

## Disseminating Asia's Third Sector Research

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In the first Asia Pacific special issue of *Voluntas*,<sup>1</sup> Lyons and Hasan (2002) pronounced optimism that “given the growing interest, the size and the diversity of the region, it is likely that studies of Asia’s third sector will appear with increasing frequency” (p. 112) since the basis for a strong research culture had already been laid. The frequency has increased in the last decade or so, albeit slowly.

A search in the ‘Academic Search Complete’ database revealed 214 publications on the third sector in academic journals in English on 15 Asian countries between 2001 and 2013—49 % on China and India (Table 1). The data show variations in research interests across the countries—while 57 % of the publications on China were on cooperatives (a large percentage of which came out in the last 3/4 years), 50 % of the publications on Bangladesh and 38 % on India were impact analysis of different third sector programs (Table 1).

There has been a dearth of comparative works, though—only fourteen of the 214 papers are comparative 50 % of which compare different aspects of India (e.g., diaspora philanthropy, cooperatives, or measuring NGO impacts) with nine other countries. All sole or lead authors of these comparative works are non-indigenous researcher.

In fact, non-indigenous authorship has been a major phenomenon in the region. Of these 214 papers, 106 have non-indigenous authors and 79 as principal author. Thirty-four of the 65 papers on China have non-indigenous authors (including 13 as principal author; 10 as sole author). This fact not only is a good sign of international

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<sup>1</sup> Samiul Hasan undertook editing works for this issue (as known to all authors and the then editor) but did not appear in the publication. Mark Lyons thought the oversight was due to the fact that no name was in the final manuscript. The then editor, replied to Jenny Onyx, he was not told. This note is added to record a past error.

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**Table 1** 214 Papers in Academic Search Complete on 15 Asian Countries 2001–2013 (Civil Society, Cooperatives, NGO, Philanthropy, and Volunteer)

Topics	China (65)	India (39)	Indonesia (9)	Bangladesh (12)	Philippines (17)	Taiwan (9)
Cooperatives	37	11			4	
Evaluation and impacts	4	15	5	6	5	1
Environment	9				3	
Civil society/governance	1	1	1	3	0	2
Third sector-government relationships	2	2	1	1	3	1
Other; corporate social responsibility; microcredit; external/donor relationships	12	10	2	2	2	5

Other countries include: Hong Kong SAR (6), Japan (8), Korea (12), Malaysia (4), Nepal (6), Pakistan (4), Sri Lanka (5), Thailand (4), Taiwan (10), Vietnam (4)

academic collaboration but may also mean language has been a barrier to knowledge dissemination. The contention is proven further by the fact that with a unique interest in third sector research in Japan as well as Korea (reflected in the membership size of 1000 and 400 in the nonprofit researcher associations like JANPORA and KANPOR, respectively), publications in English on these two countries are minimal: only eight on Japan and 12 on Korea.<sup>2</sup> Language has also been an issue in India—with 20 officially recognized languages and many third sector scholars spread across the country most works are disseminated in local languages.

With growing international collaboration (and possibly through translation), the frequency of publications (comparative or otherwise) is likely to increase further in future, but in the meantime, the ISTR Asia Pacific regional conferences have been successfully holding the momentum.

## The ISTR Regional Conference

The ISTR Asia Pacific regional conference (a two and a half day conference every other year alternating with the ISTR International conference years), in the last fifteen years, has grown and remained a major outlet for disseminating third sector research on different Asian countries consistently attracting about 100 delegates and sixty-odd papers.

The papers presented in these regional conferences capture the contemporary trends in third sector research. The trend in the post-9/11 world was reflected in the papers presented in the Beijing Conference (2003). More than half of the papers dealt with the third sector's relationship with government and private organizations (12), governance and accountability in the third sector (10), and the third sector

<sup>2</sup> *The Nonprofit Review* of the JANPORA, and *The China Nonprofit Review* publish works in English, though.

**Table 2** Eight ISTR Asia Pacific Conferences: 450 presentations with shifting foci

Conferences → Topics ↓	Osaka 2001 (66)	Beijing 2003 (59)	Bali 2011 (63)	Seoul 2013 (58)
Accountability, governance, third sector—government relationships	7	16	3	11
Evaluation and impacts	9	11	14	10
Development; community	3	6	2	2
Third sector laws and legal environment	0	10	0	7
Social capital	3	6	3	5
Social enterprise/entrepreneurship	3	0	10	8
Volunteering	14	5	3	1
Others; CSR; cooperatives; microcredit	27	5	20	14

legal environment (8). The papers presented in Osaka conference (2001) focused on philanthropy (15 papers), growth, governance, cooperation, and performance of the third sector (13), and social capital in Asian sustainable development management (7) (Hasan 2002). In contrast to the papers in Osaka Conference (2001), with fifteen papers on philanthropy, the papers in the Beijing Conference showed signs of maturity and focussed on critical analysis of the sector and its external dynamics, and of researching the governance and sustainability issues (Hasan 2004). It has grown diversifying further since (Table 2).

In the 1990s, due to the Putnam (1994) affect, an interest in social capital and its relationship to development and sustainability created interests among Asian researchers. Social capital that always has been existent in Asian countries, in different forms and labels, has been the focus of many AP conference presentations. The authors have shown consistent interest in social capital along with the evaluation and impact analyses of the third sector and its programs across all conferences. In the recent conferences, there have been renewed interests in the third sector's accountability, and governance as well as relationship with the government, new interests in social enterprises, and fewer interests in volunteering (Table 2).

There seems to be regional preferences in research areas and approaches. While evaluation and impact analyses have been consistently undertaken, there has been an East Asia and South Asia divide—the former focusing on quantitative and the latter on qualitative analyses. An important area that have witnessed much neglect is the laws and legal environment of the third sector except for the Beijing Conference where six country papers and a comparative paper were drawn out of a major comparative work in the region 'Asia's Third Sector: Governance for Accountability and Performance' (later published in Hasan and Onyx 2008).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that Mark Sidel and his colleagues' work on South Asia, and that of Karla Simon, Leon Irish et al. (icnl.org; ijnl.org) have made significant contribution in the study of third sector laws in the region.

Hasan (2013) in a panel paper, analyzing the third sector in 34 countries in Asia, contended that the third sector in the region has been large and needs to be studied in its socio-political complexities. There are very well-known third sector initiatives, e.g., the BRAC (in Bangladesh with 100,000 employees serving 135 million people in eleven countries); what is not known much is that in early 21st century China had an estimated 8.5 million third sector organizations of different forms and sizes (Wang and He 2004) i.e., about one TSO (third sector organization) for every 141 individuals. Hasan (2013) created a TSO density analysis, which defines China's third sector density as 709 i.e., 709 TSOs every 100,000 people, to relate it to other important phenomena in each country under the study.

The third sector is created and functionally effective more in strong states. Strong states with unelected government have promoted the third sector to neutralize political activism; democratic strong states have promoted the third sector for 'partnership' or 'free-riding.' Hasan (2013), considering many factors related to the third sector growth and functioning, found out that the legal instruments introduced by the military governments as tools of neutralizing political activism became a stimulus for third sector growth in many Asian countries (like in Africa). On the other hand, third sector legal environment is 'restrictive' or at best 'neutral' in countries where military did not intervene in politics, especially where tribal power is dominant (Hasan 2013, 2015a). Weak states (where the Weberian state supremacy of using coercion in an institutionalized system is compromised either by the government or other forces) let the third sector function (e.g., Bangladesh where the TSO density is 483) but not in countries with tribal or ethnic group domination (e.g., Qatar where TSO density is one) (Hasan 2015b). Tribal power also has restricted the third sector in countries with elected government (e.g., Pakistan where TSO density is 58) (Table 3).

Further, in the recent past it is seen that 'election-only' democratic governments in many countries in Asia, like in Africa, regulate TSOs not to be outshined (introducing new requirements for accessing overseas funds, licensing, monitoring, etc.). Elected (autocratic) governments (e.g., Bangladesh) have undermined the third sector to 'reclaim' its 'territory' (to protect its tainted face) with new laws containing purposive ambiguity; subjective references; vague wording; discretionary overloads; prohibitive use of fiscal tools; procedural hindrances; subjective application; activity restriction, etc. (Hasan 2011). More regulations do not mean better outcome; only mean benefitting 'us,' restricting 'them' (Hasan 2013).

The situation is better in countries with a tradition of membership organizations showing tolerance practicing competition. Hasan (2013) concluded that in Asia (in the 'third wave of democratization'), democracy has settled better in Indonesia because of its tradition of large membership organizations upholding democratic values and principles. Considering the factors highlighted above, only Tunisia in 2011 looked promising in achieving democratic government with functioning membership organizations, third sector density of 138.88, French colonial intervention, and low tribal influence in economic and political affairs (these factors are different in Egypt and Yemen where TSO density stands at 33.13 and 28.68, respectively) (Hasan 2011; further elaborated in Hasan 2015c). Thus, many research works undertaken in the region have implications beyond the region.

**Table 3** TSOs in 34 Asian Countries: a sample of facts and factors

	China	India	Indonesia	Bangladesh	Philippines	Pakistan
Colonial past (22)	Nil	British	Dutch	British	Spanish	British
Military in politics (10)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tribal system (19)	No	No	No	No	No	Low
Sedentary community (32)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Weak state (8) no data from GCC + Brunei	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Third sector density: 1 (Qatar) to 709 (China)	709	400	273	483	473	58
Latest law	2008	2013	2013	2012	2007	2011/12

The third sector, the legal environment, and its dynamics need to be understood and analyzed more to project and protect the future of the third sector in Asian countries, especially in the (re)democratizing countries and to promote membership democratic organizations—the backbone of a democratic society. True associational revolution (with organizational democracy) will help re(democratize) the countries, not more NGOs (or foundations).

## The Challenges

Language is a barrier in disseminating knowledge across the national (or even regional) boundaries, as discussed above. In fact, Asia is a large continent with much larger number of ethnic and language groups. There are countries where most people do not work in the main state language (e.g., India, Pakistan). Thus, there are differences between one's mother tongue and the language of writing creating two challenges. First, the publication may have very limited access (e.g., India). Second, in places with a unifying colonial language (e.g., Bangladesh or Pakistan), the writers struggle to reach the mainstream readers. Some other challenges in disseminating third sector research were discussed in the recent regional group meetings (especially in Bali and Seoul), organized as an essential part of the ISTR Asia Pacific regional conferences.

Apart from Japan and Republic of Korea, research infrastructure has been weak in other countries in Asia for three reasons: the publicly funded universities (e.g., India) do not have much research facilities (except for some key universities); higher education in some countries is private sector dominated (e.g., Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines) where profit primacy disallows much research opportunities; and political (party) system in many countries does not allow much leverage to the academics to undertake objective social science research (e.g., Bangladesh, China, or Pakistan).

In some countries, the third sector has grown through foreign funds, but not its research because the overseas funding agencies have been interested in visible

outcomes. Local foundations have been active in offering research funds in places like Hong Kong (SAR), Japan, or Korea, not in other places because their limited funds are needed for or targeted at a particular activity or group as wished by the founding father/mother. Since the stock market crash in the late 1990s, limited research funding available from large foundations (e.g., Ford Foundations) has all but disappeared. As a result, dedicated scholars are known to have used personal funds, self-raised grants, or topped-up fractional university funds to attend the conferences.

University disciplines in most cases seem to regulate the rigid ‘boundaries’ with not much appreciation for works beyond a disciplinary focus. University or governmental regulations, in many countries, reinforce ‘disciplinary’ boundaries by undermining interdisciplinary works in the promotion process. Thus, young scholars, eager to excel in a discipline, avoid third sector research.

In the era of ‘economic rationalization,’ higher education sector in many countries has become lucrative product to be offered with higher profit margins (even the non-profit universities in the region aim for large profits to re-invest in the ‘profit-cycle’) discarding past methods of cross-subsidizing public benefit programs. The academics become ‘instructors’ with heavy teaching load, not scholars with publications.

## The Papers

The nine papers in this special issue, presented at two ISTR Asia Pacific Regional conferences (Bali 2011; Seoul 2013), are representative of countries, topics, and research approaches (qualitative and quantitative). Despite the best effort in attaining a regional balance, South Asia is under represented, while Southeast Asia is unrepresented in the list. The open search for papers was not much successful after the Bali Conference and was extended to the Seoul Conference. The process revealed that some papers are written and committed to a journal before the conference presentations; on the other hand, most are prepared only as conference papers or as PowerPoint presentations. Further, many papers were not shortlisted for being too technical or too narrow in focus (without much international readership potential), not recommended by the reviewers, or were withdrawn (because the authors lacked time or materials to act on the reviewers’ suggestions). Finally nine papers from the two conferences remained for the issue. All papers were revised being subjected to a double blind review process (from one area expert and another subject expert).<sup>4</sup>

Conforming to the trend in third sector research in the region, this special issue includes four papers on social capital and social enterprise. The paper (Social Capital and Subjective Well-being in Japan) by Midori Matsushima and Y. Matsushima shows that trust and volunteering have a positive relation to one’s subjective well-being, whereas organizational membership does not. Nonetheless,

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<sup>4</sup> Personal appreciation and gratitude are expressed once again to the dozens of reviewers in Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America for great help that made this work possible. Thank you.

evidencing that the volunteers in their 50s are less happy than those in their 60s, the authors conclude that one's life stage tends to be very important factor in volunteering and well-being and should be studied further because it seems the level of trust increases with age impacting on social capital.

Rosemary Leonards (in 'Dimensions of Bonding Social Capital in Christian Congregations across Australia') taking the discussion on 'bonding' social capital ahead with a model concludes that the three important factors related to an underlying Bonding construct were Collective Agency, Congregational Unity, and Personal Connections. A fourth factor in the model, the desire for Homogeneity, was related to Congregational Unity but not significantly to Bonding. The model have nothing relating to religion so, the author claims, it "could potentially be generalised to the many other types of third sector organisations where people meet regularly around a shared value."

Related to some aspects of social capital, especially trust, the paper (Competing Identity: The Role of Family in Social Entrepreneurship) by Ming-Rea Kao and Chang-Yu Huang explores the evolution of a social entrepreneurship case in Taiwan, and expanding on Fukuyama, concludes that traditional societies characterized by the paradox of familism may become more inclusive with higher trust through social entrepreneurship.

The paper by Eun Sun Lee (Social Enterprise, Policy Entrepreneurs, and the third sector: the Case of South Korea) is not on social capital per se but deals with 'bonding' of the government and the third sector as the 'policy entrepreneur' to social enterprises in South Korea. The paper showcasing successful development of social enterprise in South Korea in the absence of a welfare state or a well-developed third sector argues that the phenomenon should hold numerous policy implications for other Asian countries. Indeed many countries with high access to 'rent-seeking' and low employment may try the South Korean model.

The South Korean model of social enterprise may be an instrument of empowerment, but Faraha Nawaz (Microfinance, Financial Literacy, and Household Power Configuration in Rural Bangladesh: An Empirical Study on Some Credit Borrowers) deals with empowerment from rural women's perspective in Bangladesh. With empirical perception analysis case studies, the paper argues that microfinance can 'empower' by transmuted women's economic position and power relationships, but only with financial literacy and suggests that financial literacy should be a major aspect of all future microfinance programs.

While Faraha Nawaz studies women microcredit borrowers' perspective on self-empowerment, Ruth Phillips (How 'empowerment' may miss its mark: gender agenda policies and how they are understood in Women's NGOs' by Ruth Phillips) studies women's NGO perspectives of impacts of 'gender policy' on the progress of achieving gender equality. The study reveals differences between the wide range of feminist agenda of the NGOs and the limitations of the current empowerment paradigm and identifies tensions between predominantly individualized empowerment processes and the much broader structural and other feminist objectives that different NGOs identified. The differences between the concept and the means indicate a long way ahead in achieving gender equality.

Gender equality in development paradigm could be farfetched, but people's individual efforts all over the world result in social development. The paper (Corporate Philanthropy in Contemporary China: A Case of Rural Compulsory Education Promotion) by Huiquan Zhou uses the case of rural compulsory education promotion to explore corporate philanthropists' involvement in long-term social development in China. It suggests that the corporate philanthropists should also use their power of money to promote professionalism in the Chinese nonprofit sector that may enlarge the outcome.

The paper (Local Charitable Giving and Civil Society Organizations in Japan) by Yu Ishida and Naoko Okuyama examines the factors influencing individual giving behaviors toward different types of organizations. The empirical study shows that the variables regarding personal socio-demographic traits, experiences of local social participation, and an attachment to one's local community are statistically significant in the giving behavior, but not the contextual effect such as the size of one's city. Thus, the authors suggest development of organizational form so as to achieve better local governance and success in offering public goods by attracting charitable giving from the enlightened residents.

The last paper (Developing and Validating a Measure of Stakeholder Culture for the Not-for-Profit Sector) by Jinhua (Jessica) Chen provides an instrument to quantify the typology of stakeholder culture in the not-for-profit organizations by constructing and validating a scale of Jones et al.'s (2007) four 'other-regarding' stakeholder cultures of corporate egoist, instrumentalist, moralist, and altruist. It suggests that ethical or unethical behavior is conceptually more aligned with the construct of stakeholder culture, so should be studied as such.

The first special issue with five papers increased "by one-third the number of articles published by *Voluntas* about the third sector in the world's largest continent" (Lyons and Hasan 2002), the second (with nine papers) increases the number of papers in *Voluntas* (between 2001 and 2013) on the third sector in 15 Asian countries by almost a half. While future looks promising, possibly it is time now to revisit the option of publishing a refereed ISTR Asia Pacific conference proceedings to overcome some challenges of disseminating Asia's third sector research.

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