Building a New Society on the Base of Locality --
Transformation of social forces in Taiwan of 1990s

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Abstract

The movement of “Community Construction” succeeded the precedent social movements which emerged in the 1980s, and has been evolved into a phenomenon complex which interweaved social movements and public policies in the mid 1990s. The process of local culture movement moving to the “Community Construction” also reflects the emergence and transformation of social forces from 1980s.

Social forces bore its embryo in 1970s and emerged in 1980s. In the early 1980s, social forces were represented through the collective action of self-defense. Since mid 1980s, its have evolved into social movement with a more deliberate organization. In the 1990s, the “localization of social forces” marked a new transformation. This change was deepened by the orientation of the Community Construction policy and turned into the direction of communalization.

Community Construction movement has attracted the engagement of activists from different sectors. Different social sectors have been involved in this social engineering for constructing their homeland into a better society. Five ideal-types about a good society thus have been constructed. First, “indigenous society” hopes to reconstruct a society which cherish its local history and traditional culture. Second, “traditional civilized society” want to build a local society in which habitants live with solidarity and civility. Third, “modern civilized society” wants to elevate the cultural quality of habitant. Fourth, “civil society” emphasizes the importance of grassroots democracy and local subjectivity in order to respond to exterior forces of capitalist development. Fifth, “civic society” aims to construct communities at different geographic scales, in which people of different backgrounds can live together and integrate into a civic nation.

In summary, the localization of social forces has been formed in the 1990s. Communalization was the deepen development of localization. The common axe of these two stages is the reconstruction of the relationship between people and land. Nevertheless, while the former stage emphasized the reconstruction of local culture, the latter stage turned into the formation of community consciousness. On the stage of local movement, it employs reconstruction of local culture as a mean to social reform,
the focus was society imagination. In contrast; on the stage of Community Construction, the focus has been shifted to the community imagination by which local identity and national identity was linked. Locality became the fundamental element for defining “culture” and “community”; it’s the essential implication of “rediscovering the locality”.

*Key words: localization, social force, social movement, Community Construction, civil society, civic society*
Introduction

The movement of “Community Construction” (社區營造 shequ yingzao) succeeded the precedent social movements which emerged in 1980s, and has been evolved into a phenomenon complex which interweaved social movements and public policies in the mid of 1990s. The process of local culture movement moving to the “Community Construction” also reflects the emergence and transformation of social forces from 1980s.

Community Construction movement has attracted activists from different social sectors to get involved in this social engineering for constructing their homeland into a better society. The attraction of Community Construction comes from its capacity to integrate different issues of social reform on the base of the locality. Everyone can thus construct his own imagination of ideal society. These ideals about society afford frames of meaning and give orientations for social actors. In consequence, the Community Construction manifest multiple and different-directed meanings.

The aim of this article is to discuss the connection between the development of local community movements and Society imaginations implicated in the Community Construction. The first section will re-examine two explications about the transformation of social forces. The second section presents the “localization of social forces” in the early 1990s. An analysis about the transformation from the “localization” to the “communalization” will follow the explication. Finally, this article will place the transformation of social forces in Taiwan into the world context, and explain the historicity of the localization of social forces.

1. Emergence and Transformation of Social Forces in Taiwan

In Taiwan, since 1980s, many collective actions emerged and protested the pollution of environment. Around 1987, the year of abolition of martial law, social movement had surged with full force. This period are usually called “Ten Golden Years for Social Movements”.

According to the explication of Hsiao, the irruption of social movement was due
to the liberation of “social forces” from the domination of “political forces” and “economic forces”. In consequence, social force started to response the distortion caused by political forces and economic forces.\(^1\)

However, protest demonstrations had been weakened since the early 1990s; many social movements encountered the problem of weak mobilization. But if social forces didn’t vanish, then how were they transformed?

On this problem, Ho have explicated by “institutionalization”. He stated: “In the stage of democratization, the environment movement didn’t vanish; (...). However, environmental movements’ protests actions do not cause much tension as the precedent stage. With the moderation of protest management and the opening of procedural channel, large scale mass protests had became less than earlier. We called this change as the institutionalization of social movement, because social movement has been elevated successfully to a part of democratic daily life and has formed a solid sector of civil society.”\(^2\)

Lii and Lin made their explication by analyzing the influence of creation of organizational techniques on the domiciliation of body-in-anger. So the transformation of social forces has been manifests by two trends: organization and domiciliation.\(^3\)

Institutionalization and organizational technique have explained respectively the transformation of social forces. This article wants to further question is not the appropriation of these explications, but the capacity of these explications. In other words, what aspect of the transformation can these two perspectives help us understand?

In order to facilitate the comprehension of the capacities of analysis above, we can differentiate two ideal-types of social movement study: “social system analysis” and “historicity analysis”. Social system analysis concerns the conditions of emergence and transformation of social movement, while historicity analysis concerns the meanings of emergence and transformation of social movement. The former

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2. Ho, Ming-sho, 2000: 159.
analyzes political opportunities, mobilizing structures and cultural framings; the latter discusses historical context, social meaning and cultural character. The former concerns how opportunities, techniques and meaning enable emergence of social movements, the latter emphasizes the meaning represented by the emergence of certain social movement.

Although Ho put social movement analysis in the historical context, what he emphasizes were conditions for emergence and transformations of social movement. Lii and Lin pay more attention to the social implication of the transformation of social forces, but while they put social movement in historical context, they didn’t bring the historical context into the analysis. In consequence, their explications mark two characters.

Firstly, what they explained was the modernity transformation, not historicity transformation. Institutionalization and organization techniques development explicate the general direction of modern society development. To the extent that the political opportunities allowed, the institutionalization and the organization can be observed. However, what institutionalization and organization techniques can see, is not the new social movement emerged in historical conditions, but the transformation of a social movement in the historical process. If we want to explain the transformation of social forces, we need to pay more concern at where the new social movement emerged, how different social movements transform between them.

Secondly, institutionalization and organizational techniques are analysis made from movement-centered perspective. In the contrast, an analysis from actor-centered perspective is important as well. For social movement actors, participating different movements reflects the process of searching meaning and redefining question. Vicissitudes of social movements is also a global result of actors’ investment transitions in different aspects. By analyzing the transformation of one movement, we can comprehend the modernity transformation of social forces, but if we want to explore the historicity transformation of social forces, we should make equilibrium between the movement-centered perspective and the actor-centered perspective.

To analyze the historicity transformation of social forces in 1990s’ Taiwan, besides explications of institutionalization and of organization techniques, a more proper perspective will be needed. The perspective proposed by this article is
“localization”.

2. Localization of Social Forces

The localization of social forces is manifested firstly by the phenomenon that social movement activists have switched their principal struggle field from urban streets to their own living areas, and connect the meaning of their local endeavor to the progress of the national society.

Take the environmental protest as the first example; environmental pollution affects not only individuals, but also the geographical space in which they live. An environmental movement practiced in living place is also a local movement. Lii and Lin have argued that the change of consciousness, particularly the rise of rights consciousness which is based upon individuals’ suffering experiences, was the origin of the formation of social forces.\(^4\) We would like to ask further: from protest and demonstration to a local community’s reconstruction movement, what kind of consciousness transformation has been involved? Let us examine it with the case of Kuanyin Cultural Work Position (觀音文化工作陣, KCWP).

Kuanyin had been an important rice production zone in Taiwan. However, since early 1980s, this village has experienced a series of environmental pollution and destruction. In a collective article titled “The Genesis of Kuanyin Cultural Work Position”,\(^5\) these activists explained their motivation:

Pollution of cadmium, Itai-itai disease,\(^6\) anti-6\(^{th}\) Light Oil Craking Factory, anti-Dupont……, then illegal gathering of sand and stone, leaving the land refilled with garbage and discarded materials, moreover, dumping of the discarded soil produced by the construction work of Taipei’s rapid transportation, all these things have destroyed severely the littoral zone of


\(^5\) KCWP,〈觀音文化工作陣成立緣起〉, [http://www.kucw.org.tw/el.htm](http://www.kucw.org.tw/el.htm), webpage imprinted on 2000/09/28. This website is no longer exists nowadays. However, we can find the same idea demonstrated by similar letters. For example, Pan Chung-cheng, 1997.

\(^6\) Itai-itai disease is a disease caused by cadmium (Cd) pollution.
Kuanyin area. Within a very short period of time, Kuanyin area has acquired a notorious name nationwide. A poor village without scenery resort and architectural heritage, lacking industrial specialty, if it has been noticed by people, it is entirely because of its pollution and struggle.

(…)

On the 4th may 1993, in the face of the destroy of their homeland, several young men were irritated. So the Kuanyin Cultural Work Position was established. So the journal has been published, and cultural activities have been organized. We expected to arouse the wind and the cloud, to change people's mind, to reform Kuanyin ……

In fact, Kuanyin is an epitome of Taiwan. The disaster suffered by it is not at all “the necessary cost of pursuing prosperity”, but an inevitable vicious fruit caused by “losing the education of land ethics”. The evolution of this situation was unlike what we had expected. It simply proved that we are a group of naïve idealists.

But we will continue desperately our endeavor. It’s just because - Kuanyin is our homeland!

Lii and Lin have argued the cultural origins of social forces: “When the environment becomes the vivid and substantial Mother or the Land which bears us, a sacred and unchallengeable sense of meaning gradually comes into being.”

But according to the statement of KCWP, the element which has generated the sacred sense was not the suffering of individual body, but the suffering of the Land. When the environment is transformed into a sensible Homeland, an environmental movement is no longer a momentary action of protest, but can be transformed into a local community movement aiming at reconstructing the locality. The solidarity of people and land is the key to transform an environmental movement into a local community reconstruction movement. This solidarity is achieved through the function of the sense of “homeland”. Based upon the “homeland”, social actor is not only

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individual with the consciousness for his own rights, but also a member of community with emotions for his living place. When the focal concern shifts from the protection of individual rights to the sustainable existence of local community, individual begins to extend his temporal consciousness to the past as well as to the future, community then begins to produce memory and vision.

The shift of focal point from the environment to the homeland has an important effect: the problem of culture is considered in the agenda of movement. Let us go back to the case of KCWP. They asked: “Why Kuanyinese do not cherish the land of Kuanyin?”; then they provided their diagnosis: “Lack of knowledge about homeland and the poverty of local community’s information are the cause of indifference!” For the prescription, they proposed: “The right way is a long-term input of the effort of influencing people’s mind and transforming the culture, via information broadcasting and activities’ organization”. Cultural problem has been defined as the origin of environmental problem; cultural endeavor has been regarded as the fundamental prescription to solve the many problems of homeland.

Beside environmental problem, “culture” has also been regarded as a good way to improve the democratic practice. Su Wen-kuei, one of founders of Hobei Cultural and Historical Society (滬尾文史工作室) in 1990 has explained their motivation of establishing a local cultural organization:

Up to 1990s, we had always participated in the electoral campaign, and then we found out that many problems were not political problems, but actually cultural problems. One vote could be bought by paying 300 or 500 NT dollars, this implied not only political meaning, but it also suggested that the connotation of people’s culture was under great change. Under this situation, we felt the urge to do some cultural work.

For them, the best way to influence people is to go back to where they live.

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10 In comparison with the labor movement which emphasizes the importance of entering where people work.
Locality, being the living place of people, becomes the key point to reform the society. The progress of local culture is the elevation of people’s culture quality. Therefore, one member of Po-A-Ka Cultural Work Position said: “The era of politics in command has gone. The new social movement should be carried out in locality, so it can have roots, can really influence people, and can profoundly transform Taiwan’s society.”11

Ethnic movement witnessed the switch of localization too. Both the aboriginal movement which had emerged in 1983 and the Hakka movement which was born in 1988 had extended their program of movement by switching from the protest in the streets to the reconstruction of homeland. In doing so, the activists expect they could return to the streets with a more solid base of mass support when it’s necessary.

For ethnic movement activists, the revitalization of culture is the key to ethnic renaissance. The reason for returning to the locality is to reconnect the dispersed people/culture with the land from which they came. Taiban Sasala, one of founders of “Green Mountain” (Gao Shan Qing, 高山青), the journal which inaugurated the aboriginal movement, returned to his homeland to publish “Journal of Aboriginal” (Yuan Bao, 原報) and proposed the slogan of “Battle in Homeland” (原鄉戰鬥) and “Tribalism” (部落主義). In an article titled “Return to the departure place”, he appealed:

Standing in the position of common people of basic level, we want to question, apart from “Protest! Protest! Protest!”, where else do the elites of the aboriginal movement want to lead these thirty thousand aborigines? (…)

Since “Green Mountain”, aboriginal movement always lacked a clear orientation. It didn’t catch up with the tempo and impulse of its time, so it had degraded itself to play a role as the clown. It had neither resonance with common people nor connection with the homeland, so it has become the periphery and subordinate of Taiwan’s democratic movement. (…) So we appeal: to abandon the past urban struggle, to return entirely to the homeland, to carry out an aboriginal movement which places the tribe as the

11 Cited from Ho, Ming-sho, 2000: 145.
centre of resistance, and homeland as the departure of struggle, and put into practice those ideas suggested by “Green Mountain” published eight years ago – “Returning to the tribe”.

Only by returning to the tribe, by returning to the side of old men and children, by returning to the place of origin, by devoting to taking care of ancestor’s land, would it be the way to enrich the connotation of aboriginal movement and to elevate its level, and to detach from “voices in the wilderness”.\footnote{Taiban Sasala, 2004[1992]: 3-5.}

In these paragraphs, Taiban Sasala transformed the metaphor of “city / tribe” and “civilization / savage”. “Wildness” is not in the tribe, but in the city. The tribe is the rich land which breeds the culture; on the contrary, the city represents a wildness which drained aboriginal cultures. If the aboriginal movement in the city loses the nourishment of motherland and lacks the solidarity of its people, it can merely be “voices in the wilderness”.

In summary, the common point of all these social movements’ practice is to articulate locality, culture and people. They take the locality as the platform of movement, the culture as the approach, and the people as the target. The major dynamic of “the localization of the social force” lies in this: many social movement activists learned about the limitation of protest, then switch to use the locality as the base to reform the society. Its principal spirit is to merge the movement agenda with the locality, to keep the movement close to the life of common people, so to implant progressive ideas in daily life. On one way, it reflects the extension of social reform from institutional aspect to cultural aspect, while on the other, it reflects the shift of movement perspective from the priority of political movement to the perspective of multi-subject.

Different areas, different participants, different issues, all choose the locality as the driving force. The existing social movement activists go back to the locality to continue their projects of social reform; the “localization of the social force” has come into being.
3. From localization to communalization

Civilized Society

Besides social movements’ activists, many local intellectuals who had never engaged in social movement in 1980s also decided to engage in the reconstruction of local culture by establishing Local Cultural and Historical Society or Local Cultural Association in their homeland. They usually start their actions by investigating local history or organizing cultural artistic activities. Many of participants give their reason of engagement by a simple answer “Because I live in this place, so I wish it can be better”. In contrast, activists who had participated social movements before weave usually a linkage between their local endeavors and the whole society’s progress. Nevertheless, two imaginations about ideal society were sketched: one wants to recover the solidarity and courtesy of the traditional society, while the other wishes to ameliorate the behavior of habitants and to elevate the life quality. The former imagination prototype is a “traditional civilized society”, while the latter imagination prototype is a “modern civilized society”. The common point of these two imaginations is the amelioration of the national society by the cultural endeavors at homeland.

Civil Society

In 1990s, several local community actions appeared in Taipei. Some communities raised protests to protect the environmental quality of their living place, while others communities proceed public spaces’ reconstruction by employing the principle of habitants’ participation. There were also communities which organized communal activities, aiming to facilitate the communion between habitants. These actions demonstrated a will to form a collective subject which can dispose their own living space. There is no direct linkage between the emergences of these actions to previous experience of social movement; most activists didn’t link their actions to the

progress of whole society; for these activists, the legitimacy of their actions is for the interest of their living environment. However, due to the autonomous consciousness demonstrated in these actions, these communities’ actions have been defined as signs of the emergence of a civil society which is capable of resisting powers from the state and the market.

The analysis of Huang Li-ling, ex-general secretary of OURs (Organization of Urban Re-s), fully represents this perspective:

The wave of community autonomy which emerged in early 1990s, (...) was an action of the reconstruction of space’s usage value, an action which rewrites the orientation of “space’s exchange value” of the capitalist market and the orientation of “economic-centered” urban development of the state. Meanwhile, what manifests in the process of community mobilization is the rationalizing process of grass-root democracy; its aim is to establish the identity of modern civil society.¹⁴

In this scheme, local community is a link of the composition of an autonomous civil society which is capable of balancing the power of the state and the market. Local community resists to the deprivation of capitalist market as well as the hegemonic domination of the state.

Civic Society

The localization of social forces broaden the spectrum of social movements, and lead the direction of action from issue-oriented protest and institutional reform to culture reformation and locality reconstruction, the appeal of cultural indigenization found its ground and the wave of cultural indigenization in 1990s was so raised. The KMT government responded with a new Community Construction policy, which integrated localization and indigenization, ¹⁵ oriented the dynamics of local

¹⁴ Huang, Li-ling, 1995: 27.
movements. The localization of social forces has been deepened and evolved into the communalization. The social engineering of community construction which based upon the locality has begun.

If the common axe of the localization and the communalization is the reconstruction of the relationship between people and land, then the difference between these two stages lies in the shift of the focal point. The focal point was shifted from the “culture” to the “community”. The former stage emphasized the importance of local history and local culture, while the latter stage stressed the necessity of community conscience. The scale of “community” extends along the spatial axe. When it correspond the whole extent of national territory, “habitants” become “citizen”, “community consciousness” shift to “civic ethics”, then “local community” turn into “civic society”. The sphere of civic society overlaps the territory of the state. Through the geographical-territorial approach, local community becomes the base of civic society; civic society has already become the synonym of “civic nation”.

4. Conclusion

The localization of social forces has been formed in Taiwan in 1990s. Communalization was the deepen development of localization. The common axe of these two stages is the reconstruction of the relationship between people and land. Nevertheless, while the former stage emphasized the reconstruction of local culture, the latter stage turned into the formation of community consciousness. On the stage of local movement, reconstruction of local culture was regarded as a way for social reform; it employs reconstruction of local culture as a mean to social reform, the focus was society imagination. In contrast; on the stage of Community Construction, the focus has been shifted to the community imagination by which local identity and national identity was linked. Locality became the fundamental element for defining “culture” and “community”; it’s the essential implication of “rediscovering the locality”.

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