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### From Cultural Building, Economic Revitalization to Local Partnership? The Changing Nature of Community Mobilization in Taiwan

Li-Ling Huang <sup>a</sup> & Jinn-yuh Hsu <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Graduate Institute of Building and Planning , National Taiwan University , Taipei, Taiwan

<sup>b</sup> Department of Geography , National Taiwan University , Taipei, Taiwan

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# From Cultural Building, Economic Revitalization to Local Partnership? The Changing Nature of Community Mobilization in Taiwan

LI-LING HUANG\* & JINN-YUH HSU\*\*

\*Graduate Institute of Building and Planning, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan;

\*\*Department of Geography, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

**ABSTRACT** *This paper analyses how community development was an important social parameter in Taiwan over the past two decades. Political changes occurred during and after the 1990s when the ‘community empowerment project’ enabled communities to be the new player between state and society. Various cultural contents and political manoeuvres were brought forth for empowering local society. However, soon economic concerns were introduced to community development. Community groups were encouraged to commoditize local history and develop local tourism or cultural industries to save the then marginalized local economy. Furthermore, the role of community changed dramatically under the rule of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which ruled between 2000 and 2008. The DPP, aiming at creating a ‘well-being society’, summoned communities to become a local agent in tasks such as delivering infrastructures, modernizing administration, care and service. The community organizations were framed by this policy, functioning as the political partner in local society. Since this turn of community development was re-institutionalized by the professionals who served as mediators between community and state, this paper ends by reiterating good and bad consequences of such expert tending of governmental affairs.*

## Introduction

A number of community researchers argue that community development can be seen as an alternative against the dominance of the neoliberal market-led development in a globalized world. Such an alternative is based on principles of participative democracy, civic republicanism, and sustainable development (Powell & Geoghegan, 2005). Similarly, more researchers of local economic development recognize that voluntary and community organizations (of the third sector) provide a web of social networks and create paid and unpaid jobs that benefit the overall development of the community and allow a better quality of life for residents. These advantages together should be helpful in generating and maintaining local social capital (Putnam *et al.*, 1993; Lukkarinen, 2005). In a way, there seems to be a

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*Correspondence Address:* Jinn-yuh Hsu, Department of Geography, National Taiwan University, 1 Roosevelt Road, Section 4, Taipei 106, Taiwan. Email: jinnyuh@ntu.edu.tw

consensus among the most advanced countries supposing that community development points to ways to political participation, social cohesion, and economic prosperity.

Yet, such a process of state restructuring may imply a different lesson in a different context of state–society transformation, such as the authoritarian developmental state in East Asia. For example, the regime of authoritarian clientelism, which centralizes political control in the hands of the KMT (Kuomintang) state and allows local elites to share interests at the local level while being subsidized by central government in Taiwan before the 1990s (Wu, 1987), provides a rather different lesson. The Martial Law enforced in 1947, which lasted for half a century, limited people’s freedom of speech, rights of association, and political protests. Then, many of the social associations were mass organizations with close connections to the party state. Thus, it was hardly possible to imagine the emergence of autonomous community organizations, not to mention grass-roots community movements at that time. By the mid-1980s, however, strict control was hard to maintain by the party state. After the birth of the first oppositional party in 1986 and the lift of Martial Law in 1987, a strong wave of public participation was rendered possible. According to Hsiao (1997), from the late 1980s to the early 1990s 19 types of social movements emerged in Taiwan, pushing for the great political transformation, from the consumer movement, labour movement, student movement, and feminist movement to the aboriginal people’s movement. As political control was gradually loosened, various social dynamics could unfold. This explains why the number of autonomous non-government organizations (NGOs) increased significantly from 734 to 7796 between 1987 and 2007 (Ministry of the Interior, 2010). Riding on the wave of democratization, community became a newly empowered unit for the state–society to manage. The model of community development started to shift.

This paper will explore a number of intriguing issues. How did the meanings of community change in the contrasting social contexts of intertwined domestic state policies and global neoliberal forces? What impacts, in terms of socio-spatial relationships, did community development bring forth in the divergent stages of political democratization and economic liberalization? In attempting to answer these questions, we have conducted the research with a special consideration in mind. It has become debatable to evaluate the impact of the community movement on the transformation of state–society relations simply through positive and optimistic perspectives, because the tangentially opposed discourses that prevail in the development literature see community development either as an augmented democratic unit or as an oblique ruling mechanism (cf. DeFilippis *et al.*, 2006, 2009). To cope with this double jeopardy, a case study of the community movement within the transformation of the developmental state will render possible an empirical diagnosis and a theoretical dialogue.

The following section will review theories of community development, state regulation, and economic development, and will construct an analytic framework to examine the development of the community movement within the democratic transition in Taiwan. The chronological review will provide a nuanced evaluation of the role and meaning of community projects in divergent contexts of political economy. The concluding remarks will reflect on good and bad consequences of experts’ participation in Taiwan’s communities today.

### **Theoretical Review: Community Development and State Regulation**

Community is a term with strong cultural connotations, and it refers also to the arena that allows for people’s local practices. The early sociologist Tönnies identifies a contrast

between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society or civil society). According to him, 'society' is featured by its division of labour and institutions, if not organized by individuals out of self-interest. A society as so defined demonstrates formal, abstract, and instrumental relationships. By contrast, 'community' is based on the individual's loyalty to the collective, therefore representing a more direct, significant, and total relationship of association (Tönnies, 2001). However, in examining the cultural roles of communities through history, Raymond Williams tailors Tönnies' definition and points out the double meaning of 'community' as people of a district and of different social groups with common interests. He also argues that community has a connotation of immediacy and locality, especially when considering the context of larger and more complex industrial societies. Thus, community is often chosen to be a word for experiments in an alternative kind of group-living (Williams, 1976). Related to this, Castells (1983) identifies community mobilization as collective actions pursuing the use value instead of the exchange value of places. To him, the aspiration of people to form communities is well connected to the prevalent identity issues of today. But communities may unfold variably in the conventional, antagonistic, and transformative forms (Castells, 1996). Similarly, David Harvey, while commenting on people's attachment to places in a global era, warns that their local identities tend to be reinforced by a language of aesthetics and leave out the radical politics of place. More often than not, people's loyalty to social classes and political actions is replaced by a loyalty to places. In certain situations, identity politics of place become part of a nation-building movement, such as the Basque separatist movement in Spain (Harvey, 1989).

The role of community has become even more complicated in recent decades. One of the reasons for this turn of events is the social and cultural impacts brought forth by globalization – the major force behind economic re-organization – and by neoliberalization – the hegemonic policy formulation (Shragge & Tøye, 2006). Backed by the financial and information economy, neoliberal globalization presents a transnational force, challenging the conventional power of the nation-state. In addition, it prompts a general transformation of governance in dimensions covering networks of production, environment management, employment patterns, welfare regime, and cultural affairs (Held *et al.*, 1999; Peck, 2001).

Two dimensions of state transformation are identified as vertical authority shifts between different levels of government and as horizontal authority transfers between state and non-state domains (Brenner, 2004). On the one hand, the growing social need for decentralization of power and political participation pushes governance at the local and national levels to go through a process of regulation rescaling. On the other hand, the transformation from 'government to governance' indicates a move from forms of regulation in which the state is the most important player in designing, financing, and delivering policies towards that of arrangements in which the state increasingly shares these functions with non-state actors (Jessop, 2002). In the meantime, cities and communities are argued to be the strategic sites to investigate multi-level governance, as the politics of devolution and partnership become significantly critical in neoliberal political economies (Tickell & Peck, 2002).

Such twin movements of state restructuring bring forth, according to different schools of scholars, two types of role for the community to play. One group of scholars considers community to be the critical site for practicing direct democracy, or the long-time spirit of local autonomy, and therefore the community will be strengthened by the devolution process. In this light, the locally organized civil society is supposed to improve the

quality and effectiveness of decision-making and resource allocation. Such a society is an ideal agent in fostering institutional democratization and political accountability (Nygren, 2005). The other group of scholars includes a number of neo-communitarian theorists, such as Putnam *et al.* (1993) and Woolcock (1998), who seek to connect 'the economic' with 'the social' in new ways and produce a new economic role for communities to play, assigning them the task to revitalize the local economy. Social capital implies bringing economic and social resources together, and it promises gains from embedding economic activities within a historically grown culture of trust (Portes, 1998). Policy-makers are getting more and more aware of the new social economy; hence, they formulate policies to enhance social cohesion and to reduce the barrier to competitiveness. Instead of being irrelevant to interlocal competition, communities are taken as the basic unit of social inclusion and economic development (Amin *et al.*, 2002; Mayer, 2003). In addition to its conventional part as ideological apparatus and political organization, communities, with their social network in mobilizing growth potentials, play a pivotal role in the governing of a new social economy, according to the so-called 'neo-communitarian' arguments.

Finally, the community plays an ambivalent role in the changing form of governmentality in the state transformation process. State restructuring also implies an ideological shift: the state will no longer be the primary social provider, as the market and the community are to share responsibility. Most of the community-based policies today aspire to address community development through 'bottom-up' rather than more traditional, 'top-down' approaches. These policies are led by the guidelines that communities themselves have the best knowledge of their own social service needs, and that they could readily determine those needs if they had the resources to do so (Larner, 2005). Rather than playing a passive recipient of state welfare, communities become an active subject in initiating new forms of service delivery, usually through empowerment. In some cases, the community will 'de-responsibilize' the state and become part of a shadow state (Lake & Newman, 2002). Under the neoliberal regime, community is often taken as a form of partnership between the government and voluntary sectors. In other words, the community scale becomes part of the neoliberal governance mechanism that comprises a broader configuration of the state and the key element in running a civil society. Jessop (2002) sees the rise of the community's joint partnership with the state, which came into being when engaging in building communal infrastructures, as an example of a flanking compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of the market mechanism. It is not necessary for this partnership to represent a new form of social governance based on trust and collaboration, yet it does shed light on the notion that community is the pivotal government tool for the political project of neoliberalization (Larner, 2005).

As more community organizations become incorporated into the system of governance, the tasks and work of the community sectors are too complex and too time-consuming for voluntarism. By implication, it is the power of professional expertise to take control away from the wider community of organizations. As professionalization proceeds, a growing number of community-based 'partners', many of whom started out as grass-roots activists, are formally trained, enter degree programmes, or choose to acquire specialized knowledge and skills in more structured and noted institutions. These professionals became what Larner and Craig (2005) called 'strategic brokers' who are grant writers and advocates of the community organization. Professionalization contributes to demobilization and, gradually, results in passivity in which people from the communities become more

like 'clients' rather than citizens (Shragge, 2003). It is unclear whether these subjects of professionalism should be regarded as positive liberal subjects who are active in mobilizing democratic strategies or perhaps, in a more compromised light, as 'partners' of the community movement.

As the role change of community incurred by state restructuring is sensitive to the dynamics of the Anglo-American neoliberal regimes, it remains unclear how it will impact on the communities in the East Asian context, where developmental states engage in both different and similar trajectories of transformation. In contrast to the welfare model of market economies, which offsets the poverty of the 'losers' with the wealth accumulated by the 'winners' through social security transfers, the economy of the developmental state embeds this redistribution of resources within its own fundamental institutions (Kwon, 2005; Underhill & Zhang, 2005). To some extent, the priority of economic development sacrifices the level of social demand and leads to a lack of social infrastructure and unemployment issuance in the East Asian developmental state. As a result, while the cities and communities under a welfare state regime play the role of social providers, those in Taiwan, which is an example of a developmental states, never have had the luxury of welfare redistribution, not to mention the mass of rural-urban immigrants who have hardly constituted meaningful 'communities' in the urban areas.

Moreover, a highly centralized authoritarian regime is a model political system for the East Asian developmental state in terms of coordinating the process of economic development (Winckler, 1984; Pempel, 1999). Like many other Third World countries, the KMT state, a ruling regime transplanted from the mainland and an 'overdeveloped' state machinery, was built to extract, coerce, and penetrate civil society. When engaging in community management, instead of building alliances with civil groups in local societies, the KMT state relied on local factions, which often represented a collection of local gentry's individual interests and politics. In this sense, communities become part of the nerve endings of local factions that encroach on community projects such as road and bridge construction. A regime of authoritarian clientelism was established to centralize control in the hands of the KMT state, and allowed local elites to share interests at the community level with budget allocation of the central government (Wu, 1987). It was such an undemocratic state-led regime that faced the challenges in the wave of economic liberalization and political democratization in the 1980s – a direct consequence of which was that community development became omnipresent in the process of state restructuring. The rise of a populist regime, in the late 1980s, aggravated further the political struggle at the local and community levels in East Asia, such as in Taiwan and Korea.

It was during these transitional junctures that communities transformed to become economic bases. Positive implications of the transformation, including revitalizing the local economy, facilitating social inclusion, and so forth, turned the community into a performing site. As more attention was paid to community issues, more professionalized community organizations emerged. A new form of partnership emerged, so to speak, alongside the rise in community mobilization.

The above paragraph shows that a series of changes has arisen in the wake of the process of community transformation: adjustment, coordination, and feedback mechanism. As raised by Weiss (2003), the role of 'feedback mechanism' offers a major insight into why institutions adjust or persist in the face of pressures for change. One type of feedback mechanism is the 'power-distribution effect', which underlines the idea that institutions are not so much neutral coordinating machines but rather the structures that are biased

and partial towards particular patterns of power distribution in society. In other words, the state, among other institutions, is the arena of the political struggle of confronting power blocs, and it is constantly under the sway of new rounds of power struggle. Domestic politics will be a key feedback mechanism in shaping the incorporation of interests at various scales, from local to global. Weiss's theory is very illuminating, especially in the context of the transformation of East Asian developmental states, where the democratization process has been taking place and authoritarian regimes have been replaced by populist ones since the late 1980s (Hsu, 2009). Hence, the transformation of the developmental state and the related spatial restructuring, such as community development, also constitutes a contested and indeterminate process.

Our study of the community movements in Taiwan illustrates the power dynamics and role evolution of community development in the transition of the authoritarian developmental state. Rather than arguing that the experiences of community development in the western neoliberal political economies are irrelevant to their counterparts in East Asia, this paper aims to embed the dynamics of community change in diverse state transformations within path-dependent social contexts.

Taking cues from the perspectives above, the paper would like to explore the changing meanings of communities in Taiwan in the past two decades. As the national state revamps itself continuously at the junctures of political transition and economic crisis, it calls for a new type of community to serve as an interface convenient for the government's regulation of society. This causes the rise of community movements, which does need a close examination. Among other things, the institutional changes represented by the implementation of cultural policies, which encourage the shaping of community identities and subsidize the activities of community organizations, are the concerns of this study. In the following section, a brief history of the early community policy in Taiwan will be reviewed to illustrate the passive role of a community under the authoritarian developmentalist regime. The next section will present a more detailed analysis of the policies of the Council of Cultural Affairs, a formerly marginal ministerial agency in central government, which strengthened itself, in the 1990s, by its strong policy on mobilizing communities. Along with the changing contexts of social change, three stages of a new mode of governance initiated by the Council of Cultural Affairs can be identified. This parallelism demonstrates the intertwined relationships of state transformation, economic liberalization, and ideological struggle in the community movements. A theoretical dialogue with the lessons and issues of community development will conclude this paper.

### **Prologue: The Embryo of Community Development in Taiwan before the Late 1980s**

The community development policy was initiated in the early 1960s. By receiving both expert assistance and aid from the United Nations Development Programme, a series of policies were enforced to enhance the infrastructure, public health, and social security at the community level (Mo, 2004). Community boards were encouraged by central government as the representative bodies of people to manage local affairs. By 1983, administrative units of community covered the territories where more than one-half of the national population lived (Hsu, 2004).

But these community organizations were far from being autonomous grass-roots movements in modern terms. Politically, they were loyal to the KMT regime, which retreated



from the mainland after being defeated by the Chinese Communist Party and secured local support through an authoritarian developmental model in Taiwan. The community offices were also the channels for mobilizing political support for the ruling KMT regime in local elections.

Economically, the community development policy often facilitated the state to mobilize the labour power from the local society. For example, the community organizations often helped to mobilize grass-roots or to recruit volunteers for building local infrastructures. It was estimated that from the late 1960s to early 1980s, the inputs from the government and the local volunteers in local infrastructure investments were at a ratio of about six to four (Fang, 1986). The community development policy also helped government to promote rural industrialization. The most famous one was the project of 'Living Rooms as Factories'. By absorbing the labour of housewives and children into piece work at home, communities were turned into assembly lines (Hsu, 1985).

Culturally and socially, the communities functioned mostly as a part of the ideological apparatus of the state. To counter against the Cultural Revolution in the mainland China, the KMT government claimed that Taiwan was a bastion of real Chinese culture. Through community offices, the government launched a series of campaigns to promote family values, community education, and Chinese culture, which followed the teachings of the National Father, Dr Sun Yat-sen. Consequently, community played a role of monitoring and stabilizing local societies.

The scheme of community development as mentioned above involved a few professionals and experts. Being mostly social workers of welfare and experts of public health, their influences were more technical than political. Above the community level, the local society was dominated by factions of traditional local head persons and elites. The party state facilitated, if not colluded with, the local factions based on patron-client relationships. They monopolized local resources through local business, such as transportation, construction, or land developments (Wu, 1987). To an extent, the non-transparency of urban planning often excluded public participation and monitoring, leaving room for local factions to monitor land use as well as procure profits from regional constructions and development. This presents, actually, the unique governing model of the developmental and authoritarian Taiwanese state: central government was ruled by the party state (which was controlled by immigrants from mainland China), while local society was ruled by Taiwan-born people (Wu, 1987).

In brief, by the late 1980s, community in Taiwan was fostered by the top-down state to consolidate the domination of political power and to intensify control of the ideological regime from before the 1980s. However, state-society relationships were never stable and required constant renewal. By the 1980s, the authoritarian developmental model employed by the KMT state started to see the cleavage. Economically, the Keynesian mode of economic development, ushered in by strong public investments and national enterprises, seemed to encounter difficulties with declining domestic investments. More and more political dissidents challenged the authoritarian state. A 'confidence crisis' stated to emerge from within the general public towards the KMT party state (Wang, 1996). Meanwhile, the state's cultural hegemony also faced serious challenges.

In the 1970s, an island-wide cultural awareness was at sway, which gave focus to people and land through the fledging new genres of music, literature, dance, painting, and other cultural forms (Council for Cultural Affairs [CAA], 1998). A politically radical assertion of Taiwanese identity further surfaced when the oppositional political party was born,

claiming the subjectivity of Taiwanese culture(s) in the mid-1980s. A burgeoning middle class, fostered by rapid economic growth and the free air of advanced education in western countries, started to question the oppressive politics and imposed identity of the authoritarian state (Wang, 1996). In the meantime, many local environmental protests began to attack the developmental model and to challenge the authority of the centralized state.

### Reconstructing Communities (1987–2008)

#### *Nation-building and the Rise of Local Society (1987–1996)*

The establishment of the oppositional party, the Democratic Progress Party (DPP), in 1986 and the lift of martial law by the KMT government in 1987 marked a big step towards democratization in Taiwan. From then on, political competition between the two parties has caused a sea change in state–society relationships in the late 1980s. Political gatherings and protests were legalized. The forming of new civic associations and communities by people at their will was now rendered possible. Consequently, a number of associations proliferated afterwards. It was also a time for the rise of public intellectuals. Besides using the media to criticize the authoritarian state and mobilize public awareness, many of them were involved in general social movements against the authoritarian state. In this milieu, communities were given more fertile soil to thrive than before. Many environmental scholars, young idealists, and well-educated technicians founded environmental groups to inspect the industrial pollution in their hometown (Ho, 2006). In addition, hundreds of vernacular, historical and geographical associations were set up by community activists to investigate local history with a shared commitment to constructing a Taiwanese identity distinct from the official one. Embedded in political transformation, community has become a new arena for pursuing social change.

During these moments of awakening, the strongman, President Chiang Ching-kuo, died in 1988. In answer to the external challenge from the DPP and to confront the internal power-struggle of the mainlanders within the KMT party, the new President Lee Deng-hui, the successor of Chiang, launched an ‘indigenization (*ben-tu-hua*, 本土化)’ strategy to collaborate with the politicians from the local factions to form a political majority.

Lee was the first Taiwanese President – that is, born on the island rather than in mainland China; hence, his administration played a critical role in reshaping the state apparatus, both substantially and symbolically. During his reign, the Assembly and the Congress forced general elections, during which the local Taiwanese elites eventually replaced most of the old elites born in mainland China. This restructuring move solved the long-time disputes over the legitimacy of representatives on the island. However, the reform also has its dark side. It indicated the rise of a new power bloc formed by KMT officers with rising local capitalists inside the national assembly, the worst aspect of which was the conspiratorial power in handling national sources such as the state enterprises (Chen, 1995; Wang, 1996).

Paradoxically, former President Lee’s approach also encouraged the cultural awareness of the local. He emphasized the autonomy of the local society and the history, geography, and culture of Taiwan distinct from China (Lou, 2004). Lee’s administration played a strong role in consolidating the cumulative social sentiments of a new national identity in the late 1980s and early 1990s. To echo Lee’s remarks that ‘It is ridiculous that our text books only address what happened in China yet ignored Taiwanese history per se’,

many moves were taken to redress partiality. In response to Lee's urge that 'We should let our pupils know the roots of their culture' (1995: 31), the Ministry of Education enforced a policy on revamping the text books of history and geography, in order to address Taiwan's vernacular history.

Mindful of the distinctive cultural factors, or the 'destiny of the Taiwanese people', as he claimed, Lee was determinate in promoting the solidarity of the Taiwanese people or, to put it more accurately, the birth of a new Taiwanese nation (Lee, 1995). He started a political discourse on behalf of four major ethnic groups; that is, mainlanders, Hoklo, Hakka, and aboriginal people. Covering the majority of Taiwan's population, these four ethnic groups should be, according to Lee, organized as a community sharing the same destiny.<sup>1</sup> Communities thus became a bastion for rebuilding new identities and reorganizing resources. This new state–society relationship articulated itself through the community discourse revamped by the CCA from the 1990s into the new millennium.

The CCA was established by the national government in 1982 to provide subsidies and awards for cultural workers and artists. Its establishment marked, on the one hand, a period shifting from orthodox Chinese culture to more diversified types of cultural representation and indicated, on the other hand, the emergence of a market of art and culture supported by the rising middle class who had increased consumption power due to the economic development (Huang, 1995). Cultural policies, cultural performances and exhibitions, and cultural preservation are the three areas mainly covered by the CCA (2010). Despite being a ministry level of agency, the CCA administration and budget were relatively marginal within the development-oriented policies of national government. But in 2003, when Chen Chi-Nan took the post of deputy chief of the CCA, the concept of 'indigenization' was introduced into cultural policies, and the administration of the CCA shifted dramatically to be community and locally oriented.

Chen, a Yale-trained anthropologist who came back to Taiwan in the 1970s, was renowned for his theory of the 'indigenization' of Taiwan immigrants from China (Chen, 1975). Sensing the power of grass-roots and the need for the state to change its mode of governance, he gradually developed a discourse on new citizenship through community empowerment projects. As he stated on many occasions:

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. (Chen, 1999: 128; authors' translation and emphases added)

To win public support, President Lee used the communities as a metaphor a few times to explain the content of a new national identity in his public speeches. He deliberately used the double meaning that the word 'community' signifies as, separately, groups of people living in a district and people with common interest forming a society of their own (Williams, 1976), in order to procure support from both natures of the populace. The awareness and passion for Taiwan's unique history and culture were stressed particularly so that the sovereignty of Taiwan or its distinctive independence from China became a priority. It was also a gesture from the KMT state to solicit political support from the new social groups and to counter political competition from the DPP. This was a time

when the political parties were competing strongly for local support, as the oppositional party was ruling more and more cities and counties after local elections. As the controlling power of local factions met with challenges, a better agenda to address the problem of local development was demanded. The term community thus caught the imagination of the grass-roots in Taiwanese society at that time. Most importantly, the CCA followed the social ethos to shift its budgets from subsidizing art workers to community organizers and local historians. By proposing new measures to build a partnership with local communities, a CCA policy to ordinate itself to be the mediator of social mobilization came to fill the gap between the state and local societies in the post-authoritarian era.

To increase participation in place-making and to enhance the quality of local environments, the CCA soon initiated four anchor projects, including 'Building Public Spaces for Performance and Exhibition', 'Preserving and Renovating Traditional Cultural Spaces', 'Building Local Museums', and 'Developing Community Cultural Activities'. With President Lee's approbation, the national government budgeted 12.6 billion New Taiwanese dollars (about US\$382 million) for the CCA for planning and constructing above items from 1994 to 2000 (Huang *et al.*, 2001).

One feature distinguishes cultural governance at this stage from the early one. When holding art and cultural activities, the old pattern the CCA used was to bring artists or craftsmen from the local areas to the big cities to present their local cultures. Big cities, especially Taipei, were the centre, but the subjectivity of each locality has been stressed since the mid-1990s. Large numbers of experts, planners, and government officials were dispatched to the rural areas to work with local administrators and residents. And the proposals were required to be developed through a participatory process with local people to reflect local demands. This policy approach has two meanings. For one, it helped the local to catch up with historical preservation or cultural infrastructures, which were often ignored by the developmental state. On the other hand, the CCA's policy accelerated public mobilization and bypassed the local factions.

During these institutional changes, the CCA worked closely with the cultural centres in counties and townships, which originally were marginal institutions at the local level with very limited budget and staff. Through years of institutional renovation and development of human resources, the CCA gradually formed its social and administrative networks for community empowerment beyond the original bureaucratic system of community development.

This stage features indigenization or 'rediscovering the local society'; from this emerged various forms of community activism, many of which developed into feasible projects echoing the CCA's top-down initiatives. During the milieu of political competition, cultural awareness, and democratization against the authoritarian state, community became a place where the innovative top-down and bottom-up forces met.

### *Economic Revitalization and Community Empowerment*

As President Lee was re-elected and reinforced his power in 1996, the mission of community projects for political campaigning lost its urgency. Thus, the discourse of community was fine-tuned gradually to strengthen the development of local economies, particularly those in rural areas, which were threatened by the forces of globalization and liberalization (Hsu, 2009). Consequently, in 1998 the CCA added as a new task the item of 'revitalizing local cultural industries'. The concept of 'cultural industry' proposed

by the CCA was defined as 'an industry based on creativity and uniqueness with its roots in local tradition and characteristics or the originality of local craftsmanship. And it emphasizes the living cultures and values of the locality' (CCA, 1998: 5).

Chen (1998) clearly argued that 'social life and economic development could work together and need each other in community projects'. By providing budgets and expertise to the local, the CCA facilitated 100 communities to develop and market local products. Purposefully, the Japanese model of revitalizing the rural economy, 'one village, one product', was followed, and the know-how about management and design for commercial streets was introduced. The economic premise prevailed, therefore, in the community projects. Yet, the prescription of community empowerment as the remedy for local economies did not come without an unexpectedly massive disaster in 1999.

On 21 September 1999, central Taiwan was hit by an earthquake. Nearly 3000 people died and many communities needed to be reconstructed. Large numbers of NGOs and volunteers immediately came to participate in the disaster relief job. Aiming to integrate the development of economy, care, and culture, the CCA soon acted to incorporate the reconstruction work as one major dimension of the Community Empowerment Project, involving professionals, including architects, planners, organizers, and social workers, for a variety of services. These professionals introduced new practices such as eco-tourism and organic farming in some rural communities in central Taiwan, which soon spread to other parts of the island (Huang, 1999).

Among others, the most important agent at the time would be the Society of Community Empowerment (SCE), an official organ established in 1996. Dr Lee Yuan-cher, a Nobel Prize winning scholar of Chemistry, the then Director of Academia Sinica and the key consultant of President Lee Deng-Hui, was recommended by the professionals to serve as the President of the SCE. The SCE soon became the major partner working closely with the CCA in terms of training government staff and community organizers.

The SCE also built extensive connections with scholars abroad. The intriguing example was that the CCA, through the introduction of experts from the SCE, relied heavily on the experience of the Machizukuri (community-building) Movement in Japan as a reference for Community Empowerment Projects. In Japan, the Machizukuri Movement rose as a trend of local mobilization after the strong anti-pollution movement in the 1960s. In rural areas, Machizukuri is frequently applied for promoting economic transformation, against the advent of post-industrial society. In Japan, this movement pushed innovative local people to participate in, if not inspire them, to organize value-added craft industries, cultural industries, and tourism (Sorensen & Funck, 2007).

In addition to the contexts of social development shared between Japan and Taiwan, the fact that Taiwan had been Japan's colony at one point also explained the long-term interaction among the intellectuals of the two societies. Back in the colonial days, Japan set up a few universities in Taiwan and, in the twenty-first century, it still serves as a major destination country for Taiwanese overseas students. In the area of community-building in Taiwan, many scholars or experts thus gained degrees supervised by either the colonial Japanese or present-day Japan.

The Japanese experience of engaging NGOs in the reconstruction after the Hanshin earthquake also has exemplary effects on the CCA for establishing the link between Community Empowerment Projects and the SCE professional groups in the post-921 earthquake reconstructions in Taiwan. While running the Community Empowerment Project, the CCA closely consulted the Japanese scholars and community organizers, inviting

them to Taiwan for sharing experience or conducting training courses. So the influence of Japanese experience, endorsed by the SCE, was highly visible, especially in the CCA's translation of Japanese institutional design into its own. Another well-noted model story was the 'Tao-Mi ecological community', which had been seriously hurt in the earthquake but was reconstructed with the support from the CCA and community professionals. The fact that a Paper Church, designed by the Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, which once stood in the Hanshin Earthquake Reconstruction Area now stands in Tao-Mi tells of the strong connections between Japanese and Taiwanese community activists and professionals. And after two decades of economic growth owing to its booming tourism, Tao-Mi now serves as a successful model of community development.

On the other hand, from the late 1980s to 2001, the Small and Medium Enterprise Administration, a department within the Ministry of Economic Affairs, shifted its subsidizing approach from sectors of merchandise manufacturing and agricultural processing into cultural industries and tourism. This investment of government resources indicates that the community empowerment approach of the CCA had crossed the boundary of government affairs and influenced the Ministry of Economic Affairs, an administrative level with the richest sources and decision-making powers. It was evident that the previously mobilized cultural communities now became a new interface in terms of rescuing the declining rural economies against the challenges of globalization. Cultural industry and tourism were the new focuses of community-building.

### **Institutionalization and Professionalization: Community Engagement as Legitimizing Forces (2002–2008)**

The DPP won the Presidential elections by a marginal majority in 2000. This bleak triumph drove the DPP to reach out for communities to break political control of the KMT at the local level. For the DPP government to cope with the next Presidential election in 2008, a new policy framework called 'Project for Challenge 2008' was compiled in 2002 by the Executive Yuan, a ministry at the highest level of the Taiwanese government. And within this project, a sub-project called 'New Homeland Plan' was drafted by Chen Chi-nan, who was formerly the deputy Chief of CCA under the KMT government but who had become the Chief of CCA under the DPP government. This project targeted communities as the bases of 'autonomous citizen participation', with the professional support from experts and financial support from the government (Wu, 2004). The whole project lasted from 2002 to 2007. Although the New Homeland Plan was drafted by the CCA, the policies it covered already expended into other ministry-level agencies in central government, including the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Economics, Council of Agriculture, Council for Hakka Affairs, and Council for Indigenous Peoples. More than 4.1 billion New Taiwanese dollars were invested in the New Homeland Plan just in 2003; yet, in terms of budgets, the sum for the CCA was almost the smallest amongst the agencies (Executive Yuan, 2003). This policy change indicates that community has gone beyond different ministries and political parties to respond to national policy, if not to constitute a new dimension for every governmental consideration.

As well as through the cultural economy approach mentioned above, a well-being society was proposed further by the government in the new agenda of community partnerships. Several goals were specified for this. As the Ministry of the Interior pointed out, the plan was to join communities and government together to launch, first, the community care

systems 'Consumer-Oriented' and 'Aging in Place', second, the self-reliant care system for remote areas (Executive Yuan 2003: 263) and, third, to 'develop care labour from the local society' (Executive Yuan 2003: 265).

For the then newly established agencies like the Council for Hakka Affairs (set up in 2001) and the Council for Indigenous Peoples (set up in 1996), the New Homeland Plan aimed at building social and cultural infrastructures for ethnic groups mostly residing in agricultural, poor, and remote areas in order to boost their tourism. From 2004 to 2007, more than 410 million New Taiwanese dollars (about US\$13 million) were, accordingly, invested by the government in the Hakka villages and aboriginal tribes.

Besides befriending the newly emerging community groups such as the local history study groups and community organizations of environment and conservation, this policy also looked for collaboration with well-established institutions such as farmers' associations, irrigation associations, 4-H clubs as well as the fishermen's association, all of which had been conventional local organizations and mass organizations. They had been playing as KMT's political turfs since the community development era in the 1960s (Executive Yuan, 2003). But in the age of institutionalization, community networks or groups were requested to form official entities in order to obtain grants under state regulation. The red tape has created a situation for established local organizations to compete for available resources, if not to become obstacles for alternative community activism thenceforth.

One key institutional arrangement was the implementation of the 'Community Planning System'. It was initiated by the Taipei City government in 1999 to recruit professionals such as planners, architects, and even community organizers into the process of collaborative planning for neighbourhood design. Hence, the tasks of community planners included establishing a community studio for contact with local residents, providing consultant services for communities to facilitate the Neighborhood Plan, and distributing planning information to residents. In accordance with this policy, local government provided honour awards and consultancy fees to professionals and community organizers to create a collaborative framework and to transform the antagonistic relationship between the state and society. Although minor conflicts still occurred between government and the communities from time to time, this new approach was functioning well in confronting the outspoken communities.

As a result, the community planning system was adopted nationwide, and almost every county enforced it by 2003. Later, this system was incorporated into the 'Project for Challenge 2008', with budget funding and administrative support. In hindsight, this turn of events was not that positive considering its controversial effects. On the one hand, the community planning system did open up an institutional opportunity for the compassionate professionals to work with communities and induce social innovation. On the other hand, the massive scale of policy and funding also promulgated large groups of opportunist-experts who saw community building as good business. They created the Standard Operation Process to cruise communities in search of partners and solicit their proposals. This manoeuvre caused community to become an arena of combating progressive and regressive forces.

In 2005, the community-oriented scheme of the New Homeland Plan was further expanded into the 'Six Star Community Health Project', which integrated 62 tasks across 13 ministry agencies. The goal of the Six Star Project was to achieve a more comprehensive 'community empowerment movement', covering the fields of industrial

development, community care and welfare, community security, humanity education, ecology and environment protection, and the local landscape. All of them were meant together to make 'healthy communities'. By 2006, the Six Stars Project had collected 10.5 billion New Taiwanese dollars (about US\$0.32 billion), and the budget has increased continuously in the following years. This grand project incorporated further the fields of public health, social security, and environment to become the affairs of government–community partnerships. A special, official committee was set up to integrate these communal affairs. To this stage, community has turned out to be a pivot concept in government policies, in particular for creating the 'Well-being Society' (Executive Yuan, 2007).

However, there were people who deemed them to be 'vote-buying' policies (Lin, 2007). In fact, many of the community projects allocated budgets in the name of constructing community infrastructures (such as community museum, cultural centre, community library, etc.), holding cultural and social festivals, and compiling local histories. As many infrastructures were not used and left vacant in practice, their existence explained their being pork-barrel constructions. More often than not, these construction plans were intervened either by the local factions of the old or by newly formed clientelism (Huang, 2009). Even so, community associations became potential agents for the DPP government to counterweight the KMT-controlled local factions in the local turf wars.

### **Critical Evaluation**

This research argues that the nature of community-building changed from national culture building in the late 1980s, to economic, rural revitalization by the late 1990s, and finally to state–community partnerships mediated by professionalism during the 2000s.

At first, the community was bestowed with a colour of the 'third way', in which the rise of civil society was used to paint the community movement to distinguish it from the state and society (Chen, 2004; Tseng, 2003). It was expected that the users and beneficiaries of community initiatives would be not simply welfare providers and responsible individuals, but also active political subjects who might have a voice in their often disempowered local communities. By doing so, these political subjects could organize and become the citizens of the new nation.

Despite emphasizing the local, the appeal to citizenship of the new nation usually presupposed a uniformity in political orientation of community organizations and did not examine their diversity, histories, and traditions. As warned by Benhabib (1992), such supposed homogeneous community was prone to intolerance, exclusiveness, and even forms of racism, sexism, and xenophobia. Moreover, it was too optimistic not to see that the omnipresence of the developmental state had led to the demise of civil society. At this stage, communities also failed to see that a highly politicized (even partisan) political society was the only room to manoeuvre under the authoritarian rule of KMT regime, which penetrated local societies with clientelism. Instead of dealing with the state machinery directly, the then President Lee Tung-hui took a detour of community empowerment to strengthen his political power and legitimize his desire of a new nationhood.

An unexpected earthquake changed the image of community from being simply an ideological symbol to a dynamic agent that set off a series of economic mechanisms in which professionals played an important part. The direct consequence of this transformation was



that economic outputs generated by community cultures became a major concern. The meaning of community heritage was no longer just for self-esteem but for upgrading the place; that is, regional singularity was turned to be the vantage point for earning money. However, there were other bonuses. Politically, such a community-based economy revitalized the solidarity and reciprocity among locales with shared problems. Through demonstration projects that meant to communicate their common needs, these communities developed and felt, indeed, the value of mutuality.

At face value, community initiatives of this nature work against the legacy of state-driven or market-based cultures, let alone how these initiatives fought, also, against the local intervention of context-blind local fractions. Underneath the surface, communities fortified by these initiatives recognize the power and potential of an enlarged democracy. The more they know how democracy draws on the creative impulses of an active civil society, the more people are drilled by this unfounded energy. However, the great challenge of this romantic story is its alienation from the broader context – that is, the context of economic liberalization and political democratization. Moreover, there is the risk of summoning into communities those people who work not simply to address the issue of economic regeneration and social justice (Amin, 2005). There were reasons for such a complication to arise. In appearance, most of the towns and villages in the countryside were covered in the projects and regained growth momentum from government subsidies. In actual practice, leaving communities alone to compete for national resources will not, as Huang (1995) points out, alleviate the regional disparity. While communities in urban areas empower themselves by realizing the democratic participation and economic regeneration, others, mostly in rural areas, suffer from a failure in resource competition for a lack of social capital and political clout. As Harvey (1996) points out, a dialectics of militant particularism and universalism exists in social activism, and the question of what level of abstraction and geographical scale should be deployed always constitutes the thorny issue in evaluating community movement.

Finally, institutionalization appeared to legitimize community planners and associations, leaving them more room to manoeuvre in community projects. It stands to reason whether those truly enthusiastic about community development were granted legal status and subsidized properly to participate in the management of community affairs. Yet one thing worthy of notice is that the minorities received, eventually, due attention. Particularly, the policy that targeted socially weak groups such as the Hakka and aboriginal peoples helped distribute resources to the obsolete areas, sponsoring the expenditures of their community development. In contrast to the clientelism of the KMT regime, the DPP resorted to communitarianism, which emphasized the injustice of regional disparity and strengthened the identity of local communities. By doing so, the DPP aimed to break up the dominance of local KMT factions and replaced them with community associations.

However, the more institutionalized, the more funding these associations would need. Instead of being taken as part of flanking governmentality, which was obvious in the western neoliberal shadow state (Jessop, 2002), community associations in Taiwan needed to be cautious about the institutionalization of the participatory mechanism and to keep a critical distance from the ruling groups or state regime. As a matter of fact, there were more and more associations relying on contracted projects for their operations, which meant that the danger of partisan clients never left them. Figure 1 illustrates the changing relations among the state, community, and professional groups in the processes of democratization and liberalization.

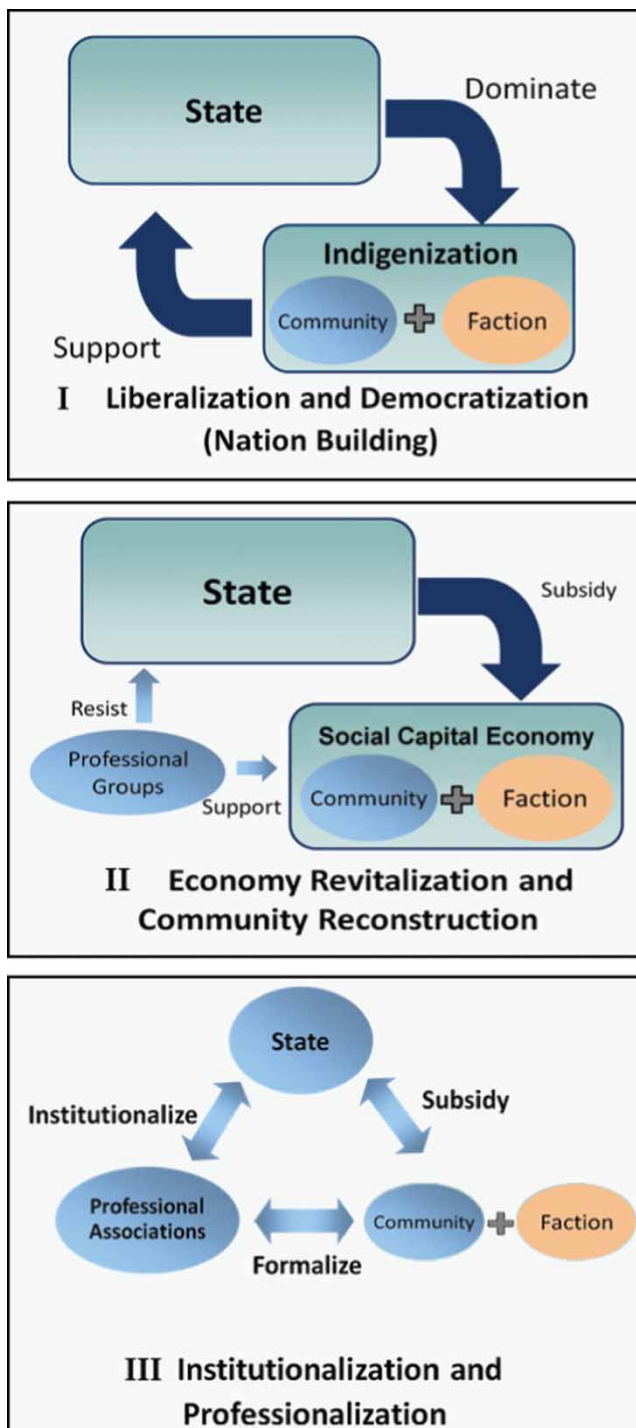


Figure 1. Changing relations among the state, community and professional groups.

## **Conclusion**

When analysing the rise of the Community Empowerment Project in Taiwan, Lu (2002) argues that this place-making movement was highly articulate – ergo, a new national–cultural discourse was shaping up during the 1980s and 1990s. According to Lu, ‘Through expansive programs for community making and historical preservation, a new form of governmentality which underscored progressive, flexibilities and pluralism has been constituted’ (2002). She further pointed out that this place-based movement has its roots in both the processes of ‘indigenization’ and ‘globalization’ taking place in Taiwan. These insights delineate well the multiple contexts in which the Community Empowerment Policy was initiated by the CCA as the representative policy for reconstructing state–society relationships.

However, as the political and economic contexts changed across the millennium, this progressive approach did not keep moving in the same direction. Particularly after the DPP government took power in the central government in 2000, the agenda for new national culture lost its radical potential as a projective identity (Castells, 1996). Instead, the challenge of economic transformation under globalization was taken by the government to be the new social agenda. Under such circumstances, the Cultural Industry was supposed to answer the demand of the revitalization of rural economy rather than to fortify the sense of Taiwan identity.

In addition, under waves of democratization, the developmental state was forced to increase, rather than dwindle, its welfare budgets, which did happen in Taiwan as well as in other East Asian states (Kwon, 2005). Among others, the community programmes demonstrate not only how full of variety the economic reproductions of citizens can be but also how well they have been taken care of, including care for the elderly, cultural activities, and even vocational training. However, it is not the retreat of the state, but the changing mode of governance that fosters the proliferation of community programmes, as shown above. In this sense, the rise of the welfare community, unlike its neoliberal counterparts in the Anglo-American systems, means a hybrid form of state intervention and liberalization.

However, as community participation becomes stronger and hegemonic in policy-making, institutional absorption in civic engagement becomes inevitable. As demonstrated above, being an anchor national policy across ministries, the 2006 Six Stars Project was institutionalized by the national government to channel the inputs of community participation. In the national plan, the role of governmental leadership in regenerating the regional economy and providing social security in a comprehensive way was given up. It was replaced by thousands of small local plans for self-salvation.

Consequently, two submerged reefs might obstruct the progressive path of community movement. On the one hand, under the state’s plan, for example, some policy issues, such as care for the elderly, required more inputs from communities to make up the financial and managerial gap. Such a downscaling scheme might hide a changing mode of governmentality that attempted to shift the responsibility from the government to individual households and local communities. Ironically, the empowerment projects that carry potential emancipative powers from the authoritarian developmental state are likely to fall into a scheme for rescuing the state from the siege of welfare responsibilities. On the other hand, a group of community planners and managers, a new type of professionals created in the process of community-building, could play the role of strategic brokers who live on

writing community proposals and negotiating with government to improve community quality (cf. Larner & Craig, 2005).

Far from devaluing the significance of strategies of social empowerment and bottom-up development, through which community-based initiatives have succeeded to build social solidarities and a politics of local care, the concern of this paper lies in the contradictory role of institutional challenger versus local partner, which will always haunt community associations in the political society. Community professionals could become, as shown in this paper, local partners of the state with which to engage in community policy. But a negative aspect looms large too: some of the community groups and professionals rely too much on government grants, and thus downgrade themselves as the flanking arm of the state. Just like a double-edged sword, the community movements could speed up democracy by dissolving the authoritarian regime, but not without the risk of playing the vassals of the liberalized state.

### Note

1. Four dominant ethnic groups make up the Taiwanese population. The majority, the *Hoklo* (*Ben-Sheng-ren*, 本省人), are referred to commonly as those Taiwanese people who claim Han Chinese ancestry from the southern part of the Fujian province of China; they occupy over 70% of Taiwan and are identified as native Taiwanese, despite the fact that a small group of aboriginal people (*Yuan-zhu-min*, 原住民, the fourth group, around 1.5%) had been living on the island much earlier than the *Hoklo*. The second largest group are the *Hakka* (*Ke-jia-ren*, 客家人), who comprise about 15–20% of the population and have descended largely from Guangdong. Many Hakka moved to lands high up in the hills or remote mountains to escape political persecution by the *Hoklo*. The third group, the mainlanders (*Wai-Sheng-Ren*, 外省人), refers to those people who migrated to Taiwan with the KMT party in 1949. They constituted 14% of the total population (Wang, 2003).

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