

Lukang anti-DuPont movement (Taiwan)

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Originating as a seaport in the eighteenth century, Lukang is a commercial city and center of religious worship in central Taiwan (DeGlopper 1995). In March 1986, local residents launched a movement against the multinational DuPont company's project to set up a titanium dioxide plant. The investment was welcomed by government officials and viewed as a major boost to stimulate the economy out of a recent recession; however Lukang residents, who knew of the 1984 Bhopal tragedy in India, were worried about the toxic hazard posed by another American chemical company. Under the leadership of a newly elected city mayor, who ran on an anti-DuPont stance, opponents organized the Changhua County Nuisance Prevention Association and staged a series of protests, including a local demonstration and a petition, in front of the presidential house in Taipei, which was unprecedented because Taiwan was still under the rule of martial law, which prohibited unauthorized mass gatherings. Despite the media campaign to showcase its safety commitment as well as an invited tour for local politicians to visit its US facilities, DuPont failed to win the confidence of the people of Lukang. In March 1987, the company announced the decision to suspend this controversial project. Upon receiving the news, Lukang people celebrated their victory by staging a religious festival to express their gratitude to their patron goddess, Mazu. Two years later, DuPont finally established their delayed plant in northern Taiwan (Reardon-Anderson 1992).

In hindsight, the Lukang protest played a critical role in the history of Taiwan's social movements. Though not the first incident of anti-pollution protest, the unexpected victory

of a small town over an American chemical giant enhanced the morale of Taiwan's nascent environmentalism, which only began to flourish after the lifting of martial law in July 1987 (Ho forthcoming). Later, many Lukang activists participated in a number of environmental protests all over Taiwan, and thus were instrumental in spreading the technique of grassroots mobilization. Nien Hsi-lin, a former schoolteacher, was the chief architect of the Lukang movement, which in turn propelled him into an uninterrupted career of activism for more than two decades. Basically, the Lukang success consisted in the skillful mobilization of local identity to frame the industrial investment as a threat to the traditional way of life. Local identity became a powerful weapon because the Kuomintang regime had sought to eradicate indigenous culture and history in the name of Chinese nationalism. In addition, folk religion in the form of communal worship of a patron deity was also politically suppressed for the sake of modernization. Since the local resentment against these attempts of state control was endemic, the movement leaders were able to use the famous slogan "I love Lukang and don't want DuPont" to secure broad-based participation by merchants, fishermen, and temple organizations. In other words, community solidarity expressed in religious rituals was highlighted in the struggle against a potential polluter, and this pattern of community mobilization was constantly repeated in the subsequent environmental protests in Taiwan (Ho 2005a).

The Lukang activists were also assisted by external allies. Though the Kuomintang still exercised strong censorship on the media at that time, the Lukang story was largely reported in a positive fashion, thanks to a number of environment-conscious journalists who also acted as informal consultants. Liberal college professors wrote sympathetic op-ed articles to urge moderation on the part of the government.

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Due to the high visibility of the DuPont project, the embryonic student movement broke loose from the confines of the college campus. During the 1986 summer vacation, a contingent of National Taiwan University students conducted a field investigation, and later published their findings to emphasize the prevalent local fear of toxic threat. Prior to the Lukang movement, Taiwan's environmentalism was mainly restricted to middle-class professionals whose effort was concentrated on educating the public and officials. Afterwards, journalists and professors were emboldened to work with the grassroots. The Taiwan Environmental Protection Union, organized at the end of 1987, was the product of this cross-class collaboration.

The Lukang movement also brought about political reverberations. At the end of 1986, political opposition organized the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) for the Legislative Yuan election. The Lukang dispute convinced the opposition leaders that they could challenge the Kuomintang effectively on environmental issues. The fact that a DPP candidate, who capitalized on the anti-DuPont sentiment, scored a landslide in Lukang seemed to confirm this strategy. The young opposition party adopted a pro-environment platform which included the famous anti-nuclear clause. Since then, the political alliance between environmentalists and the DPP has been formed (Ho 2003) and persisted until the latter came into power in 2000 (Ho 2005b). Alerted by the widespread support for Lukang and

DuPont's retreat, the Kuomintang government also stepped up the modernization of environmental administration. The cabinet-level Environmental Protection Agency was set up in August 1987, in a gesture to regain public confidence.

SEE ALSO: Collective identity; Environmental movements; Framing and social movements; Political opportunity/political opportunity structure.

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