

1 Introduction

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Introduction

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

Thailand is one of the countries where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been playing an important role in the country's economic, social, and political development. Nearly forty years ago voluntary organizations began to emerge in order to assist underprivileged people, trying to lay out an alternative path for the nation's development. Over the past four decades, NGOs have expanded their fields of activities extensively. NGOs are now recognized, regardless whether positively or negatively, as influential actors in politics at the national level.

Reflecting this development, the literature produced on Thai NGOs has been increasing, especially since the late 1990s. However, as will be discussed later, there is still a great deal of room for studies of the NGO activities that have not been well-documented. Moreover, the recent economic and political situation in this country has also meant that a review of NGO activities is required.

Thailand is now going to "graduate" from the status of a developing economy. Even though there are still many problems left unsolved or newly emerged, it cannot be denied that the classic problems of poverty, such as low income and malnutrition, are decreasing. At the same time, the government is becoming more resourceful, while local people are more capable of dealing with problems. These situations imply that the demand for NGOs in economic and social development is shrinking. The rapid economic growth has also brought a serious shrinkage of funding to the NGOs. Many foreign donors have begun sending their assistance to countries other than Thailand. However, fund-raising within the country is not still easy. The service recipients are not well enough off to pay for

the services they receive. The role of the government as a source of funding is, therefore, becoming more important.

However, the government is not necessarily ready to cooperate with the NGOs. The present government of Thaksin Shinawatra has expressed dissatisfaction regarding the NGOs, which often criticize government policies. By appealing to a nationalistic sentiment, the government has criticized the NGOs' reliance on foreign funding sources. The Upper House formed a committee to scrutinize the behavior of NGOs (Upper House, 2003). Journalists feel that control over news coverage has become tighter under the present government (Thai Journalist Association, 2003). This tightening of control has limited the media through which NGOs can publicize their assertions.

At present NGOs are not free from criticism in Thai society, either. *The Daily News*, one of the mass-circulating newspapers, described NGOs as groups of people who neglect Thai national interests and use force for their purposes (EGAT, 2000). A group formed with the purpose of disseminating anti-NGO ideas (Omrisa, 2003).

Under these circumstances, scholars need to present the reality of NGOs. For example, when the source of funding is under question, facts must be provided regarding how NGOs secure their funding for development and advocacy project implementation. When people simply discuss the image of an NGO – whether positively or negatively – rather than its reality, they need to be taught about what the NGOs have been doing.

The basic intention of this report, therefore, is to provide facts related to NGO activities from two points of view. The first viewpoint is a sector-wise review of NGO activities. Six chapters in the report record the experiences and development of non-governmental organizations in the major fields of NGO activity. Even though the amount of literature on NGOs has been increasing rapidly since the late 1990s, many fields are still not well-documented. For example, a clear picture has not yet been formed of NGO activities in the field of rural development since the 1960s, even though the rural sector was the main arena of NGOs until the 1980s. The political roles of the NGOs are often cited, but this field of activity remains poorly documented. This report, therefore, aims to add to the body of knowledge on the development of NGOs in this country. Some chapters

provide accounts of the specific experiences of NGOs, while others provide an overview of NGO development in a certain field.

Another viewpoint in this report is the study of certain topics that may be related to many fields of NGO activities. The available literature from this point of view seems to be even more scant. For example, we do not know much about the role of foreign NGOs and the other foreign agencies in the early period of NGO development. Even though the funding sources of NGOs often become political controversy, there are few studies that show, in reality, who the sources were. We know that many discourses – such as popular participation, communalism and economic nationalism – are closely related to NGO activities. However, the development and impact of these discourses in the NGO sector are not well studied. The Thai King and his family members have been implementing developmental activities, but we have little knowledge about those activities. Although many NGO staff members are regarded as ex-activists from students' movements and leftist movements, it is not easy to evaluate the impact of these social movements on the Thai NGO sector. In this way, there are many topics that will benefit from further study with regard to NGOs in Thailand. Nevertheless, this report deals with only two topics : the NGOs' funding and the development activities of the royal family.

For readers who are not familiar with Thailand or its NGO sector, the report provides another two chapters that describe the environment and the development of NGOs in this country. Rather than being a plain guide to the chapters that follow, however, they present analyses that allow readers to understand the economic and political conditions shaping the characteristics of Thai NGOs.

One expected outcome of this study is that it will provide facts on Thai NGOs for future comparative analysis. The analytical frameworks of NGO-related phenomena are based on the experiences of non-state actors in Western and developed countries. However, the context of the non-governmental or non-profit organizations in developing countries differs from that of developed ones (Shigetomi, forthcoming). English literature on NGOs in developing countries will help us to widen the analytical perspectives. Reports on non-English speaking countries will especially enrich the source of knowledge concerning developing countries. However,

the existing literature that provides detailed information on Thai NGOs is mostly in Thai.

Comparative perspectives in an international context will bring positive feedback to the study of Thai NGOs. For example, when NGOs tried to participate in politics in Thailand and the Philippines in 1990s, the former kept some distance from the formal political arena, while the latter actively participated in political party politics. A specialist in the politics of the Philippines sees the reason for this as lying in the fact that their political institution was brought from the United States (Kawanaka, 2002). This then begs the question: what kind of political structure brought about the Thai phenomena? In this way, the differences between Thailand and the other countries provide us with a new theme for the study of NGOs in Thailand.

This report as a whole is not intended to express a unified opinion or conclusion about NGOs in Thailand. It is rather a promulgation of essays that records or analyzes different issues. Each chapter does not represent the ideas of the study team as a whole, nor any institution to which the author is affiliated.

DEFINITION OF NGO

Even though each chapter is considerably independent, we should identify what we mean by the term “NGO” in this report. Instead of drawing definite lines between NGOs and other organizations, it is suitable to draw up an “ideal-type” definition as a broad cover of the organizations that are dealt with in the following chapters. In his attempt to compare 15 Asian countries, Shigetomi (2002, pp.6-8) used the following six attributes to define an ideal-type NGO. These attributes are (1) non-governmental, (2) non-profit-making, (3) voluntary, (4) of a solid and continuing form, (5) altruistic, and (6) philanthropic.

The first four attributes are commonly used in the definition of NGOs by many scholars (Salamon & Anheier, 1994). Being “non-governmental” means that an NGO must carry out its decision-making as an organization, independently of the wishes of the government. “Non-profit-making” means that its activities must not be driven by profit-making motives, and that

whatever profits may arise from its activities must not be divided among its members for personal benefit. "Voluntary" means that the only qualification for membership must be the desire of an individual to participate. Participation must not be conditional on belonging to some other organization. The fourth attribute, a "solid and continuing form," means that, unlike various forms of voluntary activities carried out on an *ad hoc* basis, an NGO must be an ongoing entity with a solid organizational form.

The last two attributes have been added since we are studying NGOs in the context of a developing country. The fifth requirement, "altruistic," means that the immediate purpose of an NGO is to act for the benefit of others. The addition of this requirement was necessary because the provision of relief to the socially and economically disadvantaged was an important motivator for the establishment of NGOs in Thailand. This requirement was added in order to differentiate the NGOs from organizations set up to pursue the specific common interests of local people. The last requirement, "philanthropic," refers to the fact that an NGO is unlikely to receive adequate payments from the recipients of its services. This requirement is predicated on the fact that the recipients of services offered by NGOs in developing countries are the socially and economically disadvantaged. As a consequence, NGOs must raise funds for their activities from sources other than the recipients. Given their "non-governmental" nature, this means that they must count on contributions from the private sector for significant portions of their funding. With the introduction of this last requirement, hospitals, educational institutions, and other organizations that Salamon and the others (1999) include in their definition of non-profit organization (NPO), must not be our major focus in this report.

These attributes are not requirements applied overly rigorously at the expense of narrowing the coverage of NGOs. Rather, the ideal-type definition gives an image of organizations on which this report intends to focus. It would be more useful to consider the reasons as to why the actual NGOs differ from the ideal-type, rather than excluding them from consideration.

REVIEW OF STUDIES

Most literature on Thai NGOs appeared after the 1980s. This was due to the fact that, in the 1970s, the number of NGOs was still small and the relatively free political environment did not last long. One exceptional study is Misra's analysis (1976) on the teachers' organization (Krusapha) and Union for Civil Liberty, but she regarded them as pressure groups. It was after 1983 when a fair amount of literature on Thai NGOs began to appear. The literature mostly consisted of a description of the activities of NGO activists (Jon, 1983; Phumtham, 1984; CCTD; 1984). In 1984, NGOs held a one-week campaign to publicize their activities. The organizers published a report promulgating Thai NGO activities in various fields (Khomsan, 1984). After 1986, some NGO activists wrote review reports and discussed the achievement and further tasks of Thai NGOs (the articles in *Pacharayasan*, 1986; Apichart, 1986). NGO activities started to attract academics; Prudhisana (1987) and Suthy (1989) provided the earliest studies in this field. Gohlert compiled his research into an English-language book (1991), which primarily analyzed the strategies of NGOs in rural social development.

The amount of literature on Thai NGOs increased rapidly in the last half of the 1990s, as seen in Table 1-1. Several books review entire fields of NGO activities (Amara & Nitaya, 1994, 1997; Anuson, 1998; TDRI, 2000; Sa-nguan & Suraphon, 2001; Benchamat & Suraphon, 2002). Some books promulgate the various perspectives of NGO activists (Phaisan, 1991; Jaturong & Gawin, 1995; Narong, 1999). Along with the diversification of NGOs, literature that reviewed a specific field began to appear. For example, Pfirman and Kron (1992) and Dararat and Orot (2000) reviewed environmental NGOs. Bantorn (2002) carried out a comprehensive survey in the field of public health. Busaba and Duangsamon (1995) reported on NGOs dealing with AIDS problems. Mali (1998) argued the roles of NGOs in the area of education. Prudhisana and Maneerat (1997) and Paveena (2000) analyzed the political activities of NGOs. Suphanni (2000) reviewed the sphere of child and youth issues, while Phansak (1995) focused on the child labor problem. Surasit (2000) described the activities of some rural development NGOs. Some reports covered specific regions

(Athachak, 1998, and Chatchawan, 2000, for the North; Somphan, c.1997 for the Northeast). Some directories of NGOs also provide brief overviews of the situation in each region (see Anuson & Suphaphan, 1997, and Anuson, 2003, in the directory listing at the end of this chapter).

Table 1-1: Amount of literature on NGOs in university libraries of Thailand, by year of publication

(Obtained from the internet catalogues of Thammasat University and Chulalongkorn University)

Period	Thammasat ⁽¹⁾	Chulalongkorn ⁽²⁾
Before 1984	4	0
1985-89	3	7
1990-94	11	7
1995-99	20	25
After 2000	7	14
Total	45	53

Source: Thammasat University; <http://192.150.249.123> (accessed February 11, 2004)

Chulalongkorn University; <http://library.car.chula.ac.th/searched> (accessed February 12, 2004)

Notes:

- (1) Searched by title key word using the words, “ngo”, “non-governmental organization”, or “องค์กรพัฒนาเอกชน”.
- (2) Searched by subject, using the words “องค์กรพัฒนาเอกชน”
- (3) The following documents were not counted:
 - Those which apparently do not deal with NGOs.
 - English literature which does not specifically discuss NGOs in Thailand, except those published in Thailand.
 - Visual materials.

Of these efforts to provide an overview of the NGO sector, one important contribution is a series of works by Amara Pongsapich and her team. During the 1990s, Amara and her institute (Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, CUSRI) got involved in several projects proposed

by foreign agencies, such as John Hopkins University (CUSRI, 2002a, p.1). This was a reflection of the academic concern in developed countries, where studies of the non-profit sector and civil society were becoming quite popular. Consequently, the research theme had to fall within the framework of the project proprietor in developed countries. CUSRI's most recent work (2000a, b, c, d), which provides comprehensive data on the non-profit sector in Thailand, is also a part of the John Hopkins University project, and, as a result, focuses on the size of the non-profit sector, legal institutions (see also Nanthawat, 1998, and Chinchai & Titawat, 1999) and funding agencies (see also Amara, c. 1998).

Even though the number of publications has been increasing, what is desperately needed is an investigation guided by a certain question or from a particular perspective. Most of the existing literature simply describes the phenomena, i.e., the number, characteristics, and practices of NGOs. Researchers rarely analyze what makes such phenomena occur in this society. A comparative perspective may give us questions for further analysis. However, large areas of NGO activities remain undocumented. Except for work by Amara and Nitaya (1994, 1997), Jaturong and Gawin (1995), and Gohlert (1991), there are few works in English that provide information on the Thai NGO sector.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 (Kasian Tejapira) provides readers with some basic information on the period just before the rise of NGO movements in Thailand. Kasian analyzes the economic and political structure of the "Sarit regime," from 1959 to 1973. He breaks the regime down into four elements: (1) military absolutist dictatorship; (2) alliance with American Imperialism; (3) unbalanced growth strategy; and (4) growing socio-economic imbalance. He proposes that the economic imbalance in Thai society and political oppression prepared Thailand for the rise of NGO movements.

In Chapter 3, Shinichi Shigetomi reviews the development of the NGO sector in Thailand. He discusses the change in the NGOs' economic and political spaces, through an explanation of the emergence of four trends in the NGOs, which respectively place importance on (1) resource transfer,

(2) community advocacy, (3) confrontational political advocacy, and (4) governance participation. All these trends exist at present and have different opportunities under the current economic and political conditions.

In Chapter 4, Gawin Chutima, who has been working at enhancing NGOs' fund-raising capabilities, gives a bird's-eye view of NGO funding in Thailand. His description covers domestic philanthropic institutions, development NGOs, foreign funding agencies, foreign governments, and Thai governments. He also identifies the situation currently faced by NGOs. By providing statistical information, he states that public donations still form only a limited fundraising source for Thai NGOs, and that the number of NGOs relying solely on foreign organizations is not large.

Chapter 5, by Chanida Chitbundid, Chaithawat Thulathon, and Thanapol Eawsakul deals with the royal family's philanthropic activities, which the existing literature has rarely studied from an analytical perspective. Although it may be debatable whether the royal household is an NGO or not, it cannot be denied that the King and his family members have carried out many philanthropic and development projects for the public benefit. In this chapter the authors state that the form and content of the activities have changed according to the economic and political environment.

In Chapter 6, Apichart Thongyou discusses an important period regarding NGO activities in the field of rural development. He was one of the pioneer NGO workers who were in the fields of poverty-stricken North-east Thailand during the 1970s and the 1980s. His paper fills in the historical blanks regarding how NGO workers developed their individual and organizational capabilities. This chapter also reveals how the concept of "community culture" grew in grassroots activities. He argues that the NGOs in the later period diversified and became inclined towards political activities, rather than grassroots movements.

Chapter 7, by Maneerat Mitprasat, provides a clear categorization of NGOs in the slum development sector. She tries to characterize slum NGOs within an economic and political context. From her argument, three periods can be identified: philanthropy, development, and politicization. During each period, the establishment of new NGOs can be observed, as well as the adjustment of existing NGOs. She also views NGOs' capabili-

ties and strategies as being essential for the successful reformation of the urban poor's living conditions.

The author of Chapter 8, Weerawat Paphussaro, provides a view from a government official who has been working closely with NGOs with regard to coordinating NGO-government cooperation. He begins with a presentation of the way in which government policy on environment conservation has developed over the last few decades through using important laws as marks of periodization. He then goes on to explain the institutional framework of NGO-government cooperation, environmental funding schemes and the networking of environmental NGOs. In the later part of the chapter, he argues the potentials and limits of NGOs and gives some recommendations to both the government and NGOs.

Chapter 9, by Sudarat Sereewat, provides another example of NGO-government cooperation. After a brief explanation of the development of NGOs that are concerned with children's and women issues, Sudarat concentrates on NGOs dealing with the commercial sexual abuse of children, especially the activities of FACE (Fight Against Child Exploitation). FACE works in close collaboration with some governmental agencies, such as the Office of the Attorney General, the Department of Public Welfare, and the police. The author presents four cases that show how and why NGOs play an indispensable role in tackling the problem of sexual exploitation.

In Chapter 10, Bantorn Ondam reviews the development of NGOs in the public health sector. He discusses the fact that the development of NGOs has depended on contextual changes in the "health" issue in Thai society. For example, the first generation of NGOs arose in response to the urgent needs of people affected by wars, disasters, and accidents. The NGOs began to put more importance on grassroots development when the idea of "Health for the People" came up as a result of the students' movements in 1970s. The government policy of putting importance on primary health care also affected NGOs.

In the last chapter, Shinichi Shigetomi traces the development of NGOs' political activities and tries to find the mechanisms by which these NGOs assert their political influence. He found that until the 1980s, human rights NGOs put emphasis on economic issues, but from the viewpoint of basic human rights protection. During the 1990s, the NGOs

began to be major political actors. Shigetomi analyzes the strategies of NGOs during the May 1992 Event, the political reform process, and the situation after the reform. He concludes his analysis by identifying the source and media of the NGOs' political influence.

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Appendix: List of NGO Directories

(The directories are selected from CUSRI (2002d) and the library catalogues.)

General

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