

Inclusion, Identity, and Environmental Justice in New Democracies

The Politics of Pollution Remediation in Taiwan

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When Howard Odum and Elisabeth Odum remarked in the 1970s that “while money moves upward, pollution moves downward,” they were describing the prevalence of environmental injustice in the United States.¹ Since the late 1970s, following such famous incidents as Love Canal and Bayou Sorrel,² environmental justice activism has emerged in the United States, connecting traditional environmental issues with a variety of civil rights concerns,³ as well as linking biological diversity with cultural and ethnic diversity concerns.⁴ Grassroots advocacy has raised political and social awareness of environmental justice, leading to legislative and executive initiatives aimed at reducing the exposure of underprivileged communities to environmental hazards.⁵ Since then, some money (for example, the Superfund) has moved downward to compensate victims and clean up environmental hazards in affected communities.

Despite increased government efforts and public awareness, environmental justice has remained an elusive goal in the United States, as many empirical studies have identified patterns in which economically and racially disadvantaged individuals and communities have remained disproportionately exposed to environmental nuisances and hazards.⁶ Depending on the circumstances, many economic, political, and institutional factors have contributed to such patterns. For example, impoverished communities may be enticed by economic opportunities that accompany environmental hazards.⁷ Local land use and zoning regulations, together with federal and state permit systems, affect the chances that toxic-releasing facilities are located near disadvantaged communities.⁸ The presence of grassroots environmental activism and socially constructed perceptions of environmental risks among residents in disadvantaged communities can also influence whether these communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards.

Given the complexity of environmental injustice in the United States and other well-established liberal democracies, students of comparative politics may wonder how similar issues play out in transitional polities. As noted by Richard Rose and Doh C. Shin, many transitional polities in the third wave of democratization have experienced what they called “democratization backwards,” in which free elections were introduced before civil society was strengthened, a tradition of rule of law was consolidated, and an

accountable administrative system was established.⁹ This experience contrasts with the long tradition of political development during the first and second waves of democratization, which allowed for the progressive inclusion of various groups and categories of people in political life.¹⁰ Although democratic institutions per se may not fundamentally alter what Charles Tilly called “categorical inequalities,” such as those between economic, racial, and gender groups, well-established democratic institutions can facilitate processes for conflict resolution, mutual adjustments among social groups, and protection of basic political and social rights.¹¹ In this context, although there is no guarantee, it is easier to search for institutional solutions to protect the basic rights of disadvantaged communities against exposures to specific environmental hazards.

A transitional polity in the third wave of democratization may adopt one of many western institutional forms, yet its minority and disadvantaged groups may continue to face greater obstacles in addressing environmental injustice issues than those in more mature democracies. In some cases, residents in disadvantaged communities may not be fully aware of their adverse circumstances and their basic political rights, and even if they have grievances, they are unfamiliar with available institutional channels to address them. After decades of authoritarian rule, it is not uncommon for the social underclass in these polities to remain submissive to public authority long after the introduction of free elections and other democratic institutions. To mobilize the socially disadvantaged to fight for their own rights, entrepreneurial leadership can potentially play a role. A critical challenge for such leadership is not only to navigate the newly created institutional channels for redressing grievances but to gain the support of the victims themselves who may be unfamiliar with their rights and less than fully aware of the injustices they are suffering.

In many transitional polities today, environmental justice issues are difficult to tackle, especially because during the former authoritarian era, public authorities tended to follow the “least resistance” logic in permitting, or in some cases encouraging, the placement of highly polluting facilities in disadvantaged communities where the residents often lacked adequate knowledge of the related risks and were less capable of rallying opposition against such facilities. As the health and other negative effects of the hazards become known, in what ways can residents in disadvantaged communities be alerted to these effects and mobilized to fight for their rights in order to mitigate those effects?

This article addresses this question in the context of a case in Taiwan, a transitional polity that exhibits many features of “democratization backwards,” in which free elections were established before other societal and institutional requisites for a fully functioning democracy were in place, and many institutions for broadening the breadth and depth of the democratic process were being built when movements against environmental injustice were unfolding.¹² In this case, residents in a disadvantaged community were initially unaware of or reluctant to acknowledge the environmental harms that had been inflicted on them. They were not mobilized until policy entrepreneurs from outside the community began to press the issue on their behalf by gaining their trust and support and by navigating various political and policy institutions, which were also undergoing democratic transformations at the same time.

The field study was conducted between early 2005 and late 2008. Several rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted with five environmental activists at both local and national levels, more than a dozen villagers including two former employees of the company responsible for the pollution, three government officials, and four scholars and specialists who were familiar with the case. Some follow-up phone interviews were conducted in 2009. Also, company and government documents relevant to the early history of the case were examined.¹³ Although we were unable to arrange interviews with high-level company executives and central government officials, the early official documents and interview data have provided the necessary information to trace the development of the entire case.

The case is theoretically significant in at least two respects. First, it illustrates the types of issues that may arise when the quest for environmental justice unfolds together with the democratization process. Second, it adds to the literature on social movements by highlighting the interactions between identity formation, interest representation, and entrepreneurial politics.

Inclusiveness, Identity, and Subrogation Social Movements

Inclusive Pluralism From a pluralist perspective, democratization helps promote environmental justice by developing inclusive institutions that can accommodate diverse interests and promote equal rights for the entire population.¹⁴ As a polity becomes more democratic, it is likely to develop a set of institutional infrastructures for disadvantaged groups to defend their rights in different policy arenas. First, legal provisions such as freedom of information and sunshine laws help reduce information asymmetries between government authorities and the public, thus enabling the disadvantaged to have better access to the policy process.¹⁵ Second, such institutional provisions as judicial review and citizen lawsuits help check power and offer multiple veto points for disadvantaged groups at multiple levels of government.¹⁶ Third, independent review commissions represented by professionals and citizens, together with other participatory channels, make the policy making process more open to minority interests and policy entrepreneurs who seek to represent them.¹⁷

Such inclusive institutional infrastructures have encouraged the rise of public interest lobbies in the United States since the 1970s.¹⁸ Referred to as “neopluralism” by Andrew McFarland,¹⁹ this new form of interest group politics has arisen in many countries, involving policy entrepreneurs advocating on behalf of others’ interests, especially those of traditionally underrepresented social groups. In addition to trying to promote the development of more inclusive institutions for diverse interests, such advocacy involves a process of identifying those who are socially marginalized. Characterized as “politics of difference,”²⁰ or “identity politics,”²¹ a key challenge for the policy entrepreneur has been to reclaim, redescribe, or transform previously stigmatized accounts of group membership among the disadvantaged.

Identity and Recognition Politics Members of underprivileged groups may not be fully aware of their disadvantaged situation; for example, females in male-dominated

societies may not be fully aware of their subordinated position.²² In some cases, underprivileged individuals notice their situation, yet they choose to reject the negative scripts and to remain different, such as cases with ethnic minorities, the disabled, or HIV carriers.²³ They may also decide to reject taking on the identity that entitles them to specific claims.²⁴ Regardless, correcting the injustice requires efforts to raise the self-identification and awareness of members of the disadvantaged group (identity politics), and efforts to fight for the recognition and legitimacy of equal rights (recognition politics).

Identity politics and recognition politics are intricately connected to each other. From the mainstream pluralist perspective, identity politics serves as the foundation for recognition politics. For instance, when the membership of a specific category grows to a critical threshold, it can begin to attract widespread social attention and external support, thus enabling it to pursue favorable policies and gain societal recognition of their differences and associated rights. What has rarely been studied is how recognition may proceed without the corresponding identity. In some circumstances, those who suffer from injustice may not be aware of the problem, or they may intentionally deny it. In this case, their interests may only be claimed via subrogation, that is, advocacy represented by outsiders.

It is not uncommon for advocacy campaigns to be led by people who are not potential beneficiaries. Many environmental movements, for example, seek to conserve natural resources, save endangered species, or preserve the ecological system on behalf of future generations or sometimes nonhuman species. The situation becomes more complicated, however, when subrogation takes place against the client's will, or *ultra vires*. To promote the recognition of a minority status, the activists may confront a situation in which the intended clients refuse to accept the identity and are hostile toward such efforts. Consequently, the activists need to fight the battle on two fronts. How, then, will such advocacy be sustained and succeed?

Subrogation Movement Although little has been written on this scenario, one can imagine that when activists fail to gain the potential clients' support, the viability of the social movement becomes problematic. First, the ability to solicit participants and contributors will be constrained because potential patrons are hesitant to support a campaign that may generate resentment rather than praise from the intended clients. Without the clients' cooperation, activists will have difficulty collecting the evidence necessary to make convincing claims.

Second, to be successful, an advocacy movement needs to attain a critical mass, which often means a coalition of existing social groups. Yet without a legitimate cause, it would be difficult for activists to form such a coalition and to put it to effective use. Among different coalition forms,²⁵ Andrew Jones and others argue that a lead organization responsible for strategic and framing decisions with the support of other organizations will be the most efficient form needed to attain a critical mass.²⁶ In the initial stages, coalition building benefits from such measures as lobbying, publicity, organizational maintenance, and framing that can produce quick results.²⁷ Most of these measures require strong leadership.²⁸ Yet strong leadership is unlikely to emerge without authorization from the intended clients.

Third, different social groups may face collective action problems among themselves. The social movement literature suggests that protest participants can be coopted by the public authority that controls sizable resources.²⁹ In a coalition, individual groups may choose to accept a deal with the authority and thus withdraw from the collective effort. This is especially the case for the lead organization, which can easily become a target of cooptation, resulting in the coalition's collapse. Without solid support from the clients, the lead organization may be more inclined to make a deal with the authority.

Given such obstacles, there is no guarantee that entrepreneurial politics on behalf of disadvantaged groups can be successful even in western democracies. In most of the third wave, newly democratized countries, with many inclusive institutions still being developed, political entrepreneurs could encounter even greater impediments in correcting long-term injustices. Nevertheless, one successful case in Taiwan demonstrates the possibility of such an endeavor in a transitional context.

The Taiwan Alkali Pollution Incident

During its initial stage of democratization in the 1980s, Taiwan went through a chaotic era when hundreds of protests and demonstrations against polluting sources emerged across the island seeking compensation for property and health damages. Subsequently, the Taiwanese government built a relatively comprehensive environmental governance system, modeled after those in western countries. By the mid-1990s, the system appeared to have helped slow down, and in some cases reverse, the rate of environmental deterioration and reduce the number of environmental disputes, which once threatened the legitimacy of the democratizing regime.³⁰ As a result of tightened emission standards, most polluting industries relocated either to Mainland China or Southeast Asia. As fish reappeared in streams, the azure returned to the sky, and endangered species resurfaced in the wild, the number of antipollution protests subsided.

Behind these apparent successes, at least one big environmental problem that remained was how to handle contaminated sites that were scattered all over the country, a legacy of the "pollution first" strategy of economic development of the past few decades. The extent of contamination of many of these sites had yet to be determined, and neither clean-up nor compensatory measures were implemented at most of them.³¹ Against this backdrop, the Taiwan Alkali pollution incident initially received little public attention when the story began to surface in the late 1990s, but it gradually became a major environmental justice case demanding various institutional responses.

Poisons under the Beautiful Landscape By the mid-1990s the Tainan Plant of Taiwan Alkali Corporation was just a piece of forgotten history. The site is located on the northwestern coast of Tainan City, with abundant historical stories around the neighborhood. Before it was put under the media spotlight again early this century, the pond, together with the nearby streams, aqueducts, and numerous aquafarms, were popular places for fishing activities. These were also sites for aquaculture and rearing

and harvesting aquatic products (such as fish, shrimp, crab, clam, and eel fry). Neither tourists nor local residents paid much attention to the scratched bulletin board that prohibited such fishing activities because of “possible” pollution. This sign was mostly considered a joke because the water was crystal clear and the creatures in the water looked so lively and tasty. Only a few epidemiologists wondered about the reasons for the vast, picturesque reed field. According to their experiences, if a huge area is dominated by one type of vegetation, it usually indicates some kind of pollution.

Some of these epidemiologists were also environmentalists who were keen on digging into the hidden story. Among them, the most active were Professor Huann-Jang Hwang and his associates at Tainan Community College. Hwang, in particular, had many years of experience exposing pollution problems and helping pollution victims.³² According to their investigation, the place had been heavily polluted by its former owner, the Taiwan Alkali Corporation. This company was originally set up by the Japanese government and became one of the few industries run by the Kuomintang government after WWII, with plants in Tainan and Kaohsiung. The plants once boasted the most profitable production lines. Good salaries and a favorable social reputation made jobs in these factories highly desirable, and the plants were welcomed by the local populace. By using mercury to electrolyze thick brine, the plant in Tainan produced barreled hydrogen, liquid alkali, liquid chlorine, and hydrochloric acid in the early years. When these businesses were no longer competitive, the plant turned to produce pentachlorophenol to be used as algacide, herbicide, and preservatives in timber storage tanks. The Tainan Plant was eventually shut down in 1979 for undisclosed reasons. In 1982 the company was integrated into the China Petrochemical Development Corporation (hereafter China Petrochemical), which was originally a state-owned enterprise and privatized in 1994. After the personnel were discharged and related documents sealed, the danger posted by the pollution was gradually forgotten.

Debunking the Inconvenient Truth Epidemiologists who monitored mercury pollution in the country were first to suspect possible pollution. Mercury is a notorious pollutant in water and soil; it can easily accumulate in the human body and damage the kidneys and central nervous system. Aware of horrifying experiences among the Japanese,³³ some epidemiologists worried about similar pollution in Taiwan. Since Taiwan did not produce mercury at all, it was easy to trace the pollution by checking the industries that imported mercury. In this case, chloro-alkali plants were the major targets. As early as 1980, a survey had indicated serious mercury pollution in the waters in this area.³⁴ The survey results were jointly announced by the heads of different environmental agencies, and official documents were also issued to the company and the Ministry of Economic Affairs to solicit necessary remedial measures.

The survey report triggered intense debates among high-level government officials. Officials from the environmental department advocated a thorough recovery agenda, while those from the economic departments insisted on sealing the news to prevent adverse economic effects. When the Institute of Water Pollution Prevention (of the Taiwan Provincial Government) requested a ten-million-NT-dollar subsidy to fix the

problem in 1982, political leaders decided to control the crisis by completely covering up the report, because the disclosure of similar pollution incidents would not only deter possible investments but would also result in unaffordable financial burdens. With the transfer of its ownership to China Petrochemical, the damage control measures proposed to the company by the environmental agency were totally abandoned, except for simple bulletin boards that were erected near the pond. The issue was not raised again until the mid-1990s when the discovery of other pollutants on the same site attracted another round of attention.

Another one of these pollutants was pentachlorophenol, the once lucrative product of the plant. In contrast to the gradual and long-term effects of mercury, pentachlorophenol is characterized by an acute toxicity that poses an instant threat to living creatures. Rain can wash it into the soil and groundwater basins, and drain it into streams and aquafarms, leading to massive deaths of aquatic creatures. Because of such dramatic effects, residents had been much more sensitive to this pollutant, and in turn the company had adopted much more aggressive recovery measures. Starting from the mid-1990s when the company went through a process of privatization, a systematic recovery plan was deployed until the early twenty-first century. By the end of the last century, this pollutant had largely been removed from all bodies of water by activated carbon adsorption and from the soil by eradication.

The most troublesome pollutant, nevertheless, has been dioxin, which has been referred to as the “poison of the century” because of its toxicity and long durability in the human body. Once absorbed, it is stored in fat, thus making it hard for it to decompose or be excreted naturally. While its exact effects on the human body are still subject to exploration, such notorious problems as cancer, miscarriages, and fetus malformation have been widely recognized. In spite of its serious consequences, dioxin pollution did not attract much popular attention until recent years. One reason was that since it was newly identified the information was not well disseminated. Moreover, since detecting this material involves an expensive process, its contamination is relatively hard to confirm.

A scholarly survey conducted in the mid-1990s indicated that the soil and mud of the waters around the site contained a high density of dioxin, as high as 1,357 times the safety threshold (1000 ng-I-TEQ/kg) for the country. Another survey found that the dioxin level in fish exceeded the WHO safety standard (4 pg-WHO-TEQ/kg) by sixty times.³⁵ These results suggested that this poisonous material had spread within the food chains and therefore should have triggered a sense of crisis among residents in the affected areas. Nevertheless, everybody was surprisingly calm about this.

Who Are the Victims? One possible reason for such apathy was that no direct evidence had been provided to prove the absorption of the pollutant by the residents. There was no blood test on dioxin consistency until 2002 when a scholar conducted a government-sponsored project regarding the health effects of a nearby garbage incineration plant. Only two samples were drawn from this area, yet the reports showed dioxin levels 2.5 times higher than the average.³⁶ This astounding result was accidentally

accessed by the environmentalists, driving them to pursue policy responses more aggressively. The environmentalists first needed to seek the residents' cooperation to consolidate the evidence on the pollutants' effects. By that time most residents still rejected the idea of having a blood test for dioxin. In fact, they vigorously refused to accept that they might have been the victims of Taiwan Alkali's polluting practices. The plant had long become a mere historical vestige that should not have played any role in their present life, especially when it only brought them extra pains.

In addition to a lack of risk awareness or relevant knowledge regarding the pollutants' danger, the residents' reluctance to accept an identity as pollution victims also resulted from various economic considerations. The community is located in the north-western edge of Tainan City; most residents in the community have low income and make a living by farming or aquafarming or as vendors around nearby temples. The abbot of the local religion center, the Temple of the Goddess of Heaven, strongly opposed the campaign because he was afraid that the pollution stories would scare away worshipers and thus reduce the revenues from their petty contributions. Shops and vendors surrounding the temple shared the same concern: no visitors, no business, and no income. Similarly, many residents had for decades relied on collecting and selling aquatic products from the ponds, streams, and aquafarms for a living. Accepting the status of a victim amounted to admitting that these products were contaminated, thus threatening their means of livelihood. Furthermore, many residents owned real estate in the area. If the pollution were publicized, the value of their properties would slump.

There were also concerns regarding changes in social relations. First, many aquatic product vendors would feel a moral obligation if the merchandise they had sold to neighbors and relatives was actually poisonous, and they would feel responsible for their illnesses in the future. The psychological burden would have been unbearable. Second, some parents would worry about the marriage opportunities of their children once suspicions regarding their health conditions became widespread. Carrying such a stigma as dioxin carriers would create a lot of trouble and inconvenience in their interactions with the rest of society.

All these concerns were further entangled with a calculation of the possible benefits from accepting the identity. If the polluter had the financial capacity to afford a sizable compensation, the local residents might be more inclined to accept the status of being a victim. By contrast, when the polluter was not even tangible, as in this case of a closed factory, there was no promise that the immediate economic loss could be offset. For these reasons, the residents remained hostile to the pollution surveys, to the investigation, to the mass media reports, and to any mobilization efforts by the environmental activists. These difficult circumstances forced the environmental activists to adopt different strategies from those of other movements.

Maverick Environmentalism A key feature of this case is the target clients' refusal to be recognized as victims, many of whom raised the rhetorical question "whose rights at all?" This directly undermined the legitimacy of the movement at the initial stage. While many activists were initially interested in getting involved in this issue, without

the authorization and cooperation of the target clients, the start-up costs became too high and the expected payoffs were uncertain. As a result, most activist groups backed off quickly. Only one group, Professor Hwang and his associates, continued working on the case, but with a low profile.

A critical step in the advocacy process for this group became how to gain from the victims the right to represent them. In addition to the aforementioned obstacles, a lack of mutual trust between the environmental groups and local residents was also a thorny issue. In the relatively short history of Taiwan's environmental movements since the early 1980s, an obvious gap emerged between the grassroots populace and movement elites. Except for a few occasions in which environmentalists adopted the same stance as NIMBY (not-in-my-back-yard) protestors regarding possible polluting sources, Taiwan's environmental movements in recent years have turned to focus on the green agenda in which ecological and resource conservation have become the main appeals.³⁷ In this new trend, environmental groups have sought to represent broadly diffused interests, such as those involving endangered species and future generations, often to the detriment of the grassroots folks whose economic well being was at stake. The two have often confronted each other, and the locals have complained that the activists have been insensitive to their real-life problems.

In this case, the local residents indeed had valid reasons to suspect the true intentions of these environmentalists. They were not quite sure why these activists, as outsiders and mostly from different social classes, would care so much about their welfare. Some suspected that these activists were carrying out some sort of conspiracy, and seeking undisclosed benefits at the expense of the local residents' misfortune. One obvious benefit for the environmentalists was that they could gain extensive media exposure, become famous, and solicit more donations. By acting as representatives of the pollution victims, the environmentalists could have gained access to or even become the trustees of the compensation funds. They could bargain for the victims' best interests, yet alternatively they could also bargain for their personal interests.

Regardless of the environmentalists' motives, if anything was to be done, it had to start with the local residents accepting their status as victims and authorizing the activists as their representatives. Nevertheless, the local residents were not sure about the activists' ability to fight for their interests; nor could they be sure whether the activists would actually be faithful to their best interests. The activists themselves were not sure how much compensation they could acquire for the victims under this extremely difficult situation. Remedial institutions were largely absent, the legal processes were complicated and lengthy, the polluter had disappeared, and the governments were dodging responsibility. To overcome these difficulties, the activists first needed to gain the victims' trust.

Among the many environmentalists, Hwang had the most success developing trusting relationships with the residents over a period of a decade. After settling in the area for career purposes, he focused on the pollution problems of the most notorious stream in the area (the Er-ren Stream).³⁸ In his efforts to monitor water quality and trace pollutant sources, he was eventually able to make friends with local fishermen, especially the

leader of the Fishing Raft Association, who often accompanied him on sample collecting trips. The common experiences of receiving life-threatening intimidations from the polluters solidified their bond.³⁹ This local and deep-rooted friendship gave Hwang a unique opportunity to connect to the relatively exclusive grassroots networks, and to build up his professional credibility.

With the help of some local residents, Professor Hwang was able to collect detailed information about the Alkali Plant, especially its historical development, production procedures, and land use arrangements. The data enabled him to predict pollution conditions and to pinpoint the most polluted spots with amazing accuracy. This ability further enabled him to bargain with the public authorities, and in turn enhanced his credibility in fighting for the local residents' interests, thus propelling him to the leading position in the advocacy movement.

To overcome the identity problem, Hwang first targeted those who were not reliant on collecting aquatic products for a living and were suffering from diseases that could be directly attributed to the toxins. They were desperate for external resources to deal with their predicament and thus would most likely be willing to back him up. Eventually he persuaded a small number of victims to face the cameras of the mass media. The media reports and subsequent public attention served to persuade other residents that they were being exposed to a very poisonous environment that needed urgent treatment. Some residents started to look around and found that many of their relatives and neighbors were suffering from diseases similar to those described by the environmentalists.⁴⁰

Some local residents began to consider the worst-case scenario more seriously and started to seek help from external resources. The aging villagers, in particular, were aware of the possibility of pollution after the repeated disclosure of test results, and thus were worried about potential illness and associated medical costs. It would thus have been very attractive to them if they could gain assistance from public funds.⁴¹ Some residents began to seek the help of environmental groups to voice their concerns. When the number of identified victims grew to a certain level, the movement's legitimacy was enhanced, its media exposure increased, and its pressure on the government substantiated. The increasing possibility of receiving external medical assistance and compensation convinced more residents to consider accepting the status of victim so as to be included as a beneficiary of potential services. The advocacy movement gradually gained irreversible momentum, with local residents firmly behind the activists seeking redresses for them.

A major target of the movement was the government, which had not only a *de jure* obligation but also the most resources to pay compensation, offer medical assistance to the victims, and clean up polluted sites. The focus in the later stages therefore shifted to the public authorities and their policies, at both the central and local levels.

Changing Political Opportunity Structures and the Policy Turn Not surprisingly, the local government had tried to cover up the pollution incidents and initially adopted a confrontational approach toward the activists. The supreme principle for the bureaucratic system was to keep the governing task under control, and thus whatever situation

beyond their control would trigger anxiety and hostility, and would be managed in a passive manner. When the environmental groups first targeted this pollution incident in 1998,⁴² a remedial policy for industrial pollution was still absent. Neither clear operational guidance nor financial resources were available for the officials in charge to solve the extremely complicated problem. The Soil and Groundwater Pollution Remediation Act was not enacted until 2000, the Implementation Rule not announced until late 2001, and the funds not appropriated until 2002.

The officials at the Environmental Protection Bureau in Tainan City were aware of the seriousness of the pollution,⁴³ but they dared not open the Pandora's Box by acknowledging it because numerous problems, including possible lawsuits, medical treatment for the victims, and cleanup projects, would ensue. All of these required strong financial support, professional knowledge, and complex administrative procedures. Fearing an impending political crisis, the local officials adopted an evasive strategy by trying to hide evidence of the pollution under a huge public stadium, hoping that the public might forget the awful incidents of the past and let bygones be bygones.

The decision to cover up was partly triggered by economic development considerations. The site was adjacent to a new industrial park (the Tainan Technology Industrial Park) that was at a critical stage of attracting investments. As the most important and advanced industrial park in the city, it was expected to be the engine of local economic development. Even the slightest hint of possible dioxin pollution would scare off most possible investors and halt its development. From the perspective of the local politicians, it was important to refute the environmentalists' arguments in order to prevent the crisis from escalating.

This strategy appeared to work initially for the local government because essentially no one admitted to being a victim at all, and no remedial or compensatory measures were demanded by the constituency. The feeble requests from environmental groups could be largely ignored. In addition to perfunctory responses to the environmentalists' suggestions, local government officials tried to offer the most aggressive groups research projects, hoping to change their attitude by granting special favors.⁴⁴ Since they were the only source of complaints, quieting them would be the most efficient way to get through the troublesome incidents.

Since 2000 the local authority was also keeping an eye on changes in the political opportunity structure.⁴⁵ Although the Remediation Act was enacted that year, it had only a symbolic effect at that time because implementation rules were absent and specific administrative procedures were still unknown, the funds needed for remedial measures had yet to be appropriated, and distributional mechanisms were only in the planning stage. Once the management committee of Taiwan's version of the "Superfund" was formally put into operation and authorized to identify the most seriously polluted sites for remediation in November 2001, a sea change in the opportunity structure occurred. To most local governments, pollution sites were now no longer mere annoyances beyond their capacity to deal with, but also opportunities for acquiring tremendous resources from central agencies. In other words, the scenario changed from a hot-potato-passing to a pork-barrel game.

Local politicians had to strike a balance between two contradictory concerns, namely, the threat of social unrest versus subsidy solicitation. As a new set of institutional rules began to take shape and subsidies from the central government became available, the concern about social unrest decreased substantially, even though the scale and complexity of the remedial issues were still intimidating. They realized that the issues had to be tackled one way or another, especially under the persistent surveillance of the environmentalists. In the meantime, local governments were also lured by the availability of financial aid. Since many polluting sites were competing for a limited amount of funding at the same time,⁴⁶ it required aggressive steps to acquire a sizable subsidy.

This latter consideration eventually pushed the local government to disclose more of the pollution information that had originally been concealed. Public officials began to improve their relationship with the environmentalists. Certain qualities of the environmentalists made them perfect partners in this case. First, professionalism and their long-term engagement in collecting related data equipped the environmental groups with an extraordinary ability to map the pollution conditions in detail. This information, in turn, was critical to the decisions regarding the allocation of the remedial funds. For example, the seriousness of the pollution was usually determined by the average consistency of the samples. While the polluted site might have covered a broad area, how to get to the right spots to collect samples largely determined the seriousness of the pollution. In this case, Professor Hwang demonstrated an incredible ability to identify contaminated spots. By means of a thorough study of the land use plan and operational details of the factory, he easily identified the most polluted spots for sampling. This made him the most valued figure in this case.

Second, the networking ability of the environmentalists in both the academic as well as social movement arenas made them valuable advocacy partners. To enhance the legitimacy of its decisions and to ease contentious environmental disputes, the central government had begun to include scholars and environmentalists in its decision-making mechanisms for many environmental policies. The same was the case in determining the remedial priority of the polluted sites. Some of the environmental groups were themselves local chapters of nationwide federations, while others had a long-term partnership with nationwide membership associations and supported each other in a wide variety of environmental issues. Connecting with these groups via local environmental activists seemed to be a reasonable strategy for soliciting more remedial funds.

Thus the Tainan city government became more active in tackling this case in view of the changes in the broader political environment. Through such measures as designating the place as a pollution control site, replacing the officers in charge, and inviting local environmentalists into the decision-making circle, the mayor organized a local advocacy coalition to seek available resources from the central government. While the detailed clean-up plan is still being debated, a substantial amount of funds has been allocated to this case. Based on a court ruling in 2007, the company will put aside NT\$1.65 billion for clean up in the next fifteen years. The Ministry of Economic Affairs will establish a NT\$1.3 billion fund for local residents' living expenses and

healthcare. Any resident in the three wards may receive a total of NT\$2,418 per month in living and healthcare subsidies. Those with serious illnesses will receive NT\$15,000 per month as medical subsidies. Those who relied on aquafarming for a living will be paid NT\$80,000 per year for discontinuing their business.⁴⁷

Interest Conflicts in Identity Politics

At the early stages of this campaign, the environmental activists encountered resistance from the government on the one hand and hostility from the residents on the other. To survive such a difficult situation, they were faced with two main tasks—to establish the socially recognized truth of the pollution and the suffering by the victims, and to advocate a remedial policy for them. There were, however, two structural obstacles. First, the residents themselves faced a social dilemma in that short-term individual interests clashed with collective ones. If the majority of local residents accepted that they were pollution victims, the community as a whole would have a greater chance of receiving remedial benefits from the government. Nevertheless, whoever chose to do so first would potentially face great personal costs if it turned out that not many other residents were willing to do the same. Second, even though some individuals might be willing to do so for whatever reasons, they would confront another social dilemma. Since the pollution in question could not be isolated as a household incident, one individual's decision to accept such an identity would inevitably impose costs on his or her neighbors. The presence of a social network in such a situation would therefore serve to prevent the individual from engaging in such “whistle-blowing” actions.

To overcome these dilemmas, strong leadership was needed to coordinate individual actions.⁴⁸ A strong leader would provide a vision that promised compensation for the initial costs involved in accepting the identity of a victim. The leader could secure cooperation from more residents by collecting evidence, launching media campaigns, and soliciting alliances with local elites. By showing signs of a policy change, a bandwagon effect might ensue, leading to a sustainable social movement.⁴⁹

Allies or Competitors?

It is possible that environmental groups sharing similar ideas can work closely together to shape policy decisions and agendas. It would, however, be naïve to assume that these groups will always collaborate well with one another. Each environmental group has its own missions and priorities, and each must attract a steady stream of patrons and donations to maintain its daily operations. In this regard, environmental groups are often competitors. This is especially the case for groups that are critical of government policies because they usually stay away from government funding and rely on private donations for survival. Although business enterprises could be an alternative source of funding, many environmental groups prefer to rely on small petty contributions from

the growing green bourgeoisie. To gain support from a diffused group of potential donors, environmental groups need credibility and media exposure. An environmental group would seek to gain credit for being the leader of a high-profile movement as a way to attract widespread social support. In this way, environmental groups can easily become competitors with each other. To avoid conflicts, each environmental group would try to find a niche for itself and avoid direct conflicts with other groups. A long-term tacit agreement may exist between potentially competing groups regarding specializations on issues or policy domains, different spheres of influence, and division of labor.

Further, each environmental group needs to be sensitive and show respect to other environmental groups in regard to their long-term territories.⁵⁰ When different groups work together for whatever reasons, a coalition can be maintained only if the invited participants strictly limit their roles as secondary helpers so that future credits can be distributed accordingly. In the same vein, local environmental groups with strong local connections usually play the leading role, while many nationwide, membership-based organizations may join the campaign, but only as secondary supporters. Rarely is there any other locally based group in the same coalition because the dominant group will feel threatened by the possible intrusion of grassroots networks and claims of movement credit. Tacit agreements and informal rules of this sort tend to develop over time.

How Did the Lead Organization Emerge?

Another notable issue concerns coordination problems in a highly decentralized system. Environmental groups often must compete with each other for the leadership position in a specific movement. To claim or defend its dominant position, the leading group must successfully manage a network with several strings of relationships, including those with clients, patrons, partners, the mass media, and even the opposition camp. Whoever was able to manage the multiple relationships effectively would be eligible to perform such leading functions as making framing and strategic decisions.⁵¹

The core issue, however, is the relationship with the victims. In this regard, the key is trustworthiness. To maintain trust with the local residents, the environmentalist sometimes had to sacrifice other valuable objectives. For example, when the victims failed to get the promised compensation from the government, they threatened to cause a mass panic by selling the polluted aquatic products in the market. Although this strategy apparently violated basic ethical principles, Professor Hwang decided to support it in order to maintain a trusting relationship with them.

The environmental group must also manage other components of the network of relationships. One tricky issue concerned the environmentalists' relationship with the responsible party, China Petrochemical, the successor of Taiwan Alkali. One might have expected the corporation to be hostile toward the environmentalists whose actions would inflict substantial costs upon them. However, this company actually developed a collaborative relationship with the lead environmental group, Professor Hwang and

his associates. The company was apparently liable for the remedial costs, which were estimated to be as high as NT\$4 billion. Yet the company executive believed that Taiwan Alkali was actually owned by the government when the pollutants were emitted, and therefore the costs should have been shared with the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA). Since China Petrochemical was under the supervision of MOEA, its executives had no intention of confronting MOEA openly on the issue. Instead, they made available to Professor Hwang a number of earlier documents. By having access to these documents, Professor Hwang enjoyed an information advantage, which made him a formidable opponent of any unfavorable governmental decisions. In return, Professor Hwang shifted the target of accusation from China Petrochemical to the Ministry of Economic Affairs, which he also believed to be more capable of compensating the victims.

Another key string of relationships was with the local government. While the local government was supposed to be responsible for handling this troublesome incident, the scale and complexity of the case had been far beyond its capacity, especially in terms of finance, professional knowledge, and administrative capacities. Not unexpectedly, the local government initially adopted an evasive attitude toward the whole issue. Nevertheless, when outside funds became available and central government agencies got involved, local politicians sought to ally themselves with the activists to fight for the residents in the new pork-barrel game. This transition was a critical turn for this case and might not be applicable to other cases. Yet, when it actually came, the advocacy group was ready to seize the opportunity. The joint efforts between the local government and environmental groups made this incident a well-known case in Taiwan, resulting in substantial resources made available for compensating the victims.

Conclusion

This article illustrates how environmental justice issues in a newly democratized polity may be addressed when members of disadvantaged groups are not fully cognizant of their plight and their rights for fair treatment. Without a well-developed set of inclusive institutional infrastructures in place to facilitate the representation of underprivileged interests in the policy system, residents in disadvantaged communities may refuse to accept the status of a pollution victim. Accepting such an identity involves not only such psychological issues as a sense of guilt or an assignment of blame but also realistic cost-benefit calculations. To overcome these obstacles, a credible promise to the residents for tangible benefits is needed to offset the expected costs. Yet it is difficult to develop a credible promise without an effective leader to coordinate various collective efforts. A leader emerges when a specific civic group can connect with the local social networks to earn trust and apply professional knowledge to influence government decisions. A social movement can successfully impact policy decisions only if challenges in the initial phase of identity politics can be overcome.

In its advocacy efforts, the lead organization needs to manage several strings of relationships simultaneously. In addition to those with the targeted clients, the most

critical relationships are those with other civic groups and governmental agencies. These strings of relationships need to reinforce each other in order to produce tangible results. In the end, advocacy efforts need to produce formal institutional changes in order to produce a sustainable legacy. In a transitional polity like Taiwan, many of these institutional changes may be triggered by factors other than the movement itself. Regardless of the sources of changes, leaders of the movement must seize emerging structural opportunities to advance their cause.

This article contributes to the growing environmental justice literature by highlighting how policy entrepreneurship, together with the collective action dynamics of identity and recognition politics, may shape policy responses to environmental justice issues. It also contributes to the literature on democratization by illustrating how changing political opportunity structures associated with “democratization backwards” affect public interest advocacy. Specifically, when more inclusive democratic institutions are introduced, “neopluralism” will become more prominent in many transitional polities. Various contingent elements associated with institutional transformations, however, may impose extra challenges to public interest advocacy in new democracies. How these issues play out in various transitional contexts merits further research.

NOTES

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1. Howard T. Odum and Elisabeth C. Odum, *Energy Basis for Man and Nature* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

2. The Love Canal episode in 1978 is widely considered to be the triggering event for environmental justice movements. See Giovanna D. Chiro, “Environmental Justice from the Grassroots: Reflections on History, Gender, and Expertise,” in Daniel Faber, ed., *The Struggle for Ecological Democracy: Environmental Justice Movements in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 104–36. Regarding the Bayou Sorrel incident, see J. Timmons Roberts and Melissa M. Toffolon-Weiss, *Chronicles from the Environmental Justice Frontline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3. Faber, *Struggle for Ecological Democracy*.

4. Ralph C. Bryant, *International Coordination of National Stabilization Policies* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1995).

5. Andrew Szasz, *Ecopopulism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Evan J. Ringquist, “Environmental Justice,” in Robert F. Durant, Daniel J. Fiorino, and Rosemary O’Leary, eds., *Environmental Governance Reconsidered: Challenges, Choices, and Opportunities* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 255–87.

6. Lisa Schweitzer and Max Stephenson, “Right Answers, Wrong Questions: Environmental Justice as Urban Research,” *Urban Studies*, 44 (February 2007), 319–50.

7. See Robert D. Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement,” in Bullard, ed., *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1993), 15–39.

8. Lisa Schweitzer and Sangmin Kim, “Environmental Justice and Collaborative Governance: Building a Socio-Spatial Perspective for Facility Siting,” *International Review of Public Administration*, 13, Special Issue (March 2009), 45–59.

9. Richard Rose and Doh Chull Shin, “Democratization Backwards: The Problem of Third-Wave Democracies,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 31 (March 2001), 331–54.

10. John S. Dryzek, “Political Inclusion and the Dynamics of Democratization,” *American Political Science Review*, 90 (September 1996), 475.

11. Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
12. For example, see Shui-Yan Tang and Ching-Ping Tang, "Democratization and Environmental Politics in Taiwan," *Asian Survey*, 57 (March 1997), 281–94.
13. All interviews were conducted with full disclosure of the research purpose and consent from the interviewees.
14. Daniel Faber and Deborah McCarthy, "Neo-Liberalism, Globalization, and the Struggle for Ecological Democracy: Linking Sustainability and Environmental Justice," in Julian Agyeman, Robert Bullard, and Robert Evans, eds., *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (London: Earthscan Books Publications Limited).
15. James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 129–30.
16. Frederic C. Lane, *Profits from Power: Readings in Protection Rent and Violence-Controlling Enterprises* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979).
17. For an example of how environmental impact assessment has helped environmental groups to challenge governmental decisions, see Ching-Ping Tang, "Democratizing Urban Politics and Civic Environmentalism in Taiwan," *The China Quarterly*, 176 (December 2003), 1029–51.
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19. Andrew S. McFarland, *Neopluralism: The Evolution of Political Process Theory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).
20. Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).
21. Satya P. Mohanty, Paula M. L. Moya, Linda M. Alcoff, and Michael R. Hames-García, *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Nancy Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition and Participation," in Larry Ray and Andrew Sayer, eds., *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn* (London: Sage, 1999), 7–87.
22. For examples on third world women, see Chandra T. Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); for an economic analysis of the issue, see George A. Akerlof and Rachel E. Kranton, "Economics and Identity," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 115 (August 2000), 715–53.
23. For disabilities, see Tom Shakespeare, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader: Social Science Perspectives* (London: Cassell Academic, 1998).
24. For examples on homosexual groups, see Elizabeth A. Armstrong, "From Struggle to Settlement: The Crystallization of a Field of Lesbian/Gay Organizations in San Francisco, 1969–1973," in Gerald Davis, Doug McAdam, W. Richard Scott, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Social Movements and Organization Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 161–87.
25. Gerald Maxwell and Pamela E. Oliver, *The Critical Mass in Collective Action: A Micro-Social Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
26. A "network invocation structure" in Andrew W. Jones, Richard N. Hutchinson, Nella Van Dyke, Leslie Gates, and Michele Companion, "Coalition Form and Mobilization Effectiveness in Local Social Movements," *Sociological Spectrum*, 21 (April 2001), 207–31.
27. Maxwell and Oliver refer to this as a "decelerative production function" to indicate those measures with diminishing returns. *Critical Mass*.
28. Jones, Hutchinson, Dyke, Gates, and Companion, "Coalition Form."
29. Dryzek, "Political Inclusion."
30. Ching-Ping Tang and Shui-Yan Tang, "Taiwan," in Helmut Weidner and Martin Jänicke, eds., *Capacity Building in National Environmental Policy: A Comparative Study of 17 Countries* (Berlin, Germany: Springer-Verlag, 2002).
31. One example is the organic solvents pollution by Radio Corporation of America in Taoyuan, which is believed to have resulted in life-threatening diseases (such as cancer) for more than one thousand former employees. Since the site was proven to be seriously polluted in the 1980s and declared a permanently polluted site in 2002, the victims have not yet worked out any remedial deal and are still faced with international legal struggles as they seek compensation.
32. Although Professor Hwang teaches at Chung Hwa University of Medical Technology, the social movements he advocated have been mostly based in Tainan Community College, which has stronger ties to local networks. In our interview with Hwang (February 1, 2005), he indicated that rather than focusing on academic achievement only, he found himself more confident as a practitioner in environmental protection, and defined the meaning of his life as helping victims of pollution.
33. The famous Minamata Disease in the mid-1950s attracted worldwide attention regarding the dangers of methylmercury pollution. Chisso Co. Ltd. located in Kumamoto Prefecture poured methylmercury into the

nearby watercourse (Minamate Bay) and caused unknown diseases in that neighborhood as well as nationwide panic. More than 2,000 people were reported to have been affected by this disease and about 1,000 patients died from it. For details, see Masazumi Harada, "Minamata Disease: Methylmercury Poisoning in Japan Caused by Environmental Pollution," *Critical Reviews in Toxicology*, 25 (January 1995), 1–24.

34. Shih Zong Lu, Song Lin Zhang, Zeng Zong Hong, Jian Miao Luo, and Mo Hsiung Yang, "A Survey on the Mercury Pollution Surrounding Chloro-alkali Plants," *Industrial Pollution Prevention and Control*, (April 1985), 21–39 (in Chinese).

35. De Gao Song, *An Analytical Survey on the Environmental Organic Compounds with Chlorine Toxicity in the Taiwan Area* (Hsinchu: Ph.D. Diss., Department of Chemistry, National Tsing Hua University, 1994) (in Chinese).

36. Huan Jang Hwang, "A Gleam of Justice: The Trilogy of Taiwan Alkaline," *Taiwan Watch*, 6 (March 2004), 18–25 (in Chinese).

37. Ming Sho Ho, "Contested Governance between Politics and Professionalism in Taiwan," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 34 (June 2004), 238–53.

38. Along the banks there were numerous factories, mainly in the electroplating, waste metal smelting, and refinery industries, which illegally drained poisonous wastewater and casually dumped industrial waste such that the estuary fish were seriously threatened.

39. Interview with Professor Hwang, February 1, 2005.

40. Their observations were also supported by an official statistic indicating that the proportion of deaths from cancer (39.34 percent) in that neighborhood had been much higher than the national average (25.5 percent) in recent years.

41. Interview with a senior villager, April 10, 2006.

42. The pollution issue was first revealed by another environmental group, the Foundation of Environmental Quality, which openly accused the Tainan city government of trying to cover up the dioxin pollution by building a stadium on the site of the closed-down factory.

43. Interview with local environmental official, February 1, 2005.

44. Interview with environmentalist, February 1, 2005.

45. Political opportunity structure as used here refers to a set of macropolitical conditions that might affect the incentive structures faced by actors, action repertoires available, strategies applied, level of mobilization, and the success of a specific social movement. Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

46. The amount accumulated to about NT \$1.5 billion within the first three years.

47. Telephone Interview with Ms. Cheng, Tainan Environmental Protection Bureau, July 7, 2009. For the details of the compensation scheme, see <http://cpdc.recyclesources.com/construction.asp?ssn=52>.

48. Gary J. Miller, *Managerial Dilemmas: The Political Economy of Hierarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

49. This resembles an "Assurance Game," *Ibid*.

50. For example, Professor Hwang, based at Tainan Community College, has long been famous for the protection of the Er-ren Stream. When other organizations, such as TEPU in Tainan, tried to take over his leading position in this movement, tensions ensued. Since then the two groups have no longer been able to work together. Interview with environmentalist, September 10, 2006.

51. Jones, Hutchinson, Dyke, Gates, and Companion, "Coalition Form."