

Democratizing Urban Politics and Civic Environmentalism in Taiwan*

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ABSTRACT What makes urban policies more responsive to environment problems? Local politics in Taiwan is considered to have combined features of both the pro-growth urban regimes of Western democracies and the clientele network of an authoritarian regime. Such features have made the sector resistant to democratic reforms: long after the introduction of competitive elections, urban policies were still overwhelmingly controlled by a handful of power elites and thus the interest of disadvantaged groups was seriously under-represented. Nevertheless, cases of anti-growth politics in different localities indicate the possibility of democracy trickling down to the local level, thereby moving local politics beyond a mere preoccupation in rent-seeking activities towards a civic activism based on a shared agenda of social and environmental issues. How such a transformation can occur can be illustrated by the Hsiangshan Tidal Flat Development Project in Hsinchu city. That incident demonstrated that such procedural requirements as environmental impact assessment in public policy-making provided civic groups with a very powerful tool to prevent an unpopular developmental project from destroying the local ecosystem. The Hsinchu case illustrates the dynamics among institutional reforms, informal political arrangements and strategic responses of civil groups that have resulted in a transformation of traditional urban politics in Taiwan.

Neither academics nor practitioners have paid enough attention to how local politics may evolve in the course of democratization.¹ This implies that either it is not an issue worthy of attention, or that democracy will naturally trickle down to the bottom level of governments once the transition is initiated universally. Limited empirical evidence suggests, however, that political reforms at sub-national levels may not fare well.²

* The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange and the comments by Professor Michael Douglass of the University of Hawaii, Professor Ho Kong Chong of the National University of Singapore and Dr Karl Doerstling.

1. Some valuable contributions include Desmond King and Gerry Stoker (eds.), *Rethinking Local Democracy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Henry Teune, "Local government and democratic political development," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 540 (1995), pp. 11–23.

2. A few examples include a case in Brazil by Rebecca Neaera Abers, *Inventing Local Democracy: Grassroots Politics in Brazil* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); cases regarding East-Central Europe edited by Harald Baldersheim et al., *Local Democracy and the Processes of Transformation in East-Central Europe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); and a case in Russia by Kimitaka Matsuzato, "Local elites under transition: county and city politics in Russia 1985–1996," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 8 (1999), pp. 1367–1400. For a critical review specifically on Taiwan's local politics after democratic transition, see Cheng-Tian Kuo, "Taiwan's distorted democracy in comparative perspective," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2000), pp. 85–111. For a general discussion on local democracy as a necessary component of democracy, see Lawrence Prachett and David Wilson (eds.), *Local Democracy and Local Government* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

As argued by Diamond, "democratization inevitably proceeds unevenly, and 'authoritarian enclaves' persist most stubbornly at the local or provincial level"³ Local politics of new democracies is usually entangled with personal networks such as factions and kinship nexuses and thus tends to be vulnerable to notorious patron–client networks that promote private interests and favouritism. This turns public expenditures into private rents and democratic institutions into a mere formality. Whilst national political elites are more willing to commit themselves to democratic principles (such as by increasing accountability and responsiveness) to meet rising domestic and international expectations, local politicians who hide beyond the mass media spotlight and scholarly attention may still be entangled in traditional practices whereby their political supporters are maintained by favouritism and material rewards.

Such a relatively intact local political ecology emerges as a salient issue when democratic ideals expand in the public mind. The public gradually becomes more conscious of the government's responsibility to pursue a variety of issues that are deemed to be in the public interest, and thus controlling specific rent-seeking activities becomes an issue of national importance. The question then becomes, how can local politics be transformed given its entanglement with vested interests?

This article cites a case in Taiwan explaining the evolution of urban politics in the course of democratic consolidation. The study looks at how stubborn authoritarian legacies that combine the pro-growth regimes of pluralistic urban politics and traditional clientele networks can eventually be transformed so that public interest is better represented in the local political arena. While democratization can be regarded as a series of institutional adjustments at different tiers of given political systems,⁴ previous research usually focused on constitutional overhauls which enable citizens to organize voluntary associations, and establishment of electoral rules which promise universal suffrage and fair elections. Nevertheless, as the literature on democratization accumulates, more attention has been given to the exercise of power by public authorities and the social and economic consequence of governmental policies.⁵

One essential dimension is how governmental decisions can be responsive to electorates, especially to those groups traditionally disadvantaged. According to pluralistic democratic theories, fair representation of different interests depends on the availability of institutional measures through which these groups can exercise influence within the policy arena. Although constitutional overhaul and electoral rules can set up the

3. Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1999), p. 244.

4. Philippe Schmitter, "The irony of modern democracy and efforts to improve its practice," *Politics and Society*, Vol. 20 (December 1992), pp. 507–512.

5. For example, see Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Political regimes and economic growth," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 7 (1993), pp. 51–71; Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *Economic Reform and Democracy* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); and Sylvia Bashevkin, "Interest groups and social movement," in Lawrence LeDue, Richard G. Niemi and Pippa Norris (eds.), *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997).

foundation for broader civil participation, the accessibility of public decision-making by ordinary citizens seems to rest on the installation of practical administrative regulations regarding how policy information should be gathered and shared by the public, how different performance criteria should be prioritized, and how the decision can be scrutinized, challenged or even vetoed. Once these procedure rules are established comprehensively and civic groups learn to challenge governmental decisions through them, traditional power elites will be less dominant in public policy decision-making.

To elaborate on the above arguments, this article first depicts Taiwan's local politics by describing its telling features of pro-growth urban regimes and clientele networks. Secondly, by delineating and analysing the case of the Hsiangshan Tidal Flat Development Project in Hsinchu city, it shows how such institutional measures as the environmental impact assessment have enabled civic associations to block the decisions of the traditional power elites. This is a landmark case through which the conditions for green politics to occur in a local policy arena can be examined. In conclusion, some of the theoretical implications for democratization and civil society are presented.

Urban Politics in Taiwan: Pro-growth Coalitions with Clientele Networks

Taiwan's urban politics over the past few decades can be largely described in terms of an urban regime theory supplemented by a sociological understanding of informal exchange networks in the public policy process. The theory of an urban regime was originally developed to describe urban politics in the United States.⁶ By "regime" it refers to a set of informal arrangements that can supplement formal political rules to make and carry out governing decisions. A regime emerges when political elites find themselves seriously constrained by the deficiency in resources to govern the city effectively, and thus seek an alliance with strategically positioned economic elites. In contrast, business elites have a strong interest in maintaining pro-growth public policies because of the financial gain, compelling their alliance with the elected politicians. These allied political and economic elites share the same vision of the city's future in accordance with their own interests and implement that vision forcefully.⁷

In his award-winning work "Regime politics,"⁸ Stone emphasizes the "continuity" of urban politics, or as rephrased by Dowding, "why was

6. John R. Logan, Rachel Bridges Whaley and Kyle Crowder, "The character and consequences of an assessment of 20 years of research," *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (1997), pp. 603-630.

7. Harvey Molotch, "The city as a growth machine: toward a political economy of place," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82 (1976), pp. 309-330; Harvey Molotch, "The political economy of growth machines," *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 15 (1993), pp. 29-53.

8. Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

there so much continuity in policy despite a changing set of politicians who campaigned on distinctive issues with different bases of electoral support?"⁹ By citing Atlanta in the United States as an example, Stone illustrates with details the co-operation between public authorities and business elites. Since every city leader has to manage the fragmented sources of political powers in a check-and-balance democratic system and to satisfy the conflicting demands among different sectors of electorates, a unified business elite with their rich resources to satisfy different stakeholders becomes the essential governing partner that different electoral politicians want to ally with.¹⁰

A similar explanatory framework seems to be applicable to other political systems outside the United States.¹¹ Some studies, however, turn to focus on the challenges and exceptions of urban regime theory. One prominent example is probably the emerging anti-growth movement observed by Schneider and Teske, who further specified conditions for such anti-growth entrepreneurs to emerge and survive.¹² Although the above studies implicitly assume that this theory can be applied only to a democratic political system with free elections and competitive party politics to keep periodic leadership change,¹³ Taiwan as a one-party authoritarian polity until the mid-1980s seems to fit the regime model well. An examination of Taiwan's local politics indicates that even under

9. Keith Dowding, "Explaining urban regimes," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 25, No.1 (2001), p. 9.

10. Stone, *Regime Politics*, p. 5. Urban regime is defined by Stone as an informal arrangement to bring together institutional connections and promote co-operation in a distinctive policy agenda across institutional boundaries. Dowding supplements this concept by arguing that the agenda should survive personnel and leadership changes or political successions to reflect an overarching value or ideology among members. See Dowding, "Explaining urban regimes."

11. For example, Strom applies it to another federal system, Berlin in Germany; Haughton and White examine cases in a non-federal system, the United Kingdom; and Broadbent even applies the Far Eastern case of Japan under the same theoretical framework, with different degree of success respectively. See Elizabeth Strom, "In search of the growth coalition: American urban theories and the redevelopment of Berlin," *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1996), pp. 455-481; Graham Haughton and Aidan White, "From corporate city to citizens city? Urban leadership after local entrepreneurialism in the United Kingdom," *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1999), pp. 3-23; and Jeffrey Broadbent, "Strategies and structural contradictions: growth coalition politics in Japan," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 54 (1989), pp. 707-721.

12. Mark Schneider and Paul Teske, "The antigrowth entrepreneur: challenging the equilibrium of the growth machine," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (1993), pp. 720-736. For an exceptional example in New York, see William Sites, "The limits of urban regime theory: New York City under Koch, Dinkins, and Giuliani," *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1997), pp. 536-557. For a contrast between Chicago and Pittsburgh, see Barbara Ferman, *Challenging the Growth Machine: Neighborhood Politics in Chicago and Pittsburgh* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996).

13. Without such a threat of possible power transitions, the utility of "regime" in explaining local policy "continuity" dissipates. Accordingly, Dowding argues that one-party government should not normally be labelled as a "regime." Nevertheless, this presumption is still generally held, especially since the concept of regime theory has been extended to serve a narrative function in describing different types of urban politics. See Dowding, "Explaining urban regimes." For example, Zhu applies the concepts of "growth machine" and "growth coalition" to capture the dynamics of urban land reforms in China. See Jieming Zhu, "Local growth coalition: the context and implication of China's gradualist urban land reforms," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1999), pp. 534-548.

authoritarian rule there were frequent political successions through local elections, while there was also an obvious “continuity” in policy, namely, undertaking varied pro-growth economic projects.

Very shortly after Taiwan came under the jurisdiction of the Republic of China (ROC) in 1945, island-wide elections for village warden, township councillor, township head, and county or city council members were held in 1946. From then on, voting participation rose steadily, and competition increased dramatically when non-Kuomintang (the Nationalists Party, hereinafter KMT) candidates were gradually able to gain more of the popular support via skilful campaigns.¹⁴ It is hard to say that these elections were fair,¹⁵ but it is proper to say that they were not rigged by the ruling party and were recognized as being competitive enough to cause frequent changes in local leadership.¹⁶ According to a recent estimation, only half of those seeking re-election succeeded between 1960 and 1986.¹⁷ With frequent reshuffles of political leadership on the one hand and policy continuity (in an expanding local economy) on the other, one can reasonably contend that there should be a structural logic at work. The urban regime is thus a plausible case in point: different factions in the ruling party (the KMT) competed in local elections and campaigned on distinctive issues with different bases of factional supports. Nevertheless, no matter who won the elections, they faced the same local financial stress and pressure of getting re-elected. These concerns eventually forced the elected politicians to ally with business elites by adopting similar sets of pro-growth policies.

A classic case concerns Taichung city in the central part of Taiwan. Over the past two decades, the city had experienced rapid expansion during the tenure of several mayors (both KMT and non-KMT). Regardless of their political affiliation, all these mayors had engaged in projects involving urban rezoning, and rearranged more than 1,700 hectares of scattered non-urban planned districts into integrated residential and commercial districts. Such projects have increased values of neighbouring land values by as much as 600 per cent, benefiting not only the land-owners but also the coalition partners who were able to collect and mobilize sufficient capital to bid up the land prices over a very short

14. For a brief introduction on the evolution of Taiwan's elections in its authoritarian era and how “democratic” these elections were, see Linda Chao and Ramon Myers, “How elections promoted democracy in Taiwan under martial law,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 162 (July 2000), pp. 387–409.

15. Criticisms on the fairness of Taiwan's local elections include the electoral system favouring KMT candidates with organized support; huge KMT party assets awarding KMT candidates overwhelming financial advantages in campaigns; and the KMT's control of the mass media, intelligence agencies, internal revenue service and judicial branches that may pose a threat to competitors. For details, see Qingshan Tan, Kien-hong Yu and Wen-chun Chen, “Local politics in Taiwan: democratic consolidation,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, No. 5 (1996), pp. 483–494.

16. Ramon Myers, “A new Chinese civilization: the evolution of the Republic of China on Taiwan,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 148 (1996), pp. 1073–89.

17. See Lin Chia-Lung, “Difang xuanju yu Guomintang zhengquan de shichanghua” (“Local elections and the marketization of the KMT regime”), in Cheng Ming-Tung and Cheng Yung-Nien (eds.), *Liang'an jiceng xuanju yu zhengzhi shehui bianqian (Local Elections and Socio-Political Evolutions on Both Sides of the Taiwan Strait)* (Taipei: Yuedan, 1998).

period and to manipulate the market to their benefit. City governments in turn have benefited from collecting taxes from real estate transactions and selling reallocated public lands.¹⁸

Similar joint ventures of urban rezoning advocated by coalitions of political and economic elites also occurred in other major metropolitan areas in Taiwan, especially during the “bubble economy” era of the late 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁹ The local elected politicians have to appeal to business elites for possible investments in such urban-rezoning development projects. Once these projects succeed, they can bring tremendous benefits for the coalition members, while some benefits also spill over to other parts of the electorate, and thus promise the success of re-election. Nevertheless, deployment of such pro-growth zoning projects with legal and extra-legal real estate transactions may destroy the local environment and thus be in conflict with the diffuse environmental interests.

Further examination reveals an essential factor that differentiates Taiwan’s pro-growth regime from its Western counterparts: the dominant role of political leaders in the coalition. Not surprisingly, political elites in an authoritarian context can better control the state apparatus to regulate economic activities (and thus allocate economic rents), and distribute social welfare benefits to co-opt or suppress the autonomous civil society,²⁰ turning their coalition partners into mere clients who promise political loyalty in return for economic privileges and protection – a patron–client network.²¹ Over a period of more than four decades of authoritarian rule by the KMT, Taiwan has developed a dual clientele system that included “party clientelism” to maintain nation-wide networks with capitalists as well as civil groups, and “local-faction clien-

18. For a detailed analysis on the political economy of Taichung’s urban development, see Wang Jenn-Hwan, *Shei tongzhi Taiwan? (Who Governs Taiwan?)* (Taipei: Juliu, 1996).

19. For more case studies, see Juo Sue-Ching and Chen Tung-Sheng, “Jiceng xuanju xia de difang zhengzhi yu jingji liyi” (“Local politics and economic interests of local elections”), in Cheng and Cheng, *Local Elections and Socio-Political Evolutions*. Regarding Taiwan’s “bubble economy,” see Yu Tzong-Shian and Wang Chin-Lih, *Taiwan paomo jingji (Taiwan’s Bubble Economy)* (Taipei: Lienjin, 1999).

20. At the local level, political leaders gained the privilege of running credit businesses, thereby enjoying special advantages to mobilize capital to invest in urban planning related projects.

21. Whereas clientelism is defined as “those in power use their access to state resources to provide personal favours to a broad-based clientele who, in turn, mobilize votes for their patrons,” one major feature of such relations is, according to Lomnitz, the power imbalance in the networks of reciprocity. Therefore, when the power is distributed more evenly among partners, it is more of a coalition; otherwise, it is more of a patron–client network. In the case of Taiwan’s local policy arenas, it is a more a structure of “clientelism” from an external perspective: local political elites as faction leaders have to exercise loyalty towards their patron, the ruling party, that exercises a determining influence over the nomination of election candidates and local policy decisions that are subject to review by upper levels of government. Nevertheless, from an internal perspective, there would also be a coalition consisting of local factions’ leaders such as city leaders, councilmen and businesspersons who run credit unions and other local monopoly businesses together. For the above quoted definition of clientelism, see Rebecca Abers, “From clientelism to cooperation: local government, participatory policy, and civic organizing in Porto Alegre, Brazil,” *Politics and Society*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (December 1998), pp. 511–537. For the argument about the imbalance feature, see Larissa Alder Lomnitz, “Informal exchange networks in formal systems: a theoretical model,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 90, No. 1 (1988), pp. 42–55.

telism” with grassroots elites to mobilize votes at the bottom.²² After democratic transition, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) engaged in destroying such networks after taking over more local offices and eventually the presidential palace in 2000.²³ Nevertheless, DPP politicians have also built up their own networks in different localities so that such informal arrangements remained operative and influential long after the democratic transition.²⁴

The operation and maintenance of local-faction clientele networks in different localities in Taiwan have been fully explored following political liberalization in the late 1980s, so that academic surveys on such scandal-like stories are no longer politically taboo.²⁵ Ample evidence indicates that the combination of personal networks and elite coalitions has been at the root of political corruption and administrative inefficiency, which in turn has resulted in tremendous social waste.²⁶ The exposure of legal and extra-legal activities associated with local-faction clientelism and pro-growth coalitions has raised concerns about the quality of Taiwan’s local democracy. This has generated support for the cancellation of township-level elections that are most susceptible to the undue influence exerted by local political networks.

The Rise of Civic Environmentalism as the Challenger of Traditional Elites

The aforementioned political networks have also constituted a major obstacle for the environmentalists in their efforts to promote environmen-

22. Fang Wang, “The political economy of authoritarian clientelism in Taiwan,” in Luis Roniger and Ayse Gunes-Ayata (eds.), *Democracy, Clientelism, and Civil Society* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), pp. 181–206.

23. Major measures included cracking down on vote-buying in elections and investigating illegal loan transactions between politicians and their associated credit unions.

24. This was not to say that DPP members have not become involved in clientelism. In some localities where the opposition force has been traditionally strong, such as Kaohsiung county, DPP magistrates have also developed similar network arrangements that connect economic activities with political positions. Nevertheless, such networks are generally more prominent among KMT mayors and magistrates.

25. For empirical findings, see Chen Tung-Shen, *Jingquan chengshi (The City of Money Power)* (Taipei: Juliu, 1995); Shao Chuan-Cheng, *Taiwan diqu de xinzhongshangzhuyi (The Neo-mercantilism of the Taiwan Area)* (Taipei: Guojia zhengce yanjiu zhongxin, 1989); Liao Chung-Chun, *Taiwan difang peixi de xingcheng yu zhibian (The Formation and Transformation of Local Factions in Taiwan)* (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 1997); Tsai Min-Hei, *Taiwan xiangzhen paixi yu zhengzhi bianqian (Township Factions and Political Change in Taiwan)* (Taipei: Hongyeh, 1998); Chang Kun-Shan and Huang Cheng-Hsiung, *Difang paixi yu Taiwan zhengzhi (Local Factions and Taiwan’s Politics)* (Taipei: Lienjing, 1996).

26. Such networks functioned well in relation to vote-buying in elections, while to maintain such networks, politicians had to obtain as much rent as possible in making policy decisions. In addition to the urban planning and rezoning games specified above, other common examples have included contracting out public construction works to clientele followers at inflated prices and awarding operating licences for local monopoly or oligopoly businesses (such as for passenger and freight transportation, credit unions, stock exchanges, cable television, gravel extraction) to coalition partners and faction followers. For an economic analysis of the “social deadweight loss” associated with the above governmental intervention into markets, see David Weimer and Aidan Vining, *Policy Analysis, Concepts and Practice* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989).

tally friendly policies. About two decades ago, Taiwan's environmental movement started with grassroots protests by the victims of pollution. After a long period of natural resource exploitation and ignorance of the negative consequences of development activities, endemic diseases and health problems prevailed around the sites of many state-owned enterprises and big companies.²⁷ Although Taiwan was still under authoritarian rule at that time, the victims' anger and sense of injustice had helped the local residents overcome their fears and inertia to mobilize aggressive protests. Partly because of the legitimacy behind the protesters' efforts to seek fair treatment and partly because the political opposition movement had become a much greater threat to the KMT's ruling status, the KMT government tolerated these protests and conceded various compensation schemes to the protesters. After several successful examples of such protests, "self-salvation movements" became a typical pattern, and the protesters' demands ranged from seeking compensation to preventing the establishment of such unpopular facilities as rubbish tips, incinerators, nuclear waste treatment plants and other polluting industries. At this stage, the political opposition movements went hand in hand with environmental protests.²⁸

All the above movements were motivated by such self-interest as hygienic living conditions or a better compensation deal. Only when there were interests at stake were there strong enough incentives for grassroots participants to join in the street protests at the risk of being arrested and put in jail. When democratization proceeded with greater freedom for individuals to mobilize themselves collectively to challenge governmental policies, capital- and membership-based environmental groups (such as the Wild Bird Federation of the Republic of China, the Taiwan Environmental Protection Union, the Society of Wilderness and the New Environment Foundation) emerged and became very active in advocating institutional reforms at the central government level. Although these civic groups ranged from radical to very conservative in terms of pursuing their goals, they all differed from previous grassroots groups by engaging in issues that were deemed to be in the public interest rather than being confined to narrowly defined self-interest groups.²⁹

The development of Taiwan's environmental movement as described above is remarkably different from that of its counterparts in the US and

27. For a review on these protests, see Deborah Chen, "The environmental dilemma in Taiwan," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1993), pp. 35–55; Shui-Yan Tang and Ching-Ping Tang, "Democratization and environmental politics in Taiwan," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (1997), pp. 281–294; Hsiao Hsin-Huang, *Women zhiyou yige Taiwan (We Have Only One Taiwan)* (Taipei: Yuanshen, 1990); and Wang Juju Chin-Shou, "Huanjing nanmin de jieji lunshu" ("The class discourse of environmental refugees") in Chiu Hei-Yuan et al. (eds.), *Taiwan shehui wenti yanjiu (A Research on Taiwan's Social Problems)* (Taipei: Juliu, 2002).

28. Daigee Hsaw, "An economic framework for analyzing facility siting policies in Taiwan and Japan," in Paul Leindorfer et al. (eds.), *Energy, Environment, and the Ecology: Asian Perspectives* (Glos, UK: Edward Elgar, 1996).

29. 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: Springer-Verlag, 2002), pp. 375–392.

other Western countries, in which centuries-old, nation-wide civic associations preceded the grassroots protests against neighbourhood pollution.³⁰ Nevertheless, Taiwan is quite similar to these advanced countries in the emergence of civic environmentalism in the mid-1990s.³¹ Although the process has been intensively compressed into a very short time period, the third stage of environmentalism in Taiwan has combined such features as public interest-oriented and grassroots protests that characterized the previous two stages, respectively. Many associations with nation-wide membership have set up charters in different localities in Taiwan to engage in environmental awareness education and, by combining grassroots societal forces, have advocated environmentally favourable policies in local arenas. For convenience of discussion, I refer to this third stage of environmentalism as “civic environmentalism” to denote the features of grassroots and public-interest orientation.

Entrepreneurially minded environmentalists representing widely diffuse human and non-human interests would inevitably confront powerful economic interests. As long as the above clientele networks were tightly interwoven to defend each others' vested interests while the constituents remained apathetic in regard to public affairs or environmental degradation, environmentalists would find it very difficult to press their demands in local policy arenas. Nevertheless, some recent cases indicate that local pro-growth networks are not invincible. The case of the Hsiangshan Tidal Flat Project is a classic example that deserves close examination.

The Hsiangshan Development Project

In 1992, the Hsinchu city government, together with the Taiwan provincial government, secretly proposed a significant development project that required the levelling of several hills to fill in the largest coastal wetlands in northern Taiwan.³² This was to reclaim 1,025 hectares of land

30. For a comprehensive review of Taiwan's environmental problems and recent governmental and civil efforts in pollution control and wildlife conservation, see Richard Louis Edmonds, “Taiwan's environment today,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 148 (December 1996), pp. 1224–59. In Chinese, see Hwang Giin-Tarn, “Minzhuhua dui huanbao zhengce zhi chongji yu yinying zhi dao” (“The impact of democratization on environmental policy and the proper adaptation”), in Chu Yun-Han and Bau Zong-Ho (eds.), *Minzhu zhuanxing yu jingji chongtu (Democratic Transition and Economic Conflicts)* (Taipei: Guiguan, 2000), pp. 113–154.

31. Here I borrow Dewitt John's terms, civic environmentalism, to indicate the civic activism in environmental protection. By doing so I intend to indicate grassroots and non-NIMBY features of the environmental activism covered in this article. For original usage of the terms, see Dewitt John, *Civic Environmentalism: Alternatives to Regulation in States and Communities* (Washington DC: CQ Press, 1994).

32. Before such a project can be officially launched, it is required by law that the plan be openly announced at least six months prior to proposed implementation so that the concerned parties can voice their objections. Nevertheless, the announcement was relegated to an inconspicuous corner of a City Hall bulletin board. At almost the very end of the announcement period, it was eventually discovered by college students who called for public attention and professional back-up from civil groups.

for urban use.³³ The rationale behind the policy was that the available space in the famous Science-based Industrial Park had been exhausted but the demand for more land was not.³⁴ Since the city was spread out over many hills and slope-lands could not be used by law for construction projects, it seemed a straightforward idea to level off some of the hills and fill in the coastal wastelands in order to generate two pieces of usable urban land simultaneously, the filled-in wetland and the levelled hills. In anticipation of such dual benefits, a non-KMT mayor initiated this plan as early as 1988, but failed to raise enough capital to execute the plan. The project regained momentum in 1992 when a KMT mayor, Dr Tung Sheng-Nan, successfully solicited support from the Taiwan provincial government, which had always been controlled by the KMT. To promote the project, the developers contracted out the planning work and established a joint office that was referred to as a “decision centre” and which was made up of representatives from the Hsinchu city government and two departments (the Water Conservation Bureau and the Department of Reconstruction) within the provincial government.

Not surprisingly, the project was expected to have serious consequences for the environment that alerted local environmentalists. First, numerous coastal creatures had made this wetland into a valuable and integrated ecological system. It was noted that the tidal flat nourished about 250 million crabs from about 40 different species,³⁵ and about 201 different kinds of birds, of which 26 were endangered species eligible for special protection as stipulated by the Wildlife Conservation Law. Secondly, the hills to be levelled off to reclaim the tidal flat were also important wildlife habitats of a diversity of forest creatures. Thirdly, the forests on these hills were functioning well in conserving groundwater and in acting as a natural shield against the salty north-easterly winds, which in winter would be sufficiently strong to threaten the agriculture of neighbouring areas.³⁶ It was widely recognized that launching this project would be tantamount to killing the wildlife in cold blood and would entail untold destruction of the valuable eco-systems. Shortly before the “announcement period” expired, the Wild Bird Society of Hsinchu (the

33. The total area to be reclaimed became 990 hectares in the final version of the project plan because the area to house the drainage facilities was deducted. Nevertheless, critics of the project said that the number had been fabricated to make it less than 1,000 hectares, which was a symbolic figure that signified the kind of impact that the project would have on the environment and, if exceeded, would bring into play stricter review standards.

34. The Science Park was designed by the national government for high-tech industries that had attracted world-wide investments over the past few decades. It generated about NT\$29.8 billion in turnover in the year 2000, which was approximately 9.5% of Taiwan's national income in that year. The park was popular mainly because of its management, its geographical convenience, its abundance of high-quality labour and its research environment. For more detail, consult the Science Park's website at <http://www.hsip.gov.tw>, visited on 28 April 2002.

35. During the breeding season, the number of crabs could be as many as one billion on that tidal flat; see Liu Hung-Chang, “Yiyi ge shengmin de kuhan” (“The crying of 100 million live creatures”), available at <http://www.linyhome.com/j/j311.htm>, visited on 28 April 2002.

36. For a summary of possible environmental impacts, see Huang Yi, “Kanbujian de jiao, jianta Taiwan shengtai” (“Trampling Taiwan's ecology by invisible feet”), *Huangeng (PROECO)*, Vol. 8 (1997), pp. 6–13.

Society) voiced its objections by asking the city government to conduct an official environmental impact assessment in advance. Objection notices were formally issued, not only to the city government but also to such responsible central agencies as the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) and the Council of Agriculture (COA)³⁷ which were in charge of environmental protection and wildlife conservation respectively.

In the years that followed, a wide variety of civil groups joined in the collective efforts to block the development. The major one was the Society, a member of Wild Bird Federation Taiwan with its national and international connections. There was a semi-official interest group, the Hsinchu Fishermen's Association; an affiliate of international environmental organization Greenpeace; and several grassroots voluntary groups such as the Hsinchu Cultural Association and the Association for Public Nuisance Prevention.³⁸ While a few were obviously driven by private interests – the Fishermen's Association was fighting for higher compensation for the oyster-farming industry – most had more altruistic motives: some wished to preserve this coastal area for recreational purposes, while others hoped to save the wildlife both on the tidal flat and in the hills. The diverse backgrounds of the coalition's members, however, proved to be essential for its success. The combination of different social classes representing a broader range of constituencies essentially increased the legitimacy of their demands, along with the variety of membership which pooled together a wide range of expertise and knowledge which made their arguments much more convincing.³⁹

Opposing them was the typical pro-growth coalition which had aggressively advocated the project. In the early 1990s, Taiwan was still in an era of being a "bubble" economy in which real estate remained a lucrative business and urban rezoning was the most convenient tool that the privileged groups could use to acquire private wealth through public policy.⁴⁰ Since land prices hinge largely on the specified use of the land in urban zoning plans, rezoning a piece of land may increase its market

37. The COA is in charge of the conservation of wildlife, while the EPA is in charge of pollution control.

38. Interview with Professor Lee Shong-Leih, the chief executive officer of the Hsinchu Wild Bird Society, 21 August 2002. Also see "Xinzu Xiangshanqu haipudi zaodi kaifa jihua minjian huanping shencha yijian" ("The civic review opinions of EIA on Hsiangshan Tidal Flat Development"), at <http://bird.org.tw/report/wetland/cfool.html>, visited on 28 April 2002.

39. For example, members of the Society had very limited experience in social movement at that time, but had knowledge of biology, botany and ecology. In contrast, the Cultural Association and the Association for Public Nuisance Prevention were skilful in contesting governmental decisions through administrative procedure. The latter was famous for its leading role in a protest incident against of a local polluting chemical plant, Lee Chang Yung Chemical Industry Corporation, in the early 1980s. That was also an exemplary case in which the polluter could reach an arrangement with protectors through voluntary negotiations. Interview with Professor Lee Shong-Leih, 21 August 2002.

40. For a detail analysis on the political economy of urban rezoning plans in Taiwan, see Shui-Yan Tang and Ching-Ping Tang, "Democratization and the environment: entrepreneurial politics and interest representation in Taiwan," *The China Quarterly*, No. 158 (1999), pp. 66–82.

value several times overnight. As discussed above, speculative bidding games would ensue once the rezoning scheme was informally released, whether purposefully or not, thus pushing the price of nearby land to unreasonable levels before the government actually took any action in rezoning. It was therefore estimated that once this project successfully turned forests into commercial districts and the tidal flat into an industrial park, it would bring approximately NT\$200–300 billion (US\$5.9–8.8 billion) into the Hsinchu city treasury.⁴¹

Behind the scenes were the private incentives of city leaders. Those who had access to rezoning decisions could usually borrow money from local credit unions which were normally operated by the representatives of the political factions. Since loans were often over the borrower's credit limit and could easily become bad debt, the timing of the receipt of insider information determined profitability, and usually reflected the degree of intimacy with political leaders. Factional clients and coalition partners in the city council usually received the information first hand so that they could step into the market when the land prices were still very low. Those on the fringes of the network could only obtain the information second hand and thus did not benefit from it so much. Eventually, ordinary people would be persuaded to "take advantage of such a rare opportunity," but would find that they were stuck because the land prices had been seriously overvalued.⁴² It should be noted, however, that the public did not necessarily consider such rezoning decisions and associated speculative activities to have moral problems. The situation could easily be legitimized by creating extra wealth for landowners and prosperity for certain neighbouring residents. With the huge interests involved, the project had accumulated remarkable momentum long before it went through the administrative process. Local leaders would be directly affected by the repercussions and thus it would be too harmful to cancel the project.

Since such a huge project would involve factors beyond the full control of the local elites, co-ordinated support from upper-level governments was essential. The provincial government was therefore invited to perform the following essential functions. First, as mentioned above, it was in charge of supplying capital for engineering works and compensation for acquisitions of private land. The Taiwan provincial government wisely solved the funding problem by "inviting" three enterprises that it controlled – the Taiwan Land Development Investment & Trust Co., the Tang Eng Iron Works and the Land Bank of Taiwan – to invest in the project. In return, these enterprises could charge the development costs

41. The information was revealed in official meeting records. See website at <http://rpgs1.sa.nthu.edu.tw/~crystal/envir/mount/eia/eia-1.html>, visited on 4 August 2000.

42. Except for investments in areas designated for urban rezoning, projects like this can give rise to much more in the way of side-payments due to relevant inside information. For example, this plan was linked to follow-up plans involving relocating such public institutions as the Normal College to the earth-taking area, which was expected to transform an otherwise arid place into prosperous business and residential districts. Investing in the neighbouring areas would thus be a lucrative business.

and an additional 15 per cent commission to the local governments, while the provincial government would be rewarded with a 20 per cent share of the rezoned and reclaimed land as a net profit. Again, this was considered to be an entrepreneurial arrangement because neither the local nor the provincial governments had to use their respective budgets in the process. Secondly, the leaders in the provincial government could participate in the ruling party's decision-making and thus enjoyed nation-wide influence.⁴³ Since the development project would be reviewed by central agencies, such personal networks in central policy arenas would be crucial. The open support of Lien Chan (then chairman of the provincial government) at the end of 1991 offered a guarantee of the project's political feasibility. In the later stages when the project encountered stiff opposition and became subject to an environmental impact assessment by the central government, Lien (by then premier of the Republic of China) continued to support the project to comfort the anxious investors. Whether Premier Lien was actually involved in "under-table" investment of this rezoning project is not known.⁴⁴ In addition to his growth-oriented attitude and his personal reputation being put at stake, his consistency in this event can also be explained by the huge sunk cost which had been invested in the project. Well before the construction work formally started – it actually never did – NT\$40 million (about US\$1.2 million) in planning fees had been expended and the provincial government was responsible for reimbursing the amount to the consulting company.

From March 1992 when the Hsinchu city government started to engage aggressively in this project, until 1997 when Dr Tung stepped down from his position as mayor without getting it approved by the central government, the project experienced five years of struggle, within which several turning points may be identified. First, in November 1992, the EPA responded to the environmentalists' demands by formally requesting that the project fulfil all the requirements of an environmental impact assessment (EIA), a scheme which was still in its experimental stage but had been applied to many public and private projects under administrative ordinance. Previously, in July 1992, the contractor, China Engineering Consultants Inc., had published a brief environmental impact statement as a formal procedure. Believing that such a rough report should suffice, the city government confidently ignored the warning notices from civil groups and prepared to launch the project by the end of that year. This later request that an EIA be performed, however, forced the city government to change its schedule. From this point on, the environmental groups started their struggle "within" the political system and developed

43. The Taiwan provincial government was the only major intermediate government between the local and central governments, with its composition and territorial coverage close to that of the national government. The next position for the provincial governor was usually that of Prime Minister (or Premier). Fearing a possible Yeltsin effect in the near future, President Lee eventually dissolved this level of government as part of the administrative reforms in 1998.

44. Environmentalists believed that Premier Lien had been too rich to be interested in such investments. Interview with Mr Lin Chih-Cheng, the chairman of Hsinchu Cultural Association, 21 August 2002.

another form of environmental movement that was quite different from previous violent protests.

The second essential turning point was in April 1994 when the Wild Bird Society of Hsinchu accepted the sub-contract within the EIA that was concerned with assessing the impact on the local environment. After the city government decided to comply with the central government's order to perform an EIA, an urgent matter was to do a survey on the project's impacts on the tidal flats and the ocean ecology, a part of the environmental impact statement that the contractor was not qualified to conduct. Under great time pressure, the developer eventually appealed to the Society apparently because there had emerged a consensus in the local intellectual community that no one should take on the job except the group that had led the opposition camp from the beginning.⁴⁵ Some advocates of the project warned that such a decision could be a fatal mistake because the Society was absolutely beyond their control. Others, however, were prepared to take the chance because they believed the EIA had no teeth at all, and granting such a huge research fund to the Society might co-opt it and thereby dissolve the opposition coalition. The Society was originally reluctant to take on the job, but after second thoughts it realized that it would have the opportunity to influence the decision-making process directly. Before accepting, however, it reached an agreement with the developers that was subject to two preconditions: that the survey should be conducted over a period of one full year (from April 1994 to April 1995) to obtain sufficient seasonal data; and that a full-length report of the survey should appear in the EIA document without arbitrary abridgment.⁴⁶

Both conditions proved to be critical in the developments that followed. Within the survey period, the Environmental Impact Assessment Act was finalized at an opportune moment and promulgated towards the end of 1994. The Act stipulated that all old projects still at the planning stage should fulfil EIA requirements. This project thus became the first major EIA case to come under the spotlight nation-wide. Developers of other projects now wanted to know if there had been a policy shift or, to put it bluntly, to see whether the government had the courage to turn down any projects that had significant consequences for economic development. By contrast, there were heightened expectations on the part of the environmentalists that the EPA, with the help of the Act, could perform its duties in a more aggressive manner. Yet the EPA was still adjusting to the sudden increase in empowerment it had received from the Act.⁴⁷ Rank and file officers seemed to have a subtle incentive to make

45. Only one scholar ever applied for the survey project but withdrew later.

46. For details, see Lee Shong-Leih, "Hsiangshan chaojiandai tianhaizaolu zhi huanping shiqianshi" ("Prehistory of reclaiming project on Hsiangshan Tidal Flat"), at http://216.239.35.100/search?q=cache:http%3A%2F%2Fhome.kimo.com.tw%2Fkimo-6%2Fnew_page_64.htm+%A7%F5%B6%AF%B2%A4&hl=zh-TW&lr=lang_zh-TW, visited on 28 April 2002.

47. According to the original design of the Executive Yuan, the EPA only controlled the administrative procedures of the EIA while the authority to conduct a substantial review was

this case an example to demonstrate that the EPA was no longer merely a rubber stamp of its peer-level economic departments. For example, the bureau chief of comprehensive planning, Chen Yung-Ren, was very enthusiastic about setting up institutional details for the EIA reviewing process and was very helpful to the environmental groups by keeping them informed about institutional development.⁴⁸ The top executive of the EPA, however, was in an embarrassing situation because, as a junior-ranked cabinet member, he could hardly insist on anything in inter-department co-ordination meetings,⁴⁹ let alone openly defy Premier Lien's intentions. His efforts to propose a compromise scheme at meetings of the EIA review committee were indicative of such a dilemma.⁵⁰

The other agreement specifying that the Society's report must be included in the EIA report imposed a lethal strike on the project. After the one-year survey, the Society stated in its final report that there were 26 species of birds in the targeted areas that were subject to legal protection according to the Wildlife Protection Law. Although going through the judicial process to settle a policy dispute was still very rare in Taiwan at that time, blatant violation of the law was something that government officers were reluctant to endorse because they might encounter serious "personal" troubles, such as being impeached or sued. Including the results of the survey in the official record (prepared by the developers themselves) would subject the officer-in-charge to the possibility of legal liability. This concern also explains why the EPA administrator intended to confine the disputes to the political arena, as he tried hard to satisfy both camps rather than exercise his discretionary power.

Another turning point came at the end of 1994 when the government promulgated the Act specifying the decision-making structure of the EIA review process. As requested by the environmentalists, the EIA Act stipulated that no less than two-thirds of the members of the review committee should be comprised of experts and scholars who were not government officials.⁵¹ The rationale behind such an arrangement was to

footnote continued

given to respective economic departments related to the development projects. After the environmentalists' struggles with the legislative process, the legislators finally awarded this power to the EPA. For the politics of EIA legislation in Taiwan, see Ching-Ping Tang and Shui-Yan Tang, "Democratizing bureaucracy: the political economy of environmental impact assessment and air pollution prevention fees in Taiwan," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 33 (2000), pp. 81–99.

48. Interview with Professor Lee Shong-Leih, 23 August 2002.

49. Actually, the administrator holds only a sub-cabinet level position in that the administrator can attend the Cabinet meetings but has no voting right. Therefore, the position is usually seen as an interim position for a vice-minister hoping to become a minister.

50. The EPA administrator, Dr Tsai, forcefully advocated a compromising scheme in the review committee well before most critical issues had been properly addressed by the developers. Such endeavours were severely criticized by the environmentalists who believed that the administrator should maintain a neutral standing and the case should not be closed without a scrutiny on its negative consequences. See Kuo Cheng-Yu, "Yiyang jianshe liangyang qing" ("The same construction, but different sentiments"), *Zhuqian wenxian (Bamboo Chasm (Hsinchu) Literature)*, Vol. 3 (April 1997), pp. 21–33.

51. For the politics in enacting the EIA Act, see Tang and Tang, "Democratizing bureaucracy," pp. 81–99.

isolate administrative agencies from political influence by delegating greater authority to an independent committee mainly comprised of scholars who were referred to as “the conscience of society.” Although the members of the reviewing committee were nominated by the EPA and thus there was still room for the EPA to manipulate the reviewing outcomes, the chosen scholars were usually more concerned with their professional reputation,⁵² more sensitive to objective evidence and more sympathetic to socially disadvantaged groups. Consequently, this decision-making structure proved to be less sensitive to local clientele interests and political pressure and was thus very effective in protecting widely diffuse interests.

The case went through seven review meetings, in which civil groups were allowed to express their concerns, present their evidence and propose their alternative plan to develop eco-tourism in the targeted areas. In all the meetings until the final overruling, the developers were asked to respond to critics by providing further evidence for review. Some members of the EIA review committee openly criticized the quality of the EIA report and the attitude of the developers. They complained that, in contrast to the evidence presented by the opponents, the official documents were full of gobbledygook and empty words. One committee member, Professor Chen Hsin-Hsiung, even openly denied the compromised scheme proposed by the administrator of EPA who was supposed to keep neutral in chairing the committee.

The case was formally terminated on 19 December 2000 when the fifth EIA review committee ruled that the Hsiangshan Tidal Flat Project should not proceed. Before that, Dr Tung completed his second tenure as mayor at the end of 1997, and his successor was a member of the DPP with a green flag. Another major supporter, the provincial government, was formally dissolved in 1998. The episode finally ended in 2001 when the Hsiangshan Tidal Flat was designated as a seashore wildlife protection area by the Hsinchu city government, with any substantial development being permanently prohibited.

How Institutions Matter: the EIA and the Transformation of Local Clientelism

This landmark event turned Taiwan’s coastal development policy around. Cancelling such a big project backed up by a coalition of businesses and different levels of government was quite unusual at that time, in contrast to many other similar projects that had been deployed along the western coast of Taiwan.⁵³ It was not until this case that

52. Most academics in Taiwan worry about carrying a pejorative title of “royal scholar” (*yuyong xuezhe*) indicating a scholar who endorses governmental decisions against professional judgement.

53. The most prominent one is the Formosa Plastics Group’s Sixth Naphtha Cracker Plant in Yunlin county. Specified as an “essential investment,” this project has not only received a green light to reclaim 550 hectares of land, but it has also obtained favourable governmental subsidies in the form of loans.

government officials and the general public placed such a value on wildlife. A booming economy had increased the demand for industrial parks, and the huge economic rents associated with such projects gave both government and private investors good grounds for reclaiming coastal wetlands (and “wastelands” in the eyes of developers) for industrial use.⁵⁴ The fauna of these areas, such as crabs and birds, essentially had no effective representation in the local policy arenas, nor could the preferences of citizens for preserving the wetlands for recreational or educational purposes be effectively expressed and fairly considered. However, from this point on, local civil groups found an avenue along which to pursue their policy preferences. Although this may sound too optimistic and simplistic, several successful cases of this kind in the years that followed demonstrate the potential of such democratic instruments as the EIA in enabling widely diffuse interests to be better represented.⁵⁵

It was to many observers’ surprise that local civil groups were able put to a stop to such a big project so peacefully. Unlike the many NIMBY (not in my backyard) cases that prevailed in numerous localities in Taiwan in earlier years, this case demonstrated the possibility of calm and intellectual discourse in public policy.⁵⁶ The EIA created a forum for rational debate and substituted empirical findings and deliberation for emotional confrontation.⁵⁷ This case may appear idiosyncratic because it was the first case ruled by the EIA Act, so that the government tried to demonstrate its credibility by consciously isolating undue interference. Nevertheless, the structure of the review committee proved to be the most important factor that guaranteed a greater degree of independent and professional judgement.

Such an independent review committee and debates within the committee proved to be valuable in investigating possible hidden agendas by the ruling faction or elite. In spite of the developers’ rhetoric, many believed that this project gave only empty promises. In the beginning, the

54. For an overall review of wetland policies in Taiwan, see Tseng Ming-Hsun, “Shidi kaifa yu baoyu zhi chongtu yu tiaohu” (“Wetlands: conflicts and balance between development and conservation”), *Taiwan tudi jinrong jikan (Taiwanese Journal of Land And Finance)*, Vol. 35 (1998), pp. 51–67; Lin I-Chen, “You haipu xinshengdi kan Taiwan guotu guihua” (“Examining Taiwan’s national land-use plan by seashore reclaiming projects”), *Huangeng (PROECO)*, Vol. 9 (1997), pp. 17–22.

55. For example, a hydroelectric power plant project in Nuoshan (Hualien) was overruled mainly because the site was identified as the burial ground for an indigenous tribe that was considered to have rich cultural value. Another famous case was the development project in Chigu (Tainan), in which the President’s expressed intention to reclaim the wetland encountered international appeals to preserve the habitat of an endangered bird species, the black-faced spoonbill. In that case, the environmentalists successfully secured 95% of the wetland for conservation purposes.

56. For reviews on Taiwan’s capacity building in environmental governance, see Jiunn-Rong Yeh, “Institutional capacity-building toward sustainable development: Taiwan’s environmental protection in the climate of economic development and political liberalization,” *Duke Journal of Comparative and International Law*, Vol. 6 (Spring 1996), pp. 229–272; Tang and Tang, “Taiwan,” pp. 375–392.

57. For more discussion on how the EIA has change policy-making in Taiwan, see Tang Ching-Ping, “Minzhu xingzheng yu yongxu fazhan” (“Democratic administration and sustainable development”), *Wenti yu yanjiu (Issues and Studies)*, Vol. 39, No. 8 (August 2000), pp. 17–35.

Hsinchu city government claimed to be turning this reclaimed flat land into an industrial park because the capacity of the Science Park was reaching its limit. A quick survey suggested that such reasoning went against common sense, for it was not very likely that a high-tech company would settle on a newly reclaimed piece of land because it would not be stable enough for production until decades later. Investors would also worry that the salty north-easterly wind would corrupt the buildings there. The city government therefore changed its tone by planning to trade the reclaimed land for a nearby air force base, so that the airport would be turned over to urban use. Again, that argument did not convince the EIA reviewers because the relocation of the airport was totally beyond the city government's jurisdiction. Equally problematic was that the developers refused to present any alternatives to the earth-taking plan. Razing hills of 40–50 metres in height aroused considerable environmental concerns, while insisting on removing earth from specific areas such as that adjoining a stream posed an even greater threat to the environment. Such evidence pointed to the possibility that the wetland was merely to be used as the dumping ground for the earth from chopped hills, and that hidden interest transfers would take place among privileged groups that needed to be uncovered. Suspicions on possible conspiracies probably drove the committee members to overrule this project.

A great surprise to the developers was the discovery that the project could be stopped by those civic associations that had never been "political" or powerful enough. There were no residents on the wetland, and nearby fishermen were so widely scattered that it was hard to gather them together to oppose the project. For the same reason, several unpopular facilities, such as rubbish tips and an incinerator, had been successfully installed without any significant resistance.⁵⁸ According to Taiwan's experiences over the past decade, the most troublesome scenarios were the NIMBY protests, in which the stakes were so high and the participants so dedicated that a compromise was not an option. By contrast civil groups, like the Wild Bird Society, that consisted of middle-class professionals were considered to have no courage to set themselves on fire on the street, or surround the designated site with a sit-in for months.⁵⁹ Neither would these white-collar citizens be involved in local clientele networks to have the back-up of strong factions in the policy decision arenas, nor would they have ever successfully advocated a conservation issue through an election campaign. To sum up, the power of the local civic associations had rarely been acknowledged until such cases in recent years.

To the civil groups' surprise, it was they alone that created a classic case of civic environmentalism against a pro-growth urban regime. Apart

58. For details, see website at <http://bird.org.tw/report/wetland/ccoast.html>, checked on 28 April 2002.

59. On the contrary the Society would have lost its social supports if its leaders decided to adopt such aggressive strategies as street protests because many teachers and professionals would disconnect themselves from the Society. Interview with Professor Lee Shong-Leih, 23 August 2002.

from their scientific knowledge and legal/administrative expertise, they did not have any handy tools or rich resources to oppose the regime. Although a public opinion survey indicated some local residents' concerns over the possible impacts of the project,⁶⁰ the public largely remained apathetic and opinions were divided.⁶¹ The fishermen opposed the project mainly because of their dissatisfaction with the compensation deal, whilst the farmers (mostly the landowners of the earth-taking areas) supported it because of the expected increase in land value and the compensation deal. There was no broad, emotional and populist mobilization throughout the whole process, and the thrust of the environmentalist's argument – conserving the ecology – was far from being a tangible concern of the common people. The only occasion on which both sides mobilized grassroots participation was a public hearing required by the EIA.⁶² The civil groups were more successful in rallying strong attendance of the members of Wild Bird Societies from around the entire country.

Nevertheless, the opponents of this project did feel a sense of efficacy throughout the process. Hsinchu is a very special city in that it enjoys the highest average education and income levels in Taiwan. In addition to the Science Park which employs tens of thousands of computer engineers, Hsinchu has nine academic institutes (including prestigious universities, colleges and research institutes) and their attendant neighbourhoods which have filled the city with a huge population of people with masters and doctoral degrees. Although some residents may commute between the city and the greater Taipei metropolitan area daily, many others have long committed themselves to community and public affairs via a variety of voluntary associations, constituting what Putnam has called "social capital" that can improve the performance of democracy.⁶³ When these associations have allied together, they have pooled a huge treasury of knowledge and expertise that has enabled them to press their demands rationally but forcefully.

For these civil associations, even maintaining an alliance was an unusual achievement. The alliance could easily be destroyed because some of its members might be less radical and could be co-opted by being

60. For the details about the opinion survey, see Chen Wen-Tzi, "Xinzhushi hai'an diqu huanjing ziyuan guanli zhi yanjiu" ("A research on the environmental resources management of Hsinchu city"), master's thesis, National Normal University, Taiwan, 1998.

61. For details, see Yang Lu-Yin, "Guotu kaifa zhi huanjing shehuixue" ("The environmental sociology of national territory development"), master's thesis, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, 1995.

62. Such absence of grassroots mobilization probably reflected the lack of confidence of local residents in EIA. A recent research by Hsiao Hsin-Huang indicates a popular distrust in the effectiveness of EIA. See Hsiao Hsin-Huang, "Dangqian huanping zhidu mianlin de xinren chaju wenti" ("The problem of trust lag in contemporary environmental impact assessment"), *Laogong zhi you (Friends of Labour)*, Vol. 580 (1999), pp. 6–12. Similar attitudes can also be found in the Hsiangshan area according to a recent survey. See Chen Tsai-Chuen, "Minzhu canyu he zhuan ye xingzheng" ("Democratic participation and administrative professionalism"), master's thesis, National Chung-Cheng University, Taiwan, 2002.

63. Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

granted a subcontract of governmental projects or programmes. A suspicion of possible betrayal by partners would also cause disagreement in strategies. This could have happened especially when the Society decided to accept the subcontract of the EIA report. Nevertheless, probably because those major associations had been working together for a long time against the KMT's authoritarian rule in the past decade, a sense of trust had been developed so that the alliance remained quite solid until the very end of the episode.⁶⁴

Civil forces have to be conveyed to different levels of policy arenas through convenient measures. Once the EIA Act was passed in 1994, access to public policy suddenly became possible and political opportunities arose. The procedural requirements of the EIA forced both the proponents and opponents of a specific project to present convincing evidence to a third party to make a judgement. Collecting and presenting hard evidence is exactly what academics are good at, and thus the EIA became a perfect measure for academics and professionals to participate in the decision-making process. Political opportunities also arose in this case because environmental degradation had attracted much attention and appeals to preserve the ecosystem for future generations or for the sake of the creatures themselves gradually gained more legitimacy. What was most important, however, when the EIA was first initiated, was that the developers did not have any idea how powerful the EIA would be in challenging the power of the traditional clientele networks and elite coalitions. Not until the turning down of some symbolic cases did they realize that the threat to their coalition could be real. After these lessons, the developers started to search for possible ways to avoid the EIA, while others learned to treat this requirement seriously.

This case also teaches civil groups essential lessons. It indicates that bureaucracy is no longer an impenetrable entity. Some strategies have been proved to be effective in challenging governmental decisions and thus have been adopted in other similar events.⁶⁵ The major lesson is to use administrative procedural requirements to procrastinate the final governmental decision as long as possible. While time is almost costless for the civil groups, time means money for the developers and the under-table investors because speculative investors usually have to borrow money from credit unions. The risk of a certain investment will be associated with the mobility of limited capital, and paying interest for an unknown period implies a higher possibility of financial crisis. Therefore, when unexpected obstacles to a project occur and the politicians fail to solve these quickly, anxiety will arise and disputes about their deals will ensue quickly among the investors. Those investors with greater financial stress will withdraw first, and the more who leave the riskier it will be for the rest to stay. The most important lesson for the civic environmentalists

64. Interview with Mr Lin Chih-Cheng and Professor Lee Shong-Leih, 21 August 2002.

65. For example, the same strategies have been used to save Chipen wetland in Taitung from being developed into a golf course. Interview with Professor Lee Shong-Leih, 21 August 2002.

is that the longer the final decision is postponed, the better chance they have to win, because it is more likely that the elite coalition will dissolve itself for economic reasons.⁶⁶

The elite coalition may also dissolve for political reasons. As long as a final decision can be deferred, there will always be opportunities for the civil groups to turn the situation around. When an election comes, the challengers of the incumbent might reach an agreement with the civil groups in exchange for their political support, and the election result could be favourable to the opposing camp. It was the case in Hsinchu, where these civil associations were lucky enough to have their ally, Dr Tsai Ren-Jien, win the mayoral election in 1997. Mayor Tsai eventually designated the wetland a seashore wildlife protection area five days before he finished his tenure.

Another strategy that has been proved to be very useful in getting the co-operation of lower-level officers is to write letters of complaint. According to the Laws for the Settlement of Public Nuisance Disputes, public officers have to respond officially to citizens' complaints within 30 days. Failure to do so may result in administrative punishment, which means personal troubles to be avoided by every public officer. Therefore, the officer in-charge would usually reply with a formatted letter full of bureaucratic jargon without any substantial promise. The civil groups then keep bothering the officer by writing more complaint letters. To avoid the extra workload of replying to the complaints, a rational officer would concede very soon by granting any favours within his discretion. Such practice is especially useful in getting government internal records when "Government in the sunshine" acts are still not available.

Conclusion: Building up the Civic Tradition in Backward Democratization

While most of the literature on democratization focuses attention on electoral politics at the central level, more emphasis should be put on the dynamics between the newly installed democratic institutions and informal arrangements that have persisted throughout the authoritarian era. Such authoritarian legacies as clientele network may be integrated well into a modern form of regime coalition. As argued by Roniger, "patronage itself bears a contradictory nature, being hierarchical but mutually beneficial, somehow combining inequality and promised reciprocity, voluntarism and coercion, symbolic and instrumental resources."⁶⁷ Such features make it a natural arrangement for a pluralistic society with contrasting interests and perspectives, and trying to eliminate it seems to be unrealistic and unnecessary. Nevertheless, an intensive manipulation of clientelistic networks would create instability and thus hamper the operation of democratic institutions. How to reach a structural

66. Interview with Professor Lee Shong-Leih, 21 August 2002.

67. Luis Roniger, "Conclusions: the transformation of clientelism and civil society," in Roniger and Gunes-Ayata, *Democracy, Clientelism, and Civil Society*, p. 207.

balance between such particularistic arrangements and universalistic, egalitarian civic traditions, or to “transform the public sphere,” in Roniger’s terms, seems to be a critical task for new democracies to consolidate further.⁶⁸

It is noticeable that Rose and Shin cogently raise concerns about the civic foundations of the new democracies in light of their socialist or authoritarian precedents.⁶⁹ By coining the term “democratization backwards,” they point out that the reverse process of democratization – having competitive elections before establishing the basic institutions of a modern state – has posed a double challenge to these third-wave democracies in “completing the construction of a modern state while competing with their critics in free elections.”⁷⁰ Echoing such concerns, this article tries to explain how such a double challenge can be managed, and how “liberal democracy” can possibly be achieved after “electoral democracy” has been introduced, to borrow Diamond’s terms.⁷¹ Specifically, the case examined here indicates how the civic associations may confront the pro-growth coalition and successfully transform the urban regime. It is argued that the civic foundation can be most effectively established by introducing some practical rules for civic participation – the EIA in this case – through which embryonic voluntary associations can have extra leverage in counterbalancing the overwhelming power of traditional elite groups. Traditional elites might still maintain intensified networks with other business elites and clientele followers, and thus might take advantage of free elections and dominate local public policy after democratization. Nevertheless, political opportunities did open themselves up to civic associations as institutional measures to participate in public policy-making became available. Once these institutional channels for broad-based participation are established, civil groups might gain more political efficacy and learn to be more sophisticated in terms of mobilizing popular support and tackling administrative hurdles, so that they gain a better understanding of how to conduct such entrepreneurial movements. As a result, democratic consolidation may proceed and problems associated with “democratization backwards” may not be as irresolvable as expected theoretically.

However, one needs to put such an optimistic view of democratic consolidation in perspective. The achievement of this landmark case is partly because the potential of such an anti-growth adventure by civic associations was seriously underestimated by the traditional power elites. Since the traditional power elites are still in an advantageous situation with the political positions they occupy and the abundant resources they control, they are usually less sensitive to the possible consequences of changes in the administrative rules and less capable of adapting them-

68. Luis Roniger, “The comparative study of clientelism and the changing nature of civil society in the contemporary world,” in *ibid.* p. 5.

69. Richard Rose and Doh Chull Shin, “Democratization backwards: the problem of third-wave democracies,” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 31 (2001), pp. 331–354.

70. *Ibid.* p. 336.

71. Diamond, *Developing Democracy*.

selves to new situations. Later cases indicated that the traditional elites did react with a backlash. Very soon developers of public and private projects learned various ways to manage the EIA process strategically by, for example, dividing the projects into several smaller pieces to avoid the EIA in terms of their scale. Nevertheless, those loopholes were plugged gradually as cases accumulated. Such procedural requirements as EIA can thus be considered as key mechanisms for civil groups to gain more autonomy and further to make democracy work better.