

Preface

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PREFACE

In 2000, one of the editors of this report (Shinichi Shigetomi) was collecting data on the development of the NGO sector in Thailand, in order to contribute to a comparative study of State-NGO relationships in Asian countries. Despite the fact that NGOs were widely accepted as important players in Thai economic, social, and political development, their activities were not well-documented. For example, in the field of rural development, which attracted many voluntary workers until the mid-1980s, we do not have any comprehensive reports about the development of NGOs.

Shigetomi, therefore, interviewed NGO activists and ex-activists, which was indispensable with regard to filling in the gaps in information. The interviewees talked about their exciting experiences in the 1970s and 1980s, accounts of which had rarely appeared in the historiography of Thai economic and political development. It would have been regrettable if their memories had disappeared without any written record.

In 2001, Shigetomi was assigned by the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) to implement a joint research project with Thai scholars in Thailand during the 2003 fiscal year (April 2003 – March 2004). Shigetomi proposed the above NGO study. Although the actual period of project implementation will be short (nine months from August 2003, since Shigetomi is scheduled to stay in the United States until July), it seems long enough to record the experiences of NGO workers.

Shigetomi contacted Apichart Thongyou, one of the pioneer NGO workers in the rural development sector. Apichart had been one of Shigetomi's interviewees in 2000 and the person whose exciting experiences stimulated Shigetomi to come up with the above research idea. Apichart accepted the proposal and persuaded some NGO workers and scholars to participate in the study project.

Meanwhile, Shigetomi invited Kasian Tejapira, a political scientist at Thammasat University, to join the project as well. Kasian is not a specialist in NGO issues. However, Shigetomi expected that he would contribute by analyzing the political backgrounds of the NGO movements, since he had been studying the leftist movements in Thailand. Kasian proposed adding some chapters that discuss interesting topics related to NGOs, such

as NGO funding, the discourses of NGOs, and the relationship between the monarchy and NGOs.

In this way, a rough draft of the study emerged as a mixture of chapters describing the experiences of NGOs by sector and chapters analyzing NGO-related topics. The members of the study team were a mixture of NGO staff and scholars.

We have had six meetings over a period of nine months. The discussion has been unexpectedly exciting. Each member presented what he or she has been doing and is going to write in the final paper. Every presentation was welcomed with many questions and comments. Kasian actively moderated and stimulated the discussion. Some members carried out field surveys in the provinces, even though they were quite busy with their regular activities. In spite of the limited time available for the project implementation, the participants worked with high motivation.

This research was possible because the National Research Council of Thailand and the Faculty of Political Science at Thammasat University allowed Shigetomi to conduct his research in Thailand. The project has received assistance from many individuals and organizations. This space is too limited to mention all their names, but we would like to express special thanks to Dr Chaiwat Satha-Anand (Thammasat University), Dr Maniemai Thongyou (Khon Kaen University), Dr Anek Laothamatas (Member of Parliament), NGO Coordinating Committee on Development, and all the CD workers of the Northeast Rural Development Association (NERDA). Mr Somphot Somboon and Ms Korakoch Sirichoke translated some parts of this volume.

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The Editors