NGOs have received increased attention in the last two decades. Some scholars have documented the growth of NGOs and their expanded influence in global politics (e.g., M.E. Keck and K. Sikkink, *Activism beyond borders*, Cornell University Press, 1998). Others have noted the disparate levels of development achieved by NGOs in different countries and examined the domestic structural barriers to NGO establishment and growth in countries such as Japan (e.g., F.J. Schwartz and S.J. Pharr, eds., *The state of civil society in Japan*, Cambridge University Press, 2003). While asking how and why NGOs emerge and grow, Reimann addresses both the general rise of NGOs (referred to as “convergence”) as well as the differing levels of NGO strength (referred to as “divergence”) among industrialized countries, with a focus on Japan as a case study.

In chapter 1, Reimann explains her analytical model, which she terms “activism from above.” This framework considers a number of domestic and international factors, all of which suggest NGO activism is shaped from above by the state and by international structures. At the domestic level, she identifies state policies and the structure of political institutions as causal factors of divergent NGO development. At the international level, she identifies three factors to analyze the convergence: international political opportunities, state socialization and transnational diffusion of ideas. Reimann’s model thus challenges conventional wisdom in International Relations, which views NGOs as a grassroots, bottom-up phenomenon challenging state authority. Reimann claims that her model better accounts for political factors (e.g., state policies) to explain the convergence and divergence of NGOs, in contrast to both modernization and globalization theory, which, in her view, attend principally to socio-economic factors to explain NGO convergence.

Most interestingly, Reimann argues in chapter 2 that regime types correspond to NGO development. According to Reimann, liberal pluralist (e.g., the US, the UK), corporatist (e.g., Germany, the Netherlands) and social democratic (e.g., Nordic countries) regimes facilitate NGO organization and activism through NGO-friendly domestic policies and more open political opportunity structures. In contrast, the more restrictive legal structures and limited political opportunity structures of statist regimes (e.g., Japan, France, Italy) serve as barriers to the establishment and growth of NGOs.

In the following chapters, Reimann explains the convergence phenomenon through an analysis of recent changes in international political structures and politics (chapter 3), and then examines the delayed emergence and growth of globally active Japanese NGOs (chapters 4 and 5). In the last
chapter (chapter 6) she summarizes her arguments.

Reimann’s work has many strengths. She draws on an array of research in International Relations, Comparative Politics, and Japanese Studies to address a wide range of important issues such as global governance, international norms, state identity and domestic policies. The study also provides rich and valuable data on globally active Japanese NGOs. Most importantly, this is one of the few studies that seeks to analyze both the convergence and divergence of NGO development among industrial countries.

At the same time, the study faces two shortcomings. First, it depends on a single case (Japan) to make a cross-national claim that regime type affects NGO activism. The claim is difficult to evaluate without in-depth case studies of countries representing the other three regime types she discusses. Second, the book fails to sufficiently explain how domestic and international factors interact in shaping NGO development. The study provides a partial picture of that interaction: for example, Reimann argues that state socialization at the international level has brought about changes in state policies toward NGOs at the domestic level. However, she does not discuss how state socialization and international norms (international factors) intersect with regime type. According to Reimann, “liberal and progressive rich democracies” (152) or “powerful democracies” (153) in the West (e.g., the US, the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden) support a pro-NGO norm at the international level (163-165). This might imply that non-statist regimes are promoters of that norm and that statist regimes are norm learners via international socialization. But since, in Reimann’s typology, statist regimes include Western democracies such as France and Italy, one wonders whether these countries are considered norm followers like Japan or whether they are also “powerful [Western] democracies” that promote NGOs worldwide. Since Reimann does not address these questions, it remains unclear whether regime type matters at the international level.

Despite these shortcomings, Reimann’s book is a high-quality study that offers a fresh perspective on NGO development. It will be of interest to scholars and students of civil society, NGOs in the non-Western world, or state-society relations in Japan.

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