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## CHAPTER 5

### **Community-Building, Civil Society, and Civic Activism in Taiwan: Promises and Predicaments**

Anru Lee

This chapter focuses on “community-building” (*shequ yingzao* [社區營造]), one of the most potent and widely employed terms in Taiwan’s public sphere in recent decades, and reviews how the course and discourse of community-building reflects the development of civil society and shapes the contour of civic activism in post-authoritarian Taiwan. Much has been written about Taiwan’s civil society through surging social movements, political rallies, and street demonstrations since the 1980s (e.g., Ho 2010; Ho and Lin 2011; Hsiao 1990), epitomized by the 2014 Sunflower Movement—the twenty-four-day occupation of Taiwan’s Congress that embodied the collective endeavor of different constituencies of civil society including student activists, leading non-government organizations (NGOs) on labor, gender, environmental, welfare, and human rights issues, and more fundamentally, the general public/concerned citizens (Rowen 2015 and Chapter 32 in this volume; Wang 2017). In this chapter, however, I focus on community-building. The reason for my choice is twofold. First of all, in contrast to social movements that tend to be loud, noisy, and with relatively well-defined objectives and immediate urgency, community-building is a “quiet revolution.” Community-building is mundane. The progress of community-building projects can be slow with twists and turns, and the effect can be ambiguous without clearly outlined goals or easily identified accomplishments. Yet, precisely because of its propinquity to everyday life, community-building reveals the quotidian dynamics and struggle within a community on issues such as consensus-building and public affair management significant to the ongoing development of civil society. This enables us to explore how the emergence and operation of civil society comes about in complicated local formations. Furthermore, community-building concerns not merely the community as if it were a self-sufficient entity. Rather, the course of community-building reflects the way a community is embedded within a larger political-economic context. Community-building as a strategy to strengthen Taiwan’s civil society is

therefore susceptible to the influence of various external factors. Specifically, a close examination of the contour of community-building brings to light the equivocal relationship between the state and civil society, in the sense that the Taiwan government has been and continues to be the primary source of funding for local community projects. The fact that communities are spatially grounded entities also helps to show the impact of current economic globalization. Local projects under the auspices of community-building have frequently been implemented as projects of economic revitalization through cultural means. While this may be considered by many as essential to the survival of deindustrialized communities (particularly in rural areas) in Taiwan's postindustrial economy, it nonetheless undermines the political potency central to the original intention of community-building.

To substantiate the points made above, this chapter is divided into a few sections. I start with the background of why “community”—or the rebuilding of community or the building of a new kind of community—is considered by grassroots activists (and, later, government officials) as imperative in Taiwan's struggle for an effective civil society. Also addressed in this section is how this renewed interest in “community” was transformed into actions, for which two different types of community-building-cum-civic activism are examined. This is followed by a discussion of the government-led Integrated Community-Building Program (社區總體營造) in the mid-1990s. Examples of community projects under the Integrated Community-Building Program will be discussed to evaluate both the effectiveness of community-building as an agent of civil society and the paradox embedded in community-building as an approach to both political empowerment and economic advancement. The third section picks up the economic dimension of community-building, and discusses the predicament faced by community-building movements after the 2000s, when place-making became a major strategy of economic revival in the countryside and of boosting global economic competitiveness in cities.

### **Community-Building as Grassroots Movement**

In the years immediately after the lift of martial law, a “community study” fervor was witnessed in Taiwan in the 1990s (Huang 1995; Lü 2002). Whether in local or national radio shows or among public television broadcastings, community-related topics were an essential part of the programming. Major newspapers also expanded their reporting on neighborhood stories, local cultural-historical societies, and community activities. From grassroots radicals for democracy to defenders of status quo, and from ordinary housewives' endeavors for their local concerns to politicians attempting to win popular support, regardless of one's political belief or moral standing, “community” was in the center of their discourses and it was the cause that everybody was claiming to fight for. On the surface, this dovetails with the trend of community movement particularly in capitalist advanced countries in Europe and North

America since the 1990s. In these countries, a new governance structure emphasizing community mobilization and civic activism has been deployed as a mechanism for urban regeneration and social reconstruction to make up for the failed or insufficient government policies against a neoliberal economy (Jessop 2002). In Taiwan, however, the rise of the community movement was much less the result of a declined welfare state because welfare state was not a reality (Lin and Chiu 2014: 86). Rather, the phenomenon of the community movement was inspired by two seemingly opposing forces: community mobilization based on local history and identity by political and social movement veterans seeking alternative sites for long-term, grassroots organizing, on the one hand, and the promotion of the state in the attempt to build a renewed national identity as well as a new kind of citizens, on the other (Huang 1995). Yet, why was it “community” deemed so central in the concern of both the state and grassroots activists? What similar or different meanings were conveyed by “community” in each of these conceptualizations? And, fundamentally, what is the connection between civil society and “community” or “community building” in the context of Taiwan?

At the root of Western definitions of civil society is the dichotomous separation between state and society. On the level of day-to-day practice, it points to a new kind of social organization—self-organized voluntary associations based on horizontal ties of trust—that is no longer based on primary social bonds such as kinship and that is also independent from the state. These voluntary associations then constitute a public sphere “where individuals and groups interact to influence the publicly shared understanding that govern interrelationships in collective life” (Weller 1999) and where citizens are free to pursue their collective identities and interests. While broad-based horizontal institutions intermediate between family and state, such as temple organizations or business associations, have been widely observed in modern Taiwanese history (Skoggard 2016), it is doubtful whether such institutions contributed to an independent local public sphere especially under the tight political control of the Nationalist (Kuomintang or KMT) government (Weller 1999).<sup>1</sup> The KMT regime effectively depoliticized self-organized voluntary groups throughout most of the post-WWII era until the political liberalization in the 1980s.

This history of state-society relations has had clear consequences for the meaning and characteristic of the political subjectivity specific to civil society. Directly, the authoritarian nature of the state was the prime object against which grassroots organizing found its cause and focus. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the KMT regime rested not only on the political

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<sup>1</sup> Looking forward, Weller (1999) maintains that, although such groups do not conform to the concept of civil society in its usual sense, they may be developed into alternative vehicles for political transformation; they can be mobilized into means to a democratic political culture.

and legal structure but also the cultural ideology that supported this structure. In its effort to establish governing legitimacy on Taiwan after its defeat in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, the exiled KMT (led by Chiang Kai-shek at the time) propagated the concept of cultural China to serve not only as the basis of national identity but also of government/bureaucratic structure (Chun 1994, 1996). Accordingly, local culture became “both a capacity for resisting the oppression from above and a venue for incubating political subjectivity within the state” (Jung 2016: 514). The political liberalization after the late 1980s made it permissible to conceptualize a nationscape based on the land actually inhabited by the population of Taiwan and governed by the national government on Taiwan, instead of based on an imagined, KMT-promulgated, unified China. In this political context, community-building as a means to (re)inscribe local meaning and identity and to (re)integrate space, place and political life was—and continues to be—deemed crucial by grassroots activists to the process of political democratization (Chuang 2013: 121). Furthermore, central to the idea of community-building in Taiwan is the acknowledgment of past political inequality among various cultural and ethnic groups. Community-building is therefore a part of the sociopolitical movement that seeks to create a new political legitimacy and social justice based on equality (L. Wang 2004).

Two examples of community organizing exemplify this early wave of community movement: the Hsin Kang Cultural Movement and the Meinung Anti-Dam Movement. Resonating with the evolution of social movements in Taiwan, these two movements were instigated by people who left their hometowns to pursue a college education in metropolitan Taipei but, after graduation, forwent a career in Taipei and came home because of their deep commitment to the wellbeing of their birthplaces. Each of these movements has its own roots of origin, but both have developed into a prominent advocacy group that have had a great impact on local development and inspire emulation from community advocates nationwide.

### **The Hsin Kang Cultural Movement**

Home to one of the most prominent Matus temples and an important site of annual pilgrimage in Taiwan, Hsin Kang Township of Chiayi County became a pioneer of community movement in the late 1980s. The Hsin Kang Cultural Movement was initiated by Dr. Chen Jin-huang as an attempt of cultural revival to fill the vacuum created after the loosening of state political control. Similar to many grassroots activists at the time, Dr. Chen reckoned that there existed a poverty of culture, caused by the prolonged implementation of martial law that provided the KMT regime its legitimacy based on a faraway territory. People were led to ignore the land they were inhabiting and look down on the way of life grounded on this land. As a result, traditional art and culture bred and nurtured in this soil, including temple architecture and festivals, music, and even the rice, fruits and

agricultural produce, were disregarded. Yet, in their place came vulgar popular cultural practices such as strippers performing at funerals and temple festivals and an illegal lottery called “Everybody is happy.” The lift of martial law was therefore a moment of political-ideological loss—and in his practice Dr. Chen heard many complaints of palpitations, insomnia, irritability, depression from his patients. Yet, this ideological loss also presented an opportunity to refocus on one’s immediate environment and cultural heritage (Yang 2010). In October, 1987, three months after martial law was suspended and the citizens’ right to assemble and congregate guaranteed by Taiwan’s constitution was reinstated, Dr. Chen invited choreographer Lin Hwai-min—likely the most famous native son of Hsin Kang—and his world-renowned Cloud Gate Dance Theater to come home and perform at a makeshift stage at the local high school’s auditorium. That night, Hsin Kang residents crowded the auditorium, coming with their friends and families and sitting or standing casually, just like they would have done if they were attending a performance at the courtyard of their famed Matsu Temple.

Holding a performance at a local temple courtyard is a time-honored custom in reverence of the local god and the community whose safety and integrity that he/she protects. Dr. Chen’s collaboration with Lin’s Cloud Gate was therefore meant to awaken the communal spirit as well as to (re)introduce quality cultural activities, once a regular part of local daily life for Hsin Kang people. It also indicated the birth of the Hsin Kang Foundation of Culture and Education, one of the earliest grassroots-instigated, community-based non-profit organizations.<sup>2</sup> Just like Cloud Gate that is best known for its infusion of indigenous cultural elements with western modern dance genre, active members of the Hsin Kang Foundation also seek to extend traditional associations and social relations into new areas of community life and public affairs. Since early on, a key to the success of the Hsin Kang Foundation has been its ability to work with preexisting (and long-existing) organizations, including youth and women’s groups, senior citizens’ groups and especially temple-affiliated associations that are frequently overlooked by community movement advocates elsewhere in Taiwan for being considered as lacking modern, rational or progressive streaks (W-P. Lin 2016). By working closely with these established local organizations, the Hsin Kang Foundation embraces activism not only in areas such as culture/art and history/memory, but also in child education and environmental protection (H. Lin 2011). The foundation’s attempt was to elevate people’s cultural level and to improve the quality of life. It pushed the limit of community work and changed the conventional understanding of community advocacy.

Quickly, the “Hsin Kang Experience” as widely reported on the news media, and it became a highly desirable community-development model. The Hsin Kang Foundation,

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<sup>2</sup> For details, see the Hsin Kang Foundation of Culture and Education website (<http://www.hkfce.org.tw/>).

standing in the place of Hsin Kang Township, was also invited by the Council for Cultural Affairs (now the Ministry of Culture) to be part of the National Art Festival. A main directive of the National Art Festival was to showcase locally initiated art performances and cultural activities. This (yearly) festival later became a prelude to the state-supported Integrated Community-Building Program. While the recognition from the central government and the funding that came with the recognition were by and large welcome, doubts and concerns were gradually raised by some community activists of the Hsin Kang Foundation. Specially, they questioned the purpose of taking part in government-sponsored “community” festivals or activities as these festivals or activities were often aimed at attracting domestic or even international tourists/visitors for primarily economic reasons. As a result, much of the local time, labor, and energy was consumed but very little of it went to benefit the local population and/or local causes directly (H. Lin 2011: 387).

This critique points to two fundamental factors that shape community movements in Taiwan: the continual and active role of the state in setting community development agendas and providing funding accordingly, on the one hand, and the increasingly dominant global economic concern that weighs heavily on the minds of the government and local residents (if not necessarily advocates). These, in turn, not only impact the current state of Taiwan’s civil society but also challenge our general understanding of the concept of civil society. I will return to these issues later in this chapter.

### **The Meinung Anti-Dam/People’s Movement**

One major goal of community activism in the post-martial law era was to refocus the citizens’ concern and affection on the land they inhabit, from which a renewed collective identity and public ownership could be hoped to develop. Given the affinity between land and ecology, environmentalism or environmental protection naturally emerged to be a significant part of the discourse of many of the community movements (Lee 2007). An environmental cause also gives grassroots activists a focus for their praxis that bears immediate impact on their local communities. The Meinung Anti-Dam/People’s Movement presents a prime example of this.

Located in southern Taiwan, Meinung is a small Hakka town with an agricultural economy based on tobacco production. As such, Meinung has long had a strong and distinct cultural identity as an agrarian Hakka community. The Meinung Anti-Dam/People’s Movement began when a group of returning student activists who came home after the Wild Lily Student Movement<sup>3</sup> and redirected their activism to local environmental issues in 1990.

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<sup>3</sup> The Wild Lily Student Movement was a student protest for democracy in 1990. It constituted six days of sit-in demonstration on the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Square in Taipei, which successfully pressured then-President Lee Teng-hui to accelerate democratic

Originally, these student activists focused on the protection of endangered Blue-Winged Pitta—or “Birds of Eight Colors” (八色鳥) as they are known in Taiwan—and their compromised habitat as a way to highlight the destruction of Meinung’s natural environment. This effort quickly led to a strong critique of the Taiwan government’s detrimental developmental policy. Specifically, the planned dam construction near Meinung aimed at supplying water to the region’s growing heavy industries prompted a series of protests (Yang 2010: 107–108).

The Anti-Dam Movement started with a small circle of young intellectuals and school teachers, but it gradually developed into a broad coalition of residents and organizations. In 1994, the movement organizers officially formed the Meinung People’s Association with the aim to expand the Anti-Dam Movement through grassroots and community-based actions.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the movement was construed as a struggle for survival of the distinctive Hakka culture, and the strong Hakka identity became an important component in mobilizing the community. The cultural production of the movement was also extended to include other community-building and environmental education efforts such as surveying the overall geological and hydrological conditions of southern Taiwan, promoting knowledge about the agrarian way of life based on tobacco production, creating protest music from traditional Hakka mountain songs and musical instruments (Yang 2010: 108). A Yellow Butterfly Festival (which has become an annual event since 1995) was also created. The proposed Meinung Dam would flood 6.4 square kilometers of wide-spread forest that provides a unique habitat for Yellow Butterflies and a wide variety of wildlife species—hence the name “Yellow Butterfly Valley” (黃蝶谷). Because the dam would inundate the entire valley, protecting the valley to safeguard the wildlife habitat became another rallying point for the activists. The Yellow Butterfly Festival intended to promote the awareness for the valley thus took on a distinctively cultural flavor while imbued with ecological values (Hou 2000: 18)

From “Good mountain good water to leave future generations, good men and good women against the dam” to “Let’s sing the mountain songs,” the change in slogans also indicated the transformation of the Anti-Dam movement into a broader social, cultural and environmental movement.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it is fundamentally a youth Hakka movement,

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institutional reforms, including terminating the Period of Mobilization for the Suppression of Communist Rebellion (which gave legitimacy to Taiwan’s prolonged martial law), dissolving the National Assembly, changing the way members of the Legislative Yuan were elected, and, ultimately, realizing the direct election of the president.

<sup>4</sup> For details, see the Meinung People’s Association Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/mpa1994>).

<sup>5</sup> The slogans (in Chinese) are, respectively, “好山好水留子孫, 好男好女反水庫” and “我等就來唱山歌.”



initiated by a small number of returning college graduates but ultimately carried forward by young people both in and outside Meinung. In recent years, this youth passion found its way to a deeper and more lasting cause. Since 2000 core members of the Meinung People's Association have been engaging earnestly in the operation and curriculum development of their local Chi(shan)-Mei(nung) Community College, wherein they propagate a rural way of life rooted in the daily routine of production, labor and leisure and put in practice public discussion and participation in organic agriculture or other ecological issues pertaining to environmental sustainability (Yang 2010: 108). They emphasized the importance of grassroots democracy and local subjectivity, as ways to respond to developmental forces both from the Taiwan state and the global market. The involvement in community colleges actually indicated a next phase of civic activism not just in Meinung but also across the whole Taiwan (Ku 2005; Yang 2011).

### **Community-Building as State Directive**

Political changes that occurred during and after the 1990s gave rise to community empowerment projects, which enabled communities to be the new player between state and society. This, in turn, had an impact on further political development. Grassroots activists, however, were not the only force highlighting the centrality of “community” and “community-building” in sociopolitical transformation. Under President Lee Teng-hui's call for Taiwan as “a collective of a shared life” (*shengming gongtong ti* [生命共同體]), the Taiwan government also quickly adopted community-building as a means to forge new consensus on national identity as well as to build a new kind of citizenship in the 1990s (Chuang 2005; L. Huang 1995).<sup>6</sup>

Broadly speaking, state-sponsored community development is not a new phenomenon in Taiwan. After the promotion of the United Nations as a strategy to advance the living standard in developing countries, community development was on the Taiwan government's agenda in as early as the 1960s. Yet, at that time, community development was under the charge of the Ministry of the Interior, the main mission of which was to improve the physical environment (such as construction of roads, gutters, and community center buildings). It was about public works/infrastructure upgrading but not about prompting community coherence or consensus (Liu 2008: 316–317). The “community” in this context was defined by physical space, and community development was essentially a top-down, government-led operation.

A different government approach towards “community” began to appear in the mid-

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<sup>6</sup> Lee Teng-hui was the first Republic of China president of Taiwanese descent. His presidency, which covered the years from 1988 to 2000, played a critical role in reshaping Taiwan's state apparatus both substantially and symbolically in the post-martial law era.

1990s, when the Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA; now the Ministry of Culture) championed an Integrated Community-Building Program. Enacted in 1994, the Integrated Community-Building Program was a state-sponsored community development project that urged local governments to incorporate grassroots initiatives into their public policy and channeled funds directly to support locally instigated cultural activities (Lü 2002). Similar to grassroots initiatives, an immediate goal of the Integrated Community-Building Program was to look for local characters in local history. This place-grounded identity was then expected to form the basis of a collective consciousness, which would enable community residents to work together towards common goals. In the words of Chen Chi-nan, a Yale-trained anthropologist and the architect of the Integrated Community-Building Program who later served as the CCA Minister,

Community empowerment represents a shift of thinking mode. Starting from making a new person to making a new society and a new country, it is a quiet revolution. Community empowerment emphasizes the spirit of participation of citizens... let the communities take the lead and propose their future by showing concern for their local environment, and then the provision from government budgets will follow.<sup>7</sup>

The CCA soon launched four anchor projects under the umbrella Integrated Community-Building Program—“Building Public Spaces for Performance and Exhibition,” “Preserving and Renovating Traditional Cultural Spaces,” “Building Local Museums,” and “Developing Community Cultural Activities”—and the central government of Taiwan budgeted 12.6 billion New Taiwan Dollars (about US\$382 million) for the planning and implementation of these initiatives (Huang and Hsu 2011: 136). At this stage, the emphasis of the Integrated Community-Building Program was placed on “indigenization” or “rediscovering local histories,” from which various forms of government-funded community activism or community-based projects flourished (Lü 2002; Tseng 2013). Community became a place where the innovative top-down (state) and bottom-up (society) forces encountered each other (Huang and Hsu 2011: 136). Quickly, however, the CCA took its cue from the Machizukuri (community-building) Movement in Japan and added “Revitalizing Local Cultural Industries” to the Integrated Community-Building agenda. This was partly propelled by the government’s need for a focus point to rally for community building especially in the countryside. The Machizukuri Movement, which is frequently applied for

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<sup>7</sup> The original texts came from Chen Chi-nan (1999) “Talking about the Sustainability of Taiwan from the Community Empowerment,” in *The Handbook of Good Neighbors* (Taiwan, Tainan: Rural–Urban Foundation). The translation is from Huang and Hsu (2011: 135).

rural economic revitalization by inspiring/mobilizing local people to participate in value-added craft productions, innovative cultural industries and tourism, seemed to provide an ideal model to emulate as rural areas in Taiwan are deeply affected by similar forces of economic globalization and liberalization (Huang and Hsu 2011: 136–137). As a result, economic outputs generated by community cultures became a major concern of government-sponsored community projects (C. Wang et al. 2011). The revival of local historical-cultural heritage was no longer merely for self-esteem but for upgrading the place; it was turned into a venue of money making. Politically, however, it was also expected that such a community-based economy would revitalize the solidarity and reciprocity among local populations with shared concerns—hence the advance of civic engagement in public and communal affairs (Huang and Hsu 2011: 140–141).

A full prescription of community empowerment as the remedy for local economies—and, vice versa, local economic revitalization as an approach to community empowerment—did not happen until central Taiwan was hit by a major earthquake on September 21, 1999, which claimed nearly three thousand lives and took down tens of thousand houses. As a part of the government’s disaster relief effort, the CCA soon incorporated the reconstruction work into the Integrated Community-Building Program, and engaged a large number of professionals—including architects, planners, social workers and community organizers—for a wide range of services. These professionals introduced new practices such as ecotourism and organic farming into some of the rural communities hard hit by the earthquake, which were subsequently emulated by other cities and townships (Huang and Hsu 2011: 137).<sup>8</sup> The tragic event of the earthquake hence also became an occasion to present—and test—the strength of community organizing in Taiwan. Among these post-earthquake reconstruction endeavors, the Tau-Mi Ecological Community, the first of its kind in Taiwan, is considered to be one of the most successful and now serves as a model example of community development.

### **The (Re)construction of the Tau-Mi Ecological Community**

The experience of the Tau-Mi Ecological Community, Taiwanese anthropologist Shaw-wu Jung (2012: 35) suggests, is “the result of the people making sense of their

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<sup>8</sup> Once again, the CCA learned from the Japanese experience of engaging NGOs in the reconstruction after the Hanshin earthquake. The fact that a Paper Church designed by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, which once stood in the Hanshin Earthquake Reconstruction Area, now stands in Tao-mi attests to the close ties between Japanese and Taiwanese community activists and professionals (Huang and Hsu 2011: 138). For details, see the New Homeland Foundation website (<http://www.homeland.org.tw>).

subjectivities as political agents as well as recipients of the government's privileges [particularly in terms of funding], a result of at once a historical-cultural growth and a rational-ethical creation." This characterization, I would argue, does not limit to post-earthquake community reconstruction but depicts Taiwan's community movement in relation to the state.

Today's Tau-mi is famous for its fresh air and rich natural environment. However, this has not always been the case. Before the 9-21 earthquake in 1999 destroyed most of its farmlands, Tau-mi was an agricultural village in decline and it was losing its population to urban areas with a more promising job market. An unintended consequence of this economic and demographic marginality was that the village had come to be surrounded by a vast span of undeveloped wetland which functions as a repository of diverse ecological resources (Jung 2016: 516). A study conducted by the nearby Endemic Species Research Center, a government-affiliated research facility, reported that Tau-mi has 19 of the roughly 29 amphibian species recorded on Taiwan. It is also home to seven kinds of dragonfly and several protected reptiles. This rich biodiversity inspired community activists from the New Homeland Foundation, a nationally renowned organization for its efforts to preserve and promote local cultures that was enlisted to assist the reconstruction effort, to develop the idea of community-based ecotourism. The New Homeland activists were excited about the prospect. For them, community-based ecotourism provided a viable economic strategy for which every local person was a stakeholder while at the same time it would create a new public virtue of environmental sustainability and a new vision for the village to be the custodian of a biodiverse ecosystem. Ecotourism also fits the global discourse on climate change that has taken a strong hold in Taiwan, in which "eco" everything is a new fashion in the popular culture (Jung 2016: 517). As the post-industrial urbanization created a strong market for domestic tourism, rural villages turned orchards and farms into places where city residents could go and spend some leisure time doing bird (or small, wildlife) watching, picking fruits and vegetables, or picnicking (Jung 2016: 519). Ecotourism seemed to present an ideal solution to everybody in the Tau-mi reconstruction.

To put the idea of ecotourism in practice, a village self-organizing association was established with the help of the New Homeland Foundation. This association was to give the community as a whole more control over the development and management of its ecosystem, as the community would share most of the profits obtained from tourism (Jung 2016: 517). Training classes were given to interested villagers to broaden their knowledge about local flora and fauna. These training sessions were not only to heighten the residents' awareness about their unique natural environment but, more crucially, to prepare them to become certified local guides for eco-tours in the village (New Homeland Foundation 2004: 17). Since 1999, Tau-mi has been undergoing major changes to transform itself into an eco- and tourist-friendly space. Low-impact living, water treatment plants, permaculture, and

ecological buildings were introduced. Environmentally harmful betel-nut cultivation was abandoned, and in its place came cedar trees. Local agricultural production has been attuned to tourism and educational purposes. The wetlands are now reserved for producing and maintaining a stock of frogs and fireflies—the trademarks of Tau-mi as an eco-village (Jung 2016: 517–518). All of these transformations have won praises from the media and the public and attracted a considerable amount of tourists. Today, tourism and real estate are the two dominant industries in the village, whose hills are now occupied by many Western-style bed-and-breakfast hotels originally started by local villagers but increasingly bought out or established by outside owners and investors.

### **Civil Society and Taiwan's State-Society Dynamics**

The new identity of Tau-mi as a place rich of cultural and natural resources has also changed local residents' notion about their own village. Even though the government (through the Integrated Community-Building Program funding) continues to play a strong role in Tau-mi's reconstruction effort, ecotourism indeed provides a vehicle for local civic organizing and participation. People are genuinely engaged in village affairs, and frequently voice their opinions at the village association's meetings—something unthinkable merely a decade ago. The Tau-mi example, therefore, raises a fundamental question about state-society relationship in the practice of civil society. It sheds light on the fact that civil society is not necessarily constituted against the state but, rather, a product of historical conditions embedded in the ever-changing socio-political dynamics of a particularly locality.

Revealed in the case of Tau-mi is the impact of the decades-long authoritarian legacy on the trajectory of civil society in Taiwan as a newly democratized society. The authoritarian state of Taiwan was far reaching into many aspects of local society, and it maintained its ruling legitimacy through intricate webs of social networks (Mattlin 2011). Local politicians/factions were co-opted by the state with extensive local patronage arrangements. Subsidy upon subsidy was given to local communities as a means to ensure their support of—or compliance with—the government. This history of state-society relationship has a profound impact on the nature of political subjectivity specific to civil society. Immediately, the expansive control of the authoritarian state has made it hard for any post-martial law civic organizing to be entirely independent from the state. The government continues to hold much power over local, community, or non-profit associations through laws and regulations (Ku 2012: 25–43). Consequently, while post-authoritarian citizenship in Taiwan has been increasingly characterized by the citizens' claims on rights, the claims often call for active involvement—if not direct intervention—of the government. The effectiveness of the state continues to be assessed by its ability and willingness to respond to the citizens' requests. The community-building in Tau-mi thus illustrates the inadequacy of

conceptualizing civil society formation as a zero-sum game between the state and society. Rather, it should be considered as a co-production between them (Ho 2012).<sup>9</sup>

The Tau-mi case raises an important issue vis-à-vis the market as well. Initially, local residents came together to work on the reconstruction effort based on their shared communal bonds. Over time, the emphasis on tourist consumption as a central reconstruction strategy gradually turned the community into a business under which villagers began to define their friends and neighbors as business partners. Furthermore, the forces of commodification inevitably led to greater class and economic differences, especially with the influx of outsider investments. As a result, paradoxically, the more the villagers are encouraged to participate in village affairs, the more community-building becomes entrepreneurial in nature (Jung 2016: 522).

### **Urban Community-Building as Place-Making in the Global Context**

Initially, a major distinction existed between community building in rural and urban Taiwan. In the countryside where both manufacturing industries and agriculture are in decline, local economic development is the most important goal of community empowerment. In cities, however, community organizing is often prompted by concerns over the breakdown of communities engendered by Taiwan's rapid urbanization or forces of globalization. Since the 1980s, one has observed urban social mobilization over causes such as fighting for quality supply of collective consumption, contesting against NIMBY facilities, and resisting government land acquisition under the decree of eminent domain or cleaning up illegal squatter settlements (S. Huang 2012). The root of the mobilization was not necessarily cultural in nature. However, when community-building that emphasized local cultural and identity formation grew into a widely accepted public discourse, culture also became the cause of many urban community movements—at least strategically—after the 1990s. This is in and of itself practical, given the larger sociopolitical context of Taiwan in which culture provides a highly emotional and legitimate reason for citizen struggles. Yet, along with the transformation of the basis of urban social movements came the soaring international competition between cities (Jou et al. 2011; Jou et al. 2016). Facing this new stage of global economic development, municipal administrations in Taiwan often support, cooperate, or comply with community organizing not because it is a right thing to do but because “culture” has become a valuable commodity (C. Wang 2010). City governments have sought to reutilize historical buildings or cultural assets to boost local economy and revitalize declined

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<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, whether the call for state involvement in community self-organizing is a transitional phenomenon pertaining to a newly democratized society like Taiwan or it is a lasting phenomenon remains to be seen.

neighborhoods. This often have the effect of raising local real estate prices, leading to the outcome of gentrification. Subsequently, the goal of urban community movements conflate with the government's place-making effort, to the extent that cultural production of space for economic purposes constantly takes precedence over civic concerns and citizens' public engagement (W-I. Lin 2015). This predicament is exemplified by the two cases of community organizing in Wan-hua District of Taipei City discussed below.

### **Culture, Heritage, and Citizens' Movements: Dali and Bopiliao in Wan-hua, Taipei**

The "Dali Community" (大理社區) was not an administrative designation but only came into existence as a result of civic mobilization in the late 1990s. Wan-hua District—or Monga, as it is historically known—where the Dali Community is located, was one of the earliest developed areas in Taipei in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the lack in public investment in the next century or so made Wan-hua one of the stagnated districts in Taipei in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the city center shifted to other parts of Taipei, Wan-hua no longer carried the past glamour but came to be known as a place of urban deterioration drawing populations such as gangsters, prostitutes or the homeless deemed unfavorable by the general public. When the construction plan of an electrical substation was revealed in the early 1990s, residents adjacent to the planned facility organized and protested. As a result, the plan to build an electrical substation was stopped and the "Dali Community" began to take shape. Later, Dali residents organized another major rally when the government announced that a land in the neighborhood owned by Taiwan Sugar Corporation (a semi-state enterprise) would be developed into a large nursing home through public-private partnership. Several concerns prompted the residents' resistance: the decision that would favor certain private investor was made without the input of local people; and such a decision would further exacerbate the negative image of the community as a place of an aging population and declining economy. Also, a large nursing home would bring in several hundred more occupants to an already crowded neighborhood that lacked sufficient public amenities. What the local community wanted was the government's reinvestment on public facilities that could be used by all residents on a daily basis (Hsia et al. 2002). Yet, this objection was understood as being motivated by "anti-social welfare" selfishness by the government and reported as such by the media respectively. Only when the community, with the help of urban planning academics from National Taiwan University, reshaped their focus and reframed their resistance as a struggle to preserve the historical memory of Taiwan's sugar industry, did they transcend their concerns and gain more support for their cause.

The government responded accordingly. The land of Taiwan Sugar on which the nursing home was planned was transformed into a community park. The warehouse and train platform used for sugar cane transportation on the land were designated as historical

architectures and preserved on their original site. Ultimately, the historical relations between the Dali Community, Taiwan Sugar Corporation, and Taiwan's sugar industry were articulated through the community movement and commemorated in the newly established community park (Hsia et al. 2002). This seemed to be a win-win solution, as the revitalized historical memory advocated by the progressive academics was embodied in the much-needed public space demanded by the community.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the government was planning for more. In the late 2000s, the Taipei City government allocated more money to upgrade the community park into a Tangbu Culture Park—primarily a space for Taiwanese traditional performing arts—and invited Ming Hwa Yuan Arts & Cultural Groups, a renowned Taiwanese Opera troupe, to station at the park.<sup>11</sup> This move dovetailed with the city's master plan to develop Taipei into a “creative city.” The invigorated cultural image of the neighborhood seemed to provide a perfect foundation upon which new and creative ideas could be developed—and traditional cultural elements could be reinvented—into viable cultural assets (Lin and Chiu 2014: 102). Consequently, the community park ceases to be a public space enjoyed by people in the area but becomes a space for tourism and cultural industry. Yet, the evolving nature of the community park does not seem to be opposed by local residents, as “creative city” projects a positive image of progress and economic prospects longed for by the people in this struggling neighborhood (Lin and Chiu 2014: 103).

Likewise, the Bopiliao movement—also in Wan-hua District—started as an anti-demolition protest against the municipal government's land acquisition project for the expansion of a nearby elementary school. The affected land was reserved for the school expansion by the Japanese colonial government in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, however, the city had grown substantially and private citizens had squatted on the land for both commercial and residential purposes. After gaining support from progressive academics, the Bopiliao movement turned to advocating historical preservation. Similar to the Dali community movement, the significance of Bopiliao in Taipei's early pioneering history was emphasized. Culture was used as a strategy to resist the official urban planning, turning an anti-acquisition protest into a movement for heritage production (C. Wang 2013: 677). The

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<sup>10</sup> This is by no means to indicate that there was only consensus but not conflict within the community or between the community and planning professionals. Scholarly works on community-building such as those cited in this chapter all show that the process of community-building is also a process of consensus building. This is certainly the case of the Dali community movement, in which the function of the community park has been continually debated among all parties of interest.

<sup>11</sup> For details, see the Taipei City Department of Cultural Affairs website (<http://english.culture.gov.taipei/ct.asp?xItem=42756808&ctNode=30860&mp=119002>).



community-based Association for the Promotion of Historical Preservation of Bopiliao actively engaged in historical inquiry, oral history interviews and collecting old photographs and other information to assert the historical-cultural values of the area. To avoid the impression of obstructing school expansion due to private interests, a land trust concept was also suggested, so that the local residents could be endowed with the right to engage in heritage management (Chen 2003). In the end, the Taipei City government did stop the demolition and preserve part of the historical buildings advocated by the community association. However, the city government also removed the residents-squatters according to the original plan but renamed the area “the Bopiliao Historic District.” Today, Bopiliao is becoming a major tourist attraction and it is a population destination for period film or TV production in Taipei City (L. Huang 2014)

### **“Local Currency System” as an Alternative: The Examples of Gardens City and Beitou**

Yet, community empowerment is a reflexive process (W. Wang 2011). While the increasing commodification of culture poses a challenge to the prospect of community building in urban areas (just like in the countryside), grassroots activists also work hard to find alternatives not based on the logic of capital accumulation for future community development (Hou 2013). The introduction of a “local currency system” (LCS) in some communities in metropolitan Taipei presents such an endeavor.

LCSs are local currency systems driven by local circuits of consumption, exchange, and production in primarily developed economies such as the United Kingdom (Lee et al. 2004: 595). Some Taiwanese community activists are eager advocates for LCSs because their existence provides the (admittedly limited) possibilities of local socio-economic self-determination and organization. Gardens City—a residential neighborhood in New Taipei City—is one of the communities currently practicing a local currency system. Residents in Gardens City use “Flower Currencies” to trade assorted errands such as help with children, cutting hair, cleaning water towers, repairing computers, or teaching English or Taiwanese. The Flower Currency system is not merely about economic transactions but also about local solutions to an ever-encroaching global economy. More importantly, it is about creating trust and social capital through circulating needs and services among community members, which, ultimately and hopefully, would lead to the (re)construction of social relations central to community empowerment in Gardens City (W. Wang 2011: 20–21).<sup>12</sup>

Another LCS example is the Time Bank shared among various community organizations in Beitou District of Taipei City. Similar to the “Flower Currency” system, the Time Bank is a mechanism through which services or objects are exchanged based on the

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<sup>12</sup> For details, see the Gardens City Facebook page (<https://zh-tw.facebook.com/gardenscity>).

principle of reciprocity—and social networks and capital can be created—among members in the community. In Beitou, however, the Time Bank is not the first attempt towards community building but the latest step of a decades-long process of community empowerment. Beitou, like Wan-hua, is an old district of Taipei with a long and prominent history. It has been a popular hot springs resort area since the Japanese colonial period in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Starting with a series of historical preservation movement in 1995, grassroots activists have been working nonstop towards creating a vibrant community movement in Beitou. Through their effort, the Beitou Hot Springs Public Bath in danger of being demolished was successfully preserved in 1998. This was a significant accomplishment of community organizing, not simply because the Public Bath was an important symbol of public life in historic Beitou. The continuous operation of such a public amenity offers citizens a budget place to enjoy Beitou's famed hot springs amid the pricy hotels and resorts in this rapidly gentrifying area. The small streams and ditches around the public bath also provide a natural gathering place when people sit down to dip their feet and chat. Step by step, active residents in Beitou formed a Peitou [Beitou] Cultural Foundation, drafted a Beitou Community Charter, engaged in public policy planning and deliberations, founded a Beitou Community College, established a Beitou Public Assembly Hall, organized "Beitology" panel discussions, and held Citizens' Forums for Community Empowerment.<sup>13</sup> The Time Bank is the most recent endeavor, for which the Beitou Cultural Foundation is raising funds and trying to join forces with community groups elsewhere to create a Taiwanese Alliance of Time Banks (W. Wang 2011: 21–22).

## Conclusion

After a decade of intense street confrontations, social movements in the form of protests and demonstrations started to ease in Taiwan in the early 1990s. This does not suggest the demise of civil society, however. Rather, it indicates a new phase of civic activism as many social movement activists began to devote themselves to community organizing. Social forces did not vanish but have been transformed. Community involvement has become a process for building a vibrant civil society and, in turn, the ideal that embodies civil society to which people are inspired to uphold (Jung 2012: 25). Since the lift of martial law in the late 1980s, Taiwan has experienced an exponential growth of non-profit, civic associations with diverse areas of focuses such as ecology, urban design and built environment, health and wellness, economy, education, religion, history, and culture. Many (if not all) of these associations have an active interest in public affair engagement among their memberships (Ku 2012). Furthermore, through the support of the Integrated Community-Building Program

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<sup>13</sup> For details, see the Peitou Cultural Foundation website (<http://www.ptcf.org.tw>).

and subsequent government campaigns, various social movement organizations have also transformed themselves into legitimate players in the national arena and at the policy level (Ho 2012: 411).

Community mobilization and revitalization is deepening the process of democratization in Taiwan. As shown in the examples presented above, many of the community empowerment projects aimed at fundamental transformations of Taiwan's civil society by focusing on changing cultural values and social relations at the very grassroots level. At the center of this revitalization movement is locality and local residents, who are often overlooked by institutionalized social movements that lack the capacity to incorporate these elements into their organizations (Chuang 2005: 400). However, also revealed in the examples given in this chapter is the complex relationship between the state and society. The course of community-building in Taiwan highlights the fact that the practice of civil society must confront the pervasive and ongoing changes in the framework of state-local interactions (Jung 2012: 22). Furthermore, as Taiwan is increasingly incorporated into the global economic process, economic development started as a means, ultimately, has become the goal of community-building. Community-building is, therefore, a constant struggle. It should be understood as a process but not merely a consequence.

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