

REPORT

A Brief Overview of Buddhist NGOs in Japan

Jonathan S. WATTS

AT THE OUTSET, it should be noted that the term “NGO,” as it is adopted by Japanese civil society and socially-minded Buddhist organizations, has a specific meaning that differs from the Western conception. “Non-governmental organization” usually refers to a civic or civil society group active within a society. However, in the Japanese context, NGO refers specifically to a group engaged in “international cooperation activities” (*kokusai kyōryoku katsudō* 国際協力活動) and not directly focused on domestic issues within Japan (SHIMIZU 1999, p. 699). This rather unique understanding of the NGO speaks to the marginal nature of Buddhist NGOs as actors in domestic Japanese civil society. It also shows the broader struggle of civil society in Japan in the development of a public sphere autonomous from the state and corporate affiliations.

Japanese Buddhist NGOs first emerged in the early 1980s in response to the intensifying crisis in Indo-China with the boat people from Vietnam and the mass of Cambodian refugees living on the border of Thailand. Groups like the Buddhist Aid Center (BAC), created in 1982 mainly by priests from the Nichiren sect, were in part a response to criticism in the mainstream media that Buddhism had become irrelevant to modern society and that Buddhist priests had no concern for the general well-being of people. Another factor was the increasing international exposure that Japanese, and Japanese priests in particular, were getting as the economy prospered. Many Buddhist priests active in international aid expressed the shock and

Jonathan S. Watts is a Research Fellow at the Jōdo Shū Research Institute in Tokyo. He has been involved with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) since 1990 and coordinates a small socially engaged Buddhist “think tank” called Think Sangha.

embarrassment they experienced on their first visits to crisis areas in Southeast Asia when they found that almost all of the religious-based aid work was being carried out by Christian groups from the West. These experiences set off a significant movement toward international relief activities by not only Buddhist NGOs, but also by various official and unofficial organs of most Buddhist sects, both old and new.

The second seminal moment in the development of Japanese Buddhist NGOs was the Hanshin Earthquake of 1995. As Hardacre notes in her essay earlier in this volume, the paralysis of governmental bodies in responding to the crisis led to a huge and spontaneous outpouring of relief work by common Japanese, including many of the “international cooperation activity” NGOs. Though they continue to focus on international efforts, this experience, combined with the perceived increase in social malaise during the post-bubble depression, has made Buddhist NGOs more sensitive to domestic issues. An example of increasing domestic focus is the Buddhist NGO Ayus (Sanskrit for “life”), which was founded by a group of predominantly Jōdoshū and Jōdo Shinshū priests. Unlike most other international cooperation NGOs that directly engage in relief activities in foreign countries, Ayus takes on the critical but usually neglected work of supporting the administrative capacities of NGOs inside Japan. Thus instead of retracing or repeating the work of other NGOs, as many groups do, they attempt to increase the integrative efficiency of the NGO movement by supporting its infrastructure.

An extension of the internal domestic development of Japanese civil society and a third watershed in the movement was the 1998 Non-Profit Organization (NPO) Law, which enabled NGOs to raise funds by appealing to the tax write-off afforded to donors. Anyone coming from the West where such a practice is standard would have been shocked to see such a highly modernized society as Japan be so late in developing these regulations. This is another indication of the slow development of what would be considered a typical civil society movement, at least by Western standards. “NPO” in Japan has generally a broader meaning than NGO, encompassing both international and domestic activities, but with an emphasis on the latter. This law has greatly opened up funding possibilities for Buddhist NGOs. Whereas many of these NGOs have had some sort of affiliation or connection with an official Buddhist denomination in order to maintain basic financial support, now they are less dependent on this sort of income. Take, for example, the Buddhist NGO now known as the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA). It was established in 1980 by the Sōtō Zen sect as the Japan Sōtōshū Relief Committee (JSRC) for the purpose of aiding Cambodian refugees. As it continued to develop, it took the name Sōtōshū Volunteer Association (SVA) and became one of the largest NGOs in Cambodia. In 1999, when it gained its new legal status as an NPO, it changed its name to the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA) in part to clearly separate it from any religious or sectarian ties that would

interfere with gaining either government financial aid or other secular financial support.

This secularizing trend presents the opportunity for increased integration of Buddhist NGOs into the general civil society movement without the constraints of some of the more conservative influences of traditional Buddhist denominations. However, it also carries with it the danger of a deeper dilution of the already thin Buddhist identity and ideology that these organizations carry. The highly secular nature of modern Japanese society and the general distrust of Buddhist and religious organizations have created a sort of underground socially engaged Buddhist movement in which Japanese Buddhist NGOs have tended to operate in isolation. Numerous individual priests and lay organizations have journeyed overseas using Japanese Buddhism's economic largesse to support social welfare activities, mostly in South and South East Asia, but also commonly in Africa and the Middle East. However, without a public identity and a network to unite themselves, the individuals and organizations operate in relative ignorance of each other, often retracing each other's steps and making donations to the same organizations. It was in part to remedy this situation that the Buddhist NGO Network (BNN) was formed in 2002.

Although it is still early, the events of 9/11 and the war in Iraq may be creating another watershed in Buddhist NGO development. There has been a great outpouring of peace rhetoric from all sorts of Buddhist groups since 9/11. However, one senses that Buddhist organizations are not leading Japanese society but merely trying to catch up with the general peace movement. At the same time, it appears that the urgency to find some way to respond to this crisis is leading numerous Buddhist organizations into a deeper examination of what peace means and which aspects of the Buddhist tradition can offer some meaningful response.

At a meeting held on 2 March in Tokyo about one hundred people from a wide range of Japanese religious groups, including numerous new and traditional Buddhist groups, convened for a forum entitled "The Pursuit of Peace Now" (Ima heiwa-o motomeru いま平和を求める). The opening talks looked at a number of issues such as the religious fundamentalism that is fueling both sides of the war on terrorism and various Japanese religious resources for peace. These talks, however, were kept short and significant time was spent in small seminar groups. Thus, unlike many large religious forums about peace, which like to put on a good face through long speeches by eminent speakers, this meeting appeared much more focused on the participants actively discussing the issues.

With the great variety and number of Buddhist individuals and organizations involved in social activities, it is extremely difficult to create a comprehensive list of such groups. In fact, creating such a list is one of the long-term aims of the Buddhist NGO Network. Therefore, the following profiles of the new Buddhist NGO Network and some of its principal members attempts to offer a representative list showing the range in styles of Buddhist NGOs. The explanatory text is

translated from the public materials offered by each group on their homepage. In some places, I have added a short note offering additional information. Unless noted, all publications, homepages, and information are in Japanese.

List of Buddhist NGOs

The Buddhist NGO Network of Japan (BNN)

(Jpn. Bukkyō NGO Nettowāku)

3-4-22 Kiyosumi, Koto-ku

Tokyo 135-0024

Tel/Fax: 03-3820-7323

E-mail: office@bnn.ne.jp

Homepage: bnn.ne.jp/

Member Organizations: 40

仏教NGOネットワーク

135-0024 東京都

江東区 清澄 3-4-22

Since 1980 with relief activities for Indo-Chinese refugees and famine relief in Africa, Japanese international cooperation NGOs have greatly increased in number. From within this movement, “Buddhist” NGOs have also been created in large numbers. In this way, NGOs related to Buddhism came together in 2002 to form a network to realize a global vision based on the Buddhist teaching of interdependence through developing respect and understanding across different ethnicities, religions and cultures. The Network brings together members from Buddhist NGOs, Buddhist sects (or federations of such sects), Buddhist temples or associations, and other Buddhist organizations and individuals who engage in or are connected to international cooperation activities.¹ The Network seeks to sustain the interchange between these groups, promote the development of each others’ activities, and connect each activity to the many people in their circles of association.

BNN’s basic activities are: to hold seminars three times per year to learn about international cooperation and to deepen the friendship among those in the network and with other related groups; to provide emergency relief to the victims of disasters and other tragedies both domestically and internationally; and to create a directory of Buddhist NGOs by collecting information from the activities of Japanese Buddhist NGOs both domestically and internationally (this includes developing a data base of information on relevant international problems and NGO activities). On 6 July 2002, BNN held its inaugural public meeting on “Buddhism, NGOs and Civil Society: Towards a Compassionate Contemporary Society.” It established formal membership in November 2002 and held an

1. The impetus and organizational energy behind the establishment of BNN came mostly from individuals in the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA), Ayus, and the Niwano Peace Foundation affiliated with Risshō Kōseikai.

inaugural member's meeting two months later in January. Throughout 2003, it held public seminars on topics such as: "What is an NGO? Talking about the Essence of International Cooperation," "International Cooperation and Buddhist NGOs," and "Buddhism and International Cooperation." At the end of 2003, it worked on its first cooperative project supporting relief for the indigenous Buddhists of Mahalchari in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh after attacks by Bengali settlers in August. In February and March, 2004, BNN sent relief to the victims of the Iran Earthquake which occurred in December 2003. Yearly membership is ¥30,000.

PROTO-BUDDHIST NGOS CREATED BY SECTS²

Tendai Shū's Light Up Your Corner Movement

(Jpn. Tendai Shū, Ichigū o terasu undō)

天台宗・一隅を照らす運動

Tendai shūmucho-nai

天台宗務庁内

Sakamoto 4-6-2, Otsu City

520-0113 滋賀県

Shiga 520-0113

大津市坂本 4-6-2

Tel: 077-579-0022; Fax: 077-579-2516

E-mail: ichigu@tendai.or.jp

Homepage: www.tendai.or.jp/ichigu/

Staff: 4; Members: 12,000

In 1969 during the height of high economic growth and student protests, the Light Up Your Corner Movement was established due to growing anxiety over the decline in public morality and religious belief. The movement desires to spread the spirit of the Tendai sect's founder Dengyō Daishi (Saichō) to contemporary society. It sees its present activities towards relief and education, both internationally and domestically, as representative of one part of this spiritual edification. Specifically, the movement works for education, environment, emergency relief, scholarships and foster parenting in Thailand, Laos, and India. Within Japan, it does fundraising and arranges study tours. It publishes *Tomoshibi* [A Light], the bulletin of the Conference to Promote the Light Up Your Corner Movement. For a detailed study of this group see COVELL 2001, pp. 77-106.

2. The two sectarian Buddhist "NGOs" created by Tendai Shū and Risshō Kōseikai perhaps represent the truest form of civil society movement in that they were created to first address community issues within Japan and then expanded into international activities. Sōka Gakkai has similar international activities, but I have not listed them since they do not engage in cooperative activities with other Buddhist groups inside Japan nor do they belong to the Buddhist NGO Network. Nipponzan Myōhōji is another socially-minded Nichiren-based new Buddhist movement. They are unique among Buddhist NGOs for engaging in social protest for peace and non-violent civil disobedience. As these activities are seen as an indivisible part of their religious training, they do not resemble an NGO in organizational make-up. Yet they are frequent participants in secular and Buddhist NGO activities. For more detailed profiles on these three prominent Nichiren based groups, see METRAUX 1996, GREEN 2000, and STONE 2003.

The Risshō Kōseikai Donate a Meal Campaign

Wada 2-11-1, Suginami-ku

Tokyo 166-8537

Tel: 03-5341-1641; Fax: 03-3381-9792

E-mail: info@kosei-kai.or.jp

English Homepage: www.rk-world.org/

Staff: 10

166-8537 東京都

杉並区 和田2丁目11番1号

In the late 1960s, Risshō Kōseikai began to advocate the Brighter Society Movement, a public-spirited undertaking through which the local churches of Risshō Kōseikai cooperate with local governments, welfare organizations, and volunteer groups throughout Japan. Since 1974, Risshō Kōseikai has conducted the Donate a Meal Campaign. The money contributed by its members through the campaign has been accumulated as the Risshō Kōseikai Peace Fund and is utilized for its wide variety of activities for world peace. In 1978, Risshō Kōseikai also established the Niwano Peace Foundation to contribute to the realization of world peace and the enhancement of culture by promoting research and other activities, based on a religious spirit and serving the cause of peace, in such fields as thought, culture, science, and education. Since 1980, the foundation has awarded the Niwano Peace Prize to honor remarkable religious leaders or groups that contribute to world peace through inter-religious dialogue, protection of human rights, and conflict resolution.

Over the span of two decades, more than eight billion Japanese yen has been utilized by the Donate a Meal Campaign to support eleven hundred and seventy projects in Japan and abroad connected with, among others, disarmament, development, human rights, the plight of refugees, environmental protection, disaster relief, preventive diplomacy, and human resource development. The projects supported are broken down into three categories: independent projects, joint projects with NGOs, and financial assistance for relief activities including exceptional emergency relief projects. The joint projects with other NGOs include: the campaign for sharing blankets with people in Africa, assistance for reconstruction of the former Yugoslavia, a reforestation program in Ethiopia, a project for the preservation of Cambodia's Buddhist heritage (with SVA), support for personnel training of members of Japanese NGOs, and support for the Foundation of Bataan Christian Youth in the Philippines. Risshō Kōseikai has its own publishing house and produces various books and magazines, including in English the bi-monthly *Dharma World*.

FIRST WAVE BUDDHIST NGOS EVOLVING FROM INTERNATIONAL CRISES

The Association for Renge-in Tanjōji International Cooperation [ARTIC]

The Renge International Volunteer Association

(Jpn. Renge Kokusai Borantea kai)	れんげ国際ボランティア会
2288 Tsukiji, Tamana City	865-0065 熊本県
Kumamoto 865-0065	玉名市 築地 2288
Tel: 0968-73-4851; Fax: 0968-74-1675	
e-mail: artic@uproad.ne.jp	
Homepage: www.uproad.ne.jp/rengein	

The Association for Renge-in Tanjōji International Cooperation [ARTIC] was founded in 1979 upon the Mahayana Buddhist spirit of the Way of Compassion and the Bodhisattva as exemplified by Eison Shōnin (叡尊聖人, 1201–1290),³ the Kamakura-era founder of Shingon Risshū. ARTIC's principal activity is to provide support for the social welfare and education of people regardless of ethnicity or nationality. ARTIC works to create a system by which education becomes central to the self-help and self-determination of marginalized peoples and to the respect of ethnicities, traditional cultures, and the particular religions of each country. ARTIC initially began its work in the Cambodian refugee camps in the early 1980s. Since then it has expanded its work to supporting day care and foster parenting in Sri Lanka, supporting the needs of the Tibetan community in exile in India, and providing emergency relief for disaster victims both inside and outside Japan. In 2001, Renge-in Tanjōji's parent sect, Shingon Risshū, founded the Shingon Risshū Volunteer Association that works cooperatively with ARTIC. Last year, ARTIC gained official NPO status and changed its name to the Renge International Volunteer Association. ARTIC publishes a newsletter four times per year. Membership fees are: ¥5,000 for individuals, ¥10,000 for groups or families, and ¥50,000 for legal organizations.

Shanti Volunteer Association (sva)	
(Jpn. Shanti Kokusai Borantea Kai)	シャンティ国際ボランティア会
Jibo Kaikan Hall 2 & 3F, 31	160-0015 東京都
Daikyo-cho, Shinjuku-ku	新宿区 大京町
Tokyo 160-0015	慈母会館2・3F
Tel: 03-5360-1233; Fax: 03-5360-1220	
E-mail: info@sva.or.jp	
English homepage: www.jca.apc.org/sva/english/index.html	

Staff: 175 Japanese and other Asian staff including 26 in Tokyo, 70 in Bangkok, 9 in Mae Soriang, Thailand, 21 in Vientiane, Laos, and 49 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Members: 2200

sva was established in 1980 when the Sōtō sect organized the Japan Sōtōshū Relief

3. Eison is a notable and influential figure in engaged Buddhism in Japan. From his temple Saidaiji in Nara, he offered asylum to marginalized groups such as lepers, and also traveled throughout the country establishing animal sanctuaries and promoting the maintenance of the Buddhist precepts (see KASHIWAHARA and SONODA 1994; MATSUNAGA and MATSUNAGA 1976).

Committee (JSRC) for the purpose of assisting Cambodian refugees evacuated to Thailand.⁴ With the completion of the emergency aid programs to the refugees by Sōtōshū, volunteers from JSRC established the Sōtōshū Volunteer Association (SVA) to continue their assistance. In 1999, the association gained formal authorization as an NPO and changed its name to the Shanti Volunteer Association (SVA); the word “Shanti” means peace and tranquility in Sanskrit. Its core focus is supporting educational and cultural activities in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. In Thailand, it manages nursery schools and student dormitories in depressed inner cities and agricultural regions. In Laos, it constructs schools, and prepares and distributes teaching resources and materials. In Cambodia, SVA has been engaged in providing libraries, as well as printing and publishing of teaching materials. It also constructs schools and manages vocational training centers. Other activities include the revival and development of traditional cultures and “craft aid” in which SVA imports and sells handicrafts made by the women of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia in order to financially support them. Within Japan, SVA also holds various seminars and workshops to inform more people on the current conditions of Asian countries and international cooperation, as well as arranging study tours to Asian countries. SVA publishes the magazine *Shanti* six times a year and has created other publishing projects such as books on various related issues. Its annual membership fees are ¥12,000 for individuals (¥5,000 for students), ¥30,000 for organizations, and for special “supporting members” ¥30,000 for individuals and ¥50,000 for organizations.

Buddhist Aid Center (BAC)

(Jpn. Bukkyō enjō sentā)

Komagata-dori 1-5-5

Shizuoka City 420-0042

Tel: 054-272-5674; Fax: 054-652-1982

E-mail: jpnbac@so-net.ne.jp

Staff: 4; Members: 1500

仏教救援センター

420-0042 静岡市

駒形通 1-5-5

BAC was established in 1982 to raise awareness of the international Buddhist world and to practice (*jissen* 実践) international cooperation activities in the Buddhist spirit.⁵ Its specific areas of focus are education, medical care and health, family planning, children, scholarships and foster parenting. Since 1993, BAC has begun constructing schools in order to promote education in Laos in cooperation with the Laotian government. By March of 2004, BAC had built one

4. SVA is the oldest, largest and most professionalized of the Buddhist NGOs. It is also significant for having overseas offices and staff and for moving towards a somewhat more secular identity in the Third Wave development of NGOs.

5. BAC officially lists itself as unaffiliated with any sect. However, its core leadership are priests from Nichirenshū.

hundred and two schools with six more to be finished by the end of the year. Study tours by Japanese are undertaken to help with basic fundraising. The responsibility for handling funds for the construction of each school is taken on by a group or individual within the country. Within Japan, lectures and information meetings on NGO activities are conducted to support this work. BAC publishes a quarterly magazine *BAC News* as well as a newsletter in July. Its yearly membership is ¥5,000 for individuals and ¥20,000 for organizations. For ¥12,000, one can sponsor a scholarship.

Relief (*ji* 慈), Assist (*hi* 悲), Comfort (*ki* 喜), Kindness (*sha* 捨) (RACK)
 Myosenji-cho 2-4-3 653-0884 神戸市 長田区
 Nagata-ku, Kobe 653-0884 明泉寺町 2-4-3
 Tel/Fax: 078-691-8338
 E-mail: g-fuji@hi-net.zag.ne.jp
 Homepage: www.saudade.jp/~rack/
 Members: 520

Established in 1985 to support Cambodian refugees, RACK seeks to support the self-reliance of refugees in Asian countries.⁶ It specifically focuses on education, medical care and health, family planning, human rights, women, children, and international cooperation and understanding. Its focus countries are: Cambodia, where it works for the education of street children; Sri Lanka, where it supports the Wajirasri Orphanage; Bangladesh, where it supports the Mahamuni home for mothers and children; India and Vietnam. Within Japan, it raises awareness of these countries and issues through lectures, bazaars, and picture and photo exhibitions. It publishes RACK magazine in December and a newsletter in July. Its yearly membership fee is ¥4,000.

The Arigatou Foundation
 (Jpn. Arigatou Kikin) ありがとう基金
 Yoyogi 3-3-3, Shibuya-ku 151-0053 東京都
 Tokyo 151-0053 渋谷区 代々木 3-3-3
 Tel: 03-3370-5396; Fax: 03-3370-7749
 E-mail: mail@arigatou-net.or.jp
 English homepage: www.arigatou-net.or.jp/index_e.html
 Staff: 6; Volunteers: 20

The Arigatou Foundation was established in 1990 on the occasion of Myōchi-kai's fortieth anniversary. The Japanese word, "arigatou," means "thank you" in English. The Foundation offers the members of Myōchi-kai a "superlative

6. RACK was established by a group of Rinzai priests.

means” to practice the teaching of Buddhism.⁷ The Foundation understands that aid is not only financial support for other people, but also the Buddhist practice of generosity (*dāna* or *fuse* 布施). To aid countries or people who are strongly interconnected by karma is the real heart-to-heart relationship taught by the Buddha. Some projects of the Foundation are continuous, and some are one-time-only in response to emergencies; some are independent, and some are cooperative. Specific areas concern are: education to raise awareness amongst members of the situation of children around the world; ongoing support for children and emergency aid for refugees; artistic and cultural activities for the cultivation and development of love and the appreciation of children; and cooperative activities with other religious groups to support children. In its early years, the Arigatou Foundation mostly worked in Nepal through UNICEF, but has expanded this work with UNHCR to general refugee aid and disaster relief. It has also recently inaugurated the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) to exchange information, learn from others, and work cooperatively together. Within Japan, the foundation does fundraising, and holds lectures, bazaars, and concerts. It publishes a monthly newsletter *Arigatou Foundation*.

SECOND WAVE BUDDHIST NGOS EVOLVING FROM DOMESTIC CRISES

Ayus Buddhist International Cooperation Network

(Jpn. Āyusu Bukkyō Kokusai Kyōryoku Nettowāku)

3-4-22 Kiyosumi, Koto-ku

アーユス仏教国際協力ネットワーク

Tokyo 135-0024

135-0024 東京都 江東区 清澄 3-4-22

Tel: 03-3820-5831; Fax: 03-3820-5832

e-mail: tokyo@ayus.org

Homepage: www.ayus.org/

Staff: 2; Members: 300

Ayus was established in 1993 as an international cooperation NGO with a Buddhist spirit as its foundation in order to open our eyes to the reality of the world and to tackle various problems such as human rights violations, conflict, environmental deterioration, injustice and poverty.⁸ Ayus is made up of Buddhists who have come together, regardless of sectarian affiliation, to decisively confront

7. Like the Niwano Peace Foundation and the Risshō Kōseikai Fund for Peace, the Arigatou Foundation represents Buddhist NGO activity specifically focused on giving financial aid. Most other Buddhist sects, including the traditional ones, have foundations that provide overseas aid, especially to United Nations related organizations. The foundation’s parent organization, Myōchi-kai, is another Lotus Sutra/Nichiren-based new Buddhist group, founded in 1950 by the charismatic female leader Miyamoto Mitsu who taught “the pathway to ultimate happiness and to ideal world peace by holding memorial services for ancestors.”

8. Ayus officially lists itself as being unaffiliated with any sect. However, the core leadership tends to come from Jōdoshū and Jōdo Shinshū priests.

suffering and to never lose sight of the interdependence (*engi* 縁起) with those on the other side of the world. With the temple as a base for practicing this law of interdependence, Ayus seeks to re-enliven regional society and to connect the NGOs of a region together. In this way, people, region and world are connected in an effort to promote peace and humanity.

Ayus sees itself as an NGO for NGOs. Japanese NGOs are in a vulnerable situation and need to establish a strong organizational base. In order to make civil society a reality, Ayus deals with the root of Japanese NGO society by financially strengthening NGO organizations. One part of this strengthening of NGO organizational capacity is Ayus's emphasis on confirming the effectiveness of overseas cooperation projects. To this end, Ayus provides financial support for NGO project evaluation. Further, Ayus creates and distributes evaluation materials accumulated from the experiences of numerous NGO activities to NGOs. Ayus also directly supports activities to promote peace and the protection of human rights, such as for Palestinian children, migrants infected with HIV, children on the Korean peninsula, peace activities by Buddhists, and cooperation with the No-War NGO Network. Ayus creates study tours for learning at sites of NGO activities, both domestically and internationally, and helps to send specialists to NGO training activities. Ayus produces a newsletter every month to introduce the work of its members and the NGOs that it supports. Its annual membership fees are: ¥10,000 for individuals (¥3,000 for students), and ¥50,000 for organizations.

Terra Net	テラ・ネット
Komyō-in	光明院内
Furuedako 1563-1, Kashima City	849-1321 佐賀県
Saga 849-1321	鹿島市 1563 古枝甲 1 番地
Tel: 0954-63-0597; Fax: 0954-62-2831	
E-mail: jpnbac@so-net.ne.jp	
Homepage: www.asahi-net.or.jp/~tx6h-kwse/index.htm	
Members: 38 temples, 50 individuals	

In 1995 during the Hanshin earthquake, Jōdo sect priest volunteers helped to distribute rice in the Nagata area. In 1997 this group helped to build junior high schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh as part of a project by the Kyushu block of the Jōdoshū Young Person's Association. In 2000, they established Terra Net. By exchanging information among members, the group aims at self-enlightenment and social change as a manifestation of the Buddhist spirit. Basing itself in an international vision, its purpose is to contribute to the elevation of human nature. Its core activities are helping the construction of schools and educational facilities, providing scholarships and disseminating information in Bangladesh and Thailand and for Tibetans. Within Japan, it does fundraising and arranges for scholarships and foster care. It also holds lectures

and study tours to promote awareness. It publishes *Terra Net* magazine and has also created a video on supporting Tibet. Its membership fees are ¥10,000 for organizations, and ¥3000 for individuals.

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