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THE DYNAMICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOs IN THAILAND

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**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
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ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation	The Dynamics of Environmental NGOs in Thailand
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Environmental NGOs have emerged and played an important role in the third sector in Thai society for more than two decades. Being a type of social organization, they have to interact with diverse groups and organizations all the time. Under some conditions, these NGOs can function significantly, but sometimes they are given little chance to perform to the best of their ability and make contributions to the society.

This study aims at acquiring an understanding of the dynamics of environmental NGOs in Thailand. In order to achieve such comprehension, this work has undertaken the following tasks: 1) to identify the operating environments of environmental NGOs and to examine their influence on NGOs' existence and work, 2) to analyze the adaptation of environmental NGOs to varying challenges outside and inside organizations, and 3) to propose the factors that contribute to environmental NGOs' survival.

The research is conducted through a qualitative approach, mainly using the method of case study. Three environmental NGOs have been purposefully selected by several important criteria, including their age, location, ideology, and environmental approach. The Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT), the Yadfon Association, and the Foundation for Ecological Recovery (FER) have been decisively chosen. They all have played an outstanding role in solving environmental problems for more than two decades. While the WFT and FER are based in Bangkok and have the main characteristics of conservation NGOs, which regard environment as the main focus, Yadfon is based in Trang Province and is classified as a development-justice NGO that regards environment as a secondary aspect.

The Yadfon Association was created by the Chansnoh couple, with the main purpose of raising the quality of life of the poor fisher folk and promoting sustainable development as well as community self-reliance in rural areas. Before the association commenced its work, it had to struggle with suspicion and misunderstanding of the community people, including local government officials. After spending time in learning and making the villagers gradually understand and trust the organization, Yadfon was able to mobilize people's participation to undertake initial projects and later to expand to build connections and gain cooperation from provincial authorities in order to help conserve and manage the coastal resources. The success of Yadfon has been widely recognized and admired, and has garnered support and attracted collaborative projects from various international agencies. However, the association got stuck from the resignation of experienced staff because of the changing leadership. The work scale and work space of Yadfon were decreased when the government came to compete with it and the current staff was not able to completely direct the local people any longer.

The Foundation for Ecological Recovery (FER), best known as the Project for Ecological Recovery, emerged from an ecological study group that was later actively engaged in the opposition against the construction of Nam Choan Dam. Playing the leading role of coordinating body for the environmental movement, the foundation also focused on conducting research on ecological problems and monitoring government policies while encouraging the local people and their groups to solve their problems with the information and close supervision from the staff of FER. FER was such an independent organization that it, perceiving the shift of environmental problems and funding trends, decided to establish TERRA in order to focus on issues concerning the environment and local communities within the Mekhong Region. The tipping point of FER came when the organization grew larger, in terms of more staff workers and tasks in charge. Each staff worker had his or her own issues of interest and networks and lacked proper communication. Finally the spirit of the entire team dissipated. The leader of FER, in order to solve this 'scattering' problem and in order to secure funding sources, decided to downsize FER and restrict its work in specific areas.

Among the three NGOs studied, the Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT) was the one that was most fluctuating and defeated by the turbulent environment. The foundation was founded honorably and rapidly expanded with the huge support from its international

affiliate, the WWF-USA. One after another wave of difficulties struck the WFT, starting from the departure of the WWF, money shortage, abandonment of the head, the incapability of new leader, conflicts between the staff and the leader, until the foundation announced the end of its operation under the current leader. Before that, the WFT had to confront the mistrust of the NGO fellows when it decided to cooperate and receive assistance from the PTT, and was questioned about rumors of its leader's misbehavior. Today, only the story is left, recounting an NGO that once was a dark-green becoming a leading environmental NGO paying much attention to conservation and development work.

The research findings reveal that the dynamics of the three case studies vary owing to the influence from different sectors of the societal environment and various components of the task environment. It is evident that the general environment, namely the socio-cultural environment, the political-legal context, and the economic sector, has had impacts on the NGOs studied at a certain level, albeit not significant.

Compared with the general environment, the task or specific environment has shown more influence on the operation of the NGOs. However, the elements of the task environment, or the so-called strategic alliances, have affected each organization differently. Hence, the three environmental NGOs in this study need to employ different approaches to adapt to their interacting environments.

The important point found in this research is that the internal factors of the organizations were a crucial condition that facilitated organizational integration and survival. The research findings indicate that, besides the tangible resources, the environmental NGOs also need networks, connections, capability and the contribution of the human participants, as well as positive political and social responses. In addition, the factors contributing to the survival of NGOs comprise the leadership of the organization, effective networks, knowledge and expertise, the value internalization of the staff, and the material resources. Finally, recommendations outlined in this paper call for initiatives from both the government side and the NGO side.

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This is a particularly special moment. I softly take deep breaths, press my lips together, and put all eight fingers on the keyboard. The letters appear one by one on the monitor, and the word ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS comes into sight. I look at it for a little while to assure myself that I am truly going to write the last part of this dissertation, which is reserved for expressing my heartfelt thanks to the many great people who have provided me with an abundance of invaluable support over the years of my study.

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