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978-1-107-07357-9 - Rebuilding Asia Following Natural Disasters: Approaches to Reconstruction in the Asia-Pacific Region

Edited by Patrick Daly and R. Michael Feener

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## REBUILDING ASIA FOLLOWING NATURAL DISASTERS

Over the past two decades, communities in the Asia-Pacific region have been devastated by a range of natural disasters including massive earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, floods, wildfires, landslides, and tropical storms. Responses and approaches to post-disaster relief and reconstruction, and disaster-risk reduction have varied widely, depending on scales of damage, levels of preparation, local capacities, and structures of governance.

By providing a detailed and comparative assessment of the humanitarian responses to a series of major disasters in Asia over the past two decades, this book explores complex and changing understandings and practices of relief, recovery, and reconstruction. These critical investigations raise questions about the position and responsibilities of a growing range of stakeholders. In addition to discussing the role of official agencies and professional actors involved in reconstruction projects, these studies also provide in-depth explorations of the ways in which local communities are transformed on multiple levels – not only by the impact of disaster events but also by the experiences of rebuilding.

This timely book discusses how experiences of rebuilding communities in Asia over the past quarter century can contribute to rethinking post-disaster responses globally. It proposes practices that might better address and balance local contexts and institutional imperatives, while making progress toward reducing vulnerabilities in the future. This is a valuable resource for academic researchers interested in post-disaster transformations and development studies, practitioners in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government officials dealing with disaster response and disaster risk reduction.

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## Preface

Over the past decade, both the editors of this book have been conducting research on the reconstruction of Aceh, Indonesia, following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Two particular insights gained from our experiences in post-disaster Aceh motivated our work on this book. We noticed that over the initial three years after the disaster, there was a surge of research conducted by academics, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government officials on the reconstruction – with a bumper crop of publications and reports appearing between 2006 and 2008. Over the years that followed, however, there was a marked decrease in the presence of researchers continuing work on the ground in Aceh on the longer-term processes of reconstruction and recovery.

A review of literature from other post-disaster situations reveals a similar pattern of short-term reports, project evaluations, and intense focus on preliminary academic studies, followed by a gradual loss of interest and critical attention. Although much useful information is gained through this attention to developments over the first few years of reconstruction, more longitudinal and in-depth research is necessary in order to better understand the complex and dynamic processes that define post-disaster transformations of particular societies over the long term. This book brings together thirteen studies of reconstruction efforts from across Asia over the past quarter century highlighting diverse aspects of particular programs developed in response to disasters, and tracking the longer-term political, economic, and social impacts that they have had on affected communities. These case studies are presented here in chronological sequence in order to highlight changing conceptions and practices of post-disaster response and reconstruction since 1990 that have contributed to broader regional and global developments in the field.

We feel strongly that such a long-term perspective for sustained research on post-disaster reconstruction is a necessity for any meaningful evaluation of the relative “success” or “failure” of projects. Indeed, the perspective gained through more sustained longitudinal study provides important opportunities for critical

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reflection on the formulation of the very metrics conventionally used in such evaluations. In order to understand the diverse transformations of communities impacted by both natural disasters and reconstruction programs, it is critical to balance what we can learn about the organization and delivery of aid with what we need to know about how affected communities adapt and carry on both during the intervention and after the end of external assistance.

The structure and intention of this book was in part inspired by the rich insights, intimate personal familiarity, and bigger picture perspective on post-disaster recovery provided by recent works such as Olshansky and Johnson's *Clear as Mud: Planning for the Rebuilding of New Orleans*; Edgington's *Reconstructing Kobe: The Geography of Crisis and Opportunity*; Oliver-Smith's classic *The Martyred City: Death and Rebirth in the Andes*, and Simpson's *The Political Biography of an Earthquake* (among others). Such work directs attention toward tracing the longer-term impacts of decisions made throughout the reconstruction and helps in better understanding how local communities are affected by humanitarian interventions. This book builds on this emerging literature on specific post-disaster reconstruction projects by bringing together focused examinations of multiple cases, and framing them within broader regional and global histories of evolving conceptions and practices of post-disaster reconstruction.

We have also been observing with great interest some changing patterns of post-disaster aid and humanitarianism across Asia over the past several decades. As discussed throughout this book, new aid actors – ranging from large NGOs and religious charities to community-based organizations – have become increasingly active at the forefront of disaster response in many places. This has, as we discuss in the concluding chapter to this book, substantially increased the complexity of many post-disaster contexts.

Another significant trend visible across the chronological progression of case studies presented here is that of shifts toward greater focus on disaster management and hazard mitigation. In this regard, the aspirations of the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) have had a major impact on the institutional structures and mechanisms of disaster management across the region. As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, in the wake of the Hyogo Framework, most countries in Asia have passed disaster-related laws and instituted a range of national disaster management agencies to provide more cohesive coordination for disaster response. In addition, there has been a major systematic shift from reactive emergency response to risk reduction policies that integrate measures for the reduction of vulnerabilities and for building resilience into longer-term development policies. It is clear that perspectives on hazards and approaches to humanitarianism are changing across Asia, and the longitudinal organization of this book is designed to highlight these

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emerging trends and their diverse effects on projects for “rebuilding” communities across Asia and beyond in the wake of natural disasters.

In putting this book together, we approached researchers from both academic and practitioner backgrounds with extensive experience participating in and observing particular projects of post-disaster reconstruction. We asked the contributors to focus on a particular disaster (or related complex of disasters) to provide both an overview of the event and a critical appraisal of the reconstruction processes that followed. In doing this, the contributors have developed their chapters to explore what they felt were some of the unique aspects of each recovery that might have value to all involved within post-disaster response and humanitarianism. Reflecting the complexity of post-disaster situations, the contributors to this book come from a range of disciplines, including engineering, anthropology, political science, religious studies, geography, economics, and gender studies.

Given the amounts of disasters affecting Asia, there is considerable value in looking at the past twenty-five years of post-disaster responses in Asia to better understand both the approaches used to respond to particular disasters and evolution of disaster response across the region over this period. Given the limitations on length, however, it was not possible to include a detailed chapter on every important disaster response. We have nonetheless tried to produce here a representative collection of studies across both time and geography. While ideally we would have liked to also include chapters on more events including, for example, the 1991 cyclones in Bangladesh or that of 2008 in Myanmar, expanding the selection would have eventually made for a library, rather than a single book. We hope that this collection will provide a useful starting point for people interested in the changing approaches to and practices of post-disaster reconstruction in Asia, as well as the broader conceptual frameworks applied to and lessons learned from these experiences.

During the course of editing this book, we benefitted from the support of a number of people. We would like to thank Divya Hundlani for administrative and editorial support in Singapore. In addition, Zoe Pruce and Cassi Roberts at Cambridge University Press have been very supportive and patient throughout the entire process. Finally, work on this book was supported by the Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS # 96), the National Research Foundation Singapore, and the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore.