

# 6

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## Forms of Association and Social Action

Rather than further multiplying examples of associational life, let me turn now to how and when people mobilize these ties in social action. Local efforts at environmental protection provide my primary example: Taiwan's environmental movement has become very powerful and China has grown increasingly concerned with these problems. I will sometimes draw on other kinds of cases, but always with an eye on how people attempt to influence policy from below, and how they can sometimes pressure the political structure itself.

Much of the variation among the business and religious associations I have been discussing falls along two main dimensions that help explain their potentials for social action: a range from formal to informal organization, and from more voluntary to more communal membership criteria. Figure 6.1 summarizes (and simplifies) these with a few examples. The formal/informal dimension distinguishes the sorts of things one might find in a phone book, like the Audubon Society, a labor union, or a bowling league, from the unlisted numbers, perhaps most famously the sort of people Habermas describes hanging out at coffeehouses.<sup>1</sup> To be more precise, I mean something parallel to the differences economists draw between the officially recognized economic system and the informal economy, which includes things like unregistered stalls or forms of credit with no legal support (like rotating credit associations). This informal economy is not necessarily illegal, but simply exists beyond the lines of legitimate activity drawn by the government. Similarly, the informal social sector in the preceding chapters is the part that escapes registration, control, and surveillance by legitimate government power. Those processes of control themselves help generate other features of formality—written rules, official hierarchies, and the rest.

This bias toward the formal and voluntary end has a theoretical justification in the ties of the concept "civil society" to Enlightenment notions of the individual. Under the modernist assumption that communal ties must lose their power, academic and political attention has focused on the voluntary side. This also reflects a methodological convenience—these kinds of groups are easiest to track through quantitative surveys or government registration records. As an example, Putnam's influential "Bowling Alone" article relies almost exclusively on survey information about voting patterns and formal, voluntary associations (Boy Scouts, PTA, fraternal associations, and so on).<sup>4</sup> Informal ties are largely ignored. Even the bowling example makes the problem clear. He has empirical evidence that there are fewer formally organized bowling leagues in the United States, but bowling lanes get as much use as ever, and this is almost always by people in groups, in spite of the title of his article. The alternative to bowling in formal teams is bowling in informal groups, not bowling alone. An equivalent prejudice characterizes studies of "civil society" in Eastern Europe and China, which tend to concentrate on NGOs and other formal, voluntary groups, while ignoring the reservoirs of informal social capital that I have argued are so important in China and Taiwan.<sup>5</sup>

Formal and informal associations serve some of the same functions, but their potential for social influence is not the same. Formal associations can best organize themselves to lobby government offices because they have clear structures that the state recognizes. Yet they can also most easily be co-opted or simply repressed for exactly the same reasons. This is in fact the pattern that has characterized most Chinese societies in the twentieth century, where a roughly corporatist model characterized Singapore; Taiwan, until martial law was lifted in 1987; Hong Kong, until the tardy reforms of the last few years before the handover; and increasingly the People's Republic of China. From the material I have been discussing, this effect appears clearly in the political and social conservatism of the formal and voluntary religious associations like Compassionate Relief or the Way of Unity. It is just as clear in the reluctance of big business associations, with their strong ties to officials, to push for fundamental political change in Taiwan or Hong Kong.

In practice this often leaves only the informal sector to serve as an independent source of social capital. By its nature, this sector is less well organized to promote national change, but, as Taiwan shows, it is also the resource out of which a formal civil sector can be created when the state steps back. The communal and semicomunal end of the informal sector is especially important in this because the voluntary end really does tend to dissolve into individualism if there is no formal structure—ghost worship is not likely to develop into a broader social movement, but kinship

ties or local temples certainly can, as I will show in a moment. This relatively informal and communal end of things defends social capital against the threats of modernity and authoritarian rule. It maintains a social world against the push to atomize the world, and against total incorporation by an increasingly powerful state. The social world, sometimes pushed into the narrow interstices between market and state, can nevertheless take the lead in promoting change.

### Taiwan's Environmental Movement

Taiwan's powerful environmental movement shows how this can evolve. Twenty years ago the Taiwanese rarely voiced concern about environmental problems, and seemed heedless of issues that were already rocking the West and Japan.<sup>6</sup> Yet now "garbage wars" over the placement of sanitary landfills threaten the island with mounds of uncollected refuse, large and well-organized protest movements have seriously delayed nuclear power plant and oil refinery construction, and a wide range of environmental organizations—from the Taiwan branch of Greenpeace to the Environmental Mamas—organizes people toward new attitudes and policies. The government itself, long considered oblivious to environmental issues, now produces educational cartoons on environmental protection.

Environmental protest mushroomed in the late 1980s, and just the three years between 1988 and 1990 saw over NT\$12 billion (about US\$500 million) paid to settle environmental lawsuits.<sup>7</sup> The economic impact, of course, goes far beyond direct reparations, as the island begins to deal with the legacy of decades of rapid growth with little concern for the consequences, and as more polluting industries consider moving their investment elsewhere. The environment has grown into a major issue in many local elections. It also causes an occasional scandal, as when the president was found to patronize several illegal and environmentally unsound golf courses.<sup>8</sup>

This sudden surge in the environment as an issue—in fact a metamorphosis in how nature itself is conceived—responds in part to the simple facts of pollution. Protesters complain of foul gas emissions that force their children from school, stunted crops from the polluted air and ground, and tap water that ignites at the touch of a match. "Sanitary landfills," the most volatile issue recently, are usually neither sanitary nor landfills, but just great heaps of garbage.

At the same time, this new awareness of the environment grows from the tensions and changes of modernity itself. Western environmentalism has its most immediate roots in nineteenth-century reactions to modernity, from Thoreau's partial withdrawal from the world of social com-

merce to Muir's half-religious communion with the wilderness.<sup>9</sup> As in the West, the move to the cities, the mechanization of daily life, the commodification of human relationships, and a general feeling of alienation from both nature and tradition contribute to the new appreciation of nature in Taiwan. Thus, in addition to the environmental movement, Taiwan has had a recent surge in nature tourism, nature publishing, and earlier ways of relating to nature like geomancy.

### *National Environmental Groups*

As in many countries, Taiwan's environmental movement has two faces. The first is local and ad hoc, reacting to an immediate need and then usually dissolving. The second consists of island-wide groups with a standing commitment to environmental issues. Members of these groups tend to be urban, highly educated, and quite secular. They easily fit into a stereotype of Western civil organizations, with clearly formalized structures built on a voluntary membership of individuals. International organizations like Greenpeace and Earthday have had a direct influence. Both policymakers and environmental leaders tend to have Western graduate degrees, and both speak most clearly in familiar Western idioms of economic growth versus environmental protection.

Most of the current major environmental organizations—the New Environment Foundation, Taiwan Greenpeace, the Taiwan Environmental Protection Union (TEPU), and the Homemakers' Union Environmental Protection Foundation—were founded within months after martial law was lifted in 1987.<sup>10</sup> All of these organizations shared comparable goals. As TEPU put it in their newsletter, they were "based on the principle of uniting people who care about protecting the environment in all regions and fields of work, jointly promoting the environmental protection movement and preserving Taiwan's ecology."<sup>11</sup>

Academics dominate the island-wide leadership of environmentalism in Taiwan. Both New Environment and Taiwan Greenpeace, for example, have developed into organizations run by and for small groups of perhaps a hundred academics. Neither has a significant grassroots membership, and both primarily sponsor academic lectures and similar events. When they join protest movements, it is mainly to lend their academic weight and public influence (which is sometimes considerable) to the largest issues, like opposition to nuclear power. They do not actually go out and organize. Most environmental activists described them to me as relatively moribund, run by important public figures who helped found the movement, but who have now moved on to other forums. Edgar Lin (Lin Junyi), the founder of Taiwan Greenpeace, for example, chose to pursue electoral office as a way of promoting his goals, which has left the

organization with little attention.<sup>12</sup> He has still more recently helped found the Green Consumer's Foundation.

TEPU, in contrast, remains extremely active in a wide range of protest movements, and sees itself ideally as an umbrella for local grassroots organizations. They have branches all over the island, led by local activists rather than national academics. Often these local branches focus on a small but stable leadership that has crystallized out of a major demonstration.<sup>13</sup> Their total membership in 1992 was about 1,200. Yet it would be a mistake to think of them as an organic outgrowth of local movements. Academics dominate TEPU's leadership. The chair has always been an academic, and their academic advisory committee is guaranteed 30 percent of the seats on their executive committee. It was founded by a group of eminent academics, not as a union of local leaders.

Liu Zhicheng, the chair in 1992, is a good example. He is a chemical engineer with an American Ph.D., specializing in toxicology. He describes his commitment to the environment as growing in Taiwan, first from an undergraduate course he had, and then from developments in Taiwan after he returned from the United States in the late 1980s. Yet whatever their origins, his attitudes clearly resonate easily with Western environmentalism. He sees a conflict between economic growth and environmental protection, and feels that the economy should be secondary. He argues that new growth should be halted at least temporarily while the damage is repaired, and allowed again only if ways are found to grow without doing new harm. His priorities thus lie in a kind of equilibrated nature, seen in opposition to human expansion. This is quite different from the progrowth views that Taiwanese often express in opinion polls.

Nearly all the major players in these new debates have been men. Yet there are also important women's environmental groups, which often have a much larger social base. Unlike the men, the women's groups often root their actions in dissatisfaction with family life. As extended families become less viable, especially in crowded cities, women's own career needs often directly interfere with what they see as their family responsibilities and even with their marriage possibilities. At the same time, nonworking wives in wealthy families share a new desire for fulfillment beyond the family. The answer has been a reassertion of women's traditional responsibility for nurturing children and fostering a uterine family, but taken beyond the family to the society at large, as I discussed in the preceding chapter. The environment offers a platform for these interests as easily as Compassionate Merit's philanthropy. Women involved in organized environmental groups have also tended toward philanthropic women's and religious associations. These groups are more interested in improving society than in generating new moral

philosophies, again like Compassionate Relief, and that in itself recalls traditional gender differences.

The most important such group in Taiwan has been the Homemakers' Union Environmental Protection Foundation. Many of their original leaders were the wives of leading academic and political environmentalists, and most of the group are middle-class (or higher) women in their thirties and forties, generally with a college education.<sup>14</sup> Organizational policy is to serve women who are married but not employed. In spite of their intimate ties to the academic environmental groups, the Homemakers' Union pursues an independent path. With a popular base in middle-class housewives, they are not willing to take on controversial political issues, and are not interested in the more strictly academic lectures and roundtables of the other groups. Unlike the other national environmental groups, which are mostly male and mostly American Ph.D.s, they try to root their environmentalism in issues of household and motherhood. As Lu Hwei-syin has discussed, the stock Chinese image of the nurturing mother plays a pivotal role in their imagery. Their introductory brochure thus shows an image of a woman pushing the bandaged earth in a wheelchair, with the slogan, "Women take care of the wounded earth."<sup>15</sup>

Most predominantly for them, environmental protection is a means to defend the health of their children. Following this logic, the Homemakers' Union uses the term "environment" in an extremely broad sense. For example, they run summer camps for children, organize very popular meetings on child-rearing practices, and publish books encouraging children to be more independent, especially as a way of discouraging molestation and abuse. All of this falls under the heading of "spiritual environment" (*xinling huanjing*).

Taipei's Jinghua Social and Cultural Education Foundation is a religious example of the same sort of association. They were founded by a Chan monk late in 1990, mostly to promote social education, combat pornography, and help troubled youth. They include an Environmental Protection Committee, which functions with relative independence. The head of the committee, Wu Muxin, experimented with Christianity and other religions in college, and took lay Buddhist vows some years later.<sup>16</sup> Her experience with environmental organizations began with the largely academic New Environment, and their board of directors still overlaps with New Environment to an extent. As she said, however, she felt out of place among all those intellectuals. She also felt that their research orientation distracted them from real work at the grassroots. She went from New Environment to the Homemakers' Union, but had problems there because she works, and most of their activities take place during the day.

She joined Jinghua in 1991, and helped form the Environmental Protection Committee. They began with roundtables and discussion meet-

ings, but have been moving toward other mechanisms that might meet broader audiences. They are beginning to do more public lectures, and have been organizing flea markets, allowing people to sell or exchange their old things instead of throwing them away. She also has a personal interest in promoting green products like battery rechargers or reusable shopping bags. They aim primarily at family issues and at religious audiences.

The similarity to the Homemakers' Union issues comes as no surprise given Wu's background, but the Buddhism provides two important differences. First, the structure of Buddhism provides an alternative form of organization. Wu tries to recruit important Buddhist masters to promote the cause. A famous master might have hundreds of disciples, and could easily attract hundreds to a lecture. Some have television audiences in addition. Many of these followers are older people who might otherwise be difficult for environmentalists to reach. No other kind of environmental organization has access to the same kind of social network. Second, Jinghua justifies its stand on environmental protection from within Buddhism, rather than through Chinese family values.<sup>17</sup> Buddhism, after all, forbids killing any living thing. The Buddha-nature exists everywhere and in everything, which is used here to justify a kind of ecological equilibrium. Compassionate Relief's emphasis on simplicity has also led it to address environmental issues, mostly recycling, as a secondary goal.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Local Movements—Informal and Communal Ties*

National environmental organizations take different forms depending on whether men or women dominate. All of them, however, are formal, voluntary associations of the kind usually associated with civil society. Yet as soon as we look beyond those top ranks, the environmental movement takes on specifically Taiwanese cultural forms and social organization with deep local roots. In particular, kinship and community religion can play crucial organizational roles.

It can be difficult to mobilize local temples to support environmental protest, given their intimate symbolic and organizational ties to local authority. Yet when temples can be won over, they offer the movement a powerful moral sanction in local terms, alongside a ready-made organizational network and a stockpile of funds. Both sides may try to mobilize religion. When Formosa Plastics decided to build Taiwan's sixth naphtha cracker (a large and often polluting industrial plant that refines oil products into precursors of plastics) in Yunlin, Y. C. Wang (Wang Yongqing)—CEO and one of the wealthiest men in Taiwan—called on each of the major local temples and offered a generous donation. Apparently as a result, none of them have become involved in local protests.<sup>19</sup>

an important annual ritual in polluted water. In another case, the local temple in Dalinpu, Gaoxiong City, finally supported the long and angry protests against Taiwan Power, China Petrochemicals, and China Steel, but only after a riot. The temple agreed to pay bail (over NT\$100,000) for people arrested, primarily because the accused rioters included a relative of one of the temple management-committee members.<sup>23</sup>

Local environmental movements in Taiwan also often pick up the language and social networks of kinship and make use of symbolism from family ritual, especially funerals. Demands to save resources for descendants resonate deeply with Chinese ideals of filial piety, and mesh with economic behavior that attempts to maximize an estate to be handed down to future generations. The frequent borrowing of funeral symbolism in protests furthers this image of filial piety, and rebuts state or corporate worries about economic growth with the classical Chinese value of filial piety. This is another case of drawing on earlier kinds of values as a response to perceived exploitation through the market. At the same time, however, "family" has never been the same to all Taiwanese, and gender differences in kinship experience show up in how men and women talk about the environment, just as they do in economic discourse about Confucian values.

The central idea of a duty to provide for descendants as the only way of continuing the lineage can conveniently shape environmental rhetoric, even though it (like religion) is inherently particularistic and local in appeal. A fishermen's protest in Hualian, for example, put out a brochure called "Protect Hualian's Shore for our Children and Grandchildren." It read, in part: "Dear people of Hualian County, teachers, mothers: Let us unite for the sake of our beloved sons and daughters, and absolutely oppose the China Paper factory, which continues to poison Hualian's seas and air."

Most uses of these terms are more gender laden than this brochure. One example strikes anyone passing through the site of the proposed fourth nuclear power generator, planned for the northeast coast of Taipei County. Opponents have lined the road leading through the area with signs. Probably half of them denounce the plant as a threat to the local people's descendants. When I interviewed Jiang Qunhe, one of the local leaders, he also frequently talked about the importance of preserving the area as a patrimony for his descendants. The term for descendants here is *zisun*, literally children and grandchildren, or sons and grandsons. Such sentiments appear over and over in grassroots environmental organizing.<sup>24</sup> *Zisun* was also the word used in the title of the brochure from Hualian. Frequent use of such language at local levels clearly reverberates with men's lineage ideals and a general dedication to filial piety.

Typically, the main organizers against the nuclear power plant are men, and the author of the Hualian brochure was also male.

Funeral ritual is the most public enactment of filial piety, and funeral symbolism often shows up in Taiwanese protests. Funerals have a broad back for carrying protest in many parts of the world, but seem especially prone to re-readings as protest in East Asia. They run a wide range from the conversion of official mourning to political protest in the People's Republic of China, to the South Korean borrowing of funerals of slain student demonstrators as forums for pushing democratic reforms, to the use of standard funeral symbols like white headbands and banners, pioneered in Japan but now spread throughout East Asian protest movements.<sup>25</sup>

Taiwan echoes these same themes, as the idea of filial piety helps to justify protest in widely held and politically acceptable values. As the most obvious visible commemoration of the debt owed to ancestors and the obligation owed to children, funeral ritual is a natural carrier for environmental protest. In most cases, the funerals treat the local land, river, or sea as a dead parent, trying to claim the moral high ground in these battles. By implication, holding such a funeral accuses the state or company of murdering the environment. At the same time, the "mourners" claim an expanded filial piety in response to the usual accusations that protesters are just out for financial compensation.

Sometimes protest funerals borrow another occasion for mourning, instead of mourning the land directly. One of the most influential occurred during Houjing's march to reopen their blockade, which I just discussed. The martial arts display accompanied a funeral. They carried four coffins, intending to set up a spirit altar back at the west gate of the factory compound, and thus reestablish their blockade. This "funeral" was nominally to commemorate the death of a man who had recently immolated himself in Taibei over other issues entirely. Typically, these coffins suggested the idea of mourning for a slain environment, just as they conjured up images of the discarded Confucian responsibility to the welfare of future generations. They also added an element of threat, because the group carried the traditional funeral wreaths, but wrote the names of factory managers on them, instead of the name of the dead man.

These death rituals further the idea that the environment is part of an estate which must be passed along to descendants. Women in Taiwan, however, tend to take a different view of what kinship is about, as I have discussed. In local movements as in national organizations, women tend to stress nurturing nature much more than creating a patrimony for sons and grandsons. One of the scholars at the Academia Sinica, for example, made a speech protesting the proposed construction of a sanitary landfill

nearby. Towing her children along to make her point, she even borrowed a couple of extras to help the image along. She clearly felt that her authority as mother and caretaker would carry more weight than her position as scholar and professional, and happily pointed out afterwards that she had been taken for a housewife. This call to more global issues of general nurturance marks the earth both as mother to us all, and as sick child in need of loving care. This strategy downplays the male appeal to patrimony, heirs, and local resources.

Thus large demonstrations, which are mostly run by men, often talk in generalities about preserving the world for their descendants. Such language promotes neither a nature for its own sake nor a general love of humanity; instead it builds on the old Chinese reverence for the patriline. Women's involvement, in contrast, tends to emphasize the household itself over the lineage. This universalizing theme fits easily with the national organizations run by women, with its emphasis on nurturance of children and of the earth itself.<sup>26</sup>

All these changes, for men and women both, indicate a growing local political autonomy, in which organization from below has a much greater chance to mobilize resources than ever before. Local self-help organizations, for all their ties to machine politics and occasionally even local hoodlums, appear to be signs of new kinds of local incentive not possible under the earlier authoritarian regime. They parallel in many ways early environmental organizations in Japan, which pioneered efforts in local political mobilization.<sup>27</sup>

Leaders of the national groups, the ones at the formal and voluntary corner of Figure 6.1, generally feel a great distance from tradition-bound local religious and kinship practice, exactly because those techniques rely on informal and at least partially communal ties. These practices do not fit well either with the Western-educated intellectuals who run those organizations, or with environmentalist universals. Typical of modernizing elites anywhere, they generally feel ambivalent at best about practices that seem premodern to them, especially in the forms most effective in actual movements: possessed mediums, flaming incense pots, powerful divinations. Just as importantly, they reject the localism and particularism inherent in the use of religion and kinship. The gods of local temples above all protect their immediate human communities, as lineages protect their members; they worry about the environment only when it threatens their people. This parochialism offers little encouragement for a global or even an island-wide view of ecology. Thus while local religion and kinship have actively helped build a civil society in Taiwan, and helped shape policy from the grassroots, they remain tied to purely local interests. The most "modern" sector is thus uncomfort-

able with them, even though they have also had an enormous impact on policy. Both sectors have pushed forward the lines of democratic civility in Taiwan.

### *Learning Curves*

Examining the pattern of environmental protest over time in Taiwan further reveals the social base of civil action, and shows how sensitively social movements interact with each other and with government policy. Figure 6.2 shows the general pattern in environmental protest from 1979 through 1991. The very rapid increase after martial law was lifted in 1987 comes as no surprise, but the graph also shows a small number of protests even in the relatively repressive year of 1979, with steady increases throughout the first part of the 1980s.<sup>28</sup> The first successful environmental lawsuit took place in 1981, and other protests led to eight steel mills being shut down in Taipei.<sup>29</sup> This reflected in part a bit more free space for social action that the government was allowing then. Environmental action can also claim to be strictly apolitical, which allowed this movement (and others, like the consumer protection movement) more leeway from the state than anything that claimed a political agenda.

The patterns that follow show a clear learning curve (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4). For example, the proportion of cases with radical demands—that polluting factories be moved or shut down, or that a new location be found for the village itself—roughly halved during the 1980s (Figure 6.3). This decline in radical goals responds simply to what worked. Drastic demands for the removal of factories or whole villages made it more difficult to mobilize support—major local polluters are also usually major local employers, and most public opinion favors continued industrial growth. In addition, most such attempts ran up against an official stone wall. As people learned that more modest demands had greater chances of success, they changed their strategies. Requests for compensation or reform tended to be much more successful.

While the nature of the demands has softened over time, the techniques of protest actually grew increasingly confrontational between 1979 and 1990. Extralegal techniques (street demonstrations, blockades, riots) increased to over 50 percent (see Figure 6.4). Although petitions continued to be used in about a quarter of the cases throughout the period, other officially sanctioned techniques fell from favor. Formal revelations to officials (*fanying*), formal accusations (*jianju*), and mediation hearings (*xietiao hui*) had nearly disappeared from the repertoire by 1990. The most striking increase was in blockades, where people physically blocked entrances to factories, construction sites, or garbage dumps,

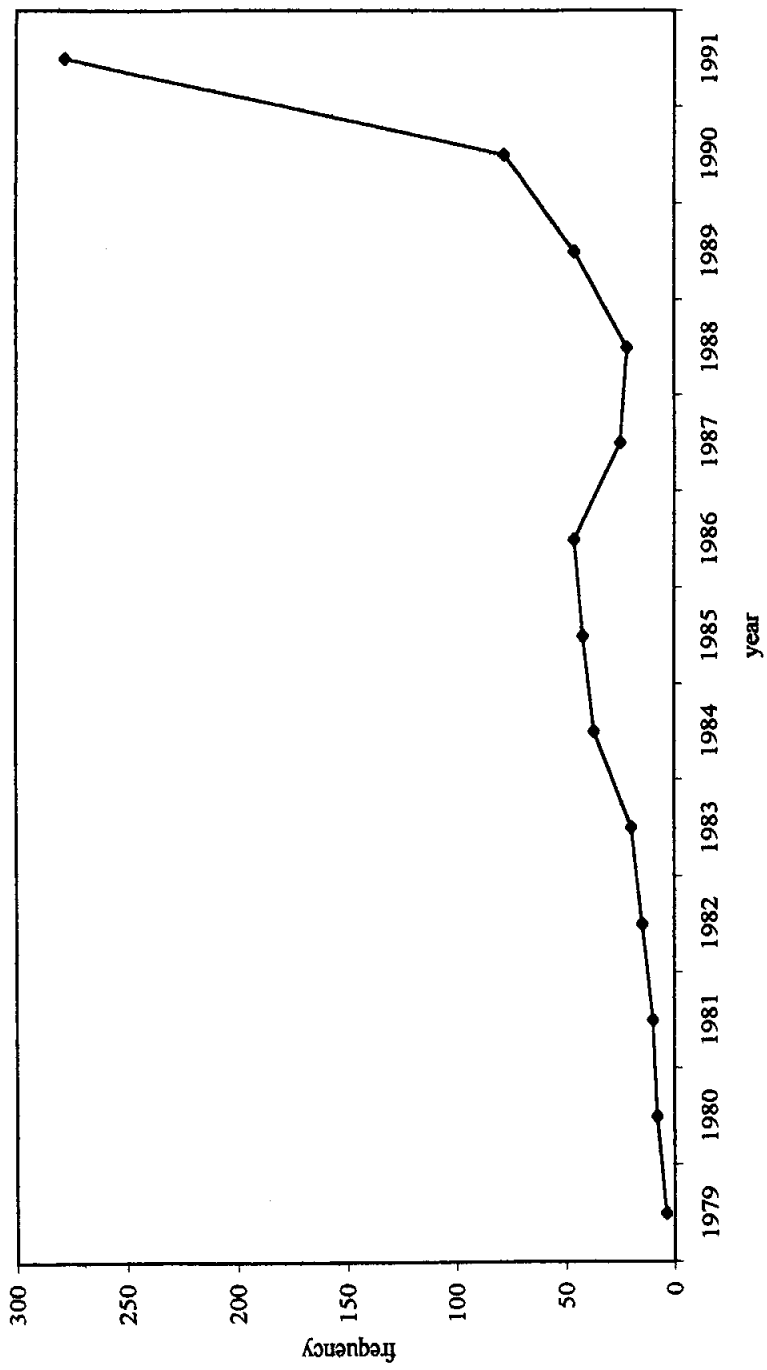
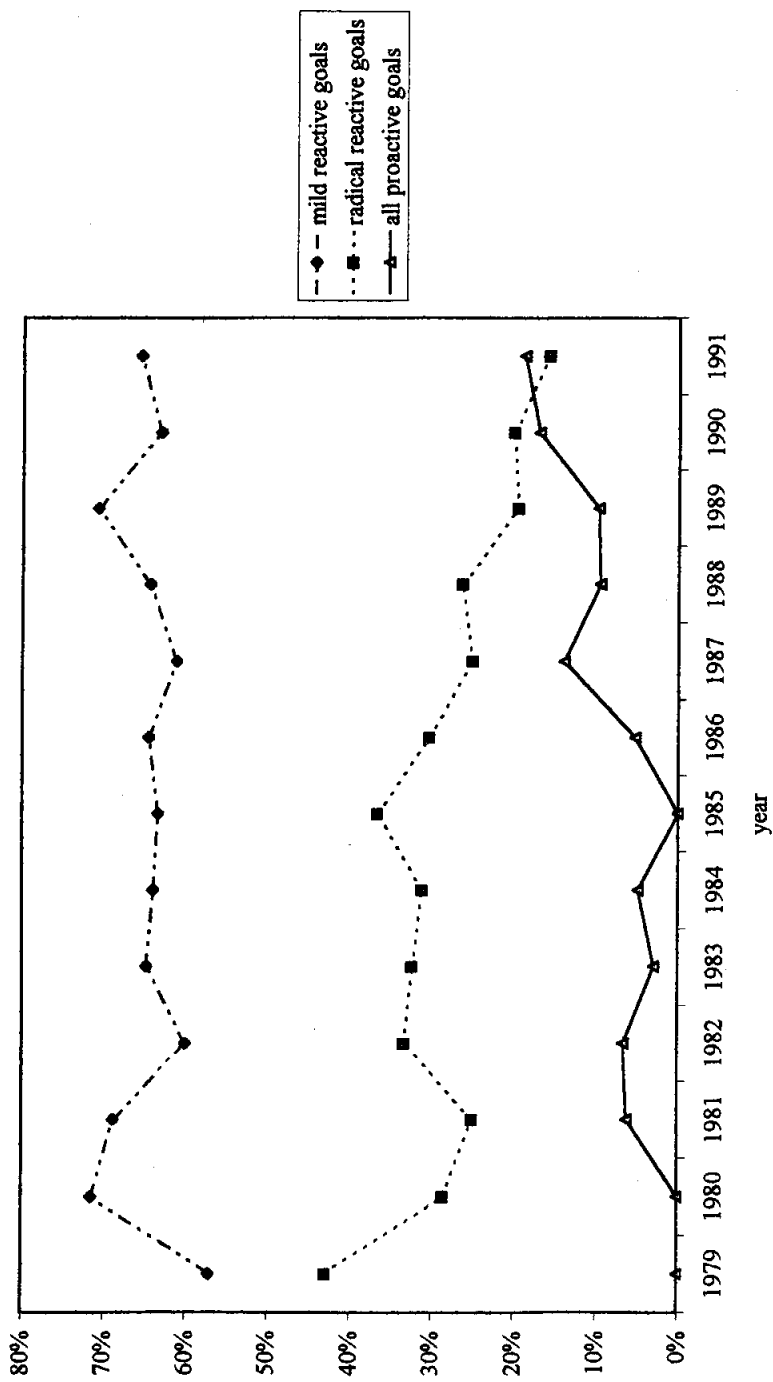


FIGURE 6.2 Frequency of Environmental Protest in Taiwan, 1979-1991



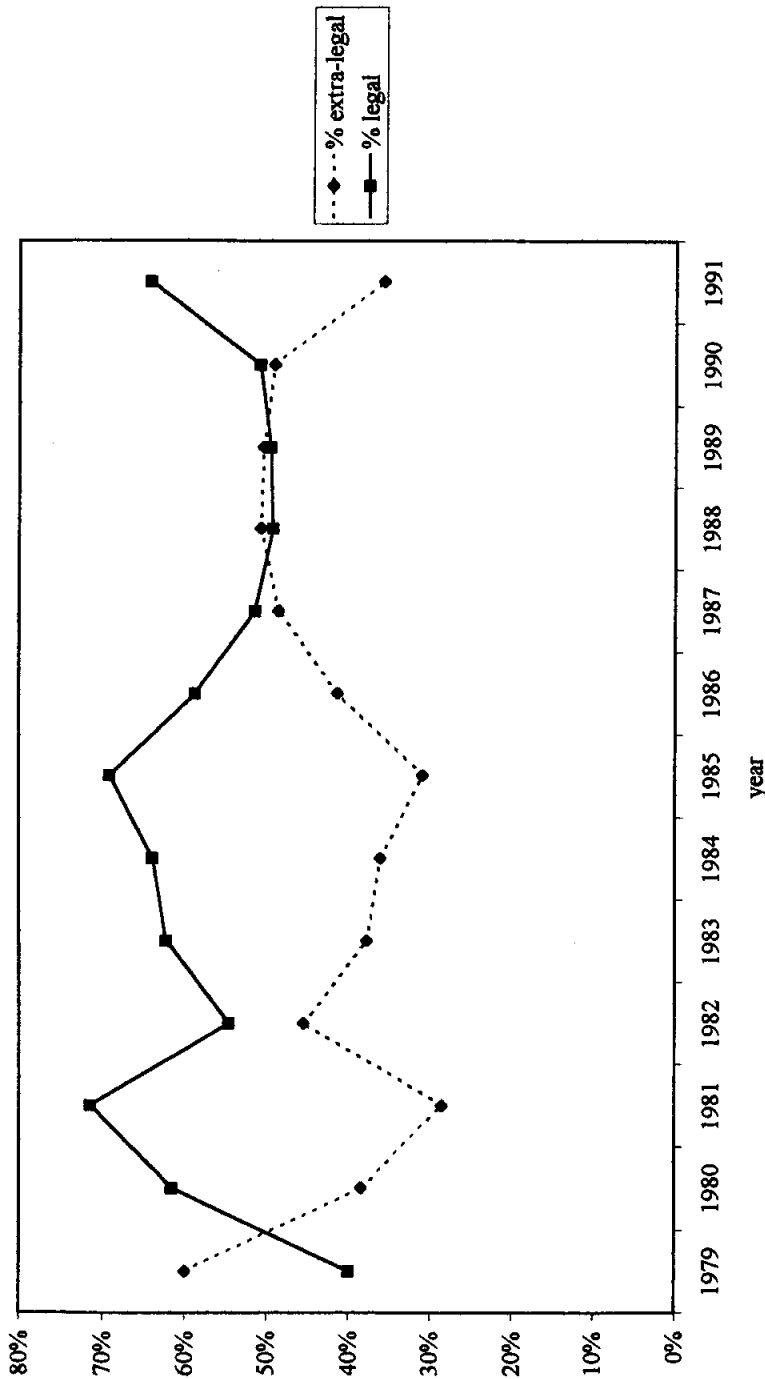


FIGURE 6.4 Legal versus Extralegal Techniques (as % of all techniques)

sometimes maintaining the siege for months or years (like the naphthyl cracker in Houjing). Nearly a quarter of the cases used blockades by the end of the period.

The explanation for this pattern again lies in a kind of pragmatic negotiation through action, as protesters learned what might work, what was ignored, and what brought down the wrath of the law. People began with peaceful and legalistic methods, which simply had little effect on an unsympathetic government. This led to an escalation in techniques, especially after martial law was lifted. The government would not tolerate riots, which they considered chaotic threats to public order. Yet they would allow extralegal techniques like blockades that kept the battle orderly (usually) and tied to the local area. Thus while the legal and political apparatus rarely came to the aid of protesters, the government did allow private solutions beyond the limits of the law.

The pattern changed again in 1991, at the same time as the number of protests increased so heavily. Legal techniques suddenly increased again, especially the use of formal revelation and public hearings. Blockades decreased, and the entire statistical pattern looks more like the early 1980s. Yet the reasons for the pattern were quite different in 1991. The explanation lies in a change in government policy, as the Taiwan Environment Protection Agency became more responsive to public demands in 1990. Word very quickly spread that working through official channels could be effective for the kinds of moderate demands (often for compensation) that people were now usually making. Adjustment of strategies took place very quickly.

The frequency of protests is thus not just a simple function of the opening of more civil space by a retreating authoritarian state. The changing state was of course a critical factor: only the most desperate dared protest under Chiang Kai-shek. Yet the numbers of protests relate more closely to an interplay between state and popular pressures. They show a lively dynamic where politicians, environmentalists, and local residents play off each other's moves, constantly adjusting their strategies and goals.

These findings help put the rapid changes of 1987 in context. Although the government clearly played an important role in moving Taiwan to democracy, much of the social base already existed in the local communities that could mobilize to pursue their interests and influence politics. Formal associations like environmental NGOs had no real place under martial law, but the social capital for Taiwan's future civil society was already developing out of local community ties. The environmental and other movements began to mobilize that social capital in interaction with the state well before martial law was lifted, and they prepared the ground for Taiwan's booming civil world in the 1990s.



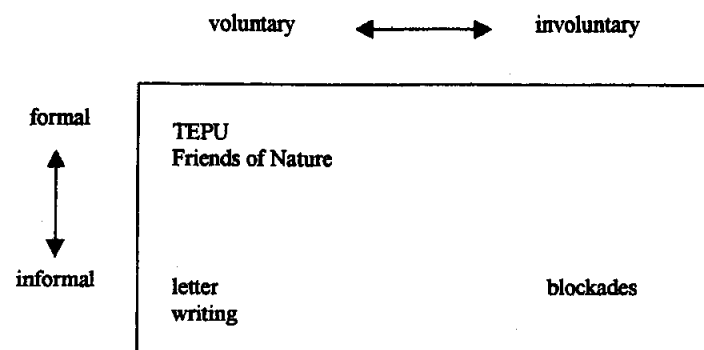


FIGURE 6.5 Examples of Environmental Action

or by working for the same unit. The mobilization of ties in units like this is one of the ironic legacies of communism, where a method of state economic and social control created a set of semicommunal ties it could not control. These networks of people who live and work together have been most obvious in the recent spate of protests after the insolvency of state-owned enterprises that are not paying full salaries or benefits, or whose failure to pay into unemployment and retirement funds for the last few years has left workers with an inadequate income. An earlier torrent of over 6,000 rural protests in 1992 and 1993 against taxation irregularities rested on village and lineage social structure. In a survey at the time, 43 percent of villagers said they could not do without the protection supplied by local lineage groups.<sup>44</sup>

The best understood example of this so far is the rural push for the agricultural responsibility system in the late 1970s. This took the form of organized undermining and twisting of official agricultural policy, rather than direct protest. Although elite willingness to adapt was certainly also part of the story here, the responsibility system is one case where peasant social organization clearly helped change policy.<sup>45</sup>

All these types of social action fit into the formal/informal and voluntary/communal distinctions I have been discussing. Figure 6.5 helps emphasize some fundamental similarities between the patterns in Taiwan and the People's Republic. As states with modernist ideologies, neither has left room for formal, communal organizations. When villages or urban districts act together, they rely on the informal social networks of kinship, religion, and neighborhood. As authoritarian regimes, both have also inadvertently fostered a wide gap between national-level formal associations and localized, ad hoc movements built on informal, communal ties. The national organizations by necessity have been politically careful,

and limited to areas that do not openly challenge official policy. Local movements are far bolder. Authoritarian rule, even at extremes like the Cultural Revolution, has never been able to destroy the independent ties on which these movements are based, but they do successfully keep such movements ephemeral and local. This changed in Taiwan only after martial law was lifted in 1987, and space suddenly opened up for organizations like TEPU, and for long-term social action that mobilizes help on a large scale, like the opposition to the naphtha cracker I have discussed, or ongoing opposition to new nuclear power plant construction.

Both China and Taiwan also mobilize communal or semicommunal ties of religion, family, and neighborhood at the local level. Some of these similarities, like the role of lineages and local temples, occur because of the shared cultural history of both places. There are also differences, of course, where their very separate political and economic legacies have reshaped those ties. This is clear, for example, in the importance of work-unit mobilization in China much more than in Taiwan. And in part both places are similar because, as I have been suggesting all along, these kinds of ties were always crucial to social life. An ideology of modernity may dismiss them as merely traditional, but in fact they are a fundamental part of modern society. They have actively contributed to Taiwan's major political transformation, and they have pushed policy changes in China.

Finally, a comparison of the two cases reminds us that while such organizations may provide a constant pressure on the state, they are no guarantee of democratic transformation. China is only just now allowing the kind of corporatist NGO sector that Taiwan had for decades. That is an enormous change, and will make a political transition much easier. But as Taiwan showed, a regime can continue for many years by keeping the national level tame and the local level disorganized. Such collections of social capital made Taiwan's transition to true civil society much easier, perhaps even made it possible at all, but they were hardly its sole cause.

## Notes

1. I borrow the phone book metaphor from Peter Berger.
2. See Xu Wang, "Mutual Empowerment of State and Peasantry: Grassroots Democracy in Rural China," *World Development*, 25(9) (1997), pp. 1431-1442.
3. For religious policy in the early twentieth century, see Prasenjit Duara, "Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity: The Campaigns Against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-century China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 50(1) (1991), pp. 67-83.
4. Putnam, "Bowling Alone."
5. Ignoring the informal sector can have stark policy consequences. For example, it can help determine whether a transitional economy favors very small entrepreneurs (like Poland) or looks to a large corporate structure (like Russia).

6. Much of the research in this section was done jointly with Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao of the Institute of Sociology at the Academia Sinica, Taiwan. We explore some of these issues further in Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, Lester W. Milbrath, and Robert P. Weller, "Antecedents of an Environmental Movement in Taiwan," *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 6(3) (1995), pp. 91–104, and Robert P. Weller and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, "Culture, Gender and Community in Taiwan's Environmental Movement," in Arne Kalland and Gerard Persoon, eds., *Environmental Movements in Asia* (London: Curzon, 1998), pp. 83–109.

7. See Li Lixun, "Gonghai Jiufen Shihuaye Zhaohuoli Zui Gao [Harm Rate from Oil Industry Highest in Disputes over Damages]," *Lianhe Bao*, July 21, 1992, p. 1. The actual figure is probably higher. Lawyers in Taiwan have told me that most such cases are settled out of court.

8. "Bunkered," *The Economist*, October 23, 1993, p. 44.

9. Other strands of Western thought also underlie Western environmentalism, including medieval ideas about the Great Chain of Being (see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* [New York: Pantheon, 1983]), elite desires to maintain and improve hunting preserves (see John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988]), and colonial scientists witnessing rapid environmental change under European impact (see Richard Grove, "Conserving Eden: The [European] East India Companies and their Environmental Policies on St. Helena, Mauritius, and in Western India, 1660–1854," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35[2] [1993], pp. 318–351).

10. Other organizations had existed earlier, but none wielded comparable influence. The most important was an environmental committee of the Consumer's Foundation, founded in 1984. See Zhang, *Shehui Yundong yu Zhengzhi Zhuanhua*, p. 53 for a list. The magazine *Life and Environment* began in the early 1980s, but never had a broad readership, and folded quickly. There were also other early precursors like the bird-watching societies in various cities and counties.

11. Shi Xinmin, "Fakan Ci [Editor's Introduction]," *Taiwan Huanjing [Taiwan Environment]* 1(1) (1988), pp. 1–3.

12. I will take up the Homemakers' Union separately below. As an organization exclusively for women, especially housewives, it differs significantly from the academic (and mostly male) enclaves I discuss in this section.

13. Thus the Gaoxiang branch grew out of the failed opposition to China Petrochemicals' Number Five Naphtha Cracker, the Northwest branch out of opposition to the Number Four Nuclear Power Plant, and the Ilan branch out of successful opposition to Formosa Plastics' proposed naphtha cracker.

14. See Lu, "Women's Self-growth Groups." Information in this section is also based on my interview with Lin Yupei, the general secretary, in 1992.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

16. This information comes from Jinghua publications and from an interview with Wu Muxin, July 13, 1992.

17. In fact, the relation of Buddhism to filial piety has always been problematic in China, where monastic celibacy combined with a willingness to make offerings to anyone's ancestors pitted Buddhists against traditionalists.

18. See Zhang, "Fuojiac Ciji Gongde Hui."

19. This is based on interviews conducted near the construction site, August 1993.

20. This summary is based on newspaper reports for the period, interviews with some local residents, and interviews with Cai Chaopeng and Liu Yongling, two of the top leaders of the protest, in July 1992.

21. Rumor also spoke of Molotov cocktails, although I cannot confirm it.

22. This example is discussed in more detail in Weller and Hsiao "Culture, Gender and Community," along with several other similar cases.

23. This is based on interviews with participants, July 1992.

24. The term *zisun* can include both genders, but the implications of a Confucian male line are clear. Reversing the two characters into *sunzi*, for instance, makes the word for grandsons, excluding granddaughters who must be specified as female (*sunnu*).

25. See Weller, *Resistance*, pp. 191–194, for a more extended discussion of this phenomenon.

26. See Lu, "Women's Self-growth Groups," pp. 34–35.

27. Margaret A. McKean, *Environmental Protest and Citizen Politics in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

28. Repression was strong in 1979 in part because the United States had broken diplomatic relations on January 1. Elections the previous fall had been cancelled, and a major opposition magazine was shut down early that year. Its leaders were given long jail terms of hard labor. There was some loosening during the early 1980s, but the general authoritarian pattern remained until 1987.

29. See Juju Chin-Shou Wang, "Economic Growth with Pollution: Taiwan's Environmental Experience," in Uday Desai, ed., *Ecological Policy and Politics in Developing Countries: Economic Growth, Democracy, and Environment* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 130.

30. See Li, "Changing Kinship."

31. Kin-man Chan and Qiu Haixiong, "Small Government, Big Society: Social Organizations and Civil Society in China," *China Area Studies Series (Japan)* 8 (1998), pp. 34–47.

32. Information on Friends of Nature is based on his public presentations, and on a brief interview when he was in the United States.

33. For a more detailed and very useful discussion of these groups, see Evan Osnos, "An Analysis of China's Environmental NGOs: Group Involvement in the Emergence of Civil Society" (senior honors thesis, Harvard University, 1999).

34. See *ibid.*, p. 39.

35. Qu Geping is the most important such sponsor for environmental organizations. He has a long history of promoting environmental issues within the government, and currently heads an environmental law working group of the National People's Congress. He is on the board of Friends of Nature and several other associations, and money from an international prize he won supported the founding of PACE. PACE is the offspring of the National Environmental Protection Agency. The most successful NGO is probably Project Hope, which does charity work in poor areas, and is the creation of the Youth Federation.

36. See Matt Forney, "Voice of the People," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (May 7, 1998), pp. 10–12.

37. This case is documented in Thomas P. Bernstein, "Incorporating Group Interests into the Policy Process: The Case of Farmers During the Reform Era" (paper presented to the conference on "The Non-Economic Impact of China's Economic Reforms", Harvard University, 1996), pp. 16-17.

38. Edward X. Gu, "'Non-Establishment' Intellectuals, Public Space, and the Creation of Non-Governmental Organizations in China: The Chen Ziming-Wang Juntao Saga," *China Journal* 39 (1998), pp. 39-58.

39. See Susmita Dasgupta and David Wheeler, "Citizen Complaints as Environmental Indicators: Evidence from China," Report to PRDEL, World Bank, 1996.

40. This is one of the preliminary findings of a large study of environmental policy in Anhui in which I am involved. Lianjiang Li and Kevin J. O'Brien, "Villagers and Popular Resistance in Contemporary China," *Modern China* 22(1) (1996), pp. 28-61, make a similar observation. The authors also identify a class of "recalcitrants" who sometimes escalate on their own by refusing to pay taxes or otherwise vocally not complying. In these cases, the government can usually simply repress them and be done with the problem. Such radical individual action also rarely attracts much broader social support. These are social isolates who are rarely successful.

41. Jun Jing, "Environmental Protests in Rural China," in Mark Selden and Elizabeth Perry, eds., *Social Protests in China* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming). Similar to my findings in Taiwan, his case studies show the use of local religion and kinship metaphors.

42. "Biejing Residents Protest Against Garbage Dump," *China News Digest*, 11 July, 1997 (GL97-098).

43. "Protestors Clash with Police in Sichuan," *China News Digest*, 15 October 1997 (GL97-141).

44. See Wang, "Mutual Empowerment of State and Peasantry," p. 1435. Li and O'Brien, "Villagers and Popular Resistance," pp. 48-49 also give several examples of rural protest over violations of the election law.

45. See Kelliher, *Peasant Power in China*, and Bernstein, "Incorporating Group Interests," pp. 13-14.

### The People's Republic

The split between a formal, voluntary, nationally organized sector and an informal, more communal sector is even starker in China than in Taiwan. China's socialist legacy and its current move toward corporatist patterns have helped remove anything in the middle. As we have already seen for associational life in business and religion, the choices tend to be between large organizations with close ties to high officials, and small-scale sets of informal ties beyond the gaze of the state.

#### Large-Scale Organizations

China's older national associations have their roots in socialist mass organizations like the union or the Women's Federation. These meshed directly with the government and Party at all levels, and originally had no real independence. With the recent market reforms, some of these groups have been thrown more on their own fiscal devices, and this has led in some cases to more freedom of action. This has been most striking at the lowest level—the street committees whose need to support themselves has led to their becoming independent economic actors.<sup>30</sup> Still, organizations like these are less NGOs than GONGOs—government-organized nongovernmental organizations—a newly coined oxymoron of great use in China. One study in Guangzhou found very few “NGOs” without direct ties to officials: only 19 percent of 152 had no officials on their board of directors, and only 26 percent said they undertook no activities on behalf of government or Party units. The more independent ones were almost entirely recreational or religious.<sup>31</sup>

Some new groups at least look more like standard NGOs. Only a few of these address environmental issues, but they are typical of new NGOs in China. The oldest and best-known group is Friends of Nature. They were founded in 1993 by Liang Congjie. Typically, they began under the safest possible auspices, in this case as a branch of the Academy of Chinese Culture (which is part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences).<sup>32</sup> After being turned down for registration under the National Environmental Protection Agency, they convinced the Academy of Chinese Culture to sponsor them by claiming an interest in indigenous ideas of nature. In fact, however, Friends of Nature has shown very little interest in earlier Chinese views of nature, and they largely promote a conservation ethic that could be heard anywhere in the world. Liang recognizes that there are great limits on what he can accomplish if the organization is not to be banned, and has thus defined his mission largely as education. They run a children's camp in the woods, and have been active in lobby-

ing to prevent harm to endangered species. Their membership has grown from an original 60 to about 600; like TEPU, it is mostly intellectuals.

Other registered organizations face the same pressures, and also stay with relatively safe issues. Some groups have been organized directly by government officials associated with the environment, and are registered directly under the National Environmental Protection Agency. Most prominent of these is the Professional Association for China's Environment (PACE), whose mission is also primarily informational and whose target audience is primarily academic and professional.

Two major groups were founded by women.<sup>33</sup> In ways reminiscent of Taiwan's Homemakers' Union or the Buddhist Jinghua Foundation, they are less tied to top academics and high officials, and more dedicated to work at the grassroots. Global Village Beijing, founded by Sheri Liao in 1996, promotes recycling and direct education through the media. Liao has run a weekly television show and also runs programs for journalists. Official limits have so far prevented her from registering as an NGO, so the organization is registered as a nonprofit company, and must pay taxes. The second group, Green Earth Volunteers (founded in 1994), has the largest public base, organizing mostly Beijing-based volunteers to undertake specific environmental projects like creating desert windbreaks. The founder, Wang Yongchen, split away from Friends of Nature due to her desire to increase the public base, especially among students. She has also been unable to register as an NGO so far. Both these groups are less intellectual-based and less officially connected than Friends of Nature or PACE. Both urge a simpler, less materialistic lifestyle, local volunteerism, and recycling. This suggests that very similar gender dynamics are taking place on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Nothing as oppositional as Taiwan's TEPU is possible now, although as a Chinese policy priority in the last few years, the environment provides a forum where people can begin to push the boundaries of political possibility. Other NGOs address similarly safe issues like welfare and consumer protection. All of them must stay very tame to get and retain their official registration as NGOs. It is worth noting that these were exactly the issues around which society could mobilize in Taiwan before martial law was lifted, and that even these deeply compromised NGOs are more than Taiwan had thirty years ago. Anything more directly political or confrontational must remain local and disorganized. Those who cross the line and go beyond the space defined by current policy quickly lose their platforms. The best example for environmental issues in China is Dai Qing, whose outspoken opposition to the Three Gorges dam project has made it difficult for her voice to be heard in China, and difficult to create any organization around her.

A typical example of the importance of informal government links was the campaign by Friends of Nature to save snub-nosed monkey habitat in Yunnan from logging.<sup>34</sup> To attract media attention, they sent a group of about 200 students, journalists, and scientists to the region to assess possible solutions. More effectively, however, Liang used his personal connections to high officials by sending letters to Vice-Premier Jiang Chunyun and Minister of Science and Technology Song Jian. This resulted in an official (but apparently unenforced) ban on logging in the area.

Environmental and other social groups either work closely with the government or are repressed. The only alternative is to remain small, disorganized, and informal. In principle China's NGOs are organized in a corporatist fashion, with one group alone to represent each administrative area. This rule is not strictly enforced, but it has added to the enormous difficulty of getting an NGO registered. The successful ones tend to have high state officials on their boards, and are often the offspring of political units—"nongovernmental" in name only.<sup>35</sup> Others, even when they are politically unproblematic, tend not to survive. A recent account, for example, documents the rise and demise of a historic building preservation group in Beijing (which competed with a government-run "NGO"), a Zhejiang migrant association in Beijing (which had conflicts with city officials), and a shelter for abused wives in Shanghai (which was thought to reflect badly on the local Women's Federation).<sup>36</sup>

Other groups are directly incorporated instead of being repressed. An early example was the Research Group on Problems of China's Agricultural Development in the early 1980s. They were mostly young urban elites who had spent time in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. They wanted to help rural people, who had no socialist mass organization to speak for them, and they were early supporters of the responsibility system reforms in agriculture. As something like an interest group, they were attacked in 1981, but were ultimately incorporated directly into the Party-State Council rural research agencies.<sup>37</sup> A similar tension occurred with Wang Juntao and Chen Ziming, whose group clearly hoped to work cooperatively with the state in the late 1980s. In their case, however, the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989 led them into opposition and ultimately prison.<sup>38</sup> As with Taiwan, however, even corporatist and authoritarian controlled civil association can be significant—it is much more social space than had been possible since before the Revolution, and these associations can become the seeds of future change.

#### *Staying Local*

National, formally organized associations must stay close beneath the government's wing, but that also makes them relatively easy to study.

Villages and urban neighborhoods in China also have many kinds of social movements; unlike the national associations, these often become confrontational, and often push at the outer limits of policy. They rarely receive press coverage in China, and are powerfully repressed if they try to organize on a larger or more formal scale. For these reasons, they are far harder to study.

Nevertheless, we know of many kinds of local outbursts through scattered newspaper reports and observers' accounts. These events include environmental issues, especially where severe local pollution is causing a crisis. More often, however, they involve land and taxation issues in the countryside, and problems of laid-off and retired workers in the cities. In many cases these demonstrations follow a pattern strongly reminiscent of Taiwan in its late authoritarian period. People usually begin with the limited official mechanisms available. These consist primarily of writing letters or otherwise notifying government officials that they should be investigating a problem. In recent years Chinese environmental authorities have received many thousands of letters like these, and some do generate a response.<sup>39</sup>

These mechanisms are primarily individual, not social. The social equivalent would be a petition, but petitions usually only appear after individual methods have failed. Authoritarian rule makes it very difficult for any organized social group to act initially. When asked why they do not act more on problems they perceive, many villagers in China refer to their lack of organization and the high costs of resistance.<sup>40</sup>

Letter-writing and similar attempts rarely succeed. Many complaints are dropped at that point, but sometimes they escalate to extralegal means like blockades or street demonstrations. A study of official records on 278 environmental disputes found that 47 involved forceful popular protest in rural areas.<sup>41</sup> This pattern again reproduces the typical Taiwan experience in the 1980s. When things escalate there is usually a move from individuals to social-based protest—isolated individuals can easily be ignored or repressed. Here we can see how the social capital stored in the informal ties of daily life can be mobilized in ways that ultimately affect policy. For example, protesters blocked the entrance to a garbage dump in 1997, saying that the odor made them sick and that a pregnant woman had been hospitalized. An earlier petition to local environmental authorities got no response.<sup>42</sup> In another kind of case the same year protesters clashed with police in Sichuan over low salaries and nonpayment of claims by their health insurance. They had again approached local authorities first, but received no response.<sup>43</sup>

The main groups in these protests tend to be residential—rural villages and urban neighborhoods. Given China's work unit structure, these areas are also united economically, either by a history of farming together