SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND DEMOCRATIZATION:
THE TAIWAN EXPERIENCE IN THE 1980S

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1. Social Movements and the Mobilization of Civil Society

Entering the 1980s, one unprecedented significant trend has been taking place in Taiwan’s civil society. After three decades of capitalist development, civil society has been nurtured by necessary economic affluence and social plurality, the basic needs of various sectors and classes were by and large met. The civil society across class, sector and ethnic lines started to press demands for change in the existing imbalanced state-society power relations characterized as an “authoritarian corporatism” or a “state-dominated corporatism” (Hsiao, 1989; Chou, 1988). However, it should be pointed out that the drive of “anti-domination” in Taiwan’s civil society has always been existing over the whole post-war period beginning with the island-wide administrative reform during the 2-28 incident, then the “Free China group” and the aborted “Chinese Democratic Party” attempt in the 1950s, followed by “The Intellectuals” group calling for political reform and the emergence of Opposition force in the 1970s and onward, and lastly and most significantly the establishment of the first opposition party, Democratic Progressive Party (DDP) in 1986 (Lee, 1987).

What could be characterized as political democratic movement in the past has been restricted to the demands for change in the political power structure, and various class, ethnic, sex and other social groups in civil society were not fully mobilized into such movement. Moreover, movements for “democratization” in the past have remained to be elite-centered, faction-influenced and election-oriented in nature and, therefore, could not be viewed as social movements. Undoubtedly, political movements led by oppositions before the 1980s have indeed paved the ground for other broadly based social groups to further challenge the Nationalist state. The social movements of the 1980s have even centered their objectives in acquiring autonomy from the dominations of the “authoritarian corporatism” excercised by the state.

Among the above eighteen social movements, though different specific objectives can be clearly identified, all demand a change in the existing state-society relations. The most commonly shared goal is to search for more autonomy to civil society cross class boundary. The state rather than adversary class was taken as a critical target to which the participants have made strong and direct appeals. In other words, the emerging social movements in Taiwan so far have not been restricted to class conflicts. Rather the social movements as a whole have generated support and participation from different class, ethnic, sex, and age groups and no clear class line has been witnessed.

The core participants in different social movements are recruited from a wide range social identities in the civil society, such as small farmers, working class, middle class intellectuals, women, students, veterans, welfare groups, pollution victims, political prisoners, and church members. Therefore, it is quite difficult to identify the reality of emerging social movements as a clear-cut class-based phenomenon, though in a few movements such as labor movement, farmers movement, and anti-pollution local protest movements, a quasi-class antagonistic sentiment has been gradually expressed. Nevertheless, the most widespread collective sentiment expressed in most of the social movements has been a feeling of “being ignored and excluded” shared by the participants. The organized collective actions are seen by them as a rational alternative to
influence the state's current and future attitudes and behavior.

Since the capability of mobilization of internal resources and the direct threat posed on the state are variant in different social movements, a tentative typology of the above eighteen social movements can therefore be made (Table 1). From Table 1, the Nationalist state in the 1980s has felt the most threat from the following social movements: anti-pollution protests, labor movement, farmers movement, veterans movement, mainlanders home-visiting movement, Taiwanese home-visiting movement, and political victims human rights movement, though these movements do not necessarily possess a high level of capacity of internal resources mobilization. These seven social movements compared to others, all have a stronger and direct threat to the state's existing policy such as labor policy, agricultural policy, environmental policy and Mainland policy, or a sharper challenge to the state's corporatist control over key designated classes or social groups such as farmers, laborers, or veterans. And the direct threat can be felt by the state immediately in spite of a rather low level of capability of mobilization of internal resources in these social movements.

The state's strategy to respond to the emerging social movements also varied depending on the current ability of the state or the political sensitivity of the issues tackled by the different movements. The intensity of the mobilization as well as the threat of the social movements and the state's willingness to respond to them then determine the life cycle of different movements at a given time.

Figure 1 illustrates the different stages of development of the eighteen social movements. It shows that since the state has already permitted the Mainlanders to visit their homeland on the mainland and allowed the New Testament church to settle in a remote mountain, these two movements have entered into the stage of fragmentation. Consumers movement, labor movement, farmers movement, students movement, and Taiwanese home-visiting movement, and the Non-home owners "Snail" movement have reached the life cycle of institutionalization as the state have responded the movements' respective demands by taking series of active measures in policy and legal reforms or administrative reorganization. Consumers Protection Act, University Law, and Regulation governing
the Taiwanese in the Mainland to visit or reside Taiwan are pending by
the legislative body, a Housing Program is being proposed, the Labor
Commission has been established in the cabinet level, and a Ministry of
Agriculture is also being considered.

The rest of the ten social movements are either in the incipiency stage
or striving into a stage of coalescence. It is expected that in the near
future these social movements could coalesce more firmly and the state
will have to deal with their respective demands in a more responsive and
effective way.

Reflected in the new reality of social movements, Taiwan’s civil society
in the 1980s is no longer passive. Citizenship is no more merely trivialized
and individuals or social groups are mobilized to against the previous
state’s policies of deliberate atomization. New networks of representa-
tion are being structured, new forms of popular associability and social
movement oriented grass root organizations are increasingly formed. The
state’s previous authoritarian corporatist rule is now being questioned and
challenged.

There are attempts to even extend coalition and alliance across different
social movements. Some common goals are being slowly developed as
some social movements have sufficient commonality of interest that might
generate an even broadly based force for political reform. By so doing,
their combined strength and visibility should increase and the state will be
forced to speed up its reform process. Through the social movements, the
civil society as a whole, also have re-learned to exercise citizenship. Such
experience has great implications for the emergence of “participatory
political culture”. And it has served to accelerate the Nationalist state’s
steps to transform its rule from a “hard” to a “soft” authoritarian posture
as manifested in the recent liberalization move (Hsiao, 1989).

A possible “popular upsurge” is even gradually emerging by different
layers of civil society in an convergent effort to expand the limits of mere
liberalization and to call for genuine democratization. This possibility
would certainly raise the perceived costs any counter-action by the state
in trying to restrict or detour such transition to democracy (O’Donnell and
Schmitter, 1986).
2. Future Prospects of the State-Society Relationships and Democratization

It would be safe to view the current status of state-civil society relations as an evolving consequence of the macro-development trends of capitalist industrialization manifested in economic affluence and societal plurality and the subsequent social class transformations, and certainly the rise of social movements.

The Nationalist state's long-lasting authoritarian corporatist mode of control over the civil society has been under question, and the seemingly weakening executive power of state apparatus and its concerned bureaucracies has also caused the worry of some ruling elites and the public. Whether or not the Nationalist state's dominant position already has been severely threatened as a result of the emerging social movements is still a debatable issue. Though there are signs to indicate the state has indeed felt great pressures from different layers and categories in the society and also felt puzzled in formulating effective strategies to face such mobilized and resurrected civil society. However, a puzzled state is not necessarily a weak or malleable state. The currently puzzled Nationalist state yet still enjoys a great degree of autonomy vis-à-vis different classes and can have reasonably autonomous power in maneuvering its relations with different sectors in the civil society.

The state is puzzled simply because it is still reluctant to face the new reality or because of its indecision to redirect the past state-society relations and not because it is already subordinated to the control of certain powerful classes or interest groups within the civil society. The class structure is still in its formative stage and no one particular class has yet exerted definite dominant control over the state, though the capitalists have stronger influence compared to other classes (Hsiao, 1987). It is unlikely that the Nationalist state will develop a strong alliance with either small farmers, working class, or the rising middle class, nor is becoming a servile state to the increasingly influential capitalist class in the foreseeable future.

In fact, the emerging social movements, despite its primary objectives aiming at political liberalization, in calling for more economic justice, also serves to prevent the state from being charged by the capitalist class.
In other words, the emerging social movements not only just press the state to relax its control over society, but also demand the state to redirect its class and sectoral coalitions. The state could in a way use the social movements as a backing to reshape its relation with the capitalists.

The crucial task before the Nationalist state (particularly the political centers) is to appreciate the new reality immediately. To recognize and accept the irreversible trend towards democracy should be a precondition to the reformers within the Nationalist political centers in order to generate popular supports and even to accelerate reform steps toward democratization. As for the future state-civil society relations, the state should identify the new social interest groups as emerged in the different social movements and readdress the existing corporatist structures that have long been the licensed representational monopoly within their respective social groups such as farmers, laborers, teachers, and women. The existing limited numbers of hierarchical and subordinated corporatist structures under the authoritarian rule have been more and more alienated from their constituencies and even have become a target of opposition.

To recognize the new elements and forces in different corporatist structure is to accommodate the demands from the social movements and to foster a transition from "authoritarian corporatism" to "democratic corporatism". In such democratic corporatist model of state-civil society relations, the state does not assume unified state direction and control and in that the corporatist structures assume more autonomous position and less compulsory and monopolist. Yet it is distinguished from "interest pluralism" as the active role is still given to the state (Schmitter, 1974, 1977). Such model will allow the Nationalist state to continue its relative autonomy and its rule will not be drastically threatened. And it also finds roots in the Chinese political culture characterized by collectivistic ideals.

This seems to be the most likely prospect for the future model of the state-civil society relationships in Taiwan in decades ahead. To envision such prospective model, new government agencies should be established, old agencies should be either expanded or reorganized, and new style of bureaucracy should also be fashioned. By so doing, the state then can effectively respond the increasing social demands and interest articulation
within the civil society and make it compatible with the long-term interests of society as a whole. However, the validity of this prospective model must remain to be assessed by the ever-evolving social and political reality in Taiwan.
Table 1: A Typology of Social Movements in Taiwan
As of Oct. 1989

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Threat Posed on the State</th>
<th>Level of Capability of Mobilizing Internal Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Aborigines Human Rights (1983-)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Handicapped or Welfare Group Protests (1987-)</td>
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<td>3. Women's Movement (1982-)</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<td>1. Consumers Movement (1980-)</td>
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<td>2. Conservation Movement (1980-)</td>
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<td>3. Teacher's Rights Movement (1987-)</td>
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<td>4. Students Movement (1986-)</td>
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<td>5. Anti-Nuclear Power Movement (1988-)</td>
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<td>1. Anti-Pollution Local Protest Movement (1980-)</td>
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<td>2. Labor Movement (1987-)</td>
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<td>3. Farmers Movement (1987-)</td>
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<td>4. Veterans Welfare Protests (1987-)</td>
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<td>6. Taiwanese Home-Visiting Movement (1988-)</td>
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<td>7. Political Victims Human Rights Movement (1987-)</td>
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Figure 1: Life Cycle of Social Movements and State’s Response
As of Oct. 1989

incipiency coalescence institutionalization fragmentation demise

1. Handicapped (1982-)
   2. Conservation Movement (1980-)
   3. Anti-Pollution Local Protests (1987-)
   4. Teacher’s Rights Movement (1987-)
   5. Aborigines Human Rights Movement (1987-)
   6. Anti-Nuclear Power Movement (1988-)
   7. Veterans Welfare Protests (1987-)

1. Women’s Movement (1980-)
   2. Labor Movement (1987-)
   3. Anti-Pollution Local (1987-)
   4. Students Movement (1986-)
   5. Taiwanese Home-Visiting Movement (1983-)
   6. Anti-Nuclear Power (1988-)
   7. Homeless “Snail” Movement (1989-)
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(Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan)