundaries between them are blurred.

Internal democracy

Is it possible for such state-sponsored organizations to be run democratically, to choose their own leaders and be held accountable to constituents? The answer is a strong yes. The Taiwanese *lizhang* seem to represent the high-water mark in this regard. Their elections are overseen by the same commissions that handle races

for offices like mayoralities, legislatures, and the national presidency. Just about anyone can run for these positions, and in most Taipei neighborhoods the races are competitive. Candidates issue formal statements of their campaign platforms, which are circulated to each household in detailed brochures from the election commission. The counting of ballots in each polling place is conducted as rigorously as in contests for higher offices, under police guard with the scrutiny of election officials and the public alike. Indeed, the process of leadership selection is considerably more democratic than in many civil society organizations.

In sharp contrast with this, straddlers in urban China and Singapore remain firmly under the control of the dominant party. Although elections of a sort are held in China's RCs, they (at best) ratify staffing decisions made at higher levels, which brook no genuine contestation or pluralism. It should be noted as well that even some democracies, like South Korea, do not have elections for official grassroots organizations; for example, the part-time *tong/gang* that serve as city governments' links to neighborhoods there are in no way chosen from below.¹¹ In other words, just because portions of the state are democratized does not imply that its local branches necessarily are.

Perhaps the most common pattern is one of partial democratization, whether through balloting or similar accountability mechanisms, or in the form of informal constraints that promote some degree of consensus-building and consultation. In Japan's neighborhood associations, for example, leadership selection processes vary by locale, and often a small core of elders appears to make the key decisions. Similarly, Mahakanjana finds that only some of Thailand's CCGs hold elections, while the leaders of others are chosen by city officials. In Indonesia, neighborhood-level leaders during Suharto's rule were voted on by residents but hardly in a free and fair way, as candidates were subject to stringent screening on political criteria. Now, as Kurasawa reports, the elections have become much more open and RT leaders from any political background are eligible, though ward-level leaders may yet have room to influence the proceedings. She also documents contextual changes that enhance accountability; even poorly educated residents have become more demanding of their RT heads and insist on transparency in decision-making.

Can they make the state listen?

Internal democracy is analytically distinct from external influence. It is possible to have fair and rigorous elections for local leaders who nonetheless have little power to press demands upon higher levels. So to what extent are straddler organizations able to *represent* their constituencies, to speak to the powerful on their behalf? When the state embraces local associations, does it in fact open itself to influence or transformation in the process?

In many instances, such upward representation is limited. China's RCs, for example, are strongly geared toward carrying out duties and facilitating programs defined by the state and the Communist Party. They have very little standing to "talk back" to the branches of municipal government that oversee them. After all, committee members were essentially chosen for their positions by the state in the

first place and can be summarily dismissed for insubordination – thus illustrating an obvious connection between a lack of democratic accountability and a lack of representative voice. In cases like China and Singapore, upward influence is generally confined to politely bending the ear of higher officials. They can call attention to individuals who need state assistance but are not receiving it. They can point out infrastructure that needs fixing, or explain that a particular policy is not well received by residents and should be rethought.

Even in democracies, grassroots representatives of this kind often confine themselves to a relatively subdued form of representation. Pekkanen argues that Japanese neighborhood associations do not evince much of an advocacy role. Several reasons seem to underlie this, in Japan and elsewhere. Association leaders may need government support, whether in order to keep their positions or to obtain resources. There are formal guidelines and informal norms that govern their behavior and that stipulate duties they owe to administrative higher-ups. They may also fall victim to "status seduction," as Jeffrey Broadbent posited in explaining neighborhood leaders who turn against their communities' wishes, swayed by the prestige that comes with playing a part in the great pageant of governance (Broadbent 1998: 190).

At the same time, we also see instances of straddler organizations prevailing on states in remarkable ways. In Hannah's study of NGOs in Vietnam that partner with the government, organizations look as though they are engulfed by the bureaucracy but in fact push it to adopt practices imported from international models that are unprecedented for this single-party regime. He makes the case that by working closely with state agencies, these groups in some ways infiltrate it and sow progressive ideas about how to work with disadvantaged populations such as garbage collectors, homeless children, and trafficked girls.

In several of the cases, local organizations can be seen lobbying the state to shunt construction or development money toward projects in their jurisdictions, such as laying or repairing roads. This form of input into the budgeting process resembles the kind of access granted to city decision-making found in Berry *et al.*'s (1993) study of U.S. cities. Taiwan's *lizhang*, like their counterparts in Indonesia and Thailand, may submit proposals for special allocations of public funds. They also obtain extra clout for such requests by dint of their ties with city council members, and even mayors, who rely on their help during election campaigns.

Just as in the case of Japan, *lizhang* are not generally found spearheading social movements. Indeed, Taiwan's NGOs often see them as part of the forces aligned against the change they are working for, whether their efforts concern the environment, the preservation of historical sites, social equality, or others. The neighborhood heads can be perceived as stodgy or suspected of taking bribes from moneyed interests like property developers. But their reluctance to become caught up in single-issue causes also (perhaps ironically) reflects their *more extensive* democratic accountability relative to NGOs. These local leaders have to explain themselves to their entire electorate, or at least a majority of it, rather than just to those individuals who happen to care about a particular topic or grievance.

Thus, internal democracy is linked to external representation, but not always in straightforward or expected ways. There appear to be several channels through which straddler organizations can obtain influence at higher levels: through institutionalized processes designed to open up decision-making to popular input via straddlers; by means of informal connections to politicians at higher levels who need supporters at the grassroots; and by offering new ideas for solving problems in forms that are perceived as less suspicious precisely because they give the appearance of emerging from "within the system."

Participating in straddler organizations

In the economic realm, government support for firms in the form of tax credits or trade subsidies can provide them with a decisive boost. So too with societal organizations, state sponsorship can confer tremendous advantages. Grassroots associations with official backing are propagated so extensively, in many of the cases considered here, that their geographic coverage is difficult or impossible for non-state organizations to match. For better or for worse, this support brings them to people's doorsteps, as it were. But do people take part? Do they welcome these bodies or shun them? *Who* takes part?

In the neighborhood-based straddlers, we find remarkably common patterns. Even the most statist of these organizations engage a great deal of popular participation — though this participation often skews toward particular demographic groups. In her survey of federated associations in the United States, Theda Skocpol and co-authors considered an organization significant if it encompassed at least 1 percent of the adult population at any point in time (Skocpol *et al.* 2000: 529). Some of the organizations under study here exceed this standard by at least an order of magnitude. Pekkanen cites survey evidence indicating the great majority of Japanese adults to be members of the official neighborhood groups, and asserts that as much as half of the adult population may be actively involved in them.

Here and elsewhere, high participation rates naturally raise the question of whether people have a choice about the matter. But in none of the cases under study, even in the authoritarian countries, are ordinary people threatened with state punishment for failing to join or participate. Rather, people's motivations for taking part are complex and varied. Social pressure and a sense of civic obligation appears to play a significant role in cases like Japan. In many others, factors like the pleasures of sociability and the psychological rewards to be gleaned from serving alongside others in an official auxiliary of the state seem to be important parts of the appeal of these groups. Whether in China, Singapore, or Indonesia, most citizens are proud of their country, and straddlers provide a way to serve the nation, even if only at the most humble of levels.

Evidence from Thailand, Indonesia, China, and elsewhere indicates that it is in poorer neighborhoods that participation is most concentrated. Kurasawa finds, for example, that in these areas residents are more interested in taking part in things like the rotating credit groups. Conversely, relatively wealthy households,

living in more modern forms of housing, tend to depend less on their communities and have less need for coordination with them. It also comes as no surprise that middle-aged and older individuals are most attracted to and available for this form of association, as is generally the case with community-based groups. Interestingly, though, whether the organization is internally democratic or not may have relatively little effect on participation. Neighborhood groups in Beijing and Taipei lie at opposite ends of the spectrum of formal accountability, yet they pull in roughly the same fraction of diehard joiners to the activities that they sponsor, even though in Taipei more people turn up for casual social activities. This highlights the centrality of sociability and camaraderie in the appeal of these groups.

Vertical and horizontal ties: pulling together or apart?

Vertical connections involve state authority, demands, inducements, sometimes impositions. Horizontal ties are peer relationships or something like them, linking those who are close to equal in power. The question that was posed to the chapter authors most insistently was how to understand the interaction between vertical and horizontal forces in the institutions they studied. After all, interpersonal, face-to-face networks lie at the heart of how straddler organizations are intended to work. From the perspective of governments, their purpose is to reach into communities and borrow or co-opt some of the information, entrée, or persuasive power that inheres in the networks there — whether this is for purposes that are benign or crudely self-serving. One might well expect (and some theories predict) these two forces to conflict with one another. Vertical obligations could well kill off horizontal bonds. Alternatively, perhaps local communities might "capture" and subvert the efforts of the state (Migdal 1988).

A common theme found in these pages is one of politicians drawing on local state-linked organizations for the purpose of establishing contact with voters. This is especially pronounced in Japan, Thailand, and Taiwan. Does it amount to a form of clientelism?¹² And if so, how malignant is it? One way in which vertical ties can be harmful is when they are used to trade material goods and benefits for political support, thus substituting short-term payoffs for deeper forms of representation and undermining democratic accountability. This varies from place to place between and even within countries, and changes over time. Pekkanen aims to debunk the idea that Japan's neighborhood associations are clientelist political vehicles. In his account, the groups are just one forum among many, providing gatherings where politicians have a chance to speak and appeal to voters but not to ensnare them in relationships of mutual dependency.

This might well be expected in a wealthy and well-established democracy, but what about in lower- or middle-income countries? Mahakanjana finds that in the poorer neighborhoods of Thailand's cities and towns, the ties that politicians form through the CCGs can indeed be clientelistic. In other cases there, she argues, the communities are not passive subordinates but work with their city representatives on an equal footing. The evidence from the Taiwanese case is

also mixed and has evolved in the past two or three decades. Many (although by no means all) neighborhood leaders there are classic examples of *tiau-a-ka*, party operatives who strive to get out the vote in legislative and presidential elections (Rigger 1999). These party "cornerstones" have been known to hand out cash payments before elections in trade for constituents' votes. While this practice continues in some parts of Taiwan, it is losing its effectiveness and in cosmopolitan cities like Taipei it has all but disappeared. Voters' need and taste for such inducements seem to diminish with rising living standards and a greater sense of civic pride.

Clientelist ties are clearly at their most destructive when used deliberately to fragment a subordinate group and turn its members against one another. Such a situation, with clientelist links to Communist Party cadres shattering any possibility of shop-floor solidarity among workers, is depicted in Walder's account of Chinese state enterprises in the late Mao era (Walder 1986). The key factor creating abject dependency and polarization is the extent to which valuable material goods, opportunities, or discretionary power over the enforcement of rules are wielded by those who would be "patrons." A form of this kind of power can be seen here in Kurasawa's description of New Order Jakarta, where one had to stay in the good graces of the RT head in order to receive letters of support that were necessary to obtain various official documents. Most of this arbitrary authority seems to have vaporized with Indonesia's *reformasi*, however. What about China? In the Mao era, frequent political campaigns gave local officials a sometimes terrifying ability to tag a person as suspect and thus jeopardize his or her future. But today, this kind of discretionary power has greatly diminished in China, and certainly the lowly Residents' Committees do not have it. As my Chapter 6 indicates, some residents dislike the kind of monitoring that RCs engage in, while others see it as appropriate, yet few have anything to fear from their neighborhood leaders, or have a reason to curry favor with them. Nonetheless, given their advisory role to the government on decisions like welfare benefits, it is also true that they have some authority over subpopulations with special needs.

Vertical power need not actively smash horizontal solidarity; it can displace or preempt it in more subtle ways. It can cultivate bonds that center on political loyalists and are reinforced through activities geared toward serving the state rather than making demands on it. It can disrupt oppositional forms of solidarity by substituting for them. Thus Singapore takes care to ensure that its grassroots organizations are run by individuals found reliable by the ruling People's Action Party, and discourages forms of community that sing an unorthodox tune. Yet we find this problem mitigated in settings where straddlers are open to competitive pressures. In Taiwan, for example, candidates from different parties (and in many cases, no party at all) vie for neighborhood leadership. Moreover, residents may form, at their own initiative, sub-community organizations (*shequ fazhan xiehui*) that can apply independently for city support. This helps prevent vertical linkages being used exclusively for the benefit of any one political clique.

In some circumstances, government backing for grassroots organizations seems actually to promote horizontal connections in certain ways. The vibrant example

of Kurasawa's RT in Jakarta has already been discussed in this chapter. In Vietnam, the state-created CSPVC, which generally exists to keep the Catholic Church under a degree of Party supervision without providing it much added value, is joined by some priests because it helps cleanse the church from the taint of colonialism that some perceive it to have. Mahakanjana argues that Thai communities often lack preexisting associational foci, and thus state-fostered organizations create rather than supplant social capital. Moreover, government backing can give credibility to programs like cooperative burial insurance, which otherwise might be defeated by mutual distrust. And as Pekkanen insists, Japan's neighborhood groups could hardly have the astonishing extensiveness that they do without state support.

Synthesis

In the end, the phenomena considered here – which may strike some readers as quirky, yet are in many ways typical of the region – remind us how much more distance our theories have left to cover before they do justice to the actual terrain of associational life around the world. Most of these groups fall between the ideal-typical poles of the oppressive Leninist mass organization, on the one hand, and the wholly self-initiated and independent citizens' group acting in civil society, on the other. Many have, in fact, moved during the course of their existence from one position on this spectrum to another. This calls attention to the possibilities for change and evolution inherent in these institutions. Even more significantly, it speaks to the fundamental malleability of associations with regard to their multiple connections to the state. Once established, these links contain the potential for either governors or governed to renegotiate and convert them to new purposes.

Broadly speaking, many of these entities could be said to constitute kinds of corporatist arrangements in that states use them in efforts to direct popular participation toward sanctioned channels. Yet the local or ultra-local scale and broad functional scope of these grassroots organizations distinguish them from the forms of corporatism that are most commonly known in the economic sphere. Some of what we see here seems reminiscent of the kind of corporatist fetters that were imposed upon (for instance) Peruvian slum dwellers by military regimes. Yet in such instances, state corporatism served little purpose other than to suppress and supplant residents' voices. In the cases here it also creates possibilities, and evinces a much more complex set of dynamics. The difficulty existing theories have in encompassing such variation attests to the fact that state-initiated corporatism remains both static and unrefined as a conceptual construct.

With respect to "synergy" and related ideas, what we see here similarly constitutes a form of the phenomenon that puts existing theory into new light. The heart of the synergy idea is that states and communities each can possess valuable assets that the other requires: resources, reach, expertise, and authority on the one hand, and micro-level networks, interpersonal trust, and credibility on the other. This is precisely the mix of ingredients that fuels an institution like Thailand's CCGs or Indonesia's RT/RW. While synergy was conceived to account for a

relatively small set of exemplary developmental projects, its actual applicability is far wider. This book shows that there are multiple forms of synergy, some producing wholly benign results, others with purposes that the theorists of this concept might find objectionable, such as surveillance and political mobilization.

Some of the chapters that follow play off or challenge the concept of civil society. It should be made clear that this book does not aim to deny the fundamental importance of civil society to good governance. We know how crucial civil society is in part by considering cases where it is absent or cowed into quiescence. Countries that deny their citizens the right to organize wholly autonomous associations through which to address public issues and make political demands are markedly different in important ways from those that respect this right. We also know this from cases around the world where citizen groups have led the way in bringing about sorely needed political change, whether at the regime level or in expanding rights and addressing injustices.

Moreover, this book does not follow the line of argument advanced by those critics who claim that civil society in its contemporary meaning is unsuitable for Asian societies. Some have argued that this concept is too beholden to the individualistic bent of the liberal tradition, and thus unable to do justice to associations in non-Western societies (Wakeman 1993; Hann 1996). Yet this is far too strong an argument. Though the term finds its intellectual origins in British and continental philosophy, it has evolved a considerable distance from those roots and now can be applied as an analytic category without reference to region. We follow instead the reasoning of scholars like Frank Schwartz and Muthiah Alagappa who point out that the existence of civil society in Asia is an undeniable fact, though it is much more highly developed in some countries than in others (Schwartz 2003; Alagappa 2004a).

The problem with civil society studies is that in seeking to establish a discrete concept, they have set rigid definitional lines that obscure important boundary phenomena. The idea of a white-and-black, binary distinction between groups inside and outside of civil society has impeded knowledge in many ways rather than advancing it, hindering our understanding of whole galaxies of actually existing organizations. We must develop much more fine-grained categories with which to comprehend the associational universe. This is, in fact, what some outstanding scholarship of recent years strives to do, whether we think of Mark Warren's (2001) categorizations, Verba *et al.*'s (1995) analysis of the role of specific types of organizations (unions and churches) in building civic skills, or Lily Tsai's (2007) careful research on solitary groups in Chinese villages. As we pursue this, we will likely find even more evidence that organizations that are independent of government have no monopoly on civic qualities, and that sometimes the state can – perhaps surprisingly – do more good than harm as it engages with associational life.

The hybrids here overlap with autonomous groups in certain crucial ways that are brought to light by the perceptive analysis of these authors. From the point of view of individual participants, some straddlers offer opportunities similar to those available in other associational venues: for instance, ways to contribute time and energy to useful purposes, and the companionship of like-minded individuals.

In other cases, these groups may offer distinct types of rewards, whether in the form of influence on government, material incentives, or even prestige. In some contexts they may in fact be better positioned than independent groups to achieve certain purposes, such as providing services to needy populations.

As we know from studies of mass organizations and state corporatism, crude top-down control of grassroots organizations unquestionably can kill them off as channels for meaningful political participation. Yet apart from such extreme cases, empirical research on the nexus of state and association is still in its infancy. Links to the state have both benefits and drawbacks with respect to the capacity of grassroots organizations to stimulate civic engagement. Their widely distributed nature ensures that they are readily at hand, and the government's seal of approval may enhance their appeal as an avenue for participation. Their connections to officialdom attract individuals seeking a way to communicate demands to the authorities, though they also constrain those who might use contentious tactics to bring visibility to a cause. Neighborhood structures in places like Taiwan and Indonesia suggest that even if state penetration of associations has negative effects, these can also be balanced with institutional features that reinforce popular accountability rather than undermine it. The key ingredients seem to be the inclusion of strong mechanisms to ensure democratic accountability, and opening up rather than shutting off avenues by which ordinary people can meaningfully affect decision-making within the state itself.

Cases where states sharply constrain the possible forms of citizen expression through local organizations and indeed use them to help identify and silence non-conforming voices, like China's RCs, can hardly be recommended as a template for other countries to apply. Even the most constructive of the straddlers seem to have much to learn from institutions designed more specifically for empowering constituents to help (for instance) take the budgetary reins of local government, to participate in managing local schools, or to monitor the performance of the state (Abers 2000; Fung 2004; Cornwall and Coelho 2007; Fox 2007). Most of the cases presented in this book do too little to bring citizens together across the boundaries of small communities, and may in fact perpetuate a form of social fragmentation. And whatever the merits or drawbacks of the organizations considered here, it is clear that not everything ought to "straddle." There are important forms of political action, such as transformative social movements, contentious calls for justice, noisy demands for redress of official malfeasance, that are unlikely to emerge from state-society hybrids.

Yet associations sponsored by and plugged into local government contribute much to their societies and should not be rejected out of hand. Where immense networks of them exist, even as legacies from unsavory periods of authoritarianism, a strong argument can be made for reforming rather than discarding them. There can be no single answer to the question of the appropriate configuration of authority and autonomy, cultivation and spontaneity at the grassroots. What may be most functional and productive instead is an organizational ecology containing a multitude of creative answers.

Notes

- 1 This chapter has benefitted from a longstanding collaboration with Robert Pekkanen; some passages draw on Pekkanen and Read (2003). I would like to thank the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations (Harvard University) and the Center for Democracy and Civil Society (Georgetown University) for their support and for sharpening my thinking about the topics discussed in this chapter.
- 2 To survey all the ways in which scholars have previously questioned or explored the often taken-for-granted boundary between state and society would be at least a chapter-length project in itself. Apart from the works cited elsewhere in this introduction, which for the most part focus, as this book does, on the specific questions posed by local associations, see the broad-brush discussions in Mitchell (1991); Migdal *et al.* (1994); and Rudolph and Jacobsen (2006).
- 3 More precisely, this figure refers to the funding sources not of the entirety of the U.S. nonprofit sector, but public-benefit service organizations, which constitute most of it.
- 4 This volume focuses on urban associations; many of the cases discussed in the chapters that follow have rural counterparts.
- 5 Jeremy Shiffman (2002) highlights the significance of the Indonesian program's community-level embeddedness. On China's family planning program, see White (2006).
- 6 Larry Diamond defines civil society as "the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules" (Diamond 1999: 221).
- 7 Scholars also advance many other claims about the possible benefits of associations; for example, that they can cross-cut and thus mitigate societal cleavages. More comprehensive statements of claimed effects can be found in Diamond (1999: chap. 6) and Warren (2001). Warren eschews the term "civil society," preferring a more open-ended approach to the study of associational life. See also Cohen and Rogers (1992); Walzer (1995); Anheter (2004); and Heinrich (2005).
- 8 One early discussion is found in Deyo (1989). On China, see the essays in Unger (2008). Indonesian corporatism is discussed in Liddle (1996).
- 9 I thank Neil Diamant for bringing this essay to my attention.
- 10 The practice of mediating disputes offers a case in point. Many straddler organizations in Asia have, among their multiple responsibilities, the task of attempting to settle disagreements among constituents, thus reducing the workload of courts and higher levels of government. At times, this has been interpreted as the result of a cultural preference for harmony and mediation, while others have sharply criticized a culturalist understanding of this practice. The truth may lie somewhere in the middle; see the debate in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*: Wall and Blum (1991), Diamant (2000), Read and Michelson (2008).
- 11 Author's fieldwork in Seoul, July 2004.
- 12 For recent reviews of the concept of clientelism, see Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) and Stokes (2007).

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2 Japan's neighborhood associations

Membership without advocacy

Robert Pekkanen

Despite their ubiquity, neighborhood associations are little studied by political scientists. Yet such local, community organizations can have important indirect influences on public policy. This chapter argues that Japan's neighborhood associations (NHAs) intersect public policy in two important ways. First, NHAs are beneficiaries of public support. Second, neighborhood associations support the effective and efficient implementation of public policy or, in a word, governance, through their sustaining of social capital.

A great deal of recent research has focused on the voluntary organizations that are seen as the building blocks of civil society. Drawing on a long tradition within social theory, influential arguments have been put forward linking the extent and quality of popular associational life to several important and desirable outcomes. Civil society is said to help inculcate engaged and participatory citizens, contribute to the health and persistence of democracy, and foster responsive and effective government.¹

There is little consensus within this literature on what the exact boundaries of civil society are. Specialists debate whether groups like firms or unions are included, whether to count those that restrict membership based on ascriptive characteristics or family ties, and whether a commitment to tolerance or pluralism is required. One of the only points of agreement is that the organizations must be independent of the state. Though they are rarely made explicit, the underlying assumptions are that only autonomous groups genuinely constitute civil society, and that any sort of government linkage deadens the civic benefits that an association might otherwise generate. State-linked groups, it is held, typically drum up a kind of ersatz involvement by citizens through pressure, patronage, or manipulation. Such participation does not constitute social capital, permit the flow of information, allow free political debate, or serve as a conduit for popular input. Moreover, groups cannot effectively monitor and restrain the state without complete independence from it.

Although state-fostered groups *can* have these characteristics, it is not always so. In fact, the varying effects of different forms of government involvement have barely been explored. Benjamin Read's Introduction to this volume is one of the few efforts to do so comparatively. However, even confining our gaze to the United States, for example, close examination reveals that state activity and initiatives have played a greater part in stimulating and shaping citizen organizations than is