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New Waves of Decentralization in Southeast Asia: Analysis of Local Government Survey Data,

Project Leader
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Project Title : New Waves of Decentralization in Southeast Asia: Analysis of
Local Government Survey Data, Fiscal Year 2018-2019

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Background and Objective

In the ASEAN countries, namely, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, decentralization reforms took place simultaneously during the 1990s in the course of democratization and the state restructuring process. The social and political effects of decentralization in these three countries were profound and extensive. The institutional changes during the transitional phase, as well as dimensions of “local politics” and political capture at the local levels, have been much emphasized in preceding studies on decentralization.

However, since the 2000s, the local governments in these countries have been assuming broader roles in public service delivery and local development. Thus, the other dimensions, such as capacity building, accountability, and autonomy of the local governments, have become major factors to be analyzed.

In this context, our project team conducted quantitative surveys in the above three countries from 2012 to 2014 to analyze the state of local government management with the support of KAKENHI 21252003 and 25283009 (the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science). The study team focused on basic characteristics of the local governments and leaders, the development of local bureaucracy and elite bureaucrats, networks with major stakeholders, and participation of civil society to reach a comprehensive understanding of the local administration in each country.

Summary of the Papers

1. NAGAI, Fumio and KAGOYA Kazuhiro,

Title: “Analysis of local government performance factors in Thailand—Institutional structure and personal performance”

Abstract: Local governments in Thailand have been playing increasingly important roles in delivering public services since the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution of Thailand. Under the first decentralization plan (2001–2007), there was a transfer of duties and responsibilities, fiscal resources, and human resources from the central government to local government. This transfer was implemented with the local government under strict supervision of the central government and centrally appointed bureaucrats such as provincial governors and district officers. Nonetheless, local governments have often received criticism for corruption and inefficient governance.

However, some local governments are noted for their good local governance. The reason for this difference in local government achievement remains to be clarified. The aim of this paper is to investigate the performance of Thai local governments using the results of a local government elite survey conducted in Thailand in 2013–2014. The survey involved randomly selected urban local governments and rural local governments, the mayors and “Palat” (top bureaucrat of local government) of which were asked to respond to the survey questionnaire. We attempted to examine the relationship between local government elites and local government performance indicators identified by the Department of Local Administration, the Ministry of Interior by quantitative analysis. Our findings indicate that the institutional arrangement of Thailand’s local government system and networks with some stakeholders seem to enhance the performance of Thai local governments.

2. KIKUCHI, Masao,

Title: “Analysis of local government performance factors in Thailand—Institutional structure and personal performance”

Abstract: Local government in the Philippines has been increasing the efficiency and democracy of its management and service delivery since the passage of the Local Government Code of 1991. Following this decentralization reform, the capacity of local government as an organization has become more important than ever. This paper investigates the performance of local governments and bureaucratic factors in the Philippines. A questionnaire survey was conducted with city/municipal planning and development coordinators who are top-ranking government officials, from 300 randomly selected local governments. The relationships between these officials and local government performance was quantitatively analyzed. The findings indicate that in

addition to local “politics,” local “government” and local “administration” have become equally or even more important factors in the state and development of local government performance and the quality of local governance.

3. OKAMOTO, Masaaki and KAGOYA, Kazuhiro

Title: Another Politicization of Local Bureaucrat in Java, Indonesia

Abstract: This paper aimed to bring local bureaucrats into the spotlight as the main actors in local politics and administration, and analyze their perceptions and behaviors in Java, Indonesia in the era of democracy and local autonomy. This quantitative research study utilized the results of a survey on local government secretaries and other data. The paper focuses on the politicization of bureaucracy or bureaucrats, which is divided into four types and deals with one type of politicization of bureaucrats in which a bureaucrat becomes political or politicized. No previous research has conducted a quantitative survey on the politicization of bureaucrats in Indonesia. The paper argues that although the emergence of political bureaucrats is significant, this is not the case in every locality in Java. Bureaucrats might become political if they have a rather centralistic view, support bureaucratic autonomy from politics, have a wide network within their own district or city, and have work experiences as local government officials in poorer districts or cities.

4. NISHIMURA, Kenichi

Title: What Affects the Performance of the Local Governments in Urban Environmental Management in the Philippines?

Abstract: Under the Local Government Code of 1991 (LGC 1991), many administrative powers, including environmental administration, were transferred to local government units (LGUs) in the Philippines. There are several laws that provide a legal framework for environmental protection such as the Clean Air Act of 1999, the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, and the Clean Water Act of 2004. According to these laws, LGUs play an important role in environmental protection administration. These laws also call for the participation of various stakeholders in environmental protection management, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), people’s organizations (POs), and private institutions.

However, several issues prevent LGUs from effectively carrying out their role and obstruct effective participation of stakeholders in environmental protection management

in each local community. These include budget constraints, technical issues, and institutional problems such as limited participation of various stakeholders. Case studies have clarified factors that improve environmental governance. These include the mayor's initiative, inter-governmental collaboration, and cooperative relations with NGOs, POs, local residents, and private institutions. Although these factors are illustrative for individual cases, their generalizability has not yet been tested. Therefore, it is important to explore general conditions that contribute to improving public management for environmental protection.

Against this background, we present the results of our analysis on the elements of LGUs that affect their performance in environmental management, especially in the urban ecosystem management sector. In particular, we examine the effects of four categories of determinants: the source of environmental policy, the mayors' networks with local stakeholders, the LGUs' networks with external political institutes, and the ability of the LGUs to acquire the external financial support. For our analysis we utilized Local Governance Performance Management System scores for "environmental governance" as dependent variables. To obtain the independent variables, we extracted data from the results of a survey that we conducted in 2011 and 2012.

We found several points related to the elements of the LGUs and their environmental management performance. First, a strong network with local stakeholders does not necessarily improve performance but may instead degrade performance. Second, for the effects of networking with external political institutes, we found that high frequency contact between the mayor and congresspersons worsens the respective LGU's environmental management performance. Finally, for the LGUs' ability to acquire external financial support, we found that financial support from the private sector improves municipal environmental performance, whereas support from the central government worsens performance.

5. FUNATSU, Tsuruyo

Title: Local Government Leaders in Thailand: Their Professionalization and Performance of the Local Government

Findings: In nearly 25 years of the decentralization process in Thailand, raising the capability of local government leaders has become an important factor in improving the

performance of local government management, following the introduction of direct election of mayors since 2005. In this context, first, this paper explores the Thai mayors' social backgrounds and quantitatively analyzes the relations between the leaders' capability and local government performance by utilizing a survey data of Thai local governments in 2006 and 2013/14. Further, it emphasizes the effects of the "dual local governance" system in Thailand, as a significant institutional factor defining the social backgrounds of mayors and their political networks.

In the preceding studies on Thai local politics, rural local leaders were often described as mere "vote canvassers" for the Members of Parliaments (MPs) in the constituencies, who always sought to politically associate with the MPs to ask for budgetary support in return. Therefore, "local politics" and local leaders' political networks have been a major focus of interest rather than their capabilities and performances in local government management.

However, the quantitative analysis in this paper indicates that the "professionalization" of mayors was a key factor in enhancing the quality of local government performance rather than the "political networks" of local leaders, especially in urban local governments. From the finding, it is concluded that a new approach for local government leaders is required in Thailand for a more comprehensive analysis to reflect on the changes and development of Thai local government after decentralization.

Findings of this Project

Through analyzing the survey data of local governments in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, the project team tried to elaborate on the primary factors influencing the career paths of mayors and top local bureaucrats, performance, and institutional building of local governments. Further, the team obtained necessary performance indicators and local financial data, when accessible, to create the quantitative analysis.

Interesting results are shown in each paper: some organizational factors, such as networking of top bureaucrats and local leaders, capability of local government leaders, and institutional characteristics are important in improving the performance of local governments. Through the analysis of the three countries in Southeast Asia, we emphasize the importance of a comparative view based on the empirical data to continue the study of local governments in Southeast Asia, just as in Japan and other OECD countries.