

Preface

The contributors to this volume, who are all area study specialists and deeply interested in development issues, occasionally in their field of study find local people who are motivated to change their environments which are plagued with desperate problems such as poverty, environmental destruction or threats to human rights. How does this happen? Why is it possible? These are the questions with which we launched this study project.

One frequently heard answer is that the situation itself impels the people to stand up for themselves. However, the structure which causes grievances among the people may at the same time function as a restriction which fetters the people to remain as they are. The mainstream social movement theories, in contrast, tell us that the actor, especially the movement organizer, is important. These theories persuasively explain how capable leaders and excellent strategies cause social movements to emerge. However, the constraints on economic resources and political freedom in developing countries may not allow the wishes of actors to be expressed in the manner commonly assumed in the theories originating in developed Western societies.

We feel that the phenomena of social movements in the developing world cannot be simply explained either by the structure or by applying an actor-centered approach while neglecting the structure. Therefore, we started to examine carefully the contextual conditions – such as institutions, resources and organizations – surrounding the social movement actors, to find what conditions determine the course of action. Such work, we hoped, may help to define the space of actors for collective action. Under the project named Social Movements and Popular Participation in Developing Countries we shared cases from various developing countries and exchanged ideas over the course of two years starting in April 2006. This volume is the final report of our academic dialogue.

We are grateful to have enjoyed the presentations of distinguished guest speakers, Dr Takeshi Wada (University of Missouri, Columbia, USA), Dr Zhang Yulin (Nanjing University, China) and Dr Hideo Nakazawa (Chiba University, Japan), at our study meetings. During the field survey, we learned extensively from the local people and the social movement leaders who generously helped us to obtain first-hand information. Dr James Midgley provided Shinichi Shigetomi, one of the editors, with a chance

to study social movement literature during his stay at the University of California at Berkeley as a Zellerbach Visiting Professor. We would like to express our deep gratitude to these individuals and institutions.

Last but not least, we want to express our appreciation to the Institute of Developing Economies and its administrative staff for supporting this research project.

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