

8

Conclusion: Strengthening Civil Society's Contributions to Regional Security

JAMES GANNON

THE CHAPTERS IN this volume provide ample evidence that even in East Asia, where Westphalian considerations have traditionally reigned supreme, civil society is playing a growing role in ensuring security and stability. This is particularly true in terms of the types of nontraditional and human security issues that are increasingly consequential for the future of the region. The five areas examined in this volume—health, human trafficking, climate change, disaster relief, and piracy—illuminate the variety of ways in which NGOs and other civil society organizations are helping to make East Asia more secure. Drawing on these analyses, a number of general observations can be made that have significant implications for our understanding about the dynamics of regional security.

TRENDS IN NGO INVOLVEMENT IN ASIA PACIFIC SECURITY

1. NGOs Are Already Playing an Important Role in Regional Security

The contributors to this volume clearly demonstrate that NGOs are already more integral actors in regional security than is generally appreciated. As Gui Yongtao notes, NGOs have been involved in security affairs to some degree for more than a century, dating back at least to the establishment of

the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863 and the peace movements of the late 19th century. In recent years, however, they have begun playing a greater role, even though their contributions often go unnoticed.

One factor that has made them more important has been the changing nature of security threats as globalization has advanced. The increased mobility of people and goods has made it easier for pandemics to jump borders and for criminal enterprises to traffic in humans, arms, and drugs. Meanwhile, the scope of some problems, such as environmental degradation and climate change, has progressed to the point where they cannot be contained by national borders. Governments in the region are trying to cooperate with one another in responding to some of these threats, but still gaps have opened up that can only be filled by NGOs, which are generally more nimble and focused, are able to forge cross-border networks, possess specialized expertise, and are capable of reaching out to those marginalized groups that may be at the nexus of security challenges but that national governments have difficulty engaging.

Another reason that NGOs are playing a greater role in addressing regional security issues in these areas is that the accepted definition of security has evolved as the threats facing East Asia have changed. NGOs have long worked in areas such as disaster relief and health that were barely conceived of as security affairs, but in recent years the field of security has expanded to encompass their activities. Put simply, NGOs specializing in these areas have stayed put, while the field of security has come to them.

Meanwhile, a third factor seems to be that we have reached a tipping point at which the resources and expertise available to NGOs, especially to those coming from outside of the region, sometimes enable them to have an impact in certain focused areas that is equal to or greater than that of the governments of major countries. Yanzhong Huang points out that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has been spending more on global health programs in recent years than the World Health Organization, while Yukie Osa notes that nearly half of the US\$14 billion in overseas funding for the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami response either came from private donations or involved NGOs as implementing organizations. This has turned the tables on government-NGO relations in a few instances. As evidence, one need look no farther than the efforts of Japan, the region's largest foreign aid donor, to court the Gates Foundation as a partner on some of its development programs.¹ Twenty years ago, it would have been the private foundation that was trying to court the government.

In their analyses, the contributors to this volume have identified at least 10 functions that different breeds of NGOs are now fulfilling in the field

of security in East Asia. These cover a broad range, from direct service providers engaged in hands-on efforts at the community level to facilitators for the intellectual dialogue that helps shape the very way we think about security.

Direct Service Provision

When people think of NGOs, the first thing that tends to come to mind is their role in assisting people in need. This description fits many NGOs in the region, from organizations that provide a broad range of services in the vein of the Red Cross and other large aid groups to those that focus on highly specialized activities. In some cases, they even play a predominant role in efforts to ameliorate potential human security threats. For instance, Huang points out that just a single NGO—AIDS Care China—is involved in the provision of anti-retroviral treatments to nearly one-quarter of the country's AIDS patients who are receiving the treatment.

Prevention

NGOs also are well placed to deal with the root causes of security threats, even on some of the most unlikely issues. For example, J. N. Mak explains how work by NGOs to promote job creation and empower the disenfranchised in impoverished coastal communities in Southeast Asia provides the only long-term, sustainable solution to the region's piracy problem by giving would-be pirates the opportunity and incentive to pursue other livelihoods. Similarly, Jun Honna describes the efforts of NGOs to engage in community development initiatives as part of their work to prevent human trafficking, along with outreach to educate potential customers of the sex industry.

Alternative Information Source

NGOs are obligated to develop a deep understanding of the immediate concerns of the communities they serve, and sometimes they have a better grasp of realities on the ground than do national and local governments. This is particularly true when they work with populations that are outside of the mainstream—ethnic and religious minorities, immigrants and the impoverished who live on the margins of society, and populations that are not easily acknowledged or condoned by the political and social establishment, such as sexual minorities, drug users, and people engaged in illicit activities. Plus, NGOs are less confined by conventional political considerations than government officials and

politicians. This enables them to more readily identify potential security threats—whether emerging diseases, growing societal resentment, or the increased exploitation of vulnerable populations—and gives them greater freedom to publicize this information. In fact, in many instances, NGOs have become the main source of data for governments on nontraditional security issues. For example, law enforcement agencies in the region have come to rely on NGOs working with women who have been trafficked for accurate information on trafficking networks. Meanwhile, health-related NGOs have started to play an important role in disease surveillance.

Policy Advice

In Western countries, and especially in the United States, think tanks and other NGOs play a major role in formulating policy proposals and advising government officials. The nongovernmental sector in East Asia is not as strong or developed as in the West, but it has started to become a more important source of policy advice on security issues, at least in some countries. In ASEAN, for example, the ASEAN-ISIS network of think tanks played a key role in proposing and advancing the idea of an ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the security confab that has come to play a central role in regional security deliberations. Meanwhile, other NGOs provide invaluable advice on a wide range of nontraditional security challenges.

Advocacy

In Western countries, NGOs have come to play a leading role in advocating for societies to prioritize important issues that might otherwise be ignored, and they are starting to do the same in East Asia. NGOs in the region have started to rack up some successes with their advocacy efforts, at both the national level and the regional level. For example, as Honna notes, FORUM-ASIA and other anti-trafficking organizations successfully lobbied ASEAN countries to take human trafficking and the mandate to protect women and children more seriously, playing an important role in the lead-up to the 2010 launch of the ASEAN Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children.

Norm Setting

Globally, NGOs are helping to establish norms of behavior, as evidenced by the success of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines in

making the use of antipersonnel landmines in warfare increasingly unacceptable. This is true on the regional level as well, where they have shown the capacity to help shape thinking about specific security issues. The case of piracy provides one example. The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) has become a major player in regional discussions of piracy and it operates a piracy reporting center in Kuala Lumpur. As Mak explains in his chapter, the IMB has spearheaded a successful effort to expand the definition of what constitutes piracy beyond what had traditionally been recognized under international law, and this has had a major impact in Southeast Asia, prompting governments in the region to take the issue of piracy more seriously.

Building Epistemic Networks that Cross Borders

The degree of independence and autonomy that many NGOs enjoy makes them uniquely qualified to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and viewpoints among regional opinion leaders. East Asia's most prominent dialogues on "hard security" issues, dialogues that help shape the thinking of the region's policy elite, tend to be hosted by NGOs and NGO networks such as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (the Shangri-La Dialogue). Meanwhile, a host of other NGOs play key roles in building and sustaining regional networks on a range of non-traditional security issues, giving disparate groups the opportunity to share lessons and explore collaborative initiatives.

Promoting Accountability

In Asia, as elsewhere, NGOs monitor government and business performance in a range of areas. Environmental groups around the region track how countries are living up to their commitments to combat climate change. Likewise, groups like FACE [Fight Against Child Exploitation], a Thai organization that monitors the prosecution of pedophiles, are proving effective in pressuring governments to live up to their promises to crack down on human trafficking.

Raising Public Awareness

Many NGOs in the region are also becoming adept at raising public awareness about the issues they champion. As one example, Muhammadiyah, a mass membership Muslim group in Indonesia, has been playing a leading role in educating the public about how to prevent the spread of avian influenza. Similar initiatives are being carried

out throughout the region by other groups on a range of issues with security implications.

Helping Other Sectors of Society Fulfill Their Potential

Finally, NGOs also play a catalytic role in helping other sectors of society respond more effectively to security threats. Chung Suh-Yong describes how NGOs in East Asia are increasingly assisting businesses and governments in developing strategies and technologies to combat climate change. Likewise, Huang highlights the ways in which states and multinational corporations are starting to use NGOs as direct recipients of donated medicines and other support, allowing for more timely and effective distribution of government and corporate resources to combat health threats.

2. Securitization Has Been a Double-Edged Sword

In many cases, it is NGOs that have pushed for the “securitization” of the issues that they cover by making the case for how integral these issues are to people’s security and wellbeing. Their success, though, has bred two dilemmas with which they now must grapple.

One involves the efficacy of responses. Clearly, the securitization of fields such as global health, climate change, and human trafficking helps mobilize financial resources and high-level attention for areas where it is desperately needed, scaling up responses to meet the scope of the challenge. This is illustrated by the way in which the shift toward thinking about the global response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in security terms played a major role in convincing governments and international agencies to invest massive resources in the fight against the disease, saving countless lives around the globe.

However, there are instances in which securitization has exacted a price. For example, as the issue of human trafficking has increasingly been viewed by regional governments through the lens of security, there has been a growing emphasis on law enforcement approaches to the detriment of the types of victim-centered approaches that are better equipped to deal with the root causes of the problem. Similarly, the fact that instances of maritime theft that would previously have been classified as domestic criminal acts are now being redefined as international piracy has motivated a harder-line response that does little to deal with the root causes of the problem.

NGOs also face a second dilemma that goes to the heart of their very mission and autonomy. While they typically welcome the additional resources that they can mobilize by stressing the security implications of their activities, the reclassification of their activities as being security related can degrade their capacity to effectively do their jobs. In her chapter, Yukie Osa relates from firsthand experience how NGOs providing humanitarian assistance need to maintain impartiality and neutrality, especially when operating in conflict zones. However, the tendency of governments to link humanitarian aid to broader strategic objectives and the increased involvement of militaries, contractors, and other actors whose aims go beyond humanitarian interests has sowed suspicion about NGOs' agendas and, in some instances, has even put them at risk of being targeted by combatants, occasionally forcing them to compromise their own neutrality to protect themselves.

3. NGOs Are Paving the Way for Broader International Cooperation

Another thing that has become crystal clear is that NGOs have a crucial behind-the-scenes role to play in East Asia in averting potential conflicts, spearheading cooperative initiatives that span national borders, and helping to build momentum for state-to-state cooperation. This is particularly important in a region with a limited track record of security cooperation and a dearth of action-oriented regional institutions.

Winston Churchill famously quipped that jaw-jaw is always better than war-war. In keeping with this dictum, NGOs contribute by convening experts and opinion leaders for intellectual dialogues. Sometimes these take the form of Track 2 dialogues that give government officials from rival countries a chance to clear the air and exchange views frankly in a private setting. In certain cases, when tensions in the region run high, it is only NGOs that can convene officials from rival countries to feel out one another's ideas. The Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) has played this role by convening the participants in the Six-Party Talks, in some instances giving North Korean representatives and their American, Japanese, and South Korean counterparts the chance to exchange their views when they may not be able to meet in their official capacities.

While sometimes it is important just to keep talking, the value of these meetings does not lie solely in their ability to promote confidence building and transparency in security policy. Savvy government officials around the

region understand how these dialogues can help build consensus around new proposals for cooperative initiatives that can later be championed at the state-to-state level. In fact, most of the successful schemes for regional dialogues and initiatives relevant to security have been advanced in this manner, including the ARF and the East Asia Summit. In a region noted for its relative lack of institutionalized security cooperation, this function has been highly significant.

Similarly, broader NGO dialogues that bring together experts and stakeholders from other sectors of society have been contributing by promoting the diffusion of knowledge on more technical issues to a broad range of experts, in the process helping them develop a common threat perception. In his analysis of NGO efforts to tackle climate change, Chung finds that one of the major obstacles to regional consensus on the approach to this issue is the differing stances of developed and developing countries. When NGOs create opportunities for experts from countries around the region to share technical information on the factors driving climate change, he argues, this better equips them to come to a consensus on regional approaches. Unfortunately, the opportunities to convene regional experts who deal with specific technical issues relevant to security remain all too limited due to the lack of sufficient institutions, language gaps, and other obstacles.

Going beyond information sharing and dialogue, NGOs are also acting more directly as vehicles or catalysts for state-level cooperation. In 2008, after the Sichuan earthquake, historical considerations and bilateral tensions made it tricky for the Japanese government to provide disaster aid directly to the Chinese government, especially through military channels. However, the Japanese government was able to funnel some of its aid to China through NGO networks by donating to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and to the Japan Platform consortium. Similar routes are commonly used by other countries in the region during humanitarian crises.

In other cases, when states have found it difficult to formally work together, NGOs have been taking a more proactive role in advancing cooperation. For instance, the spread of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis in North Korea has become a major public health problem with implications for its neighbors. It is difficult for the United States, South Korea, and other regional powers to engage directly with the insular regime in Pyongyang, but a US-led NGO consortium that includes the Nuclear Threat Initiative, Stanford University, and the Christian Friends of Korea, has succeeded in helping the North Korean Ministry of Public Health establish the country's

first lab for detecting these particularly dangerous strains of tuberculosis.² Other NGOs, meanwhile, have been providing North Koreans with medications to help fight multi-drug resistant tuberculosis.

Finally, NGOs are increasingly well positioned to remove potential irritants to relations between states in the region. Again, the health field provides some examples. As Huang explains, NGOs such as the Southeast Asia Foundation for Outbreak Regional Cooperation are undertaking disease surveillance initiatives that help prevent tensions from arising between countries that are often tempted to engage in finger-pointing about the emergence of new pathogens. Meanwhile, when there is a dangerous outbreak, NGOs can help develop shared norms for quarantines, exit screenings, and other types of interventions that might otherwise lead to accusations of discrimination and aggravate relations between neighboring countries.

Of course, as autonomous actors that represent a range of ideological viewpoints, NGOs can also magnify irritants to state-to-state relations. The growing tendency of nationalistic NGOs in Japan, South Korea, and elsewhere to insert themselves into maritime territorial disputes has made it more difficult for governments to reach pragmatic compromises, fueling strategic rivalry. On balance, however, the growing NGO involvement in issues related to security seems to have contributed to a stronger and more stable regional order.

4. NGOs in the Region Face a Wide Range of Challenges That Limit Their Contributions

While NGOs are starting to make important contributions and they have the potential to do much more, a broad range of challenges continues to slow their growth and limit their efficacy. As they become more prominent players, these challenges are likely to loom larger for the region.

For one, NGOs active in East Asia are characterized by a high level of diversity, and this leaves gaps that make it more difficult for them to work together on equal footing. The size, wealth, and functions of NGOs within individual countries in the region vary widely, which is by no means unnatural. However, there are also enormous differences in the overall capacity of the civil society sector from country to country. In other words, there are large differences in the size, capabilities, and vibrancy of NGOs in the Philippines, for instance, versus those in Laos, to say nothing of the gulf dividing the comparatively large and well-funded American

and European NGOs working in the region from their much smaller indigenous counterparts. These disparities are the product of numerous factors—history, economic development, national legal and regulatory systems, cultural and religious legacies, the state of local philanthropy, the degree of “democratic space” permitting the emergence of autonomous institutions, and so on—all of which vary more widely in East Asia than in most other parts of the world. Further complicating matters, there are also large disparities between fields, and even within fields. For example, in the health field, which is relatively well-endowed, there are numerous NGOs and significant funding dedicated to stemming the spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS but much less activity focused on noncommunicable diseases.

A related challenge is the fact that NGOs active in East Asia—and particularly those that are not government-affiliated or that do not serve as branches of Western NGOs—tend to have limited institutional capacity. In general, they operate with fewer staff, are less professionalized, and have access to fewer resources than NGOs in Western countries. To give one example, the Central Community Chest of Japan, one of Japan’s most prominent and well-established NGOs, operates with fewer than 20 staff, while its most comparable American counterpart, United Way Worldwide, has more than 260 full-time staff.

One obvious reason for the limited capacity of the NGO sector is the endemic lack of financial resources that confronts most of the NGOs in East Asia. While most countries in the region have a long history of local philanthropy, this has typically focused on religious causes, education, and other activities that can be loosely defined as more traditional “charity”; there is only a limited track record of giving for NGO activities. This has led to various imbalances that endanger the autonomy and operations of NGOs. In some instances, it has encouraged a dependence on government funding, which in turn hampers NGOs’ ability to serve as credible monitors of government policy, disseminate information that contradicts government stances, or propose alternative policies. In other cases, NGOs in the region have become overly reliant on overseas funding, which can distort local civil society and also sow suspicions as to whether NGOs are advancing a foreign agenda.

A related challenge is the relative lack of governmental and societal acceptance that NGOs often face in East Asia. This is most conspicuous in countries like China, where the democratic space is severely constricted. As Huang mentions, this has led to a situation in which 9 out of 10 Chinese civil society organizations have to make do without official nonprofit status

and all the benefits this confers. However, the difficulties that NGOs face in being taken seriously are not limited to the more authoritarian countries of the region. They exist even in as fully democratic a country as Japan. There, the legal and regulatory systems for NGOs remain so overbearing that even 15 years after domestic reforms to encourage the formation of a class of smaller, community-based NGOs—“NPOs” in Japanese parlance—only 267 of the 45,000 officially registered NPOs have been able to obtain government approval to accept tax-deductible donations.³ As Osa points out in her analysis of disaster relief, this lack of societal acceptance was also manifested after the March 2011 earthquake in the reluctance of Japanese government officials to take NGOs specializing in disaster relief seriously as professional partners rather than as unskilled volunteers. This ended up hobbling NGO efforts to provide disaster relief during a national crisis, even though it was an explicit government policy to work closely with NGOs and rely on their expertise.

NGOs in the region are held back by one final challenge, the weakness of their own governance coupled with a lack of transparency and accountability. In many countries, there are questions as to whom NGOs are operating on behalf of, and these are naturally heightened when NGOs are involved in as sensitive an area as security. Going beyond these suspicions, in some places there are valid reasons for concern because certain NGOs operate as fronts for profit-making endeavors while others are created as tools to advance narrow political interests. Even many of the NGOs in the region that are autonomous actors earnestly seeking to advance society’s interests still have a long way to go in striking a proper balance between transparency and efficacy in their operations. This is perhaps natural given the state of development of the NGO sector in the region, but nevertheless it is an issue that will need to be tackled more seriously.

5. There Are Few Coordinating Mechanisms in the Region for NGOs

The region’s security challenges are increasingly transnational in nature, so responses need to span national borders to be effective. However, one of the greatest obstacles that hampers the capacity of NGOs to tackle these challenges is the difficulty they face in collaborating with other institutions outside of their national borders. There are a number of coordination mechanisms at the national level in individual countries that enable NGOs to work together. For example, many of the NGOs in

Japan that work on disaster relief can undertake joint fundraising through Japan Platform, while American NGOs responding to disasters in Asia and elsewhere share information through InterAction, a broad-based association for humanitarian assistance organizations. Yet, with a handful of exceptions,⁴ there are few regional networks in East Asia, especially ones that enable NGOs from different countries to compare notes and explore joint activities. Similarly, there are few robust institutional mechanisms that encourage regional collaboration on the part of NGOs in other fields relevant to traditional and nontraditional security.

The high degree of diversity is one factor that seems to inhibit the development of collaborative networks of NGOs in the region, and linguistic issues are another major hurdle. However, the two greatest obstacles may well be established patterns of behavior and a lack of financial resources. A general lack of familiarity with one another and, in some cases, regional enmities make it difficult for NGOs that are not accustomed to working with overseas partners to initiate and sustain networking activities. Even more importantly, NGOs' weak financial base and the strain that investing in new partnerships places on their already overextended staff makes it difficult for them to justify investing time and money in building networks that may not benefit them immediately.

Similarly, there is a lack of robust mechanisms to promote coordination between NGOs and governments or regional institutions. Many of the governments in the region have begun outreach to domestically based NGOs in a handful of fields, but these still tend to be relatively unsophisticated and are also plagued by a power imbalance that favors the government side. Similarly, ASEAN has tried to engage Southeast Asian NGOs, but dustups over issues such as the creation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and a sense on the part of NGO representatives that they are not taken seriously leaves a great deal of mutual mistrust that needs to be overcome.

MOVING FORWARD

The cases covered in this volume clearly show that the role of NGOs in regional security is growing. While it is too much to suggest that these cases illuminate a clear road map for strengthening civil society contributions, they do hint at a number of steps that can, in the aggregate, help pave the way forward by making it easier for NGOs to contribute to the field.

One step that would be useful is greater efforts to build up collaborative regional and subregional networks of NGOs that focus on specific fields of expertise. Such networks would introduce NGO representatives to one another, helping to build up the type of familiarity and trust that is needed to quickly initiate cooperation in times of need while also giving NGOs a forum for sharing lessons and for speaking with a common voice. Some preliminary efforts have already been made in this regard, but fields that seem particularly ripe for further network building include disaster relief, some areas of health, and perhaps human trafficking.

As possible models, there are numerous network-building initiatives around the world that have succeeded in promoting cooperation at the national and regional levels. For example, in the field of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, InterAction plays a key role in coordinating information when US NGOs respond to overseas crises. Similarly, Japan Platform has become an important vehicle for pooled funding and NGO-government coordination for Japanese groups. And CONCORD [European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development] helps Europe's NGO community take unified stances on humanitarian issues involving the European Union. None of these models can be transplanted directly to East Asia, but they illustrate the possibilities for what can be done at the regional level.

Of course, network building and other initiatives to enhance civil society contributions to regional security cost money, which is in particularly short supply for NGOs active in East Asia. Governments and regional institutions would be well advised to seriously explore ways to provide more financial support to promote regional cooperation among NGOs. This could take the form of funding to strengthen regional networks, as the European Commission has done for CONCORD and other initiatives. Going a step further, it could also entail the creation of some form of pooled funding schemes, perhaps in connection with the East Asia Summit or ASEAN, that expand on the Japan Platform model by supporting the provision of services by NGOs working in relatively uncontroversial areas such as disaster relief, where their contributions are undoubtedly needed. The trick, however, will be to do this in such a way that insulates participating NGOs from regional politics and avoids compromising their autonomy.

Private foundations and donors both inside and outside of East Asia also have an important catalytic role to play. Over the long run, there is a pressing need for further steps to nurture local philanthropy so that it can better meet the demands of the growing NGO sector. For the time being, though, the underdeveloped state of local philanthropy leaves foundations from the United States and Europe in a position to play an outsized role

in encouraging the expansion of NGO networks and the growth of civil society capacity. In attempting to do this, though, it is important for them to proceed in a sophisticated manner that encourages local initiatives and builds local capacity rather than displaces it.

In a more general sense, the cases taken up in this volume clearly show that there is a need for greater efforts on the part of governments and regional institutions to engage more constructively with NGOs that are working on issues related to security. Some governments in the region are already making serious efforts to reach out to internationally oriented NGOs based in their countries and involve them in regular consultations and collaborations. The efforts of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to hold regular dialogues with NGOs in specific issue areas stand out in this regard. Nevertheless, there is still much farther to go, which is evidenced by the fact that there is a greater psychological distance between NGOs and governments in East Asia than in many other parts of the world, and certainly more so than in North America or Europe. This is due, in part, to the reflexive distrust that many governments in the region tend to feel toward civil society and the historical tendency for governments to dominate the definition of the "public good" and its implementation. Such stances are increasingly incompatible with today's reality, as we find ourselves in a new era in which governments increasingly need NGOs.

In particular, regional institutions such as ASEAN and the East Asia Summit have an important role to play in acknowledging the importance of NGOs and in urging member governments to be more proactive in engaging with them. International organizations can also contribute in this regard. For example, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria made clear that it is serious about requiring recipient countries to work with NGOs when, in 2011, it temporarily suspended hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for Chinese AIDS initiatives because the Chinese government was not involving civil society in the funded projects in the way it had promised. Similar pressure when necessary, balanced with positive encouragement, can help push the envelope on government engagement with NGOs.

Finally, the region needs to develop a more supportive environment for civil society if NGOs are going to be able to contribute to their full potential. There are numerous reforms that need to be made to the legal and regulatory systems in individual countries to make it easier for NGOs to operate and contribute to society. Some governments in the region feel that it serves their short-term interests to keep NGOs under their thumb with overly strict regulation and oversight, but ultimately this

undermines their long-term interests in seeing effective action taken on a range of nontraditional security challenges. Similarly, greater efforts are sorely needed to develop an indigenous philanthropic sector that supports NGOs, including legal reforms, the expansion of tax benefits and other government incentives, and large-scale changes in corporate norms and societal behavior. One final piece of the puzzle is efforts by NGOs themselves to improve their governance and transparency. There are deep concerns in the region, sometimes justified although often not, about the reliability of NGOs. These make efforts to be more accountable to the public and to weed out the “bad NGOs” that are solely profit oriented or are advancing agendas that diverge from the public good a prerequisite for building public trust.

Throughout Asia, banyan trees have traditionally been important because of how well they shield people from the hot sun and provide sanctuary from storms. They are distinguished by aerial roots that extend from their branches to the ground below and which eventually grow into a cluster of intertwined, multiple new trunks that support the tree’s lush canopy. Civil society is like these new trunks: in East Asia it is playing a growing role in supporting the region by making it more stable and secure. If the new trunks cannot get sufficient sustenance, the entire tree is weakened; likewise, if the growth of NGOs is stunted, regional security will suffer.

That is why, as the cases taken up in this volume illustrate, it is crucial for key actors in the region—including governments, regional institutions, donors, and of course NGOs themselves—to give greater priority to creating an environment that is more supportive of civil society, and particularly of NGOs working on issues related to security. Furthermore, seeing how the functions of NGOs and other civil society organizations are increasingly intertwined and interdependent with other sectors of society, it is important for governments, regional institutions, and others to put more energy into exploring how to create more meaningful partnerships with NGOs. Even though their contributions tend to be overlooked, NGOs have an integral role to play in advancing regional security cooperation, and if properly nourished, they will make the entire region stronger, much as the additional support provided by the banyan’s new trunks allows the tree to flourish and spread.

NOTES

1. Author's conversations with Japanese government officials.
2. See, for example, Donald G. McNeil Jr., "Tuberculosis: North Korea Develops TB Laboratory with Help from American Doctors," *New York Times*, March 1, 2010, D6.
3. Data for the number of Japanese nonprofit groups registered as *NPO hojin* that have received tax deductible status comes from July 2012 figures provided by Japan's National Tax Agency (www.nta.go.jp/tetsuzuki/denshi-sonota/npo/meibo/01.htm). According to the Cabinet Office of Japan's Economic Research Bureau, there were 45,146 registered *NPO hojin* as of March 31, 2012. "Tokutei hieri katsudo hojin no katsudo bunya ni tsuite" [About the fields of activity of NPOs], Cabinet Office of Japan NPO Homepage, March 31, 2012, www.npo-homepage.go.jp/data/bunnya.html.
4. One notable exception involves policy institutes that specialize in security studies. There are a number of networks, such as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), that convene nongovernmental as well as government-affiliated think tanks for policy dialogues. However, moving outside of the realm of intellectual dialogue, there are few institutionalized regional networks that bring together NGOs that play a more direct role in responding to nontraditional and traditional security challenges.