

The State
and NGOs

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The State and NGOs

Perspective from Asia

Edited by Shinichi Shigetomi



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About the Contributors

Etsuyo Arai is Research Fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), JETRO. Her topic of research interest is in the economy and politics of Sri Lanka.

Noriyo Isozaki is Professor of Political Science at the Political Science Department, Faculty of Law, Gakushuin University. Her topics of research interest are politics in South Korea, especially on democratization, politics over economic development, and social change.

Yoshiki Kaneko is Professor at Dokkyo University, Japan. His research interests are in the fields of Malaysian politics, ethnicity and national integration in Malaysia, and international relations in Southeast Asia.

Takeshi Kawanaka is Research Fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), JETRO. His research interests are in the fields of Philippine politics and comparative politics. Forthcoming book: *Power in a Philippine City*, to be published by IDE in 2002.

Katsuya Mochizuki is Visiting Research Fellow/Overseas Research Fellow at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs/Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), JETRO. He is implementing a research project in Nigeria called the “Emergent Actors in African Political Economy”.

Susumu Nejima is Research Associate at the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies (ASAFAS), Kyoto University. His research interest is in NGOs with Islamic features, mainly in Pakistan. Forthcoming book: *Islam and Development: Ismaili Community in Northern Pakistan* (in Japanese), to be published by Nakanishiya Shuppan Co. in 2002.

Ken'ichi Nobusue is a student at Kochi Medical School. He was a researcher at the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), JETRO, from 1993 to 2000.

Kenji Otsuka is Research Fellow at the Development Studies Department, Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), JETRO. His research interests are in the fields of environmental issues and social change in China.

Yumiko Sakai is Associate Professor of International Politics, Faculty of Law, Chuo University.

Hiroshi Sato is Professor at the Faculty of International Co-operation, Shumei University. His research interests are in the fields of economic reform and politics in India, India–Southeast Asia relations, and democratization in Bangladesh.

Yukari Sawada is Associate Professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS). Her topics of research interest are social welfare reform, industrialization, and gender inequality in southern China.

Shinichi Shigetomi is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), JETRO. His research interests are in the fields of rural development, rural organizations, and agricultural economics in Thailand. He is the author of *Cooperation and Community in Rural Thailand*, published in 1998 by IDE.

Chizuko Suzuki is a Researcher at the Afro-Asian Institute of Japan. She has been studying the social impact of foreign direct investment and social development in Vietnam.

Yayoi Tanaka is Adviser, Development Assistance Department, Japan Bank for International Co-operation. Her research interests are in the fields of theory of NPO and civil society, evaluation of NPOs, and collaboration among NGOs, government, and the business sector.

Tadayoshi Terao is Research Fellow at the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), JETRO.

Preface

In recent years non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have projected an increasingly strong presence. They can no longer be characterized simply as “volunteer organizations supporting the efforts of developing countries to develop”; they are also emerging as important actors in the realm of international politics, and have demonstrated the potential to shake even the foundations of the international economic order. In advanced countries, too, there is a growing interest in the non-profit organization sector (or NPO sector), which consists of non-governmental, non-profit-oriented organizations. Thus, not only have NGOs established themselves as lasting elements of society, rather than ephemeral bodies that are active during certain phases of a society’s developmental process, but there are also high expectations that they will play the role of leading agents of “civil society”.

However, the existing literature on NGOs is concerned almost exclusively with the questions of what roles NGOs should play, and what should be done to further boost their activities. Once we turn our attention to Asia, moreover, we are struck by the varying ways in which NGOs manifest themselves in different countries. Those in South Korea are very active in the political realm. In Bangladesh there are some that resemble large private corporations. Influential NGOs in Malaysia are heavily involved in consumer movements. Very few researchers have taken note of the varying ways in which NGOs, or what might be called “NGO phenomena”, manifest themselves in different countries, and attempted to discover the origin of these differences. The present volume, the first of its kind, attempts to understand the NGO phenomena in a total of fifteen Asian countries by looking at them from a unified analytical perspective.

The analyses presented in this volume pivot around the key concept of two “spaces” that are open for NGO activities. To begin with, there is an economic space that calls for NGO activities — this involves the need for economic resources that are not properly catered for by any of the existing sectors of society, that is, the market, the state, or the community. Second, there is a political space that emerges when the state or the community

allows NGO activities. The working hypothesis of this book is that the NGO phenomenon in a specific country is determined as a function of the “extent” and “form” of these two spaces. Positing this hypothesis does not mean that the present volume regards NGOs as being reactive to given political and economic conditions. Rather, it aims to interpret NGOs’ activities, including advocacy activities and those aimed at social reform, as efforts to fill, to the greatest extent possible, the vacant space left uncovered by existing mainstream or orthodox resources allocation channels. These reform-oriented activities may naturally be directed at the state which, with its strong political ability to regulate and control, distributes resources very deliberately. This explains why this book focuses on the relationships between states and NGOs.

The adoption of the above-mentioned methodology has narrowed the analytical perspective of this volume in the following two ways. First, this book discusses state–NGO relationships exclusively within the framework of the nation-state, with the result that NGOs based in foreign countries are analysed with reference not to the environments in their home countries but of those in their fields of operations. Second, since the book focuses on Asia, it naturally deals with state–NGO relationships primarily as they pertain to the social and economic development of the countries concerned. In fact, NGOs in Asia came into being with the main objective of working for “people alienated from the benefits of development”, and have been striving to work towards this end. This altruistic mission and lack of expectation of receiving adequate payments from service recipients is used to define NGOs *vis-à-vis* other private non-profit organizations.

Our joint research project was launched at the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) in 1999, and since 2000 has been financially supported by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF). The participants are all Japanese researchers specializing in the study of specific countries or regions of Asia. One distinctive feature of the book, then, is that it is a collection of analyses of NGOs in Asia undertaken by researchers each of whom, if not necessarily a specialist on NGOs, has intimate knowledge of the environments for NGO activities in the country of his/her specialty. A joint research project composed solely of Japanese researchers, while carrying the risk of presenting analyses through the prism of a Japanese perspective, does have the merit of encouraging participants to hold intensive discussions with one another and carry out international comparisons from a shared and coherent perspective. As project co-ordinator and editor of the book, I am confident that we have taken full advantage of the merits mentioned above.

On this occasion, I would like to express on behalf of all the participants our heartfelt thanks to the two organizations that have generously sponsored our joint project. Special thanks are due to Ms Yayoi Tanaka (formerly Chief Program Officer of the SPF, currently seconded to the Japan Bank for International Co-operation) for having resolutely proposed that we publish our findings not only in Japanese but also in English, and to Mr Akira Iriyama, President of the SPF, for having brought Ms Tanaka's suggestion into reality. Not only has Mr Iriyama taken steps to financially support the publication of this English edition, but he has also continually encouraged me to raise the academic quality of our findings sufficiently to open dialogues with both Western and non-Western audiences.

In the course of carrying out the research, we have benefited from a number of valuable suggestions and comments made by Messrs Akira Matsubara, Hisatake Togo, Yutaka Tsujinaka, and Mitsugu Endo. Each of us also received various forms of help, advice, and kindness from NGOs, researchers, and government officials in the countries of our field surveys. We would like to express our gratitude to these NGOs and other organizations, and to numerous individuals for their generous help. Our thanks are also due to Ms Fumiko Okamoto and other staff members of the SPF who have handled the administrative affairs of the project. The findings have already been published in Japanese by the IDE and Akashi Shoten Co., Ltd., and we would like to thank them for having willingly consented to our request to compile this English version on the basis of the findings published in Japanese. Lingua Guild, Inc. is credited for having carried out the tedious Japanese–English translations for this volume accurately and promptly. Last but not least, I would like to offer my special thanks to Ms Triena Ong, Managing Editor, and her staff at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) for having undertaken copy-editing work, production, and design to make this volume all the more attractive.

S. Shigetomi