

## *Sponsoring Civil Society: State and Community Movement in Taiwan\**

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**Ming-sho Ho, *National Taiwan University***

This article contributes to the growing literature on the synergic production of civil society in newly democratized countries. State sponsorship can be effective when clientelism, as a form of social dominance, continues to frustrate purposive organization from below. Three elements are necessary for this scenario. First, a group of reform-minded officials must be able to pursue an independent agenda that deviates from local elites. Second, reformers have to create new institutional avenues to channel resources downward by bypassing local politicians. Lastly, civil society organizations must be capable of effectively responding to the initiatives from above. I use Taiwan's community movement to understand the logic and consequences of sponsoring civil society. State endorsement is critical to legitimize community organizations' presence in local politics. With a detailed analysis of a local case, the Qiaodou community movement, I argue that state sponsorship is critical for the growth of civil society organizations. Sponsored movement activism maintains its political independence by leveraging the incoherence in bureaucratic division of labor, and its professional expertise offers an advantageous bargaining position when facing officials.

Civil society is a realm of voluntary associations where citizens are free to pursue their collective identities and interests. The very idea that non-elites are allowed to organize themselves without official supervision poses a serious threat to non-democratic rulers. This is the reason why civil society has been such a powerful lightning rod that inspires anti-authoritarian struggles on a global scale (Diamond 1999:233–50).

What hinders the development of healthy civil society? Who are its enemies? The liberal perspective takes rational individuals as its ultimate *sine qua non*. Therefore, when individuals are coercively bound together by traditional norms (communalism) or when they are deprived of basic freedoms of property, speech, and association (authoritarianism), there can be no civil society (Gellner 1994). Communalism and authoritarianism are often found to co-exist when rulers suppress popular organizing in the name of national interests or other sacred collective missions. Here, this kind of danger can be called “Tocquevillean” because he is the first great thinker to discover the political functions of voluntary associations in modern equalitarian society. With the

leveling of social ranks, isolated individuals become vulnerable, and the “art of association” is a necessary antidote to despotism (Tocqueville 1945:I, 10).

There, however, exists another danger for civil society. As identified by the young Karl Marx, the civil society ideally proposed by eighteenth-century enlightenment philosophers is at its core bourgeois society, where formal and legal guarantee of freedom is constantly negated by material inequality. The “Marxian” danger calls attention to the situation where people are unable to organize themselves, not because of political restriction, but rather they lack the necessary means to do so. Following this insight, left-wing commentators argue that social inequality debilitates civil society, and only proper use of state power, not its absence, can tackle this problem (Keane 1988:22; Walzer 1992:104).

Taken together, bona fide civil society is not likely to exist in the context of state control and social dominance. In recent discussions, however, there is only sparse attention devoted to the Marxian danger. The reasons are easily understandable. As the Marxian solution to abolish independent civil/bourgeois society proves to be a major political disaster, the risk he recognized is also unfortunately discredited. Echoing the call to move beyond the Tocquevillean diagnosis (Edwards, Foley, and Diani 2001; Kwon 2004; Riley 2005), this article focuses on powerlessness as a source of civil society deficit and analyzes how state authority can be enlisted to overcome this hurdle within a democratic framework.

More specifically, I tackle a particular form of powerlessness that prevents citizens from organizing themselves autonomously. Clientelism, in the sense of “the exchange of a citizen’s votes in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods and services” (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007:2), continues to exist in contemporary democracies. Because those who rely on this mode of transaction to meet their survival needs generally come from the impoverished sectors, clientelistic exchange exacerbates mass dependence upon their political leadership. Once underprivileged citizens are forced to trade their loyalty for material goods, their associational capacity is severely proscribed.

Putnam (1994) draws much well-deserved attention from students on civil society precisely because he starts out from a “Tocquevillean” question (how to improve democratic institutions), but concludes in a rather “Marxian” diagnosis (that clientelism stunts the development of “civic community” culture). In his analysis, southern Italy is plagued by hierarchical, distrustful, and divisive social relations, and this uncivil status quo continues to tyrannize hapless citizens and minimize the beneficial effects of administrative reform.

As has been pointed out (Levi 1996; Szreter 2002), Putnam does not grant enough theoretical significance for state power. By treating political

institutions mainly as a dependent variable, he excludes the possibility that state initiatives can be deployed to encourage grassroots participation and therefore challenge the entrenched positions of clientelistic elites. The statist solution is not a panacea for all social problems, but when judiciously applied at a particular historical juncture, it can be helpful to redress the issue of social inequality and provide impetuses for genuine participation from below.

By analyzing Taiwan's community movement since the 1990s, this article seeks to specify the conditions in which civil society can be nourished and cultivated with deliberate effort. Three social actors are involved in this scenario, namely, national government, local political elites, and community movement organizations. To break loose from the grip of clientelism, it is imperative to curb the hold of local political elites and at the same time to enhance the influences of community movement organization. I shall argue that this route of co-production of civil society takes place when (1) national government incumbents decide to pursue an independent agenda that deviates from the local elites' intention and are willing to cooperate with social movement organizations; (2) national government incumbents are capable of channeling resources to and bestowing legitimacy on their local movement allies so as to elevate their standing vis-à-vis politicians; (3) minimal organizational capacity exists in advance and responds effectively to the initiatives from above. With a case study on Qiaodou Township in southern Taiwan, I will demonstrate that state sponsorship of civil society does not necessarily result in political dependency. Community activists can skillfully manipulate the various channels of bureaucratic machinery and pursue their own movement agenda.

### **The State–Society Co-production of Civil Society**

For constructing a sustainable civil society, the zero-sum conceptualization of state–society relations turns out to be inadequate.<sup>1</sup> First, pure self-organizing is a necessary but rarely sufficient condition for civil society. This is especially the case in recently democratized countries where grassroots-initiated activities have long been stunted by political control. Deficits in mutual trust, resources, and leadership constrain the extent of popular organizing. Thus, during the transitional period, it is possible to stage large-scale anti-regime demonstrations merely by the strength of informal networks (Opp and Gern 1993); but when it comes to the routine purposive organizing that is devoted to a particular goal and based on formalized procedure, such mass spontaneity is not easy to come by. Thus, under this circumstance, a collaborative approach by state and non-state actors is a viable, though by no means the exclusive, strategy to construct civil society.

It follows that civil society differs from clientelism not because the former categorically rejects any sponsorship from state agencies, but rather in how their transactions are conducted. There are three criteria that help us to determine whether a given state–society interaction is civil society-oriented or clientelistic.

1. Impersonality/personalism. Civil society organizations involve citizens' participation for a specific purpose, or what Diamond (1999:223) calls "public ends." The organizations have to possess a minimum degree of separation from their leaders, and hence, when dealing with the state, they speak in the name of their constituencies and ideas. In contrast, clientelism is characterized by the primacy of person-to-person relations, or dyadic alliance (Landé 1977). A clientelistic organization tends to be dominated by leaders as a result, when it receives official subsidies, it is more likely a reward for the personal loyalty performed by the followers.
2. Specificity/diffuseness. Gellner (1994:97–102) argues that the advent of "modular persons" makes possible civil society. Individuals become "modular," or interchangeable, to the extent that their inner personhood can be separated from their instrumental actions. Consequently, they are capable of forming strong organizations without sacrificing their individuality. Specificity means that civil society organizations are always devoted to a particular purpose and related to their members only in certain areas. By comparison, clientelism is diffuse, a "whole-person relationship" that makes no distinction between private and public, affectivity and instrumentality (Scott 1977:126).
3. Competence/reciprocity. Ideally, civil society organizations are able to obtain state sponsorship either because they have demonstrated credible professionalism that is needed for policy partnership or because they are a legitimate representative for sizable societal interests. Either way, it is their organizing competence that wins them official recognition. On the other hand, clientelistic organizations operate by the logic of reciprocity so that official patrons' favors are exclusive and particularistic (Landé 1977:xxiv–xxvi). Hence, a moral obligation is imposed upon the recipients who must pay back with their unswerving services.

Therefore, as long as the state's material supports for social organizations abide by the principles of impersonality, specificity, and competence, the result is not necessarily reinforced clientelism. The existing literature on Latin American civil society (Fox 1994, 1996; Houtzager 2001; Houtzager and

Kurtz 2000) provides us the clues on the optimal combination of circumstances for the co-production of civil society.

First, a group of reform-minded officials must be able to control certain state agencies, and they must be sufficiently independent from existing local elites to promote policies that deviate from the latter's interest. It is very seldom that these state reformers consciously pursue an agenda to foster civil society in general or empower social movements in particular. Whatever the motives of national government incumbents might be, what really matters is that they come to be aware of the need for external allies and are willing to uphold this new alliance even in the face of backlash from local elites.

Second, state reformers must be able to generate policies that reward the cooperative behavior from targeted groups. It is critical that the state-provided resources must not be channeled through conventional procedures so as not to be captured again by clientelistic elites. Clientelism persists because there is no other political mechanism that can integrate center and periphery. Consequently, local elites monopolize the existing brokerage channels and distribute the resources from the center as their own favors. Hence, institution-building needs to proceed in advance in order for the resources to reach the potential allies. In addition, given the widespread skepticism toward public participation, an unfortunate legacy from prolonged authoritarianism, the reformers will have to justify their novel approaches either by endorsing them with official legitimacy or by appealing to consensual values.

Last but not least, civil society groups need to develop a certain level of capacities to generate effective response to state initiatives. Minimally, independent organizations that are not controlled by local elites must be present. Inter-group networking that spans across localities is a vital asset to produce positive effects on a national scale. These conditions make possible a "sandwich strategy"<sup>2</sup> whereby the national and the local come together in a collective effort to eliminate the tenacious "authoritarian enclaves."

### **State Sponsorship and the Specter of a Depleted Civil Society**

The idea that civil society is simultaneously vulnerable to the Tocquevillean danger (state repression) and the Marxian danger (social dominance) is not a novel finding. Held (1987:283–89) argues that democracy is inherently a double-sided project that includes division of state and civil society as well as the necessary constraint of powerful societal interests. Nevertheless, the question of whether the dose of state sponsorship comes with an undesirable side effect should be taken into consideration. A likely negative scenario is that political inclusion of voluntary associations robs their influence and autonomy—a situation that Dryzek (1996:485) diagnoses "a depleted civil society." Once the self-organizing capacity is exhausted, a democratic order is

no longer sustainable. Arguing against a simplified Tocquevillean perspective, Riley (2005:290) also points out the risk that “although associations may start as opposed to the state, they can be reabsorbed by it.”

What Dryzek identifies as depleted civil society is often called “co-optation” among social movement researchers (Gamson 1975:28–29). A “co-opted” movement receives only token acceptance and fails to secure material concessions from the government or produce substantial change. According to some scholars, the evolution of the American Civil Rights Movement represents a classic case. The 1960s’ Great Society programs in the United States were a deliberate attempt to incorporate the long-disenfranchised urban minorities whose activism had already brought about a “politics of disorder” (Lowi 1971). Over the long haul, these policies facilitated the institutionalization of civil rights organizations, integrating ethnic minorities into electoral politics, and finally resulting in the gaining control of city hall by African Americans in many major urban areas (Piven and Cloward 1971:256–75). The political incorporation, nonetheless, forces civil rights organizations to give up disruptive protests and finally forfeits their long-term impacts (Piven and Cloward 1977:23–32).

This study takes heed of the seductiveness of state sponsorship. Essentially, a social movement aims to generate social change on the behalf of marginalized people with rule-breaking methods. A movement is depleted to the extent that state sponsorship disables it from launching protest activities.

Finally, among the likely external supporters for social movements, state, being the commanding height in a modern polity, plays a critical role. Following Baiocchi, Heller, and Silva (2008:926–27), this article uses the term “sponsored activism” for such a case. As many researches have demonstrated, political elites’ sponsorship is often reactive to grassroots organizing (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McAdam 1982:122–24), and the elites are often motivated by a desire to “channel” protests into less disruptive activities. Again, should state sponsorship result in the domestication of movement organizations to the extent that they become incapable of challenging their sponsors, it will be a case of “depleted civil society.”

### **Data and Methods**

This article analyzes Taiwan’s community movement with an in-depth case study on Qiaodou. My data come from two sources, community activists’ own writings and in-depth interviews. Taiwan’s community movements are usually led by middle-class members, mostly from liberal professions, such as schoolteachers, medical doctors, and artists, and consequently they produce copious written records of their activities. For this research, I consulted the organizational periodicals, published books, and application proposals for official grants by Qiaodou activists. In addition, I interviewed seven leading

activists in Qiaodou, two government officials (national level and county level), three local residents, and two local politicians in 2008–2009.

This article chooses Qiaodou Township of Kaohsiung County in southern Taiwan as the research site. Qiaodou is located in the north of Kaohsiung City and has a population of around 36,000 (2007). Historically, Qiaodou Township was a product of colonial industrialization. In 1901, Japanese built Taiwan's first mechanized sugar refinery here and jump-started the modern history of this town by attracting migration from neighboring areas. Since then, the sugar industry had defined Qiaodou's destiny; the refinery had uninterrupted operation for almost a century (1901–1999), and up until now, the state-owned Taiwan Sugar Corporation (TSC) still possesses more than half of Qiaodou's land. Given its paramount significance, it was not a surprise that Qiaodou's community movement started with the issue of preservation of the sugar refinery.

### **Democratization, Civil Society, and Clientelism in Taiwan**

According to many observers, Taiwan's path to democracy has been driven by the gradual opening of elections (Rigger 1999). The main impetus for transition comes from political opposition, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which keeps pressuring the incumbents to liberalize, as well as the robust leadership of Lee Teng-hui's Kuomintang (KMT) to accommodate the growing demand for democracy. Now, Taiwan has witnessed two regime changes, the DPP's unprecedented ascendancy to power in 2000 and the KMT's victorious comeback in 2008.

Taiwan's political liberalization, epitomized by the 1987 lifting of martial law, set forth an ascending wave of social mobilizations by pollution victims, exploited workers, import-threatened farmers, and marginalized groups such as women, Aborigines, college students, and political prisoners (Ho 2010a:8–10). For several years, the streets in downtown Taipei were a frequent battleground between anti-riot police and demonstrators. The escalating confrontations were complicated by the fact the young DPP also mobilized its supporters to bargain for a faster pace toward the eventual democratization. Social protests and political protests were often spatially mixed and mutually reinforcing.

Starting from the mid-1990s, the political terrain began to change as Taiwan's democratic transition entered a new phase. The dualist picture of state–society relations no longer held owing to a number of reasons. First, the DPP scaled down its street demonstrations and devoted exclusive attention to electoral campaigning as new positions were opened up for competition. With the DPP's electoral turn and its incorporation into the emerging party politics, social movements as a whole became less politicized and less viewed as partisan. Secondly, social movements were no longer treated as outcasts by officials. There were some social movement organizations that

succeeded in creating new channels for public participation (Ho 2006). With these newly obtained positions and channels, social movements did not have to rely on street demonstrations as their only weapon. Finally, social movement activists saw their advocacy bore fruits as the government came to accept and implement their demands in a selective way. In some cases, social movement claims, such as education reform, were even elevated to the status of national policy and widely propagandized to credit the incumbents.

In a word, there was an increasing trend in blurring of state–society distinction. These persistent attempts to improve the working of political institutions originated from social movement organizations, state actors or the cooperation between them.

Although Taiwan's civil society was making great strides in the arena of national politics, its influence at the local level remained minimal. Voluntary associations for public goals continued to play a marginal role in many rural areas where clientelistic politics persisted as the only rule of the game. Political position holders used public sector resources (jobs, contracts, and subsidies) to extract loyalty from their followers. There were few programmatic differences among rival elites who tended to compete on the basis of better brokerage skills or deeper pockets.

The postwar émigré KMT regime needed native collaborators to facilitate its minority rule. The nationalist government used a variety of incentives such as monopolistic business opportunities, judicial immunity from wrongdoings, police protection of criminal activities, and party nomination to ensure local factions' support (Winckler 1981). Institutional manipulation brought about corrupt and divisive politics in which citizens were rarely able to influence their elected officials. The political transition set in motion since the mid-1980s failed to alleviate the overall situation. Intensified electoral competition forced the KMT to rely more on the vote-generating capacity of local factions. The DPP tended to use ideological appeal to mobilize their supporters without directly challenging local factions. As a result, the pattern of patronage-based politics was largely left intact.

By the mid-1990s, Taiwan's democratization has made possible significant growth of civil society, as many social movement organizations transformed themselves into legitimate players in the national arena. However, the vast rural hinterland remained insular and impermeable to the civil society actors, at least prior to the advent of the 1994 policy of "Integrated Community Building" (ICB) (*shequ zongti yingzao*), by which the nascent and fragile community movement organizations began to receive public subsidies and recognition, and gradually became a visible stakeholder in local politics.



### The Political Origin of Taiwan's "Integrated Community Building" Policy

In the early 1990s, social movement activists who, partly "betrayed" by the DPP's electoral turn as well as disillusioned by the repeated mobilizations, were ready to explore new approaches of participation. A significant contingent of ex-street protestors returned to their native places where they looked for a new niche to sustain their activism. Back in their hometown, they met unexpected allies. There were local compatriots who were congenial to the call for cultural preservation. In terms of social profiles, they were largely young, college-educated, middle-class professionals. They soon teamed up and became the pioneers of Taiwan's community movement.

The renewed interest in local culture was largely a popular response to the KMT's shifting cultural policy from traditional China to contemporary Taiwan in the 1980s (Chang 2006:189). Taiwan's community activists began by collecting oral histories and traditional handicrafts. They sought to reach out to a broader audience by publishing periodicals, conducting workshops, and offering in-depth guided tours. The early community movement was not overtly partisan, and instead, they used the soft power of cultural nostalgia and local identity to build their influence. As Taiwan's past history was rarely mentioned in state-controlled school textbooks, the effort to present local collective memories in a new light was immediately attractive to senior citizens. According to a 1995 national survey contracted by the Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA), there were already 134 "local cultural-historical organizations (*difang wenshi zuzhi*)," including one-person workshops, membership-based associations, and professionalized foundations.

In spite of their popularity, these community activists were unable to extend their influences beyond the politically harmless "cultural history." In addition, their organizations were minuscule and underfunded; many activists had to take an additional job to make their livings.

In 1994, the CCA promulgated the policy of ICB, which aimed to renew the sense of community among citizens. The ICB's chief architect was Chen Chi-nan, a renowned anthropologist who served as the CCA's Deputy Minister (1994–1997) and Minister (2004–2006). Basically, Chen argued that traditional Chinese culture failed to produce the so-called citizen consciousness (*gongmin yishi*), the necessary subjective preparedness for a modern nation. Therefore, government was obliged to assist its development by transforming citizens' everyday life. By stimulating growth in the community identity, citizens could break loose from the hold by traditional consciousness and start to embrace a new broader identity.

As a reformer, Chen was ingenious to link CCA's community programs to the idea of "community of fate (*mingyun gongtongdi*)," which was then

strongly advocated by President Lee Teng-hui. At that time, Lee was promoting a Taiwan-centered worldview to replace the China-centered one in an effort to indigenize the KMT regime. And the “citizen consciousness” through community revival became a cornerstone to Lee’s political project. By framing the ICB as a rejoinder, Chen immediately won Lee’s full endorsement. In 1995–1996, as Lee campaigned for the first presidential election by popular ballot, he often mentioned the idea of community building, thus amplifying the ICB message nationwide. As a result, a “community fever” caught on, and more and more government agencies began to put forward community-based policies with emphasis on “public participation.”

Chen Chi-nan’s successful promotion was matched by two critical policy innovations with which national government began to build institutional channels to local community organizations. First, the CCA radically changed the way how its annual National Festival of Culture and Arts (*quangou wenyiji*) was organized. In the past, the CCA was in charge of financing, planning, and execution; starting from 1994, the responsibility was devolved to the Cultural Affairs Bureaus of County/City Governments, which were obliged to work with a specific community to obtain national grants. The localization of the National Festival of Culture and Arts aimed to highlight the regional diversity in culture. Because community activists had pioneered in local cultural activities on their own for several years, it was inevitable that their expertise and advice were urgently solicited by inexperienced officials. For some local cultural–historical organizations, this became the first time that they were invited by the public sector and enjoyed the privileged status of consultants. In other areas where activists were absent or unorganized, local officials also felt the need to encourage their organizing.

The CCA provided funds to subsidize local cultural events, build local centers for performances and exhibition, and beautify traditional architecture. Community organizations were now able to obtain national grants to remake their homeland. This novel form of direct funding deviated from the traditional method in which money was transferred from national government to subordinate agencies. By 2001, more than 330 community organizations had received the CCA’s grant. In 1995–2004, the CCA devoted NT 540 million dollars annually to the ICB programs.

Taiwan’s community movement started as a grassroots initiative and then was gradually brought under the state’s tutelage in 1994–1995. After the mid-1990s, three elements of joint production of civil society, reformers-in-power, policy channel, and civil society organizations, were present. With the case of Qiaodou, I will argue that community activists managed to maintain their political independence even though they continued to receive official subsidies.

### The Rise of Qiaodou's Community Movement

In 1990, the national government announced the project to develop a new town in Qiaodou mostly on the TSC land. If the project were to go on as planned, Qiaodou, then with a population of little more than thirty thousand, would eventually have to accommodate three hundred thousand newcomers, and the historical sugar refinery would be totally demolished. Although local residents were generally optimistic for the New Town project which was believed to bring about increased land value, a number of culturally conscious residents feared that their collective memory might be irreversibly lost. It was attributable to their effort that the Township Office began to undertake cultural activities to revive local identity in 1994. In addition, the CCA's decision to select Qiaodou as one of its host sites for the 1995 National Festival of Culture and Arts was also based on the historical legacy of sugar industry. The cultural program, called "Qiaodou, Sugar Refinery and Narrow-gauge Rail," was designed to highlight the glorious past of this community. To prepare for the national spotlight, the Township Office set up a cultural-historical workshop (*wenshi gonzuoshi*) at its own expense. Experienced community activists, college professors, amateur historians, and local enthusiasts were brought together for the first time. In 1995, the workshop was a kind of amalgam of community college and preparatory committee. It offered courses on local history and at the same time trained volunteers to organize the unprecedented national event.

After a one-year test run, Qiaodou activists decided to set on an independent course by organizing Kio-A-Thou Culture Society (*qiaozidou wenshi xiehui*) (KCS) in 1996. In the initial years, the KCS held a series of educational, environmental protection activities as well as cultural performances to win the trust and participation of local compatriots. The leadership knew that the KCS could gain an established status within community only by offering these popular activities to attract attention. The KCS avoided taking an overly political stand by focusing on these soft issues. They mobilized a signature-collecting campaign to petition for a museum on sugar culture. Nearly five thousand residents signed for this campaign and the national government responded positively. The KCS activists were conscious that they could not afford the consequences of stirring up interest-based conflicts. As the sugar refinery reminded Qiaodou people of their celebrated past and common identity, popularizing its history by lectures, guided tours, and publications had been the KCS's main task.

The initial moderation on the part of KCS activists won local praise. Their efforts in cultural preservation helped to attract outside tourists and thus created new sources of income for local people. In addition, their educational

activities and cultural performances were a welcomed attempt to bring urban amenities to the hitherto neglected area. Thus, at least initially, the KCS enjoyed considerable support in Qiaodou. Compared with the existing local organizations, the nascent KCS exemplified the principles of civil society mentioned above because it was devoted to cultural renaissance, rather than meeting the everyday needs of local people as the clientelistic elites claimed to be.

For Qiaodou activists, the ICB programs and other government agencies' community-based policy arrived just like timely rain. For example, the CCA once put forward a program to increase its collection of historical photography. The KCS happened to possess many precious photographs of the sugar refinery. By submitting these photographs to the CCA, the KCS received NT one hundred thousand dollars. In addition, staging cultural-educational events was another way to obtain public sector resources.

The KCS's efforts in cultural activities might appear politically harmless, but its impacts were far-reaching. The campaign to preserve the sugar refinery helped to redefine how Qiaodou people viewed their historical legacy. In the early 1990s, as the New Town project was announced, residents largely perceived the sugar refinery as an ailing good-for-nothing that stood in the way of local prosperity. Thanks to the KCS's promotion, the sugar refinery became the major tourist attraction that brought holiday crowds. The TSC management learned from the KCS activists and began to exploit the cultural value of the sugar refinery after it ceased industrial production in 1999. In other words, the KCS succeeded in engineering a cultural re-evaluation among Qiaodou's people. The sugar refinery was transformed from a symbol of economic backwardness to a source of local pride.

However, in the eyes of local headmen, the mere fact the KCS could stand on its own brought about suspicion and jealousy. Since its founding in 1996, the KCS no longer depended on the Township Office financially. But to maintain a harmonious facade, the KCS continued to invite the Township Mayor to speak at the opening ceremony of their events. This gesture of goodwill, however, did not stop the negative rumors against the KCS. It was said the KCS was able to receive Kaohsiung County Government's grants because the then Magistrate came from Qiaodou. In other words, the official grants were no more than political bribery based upon personal favor. Undoubtedly, local elites manufactured and circulated such slanders to destroy the KCS's credibility among residents. For them, there was nothing more threatening than an independent channel to public sector resources. In short, there existed a delicately maintained status of coexistence between community movement and politicians.

### Confronting Local Clientelism

Qiaodou was the hometown of a powerful political clan Yu, who led the anti-KMT forces for many decades.<sup>3</sup> Yu Dengfa, a charismatic grassroots politician, became the first Township Mayor in the postwar era and later held the position of Kaohsiung County Magistrate (1960–1963). Yu's persistent defiance against the KMT national leadership led to his arrest on the charge of "harboring a communist spy" in 1979, which triggered the first anti-regime demonstration by the opposition movement after the imposition of martial law rule in 1949. Over the years, Yu Dengfa built a vast network of followers. After him, his son-in-law (1978–1981), daughter-in-law (1986–1993), and grandson (1994–2001) had won the position of County Magistrate successively. In other words, from 1986 to now (2010), the KMT had been consistently unsuccessful in the county-level election—a conspicuous anomaly in Taiwan's local politics.

Although acclaimed as the "Mecca of Taiwan's Democracy," Qiaodou's local politics followed the same pattern as elsewhere in the nation. In spite of the political non-conformism, Yu's clan functioned exactly according to the logic of clientelism, and it has evolved into one of the competing local factions in Kaohsiung County. In fact, Yu Dengfa gained his popularity by providing a variety of services to his compatriots, such as building street lamps, bridges, and paved roads. Clearly, the advent of democratic opposition accommodated, rather than challenged, the pre-existing clientelism. What the democratic movement left unfinished was taken up by community activists in their confrontation with clientelistic elites.

Beginning in 2002, the situation took a turn for the worse, and the triggering factor was the controversy of the Kaohsiung Mass Rapid Transit (KMRT) project. The KMRT was a long overdue attempt to ease the congested traffic in the second largest metropolitan area in Taiwan. The KMRT that linked several communities on the outskirts to the city was particularly popular in Qiaodou as many people were looking forward to the increased land value. According to the plan, the KMRT would have three stations in Qiaodou, one being directly located within the premises of the sugar refinery.

The KCS did not oppose the entire KMRT project, but its criticism was limited to issue of the site-decision for the rail track and stations. The KCS contended that the KMRT would wreak havoc on the integrity of the historical sugar refinery by removing trees, a local temple, and anti-air-raid shelters. Everything in the sugar refinery should be preserved as it was a century ago. When the planning authority charted the KMRT route, it failed to take into consideration that the Qiaodou sugar refinery was listed as a national cultural heritage. Besides, the KCS also argued that the designated route, which

deliberately sidestepped Qiaodou's downtown area, would not be of much service to local residents. In other words, locating the KMRT route in through the sugar refinery was an act of expediency to save government's money, but local residents would not benefit.

After a heated internal debate, the KCS decided to escalate its protest against the KMRT authority in 2002. In their mind, to fight a disastrous construction project was to protect the collective memory of their hometown; hence, the campaign was called "Defending Qiaodou (*shoufu qiaozidou*)." To persuade the KMRT authority to revise its route plan, the KCS activists held public hearing meetings, distributed flyers, and even filed a lawsuit against the officials in charge. The KCS also staged a series of arts-in-protest, such as building a suspended hut between two trees that were scheduled to be removed, and mobilized their artists-in-residence to design artwork that highlighted the destructiveness of the transportation project. As the KCS was a nationally renowned community organization, it easily won the support from movement activists throughout Taiwan. Furthermore, the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Kaohsiung County Government also backed the KCS's demand in public.

The KMRT authority neutralized the KCS's opposition in two ways. In public, they showcased the commitment to preserve old trees by spending NT five million dollars to relocate them carefully. In private, the KMRT authority teamed up with Qiaodou politicians who spread negative rumors against the KCS. The KCS was portrayed to be a traitor who stood in the way of hometown prosperity. With the help of local elites, the KMRT authority also bused residents to tour the construction site. The sightseeing presented the state-of-the-art technology and left a favorable impression among the visitors. The KCS was forced to fight an uphill battle against the united front of local elites. The KCS activists expended tireless effort to emphasize that they demanded the re-routing of the KMRT, not its abandonment. They were frustrated to find that many compatriots began to view the KCS as a bunch of loony Luddites who loved abandoned factories more than modern transportation.

In the end, the KCS failed to change the KMRT route. Historical buildings were demolished to make room for the stately "Qiaodou Sugar Refinery Station." Only eight trees were meticulously transplanted, instead of being mowed down according to the original plan. The KCS's popularity among Qiaodou residents was severely damaged. There was a period of time when the KCS leaders were actually threatened with physical assault by angry residents.<sup>4</sup>

In hindsight, the 2002–2003 "Defending Qiaodou" campaign was a deliberate testing of the de facto cease-fire agreement between community activists and elites, and ended with a defeat for the former. After years of managing

local activities, the KCS succeeded in establishing itself as the accepted custodian of culture. But when the KCS sought to step outside of their cultural sphere and dabbled in politics, they encountered the concerted resistance of local elites. Even though the KCS failed in both cases, their courageous opposition to the construction projects supported by local elites was noteworthy. In the past, local dissidents who were dissatisfied with their headmen had no public space to manifest their disagreement. By initiating opposition, the KCS created a new channel of public participation and helped to articulate the hitherto suppressed voices.

### **An Anatomy of Sponsored Activism**

In Taiwan's community movement, the KCS was not an atypical case. After countless trials and errors, many organizations became the conscientious voice in their hometown and kept a watchful eye on local politics. Although they were still too weak to transform the pre-existing patronage politics, their presence itself carved out a relatively autonomous sphere of culture, which clientelistic politicians had to respect.

In response to the state's community-building programs, community organizations proliferated in every corner of Taiwan. The creation of a new channel for national government grants based on professionalized application and review pushed the state-society relation toward rule-governed transparency. Elites' discretionary power over public resources was greatly reduced. Yet, community organizations' activities remained reactive to the initiatives from above as they continued to rely on government subsidies. And none of them would be able to survive on their own, financially speaking.

The KCS case provided a detailed picture of sponsored activism. In 1996–2000, nearly half of its income (49%) came from government, while 23 percent was from corporate donations and sponsorship, and 28 percent was from membership dues, sales, and services. Even though Qiaodou activists had demonstrated remarkable professional skills, their organization would not be viable without government resources.

In terms of its routine operation, the KCS stood very close to ideal-typical principles of impersonality, specificity, and competence. First, most of its state subsidies followed the professional, impersonal rule, allowing little room for political discretion. The KCS activists were fully aware that many other local organizations would not be viable without politicians' patronage, and they were proud of being different. Secondly, in its first 12 years (1996–2008), the KCS has been led successively by four presidents with different personal styles. My interviewees used the leftwing and rightwing ideological distinction, rather than personalities, to describe their differences—a clear indication that the organization was distinguishable from its leaders. Finally, the KCS refused to develop a



passive mass membership by limiting voting rights to the members with local household registration. The KCS hoped to recruit only those who were genuinely interested in taking an active role. All these features showed that the KCS made efforts to promote a civil society style of activism in a hostile environment of clientelism.

The Qiaodou case clearly deviates from this unfortunate scenario of being depleted. State incoherence and activists' professionalism explained why the KCS could challenge the existing clientelistic politics while at the same time receiving government subsidies.

As noted by Zald and McCarthy (1979:243) three decades ago, "modern government apparatus is so large and diverse that individuals within it may use resources to aid social movements unbeknownst to their superiors." In the case of KCS, three sources of state incoherence in terms of (1) policy issues, (2) central/local division, and (3) regional division were observed here. First, most of the KCS funding came from cultural administrative organs, such as the CCA, and the latter was not responsible for the major construction projects that provided the resources for clientelistic politics. Secondly, the central government's decision to launch the ICB project stemmed from the incumbents' need to meet the historical presidential election in 1996, and that deviated from the political calculation on the part of local clientelistic elites. An opportunity was created for the Qiaodou activists, whose participation in the 1995 National Festival of Culture and Arts helped to jump-start the local community movement. Finally, political leaders were not necessarily in agreement when it came to the issues that spanned across more than one administrative region. During the anti-KMRT campaign, the KCS was able to enjoy funding from Kaohsiung County Government and at the same time opposed a project that was endorsed by the national government and Kaohsiung City Government. In a word, the edifice of state machinery was not a unified entity, and there were always some crevices which social movement activists could leverage.<sup>5</sup>

That the cultural projects required a minimal level of professional expertise made it less vulnerable to clientelist encroachment. Staging an art festival was after all different from building sewers. Compared with the community rewards offered by the industrial producers and government that attracted clientelistic politicians' attention (Ho 2010b; Ho and Su 2008), cultural projects appeared insignificant. Such protection, however, was far from watertight. Cultural policy administrators might be tempted to channel resources to friendly politicians, and clientelist elites could also develop their cultural capital to compete for the government's funding. Either way sponsoring civil society would degenerate into co-opting civil society. In the period (1994–2008), I did not observe such a scenario. An interviewed CCA official



revealed that even the most vociferous critic of the current cultural policy had successfully obtained funding—an indication that clientelistic re-colonization was still not imminent.

### Conclusion

This article takes a critical look at the co-production of civil society. Three elements are needed for this scenario. First, national incumbents must develop an independent political agenda at variance with local clientelistic elites. Second, reformers have to create new channels of subsidization that escape the old elites' gatekeeping. Last, civil society organizations must be capable of effectively responding to the initiatives from above.

Taiwan's story of community movement illustrated the effects as well as the limits of co-production of civil society. Under the pattern of sponsored activism, community organizations were akin to the permanent opposition party in local politics. By winning the position of respected custodian of local culture, civil society organizations were able to voice their dissent in the places where politicians used to make their decision without public scrutiny. In terms of local politics, the rise of the KCS resulted in a bifurcation between influence and power. Owing to its altruistic advocacy for local identity, the KCS was now regarded as the authoritative voice in cultural matters. Politicians continued to conduct clientelistic exchange with their followers; however, their power was no longer viewed as moral and legitimate. Cohen and Arato (1994:486, 507) suggested that civil society actors mobilized "politics of influence" to challenge "politics of power." The fact that the KCS became an influential opinion leader showed that at least a rudimentary sphere of voluntary association has emerged in the previously clientelistic enclave.

My conclusion does not endorse state sponsorship as a cure-all for the retarded development of civil society. The danger of repression and powerlessness might still persist even with the incumbents' best intentions to foster citizen activism. Building independent organizations that prefigure civil society is and will be a difficult and contradictory process. With these understandings, a judicial application of state sponsorship nevertheless offers a real possibility to challenge the reign of clientelistic elites.

In the recent discussion of civil society, the Tocquevillean insight on the danger of state repression is the leading theme; however, the Marxian concern about powerlessness and its harmful impacts upon popular organizing should be not abandoned. An uncritical use of Tocquevillean perspective may lead one to adopt an overtly pessimistic view on the state. True, many state elites pulverize the activities of popular organizing to perpetuate their rule, but under the particular circumstances identified above, the state can sponsor civil society to overcome the problem of powerlessness.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>As argued below, state sponsorship is never sufficient by itself, but needs local collaborators. Thus, I use the expressions "co-production" or "joint production" to describe the situation when pro-civil society forces join hands.

<sup>2</sup>"Sandwich strategy" is the term Fox (1994:109–10) uses to describe a series of rural democratization experiments in Latin America. This concept highlights the fact that meaningful reforms need "local and national efforts; neither can do it alone."

<sup>3</sup>As indicated previously, Taiwan's political clientelism originated from the particular circumstances in which the émigré regime sought to co-opt a hostile and alienated native society. Thus, the national government was involved in the first place and clientelism was never purely a "local" phenomenon. However, the following analysis discusses only the local dimension because the early KCS activism and the later controversy regarding MRT did not involve national elites, but only local politicians.

<sup>4</sup>That ultramodern MRT projects are widely popular in urban Taiwan—a result of the government's belated investment in infrastructure constitutes a formidable challenge to their opponents. A similar protest movement against the Taipei MRT project to preserve the Losheng Sanitarium (2003–2008) equally failed to generate local support even though a greater number of students, professors, and professionals were involved. Hence, it would be too harsh a criterion to measure the KCS movement activism simply by the result of its anti-KMRT campaign.

<sup>5</sup>Partisan rivalry between the KMT and the DPP is potentially a source of state incoherence, although this factor is less visible in the KCS case. Like most community movement activists in Taiwan, the KCS leadership leans toward the DPP in terms of ideology. But in their day-to-day activities, political leaning does not count as an issue nor does the KCS develop a formal affiliation with the DPP.

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