

# Protest as Community Revival: Folk Religion in a Taiwanese Anti-Pollution Movement

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## ABSTRACT

By analyzing a Taiwanese anti-pollution movement, this paper tries to shed light on the elements of folk religion in collective action. The Houchin protest took place in 1987 when local people opposed to the further expansion of the China Petroleum Company (CPC). This case is an important milestone in the history of Taiwanese environmentalism and famous for its persistent protest over three years. In order to see how a local community sustains its solidarity through localistic folk religion, it is worth taking a close look at the community structure prior to the protest mobilization. The next section discusses Houchin people's reaction to the CPC's upgrading plan. Here the anti-pollution protest is viewed as an emergency occasion to revive the communal solidarity. Religion permeates the whole process of their collective action by supplying ritualized forms of contention. Religion in action is more than an instrument for mobilization, but rather substantially affects the movement goal and meaning for the participants. These highly localistic messages often escape outsiders' observation. In conclusion, the paper discusses the discovery in the light of study on Taiwanese environmental movement.

Keywords: Community, religion, collective action, solidarity, ritual

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**Introduction:**  
**Blurring Boundary between the Sacred and the Secular**

Ron Aminzade and Elizabeth J. Perry (2001: 155) note, while many contemporary social movements are inspired by religious passions, scholars seldom venture beyond a “purely instrumentalist perspective” to explore these dimensions. Too often, religious factors are assumed to be distantly related to the movement goal. Such a view fails to understand the delicate fusion of the sacred and the secular in social protests. In fact, religions are important not only because of their rich material resources that come in handy in the mobilizing process, but they also substantially affect the course of movement by defining the meaning in the mind of believers-as-participants.

This paper tries to understand the religious involvement in Taiwan’s environmentalism. Ideal-typically, environmental movement is a late-modern product, with urban middle class as its main constituencies (Inglehart, 1981; Milbraith, 1984). Widespread environmental concerns mark the transition to a highly reflexive risk society, in which many principles of industrial production become obsolete (Beck, 1992). In this image, the otherworldly religious belief seems next-to-impossible to play a significant role. Thus, the unmistakably religious characteristics in Taiwan’s local environmental protests offer an opportunity to rethink the meaning of environmentalism, at least in a third world country.

Since the lifting of marital law in 1987, a great wave of environmental protest has surged in Taiwan (Hsiao, 1999; Ho, 2003; Kim, 2000; Tang and Tang, 1999; Terao, 2001; Williams, 1992). From 1980 to 1998 there were 1,727 cases of environmental protests.<sup>1</sup> Among them, a great majority (91.5%) are anti-pollution protests, while the rest are made up of conservation, anti-nuclear and other protests. The predominance of pollution shows the severe deterioration of living environment brought about by rapid industrialization as well as the local nature of protests. Since pollution is limited to and experienced by a territorial community, community members are the immediate victims and oftentimes the only potential recruits. In many protest cases, the most salient slogan has been “love for homeland” (*ai hsiang*). Local compatriots are mobilized by the place identity and fight against the unwelcome outside intruder. But what does the homeland mean for the passionate participants? In the American movements against toxic waste, participants are encouraged by the tra-

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<sup>1</sup> The author has collected data on protest case from a variety of sources, such as newspapers, magazines, and governmental archives. For further description of source and method, see Ho (2003: 31-37).

ditional value of grassroots democracy and neighborhood mutualism (Szasz, 1994: 82). In Taiwan, what kind of community vision is it that gives rise to the pervasive local defense for environment?

With these questions in mind, this paper studies a Taiwanese anti-pollution protest in the late 1980s in order to understand the underlying community dynamic. In July 1987, villagers in Houchin, a bordering community in the northern Kaohsiung City, rose to oppose the state-owned China Petroleum Company (CPC) for its expansion project to install the Fifth Naphtha Cracker (FNC). Since then, a Houchin anti-pollution movement emerged and lasted for three years. In 1990, owing to the depletion of movement resources, vicious factionalism, and repressive policing, the government finally restarted the delayed construction. Four years later, the ill-fated naphtha cracker was fully installed and put into operation.

The Houchin movement was remarkable in many ways. First, the protest took place just two weeks after the lifting of martial law in 1987. All of sudden, Houchin villagers gave free rein to their pent-up grievance for the past forty years. While the petrochemical industry has been the spearhead of Taiwan's economic development since the 1970s, Houchin people were not able to share the newly created prosperity. They suffered from the exhaust gas and wastewater produced by the CPC Refinery; their health and livelihoods were greatly damaged. In the past, the train passengers bound for Kaohsiung City were alerted by the obnoxious smell that unfailingly reminded them they were near the destination. The unfavorable political atmosphere forcefully kept them from voicing their discontent. Thus, when the angry villagers began to gather at the gate of the CPC Refinery, it was clear a new age had dawned. Silent victims became an unruly crowd.

Second, the rise and fall of movement is closely timed with the democratic transition in Taiwan. The Houchin community was able to make use of the newly liberalized situation when the movement began. During the early period, the government was relatively tolerant of Houchin movement. Some violent clashes certainly happened, but they were rather accidental and the authorities concerned did not prosecute protest leaders. At the end of that decade, political environment changed as the hardliners began to assume power. As Hau Po-tsun became the Premier in May 1990, the government took an increasingly repressive stand toward social protests. The FNC project was one of the delayed investments that Hau mentioned in particular (Wang, 1994: 123). At that time, Taiwanese environmentalists viewed the collapse of Houchin opposition with apprehension. One Taiwan Environmental Protection Union activist claimed the event signified the resumption of "authoritarian ancient

regime,” while another proposed all environmentalists should abandon the notion of “political neutrality.”<sup>2</sup> In retrospect, the repression of the Houchin protest was a great turning point in the reconstruction of state-and-society relationship in Taiwan.

Given the significance of the Houchin movement, there exist many writings devoted to this case, both in Chinese and English (Han, 1988; Hsu, 1995; Huang, 1993; Lu, 1992; Wang, 1989; Weller, 1999: 115-120). Nonetheless, with the exceptions of Lu (1992) and Weller (1999), few studies try to analyze how villagers see the protest in their own terms. Too often analysts tacitly assume an imported model of western environmentalism without questioning its applicability to other cultures. They fail to ask what community villagers have in their mind and what kind of homeland they try to defend. Inevitably, rich cultural dimensions are overlooked as researchers seek to employ the theoretical constructs of social movement study. As some commentators stress, the standard vocabularies of social movement study are culturally-laden and not easily adaptable to the non-western context (Alvarez et al., 1998; Boudreau, 1996). The point here is not to discard all western theories, but to incorporate the rich cultural practices into our understanding of environmental movement.

In this paper, the Houchin protest is analyzed from the bottom-up perspective. The protest is interpreted as a privileged moment of community revival, in which villagers’ solidarity is strengthened through ritual practices. The expressive need of community solidarity as well as the instrumental goal to terminate the FNC is important in the whole mobilizing process. In the traditional Taiwan, a community is religiously defined in that members share the same patron deity and temple. In a word, they make up a “territorial-cult organization” (Sangren, 1987: 55). Thus, elements of folk religion inevitably come into the community-based collective actions, including anti-pollution protests. By a close analysis of the Houchin protest, this paper shows religion is not just a mobilizing instrument. The predominance of religion in a supposedly “secular” protest reveals the localistic and particularistic orientation among the villagers. Their worldview comes from the early settlement period when the rival outsiders are hostile and the predatory state is encroaching. In the anti-FNC protest, villagers are able to reenact this pre-modern scenario because the state-financed investment is viewed as a danger to their living. Seen in this way, protest is one of the community responses toward external threat. By acting together, villagers help themselves to

<sup>2</sup> *Taiwan Huanching* [Taiwan Environment] 28: 1, 9.

tide over the critical moment. It follows that their inability to stop FNC is not seen as a simple and plain failure. Middle-class environmentalists and sympathetic supporters may be demoralized by the outcome, but what matters most to the villagers is they stand together in the crisis.

This paper is structured in the following sections. First, the paper analyzes the role of folk religion in the traditional community life of Taiwan. The Houchin story is presented to show how communal solidarity is sustained through folk religion. The next section discusses Houchin people's reaction to the CPC's expansion plan. Here, the anti-pollution protest is viewed as an emergency occasion to revive the communal solidarity. In conclusion, the paper discusses this discovery in the light of study on Taiwanese environmental movement.

For the data in this study, the author relies on documentary sources, including journalistic and local publications, and in-depth interviews. In spring 2003, the author interviewed eight Houchin residents. All of them are community leaders, possessing administrative or temple-managing positions and took part in the Houchin protest more than ten years ago. More than a dozen of CPC employees were also interviewed. Some of them live in the Houchin area and had first-hand local knowledge, while others are union cadres who worked with Houchin leaders in the anti-pollution protest.

### **Folk Religion, Community, and Houchin**

Folk religions can be described as popular religions in Chinese societies, or the religion for non-elite groups (Teiser, 1995: 378). This paper deals with the community-based variant. Here, folk religion means the ensemble of ritual and faith as practiced in a geographical unit. Community members share the same religion by worshipping the patron god, managing the community temple, and financing festival activities.

In Taiwan's official statistics, religions are considered as a phenomenon of denominations. That is to say, an individual religion is assumed to have distinctive beliefs, membership and boundaries. Local folk religions are usually classified as Buddhism or Taoism, but neither of the titles captures their essential syncretism. In fact, it is simply impossible to distinguish the different original sources in folk religions. A worshipped patron deity can possess Taoist magic and have a memorable story in the spirit of Buddhist karma or Confucian piety. In other words, folk religions are a creative synthesis by the common people to meet their psychological needs.

Practiced by the non-elites, Taiwan's folk religions are less inspired by the intellectual questions concerning cosmological issues than daily utilitarian needs. As a result, folk religions do not have elaborated codes

of conduct. More often than not, they are simply rationalizations of pre-existing ethical rules. Consequently the moral teaching is often traditionalist in outlook. One of the Houchin interviewees cites the ten golden rules he most benefits from: no gambling, no lascivious desire, practicing virtue, stable temperament, filial piety, spouse's mutual understanding, brothers' harmony, loyalty to friends, sense of duty, and respect for deity. Clearly folk religions do not invent or impose new ethical rules, but reinforce the given ones.

Folk religion is important for the study of local politics in Taiwan for two reasons. First, by worshipping the same deity, the community members' local identity is strengthened. In the history of early settlement, communal temples were the center of local defense. Patron gods offer protection to all local worshippers regardless of lineage and sub-ethnic divisions (Hsu, 1973; Wang, 1974). Thus, folk religion is one of the earliest modes of collective action for traditional community. Second, historically, ruling classes viewed the folk religion with a mixture of contempt and fear. The cultured officials disliked the superstitious, unethical, and wasteful aspects, while they also had security reasons to worry about the organizational power. Thus, folk religion was by necessity a conflict arena with dialectic of control and resistance. In normal times, resistance was disguised in the superficially innocent ritual and worship. During the period of open confrontation, religious elements came into stage and organized the protest activities. The story of the Houchin community provided an example of religious involvement in traditional community life.

Historically, Houchin (the rearguard) was named after one of the military brigades sent by Koxinga to colonize the southern part of Taiwan in the seventeenth century. Koxinga (Cheng Chen-kung, 1624-1662) was a warlord loyal to the Ming Dynasty. In 1661-1662, he defeated the Dutch occupants and took Taiwan as his military base. Cheng's descendants were able to maintain independence before their capitulation to the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1683. Cheng's soldiers were mostly recruited from his southern Fukien homeland, Chuanchou Prefecture. After his takeover of Taiwan, some of his compatriot troopers were sent to reclaim the wilderness to support themselves. With these troopers-colonizers, the local customs in Chuanchou were also brought to their new settlements. In Houchin, the worship of Paoshengtati (Emperor for Life Protection) was derived from these pioneers since it was a predominantly Chuanchou patron deity.

Before 1940s, the area was still a vast tract of fertile farmland in the northern Kaohsiung City. A petrochemical refinery in 1941 built by the Japanese Navy began to attract outsiders to Houchin. In the postwar era, the Nantze Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in the mid-1970s was a

great magnet for the rural immigrants. Industrialization reduced the area size that was called Houchin. For Houchin people, these immigrants were outsiders not attached to the place. The petrochemical workers lived in the guarded company residence which was forbidden for Houchin people. Workers in the export processing zone tended to be either young single women whose working career would be terminated when they were married (Deyo, 1989: 180-187), or married men whose family members were left behind in the rural area (Gates, 1979: 396). Either way, the immigrant workers' contact with their host community was temporary and partial at best. Though there was no barrier for them to live there and worship in the same temple, they were still not regarded as bona-fide Houchin people. As a result, the local usage continued to refer to the core business area as "within the village (Shenei)" and immigrants as "outside the village (Shewai)."

Today, Houchin lies on the northern border of Kaohsiung City. It takes a 40-minute ride to the downtown now, and it was much more inconvenient in the past for the lack of public transportation and private vehicles. Geographical isolation has made Houchin a unique ecological site. First, Houchin people are known for their internal solidarity and toughness against unfriendly outsiders. People there always are fond of telling the stories of local solidarity. For example, when the outsiders insulted their boys, the villagers would go to the wrongdoers together and demand justice. Even the local toughs (*liumang*) are said to care for the community. Those who made money by running a prostitution business somewhere were reluctant to bring the "pollution" back to their hometown (Lu, 1992: 63). Their bosses are seen as pillars of community rather than criminals. Purportedly, they punished their juvenile runners when the latter tried to collect protection money from the local peddlers. In the villagers' moral judgment, extortion was a lesser misdeed when it was committed against outsiders.<sup>3</sup>

For the neighboring residents, the Houchin's solidarity was judged in negative terms. The CPC workers, who enjoyed state provision of company welfare, often looked down on the Houchin people. Outsiders hold that the Houchin boys were more unruly, "eager for a fight." Luckily for the CPC workers, they have an exclusively company-affiliated school for their children. Otherwise, they were often chilled about the idea of sending their children to the same school with "those wild boys."

<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, Wolf (1968: 47) noted village tough is a "purely Chinese institution for which it is difficult to find a Western parallel." In her fieldwork, she found these persons "contribute heavily to the repair of temples and to the expenses of religious festivals," while they were also capable of committing all kinds of crime.

Second, despite the installation of factories in the vicinity, how Houchin people made their living was not very modernized. As a mid-1980s study revealed, 14.6% and 48.8% of the total 6,623 economically active population were engaged in agricultural and manual jobs respectively. Further, the education level was comparatively low. Among the 15,048 residents, 11.7% did not receive any formal schooling and only 2.5% had gone to college (Wang, 1989: 37-39). Houchin people were not impoverished because of the employment and education disadvantage, for some made a fortune by selling their farmland to factory owners and construction companies. Still, situated in the great metropolis, Houchin was a backward peripheral community overshadowed by modern industry. With these strong interpersonal ties and traditional ways of life, Houchin people were sort of urban villagers in Kaohsiung City. In contrast, other early settlements in Kaohsiung, such as Yuch'ang (right-wing brigade) and Tsoying (left-wing brigade), have long lost these communal traits owing to the rapid urbanization. In this regard, Houchin preserved many characteristics of traditional society in Taiwan. They are shown in the following discussions.

(1) *Shared Religious Belief Underpinned Community*

Houchin is not an administrative unit. Legally speaking, it is currently made up of six *lis* (wards).<sup>4</sup> Through *Li* is also subdivided into *lins*, *Li* is the smallest unit of local self rule in the urban area, and financed by the municipal government. In Taiwan, the *li* boundaries are largely drawn for administrative convenience, with little regard to the local custom, as in the case of Houchin. Then, there comes the question of how to maintain the common identity of the Houchin people above the subdivision of *li*? Here, religious association, or what Seaman (1978) called temple organization, serves as the institutional anchorage for local solidarity.

As late as in the early twentieth century, there was a system of rotating incense burner practicing in the Houchin area. On June 1 of the lunar calendar, household heads gathered in the Shengyün temple to select the annual master of incense burner (*luchu*). The master had the duty of coordinating festival and worship activities and managing the common property. In return, he received social prestige and divine auspice as his rewards. In 1964, the rotating system further evolved into a

<sup>4</sup> Prior to 1990, there were only 5 *lis* in Houchin. The new Ts'uip'ing *li* was designated to accommodate the new immigrant workers in the Nanze Export Processing Zone. *United Daily News*, April 16, 1990.

Temple Property Management Committee (TPMC), made up of fifteen managing members and five supervisory members. With this re-organization, the jurisdiction of the TPMC was also enlarged to include three communal temples in the Houchin area: the Shengyün temple, the Fengp'ing temple and Fute temple (Houchin Temple Property Management Committee, 1995: 27).

The organization of the TPMC reflected the localistic principle. Nominally, the property belonged to all residents-as-worshippers, but the TPMC was in charge of the administration. Each *lin* of the original five *lis* had one representative, while each *li* selected three managing members and one supervisory member. Thus, with the TPMC, every community member was organized into stakeholder of common property. Also, the same organizational principle outlawed any outsiders' involvement. In 1990, a new Ts'uip'ing *li* was created to accommodate the immigrant workers on the outskirts. Though the new *li* occupied the original territory, it was not religiously recognized. The TPMC continued to represent the original five *lis*, and Ts'uip'ing *li* was de facto excluded. This excommunication came as a result when the people "within the village" suspected the loyalty of Ts'uip'ing residents, who were deemed not worthy of being "Houchin people." Residents in Ts'uip'ing *li* were more distant from the CPC Refinery, and therefore, their participation in the anti-FNC protest was lower. Their lukewarm attitude incurred disfavor since the protest was a common effort.

Also the neighboring CPC workers were excluded from the temple management. The CPC workers might go to the Houchin temples for annual peace talisman (*ant'aisui*) and announcements of temple festival activity which were posted on the billboard in the company residence area. Nevertheless, CPC workers were not seen as part of the community, but privileged outsiders.

Unlike other temple organizations, the TPMC did not collect "male poll tax" (*tingch'ien*) from each household. Endowed with valuable lands, the TPMC charged peddlers in the vegetable market and night market for rents, and senior citizens' tea pavilion for cleaning fees as its monthly revenue (Lu, 1992: 77). With such assets, the TPMC naturally became the power center, and the list of TPMC read like a who's who in Houchin. Besides, the TPMC also underwrote festival activities, such as folk opera performances and movies, which provided the only public entertainments prior to the advent of modern private forms, such as television.

Taiwanese anthropologists have long elaborated on the concept of "cult circle" (*chissuch'üan*) to understand the basic organization of native society before modern transformation. By cult circle, it means a territorial unit centered on a common worshipped deity. The geographic scope

of a cult circle is below a village or town, but of varying size. Being a member of a cult circle entailed the duty to contribute to the maintenance of communal temples, which nominally belonged to all (Lin, 1989: 66-75; Lin, 1993: 171-190). Thus, each village or settlement corresponded to at least a cult circle, and the shared religious belief marked the difference between insiders and outsiders. The Houchin case clearly qualified as a cult circle.

(2) *Communal Religion was Localistic*

Houchin people made an unambiguous distinction between “public” and “private” temples. The public or communal temples were the Shengyün temple, the Fengp’ing temple and Fute temple, which were under the management of the TPMC. The rest were private temples, including ancestral halls of lineage group and smaller altars. Although one might seek divinations to solve ones’ own troubles either in public or private temples, public temples were the only place to settle down communal affairs. The encompassing scope of public temples was greater and directly related to all community members.

My local interviewees were convinced of the protection of the deities in public temple, especially *Paoshengtati* or what they called *Laotsu* (Old Ancestor). As they said, *Laotsu* graced them with timely rain to survive severe draughts in the early settlement period. Toward the end of the Second World War, *Laotsu* also sheltered them from the bombing of American air forces, while the neighboring refinery was ruthlessly damaged. In fact, right from the beginning, *Paoshengtati* was brought from China to “subdue a plague.” These stories revealed two localistic aspects of folk religion in Houchin. First, the villagers as a body faced the same threats. Only the worshipped deity had the power to protect them without discrimination. In a word, the whole Houchin constituted a “community of fate” (Lin, 1989: 101), in which every villager’s life chance was intimately bound together. Second, while the divine power was strong enough to ward off draught, epidemic, and air bombing, their grace did not extend to non-members. Outsiders might come to Houchin temples for individual peace and good luck, but there was simply no way for local deity to protect other community. The story that the U.S. air force damaged the nextdoor refinery complex and company residence proved the wonder, not the limitation of divine power.

This strong localistic orientation also encouraged the individual community member to trust more in the worshipped deity. One of my interviewees claimed his decision to quit drinking, smoking and swearing was inspired by *Paoshengtati*. He has been a “tough without belief,” but now he is a changed man pursuing the “righteous way.” This case was by

no means singular. Many people decided to become “children in contract” (*ch’itzu*) of *Paoshengtati* when they had personal troubles. A “child in contract” owed special favors from *Laotsu*, and in return, they had to shoulder more responsibilities of communal worship. Needless to say, this special kind of endearment was only exclusive for the Houchin people.

(3) *Religious Belief Solidified Community in Conflict Against Outsiders*

Throughout the Ch’ing rule (1683-1895), Taiwanese society has witnessed incessant social disturbances, mainly communal strife and popular uprising (Hsu, 1980: 87-89; Lamley, 1981). Many incidents of the communal strife rose out of struggles over scarce resources, for example, disputes over irrigation, land and business opportunity. The frontier condition was a severe survival test for each settlement community. Prior to the pro-development policy turn in the late nineteenth century, the Ch’ing dynasty maintained a largely remote and indirect rule by providing insufficient officials and quarantining the island from the mainland immigrants intermittently (Shepherd, 1993). Weak governance in a frontier society meant that social order could only be tenuously maintained. The anarchical state of affair forced every settlement community to reinforce its internal cohesion to meet the external menace. Given the salience of religion in community integration, there is no wonder religion was deeply involved with popular contentions.

Researchers in Taiwanese folk religion have discovered the phenomenon of inter-village organization of the same cult. The originally village-level cult circle might be extended to embrace the allied villages of the same ancestral places or surnames (Chen, 1995: 87). In that case, scholars called this religious association “faith circle” (*hsinyangch’üan*) to mark the difference from the narrower cult circle (Lin, 1989: 84-86). In some cases of communal strife, temples were the place where armed men gathered and pledged to fight as a body, and the torching and sacrilege of the enemy’s temples marked the victory of the other (Feuchtwang, 1974: 270). Thus, many local temples had oral legends concerning the disorders. From the stories presented in the *Gazetteer of Taiwan Province* (Historical Committee of Taiwan Provincial Government, 1971: 276-281), one might classify the following types. (1) Temples were built to bury and pacify the deceased in social turmoil. (2) Temple deities assisted in fighting by participating in combats directly, healing the wounded, stultifying the enemy’s tactics. (3) Temples were built on the site of defense blockade. (4) Temples were re-built after the enemy destruction. (5) Conciliatory temples were built to accommodate deities from the warring factions.

In Houchin, the author did not find any collective memories of large-scale armed struggle against outsiders, save the anti-CPC protest. But the Houchin community used to support more than a dozen martial arts troupes (*chent'ou*), such as Dragon Troupe, Lion Troupe, and Songchia Troupe. In the past, these martial arts troupes were used as communal militia to keep troubles away. There were two explanations about its historical origin. The first one attributed to the early colonization by Koxinga troopers, who practiced military drilling when the seasonal farming labor was over. The second explanation accredited the influence of an unidentified Chinese master of martial arts whose teaching aroused local young men's enthusiasm. Either way, these martial arts teams were closely related to the communal temple. They practiced in the temple yard and took part in performing on festival days. Their outfits were also reimbursed in part by the temple fund. Most important of all, when they learned the martial arts, they were taught a moral lesson: they should not use these skills to do evil things in the community, but only for the purpose of defense. As Sutton (1990: 548) pointed out, Taiwanese ritual troupes were moral dramatization of cosmological order, and the martial arts troupes in particular conveyed the message "we are as one against enemies, and individual effort is placed at the service of the group."

In sum, folk religion played a prominent role in the inter-village conflict, and Houchin was no exception. The martial arts troupes were a historical reminder of the bygone social instability. Further, they were the visible display of villagers armed by a common identity. Thus, there were no surprises when the Houchin people resorted to this weapon in their struggle against the CPC.

(4) *Communal Religion was a Site of Popular Resistance Against State Power*

Traditionally, for the powers to be, folk religion was not an unmitigated blessing. On the one hand, traditionalist virtue was promoted as an abiding moral guide to lead a modern life. Misfortune was interpreted as a moral defect or even the retribution of the wrongdoings in the previous life. The overall result was to "promote a conservative ideology that explicitly supports the government" (Weller, 1982: 469). No wonder when Koxinga seized Dutch-ruled Taiwan in 1661-1662 and Ch'ing dynasty defeated Koxinga's decedents in 1683, both conquerors asserted their legitimacy by claiming the goddess Matsu's assistance. On the other hand, the state also kept a watchful eye on the popular religiosity. In China and Taiwan, popular uprisings against the government have been associated with secret societies and sectarian religions (Perry, 1985, Ownby,

1995). Scholars also noted folk ideologies often constituted a cultural opposition to the dominant hegemony (Gates and Weller, 1987; Scott, 1985).

Certainly, no religion per se is conformist or radical. Religious teachings are “sufficiently ambiguous that they may be interpreted in disparate directions” (Smith, 1996: 13). As stated in the above, folk religion underpins the solidarity of traditional community. Therefore, it might be argued, when the state action threatens the communal survival, religious idea or practice might be used to resist the encroachment of state power.

Historically, rulers in Taiwan have been very suspicious about folk religion. The Japanese government first adopted a tolerant attitude toward local customs despite their prejudice against what they regarded as an inferior form of religiosity. Writing from a colonizer’s point of view, Yosaburo Takekoshi described the local religion as “unethical and corrupt idolatry” because the belief in deities did not impose moral restraints on personal behaviors but served to meet all kinds of psychological needs (Takekoshi, 1907: 299-304). But in the late 1930s, a new policy of ideological control was put into practice. The colonial government began to Japanize the indigenous population by repressing many aspects of old Chinese culture, including religious worship (Weller, 1987: 30). As the Pacific war broke out, the colonial government even billeted its troopers in the temples (Feuchtwang, 1974: 283). This kind of military commandeering was not only a sacrilege, but also a visible symbolic imposition of state power in local society. In 1937, the authority forcibly occupied the Shengyün temple and the Feng’ing temple in Houchin, and the former became a police station and the latter a Japanese shintoist shrine. The deity figures were casually disposed in the other place. The Houchin people were outraged, but could not do anything. As the legend has it, *Taotsu* inspired the villagers of the whereabouts of the figures. The courageous and pious Houchin people secretly reinstalled the divine figures in a private house and continued their worship. One month after Japan’s surrender, the Taotzu figure was finally put back in the temple (Houchin Temple Property Committee, 1995: 8). The moral of this story consisted in that secret worshipping in the face of state inhibition was a communal resistance in itself.

During the KMT rule, though the state did not discriminate folk religion on the ground of Chinese culture, repression continued. First, the state officials considered the saved money should not be “squandered” in religious purposes, but used constructively for military buildup and economic development. The lavish activities that propped up communal spirit were deemed as lack of frugal spirit (Gates, 1996: 231-236).

Secondly, for the western-educated mainlander officials, native folk religion smacked of superstition. During the 1920s, the KMT staged many anti-religious campaigns in the name of modernity and science (Duara, 1991), and the iconoclastic mentality continued with their retreat to Taiwan. The state-controlled education continued to denigrate some religious practices in contrast to modern science (Jordon, 1994: 150-151). Last, the authoritarian rulers also fear any indigenous organizations that escaped the state control and censorship. The Houchin community could not be immune from the KMT repression, either. Beginning in 1946, the Houchin people organized an annual "Sugarcane Tail Festival" (*kan-weihui*) which comprised more than ten days of staging folk operas, feasting, and parading around with deity figures. The Sugarcane Tail Festival was intended to express thanks for patron deity's protection in the bygone year and wish for peacefulness in the coming year. But owing to the authority's pressure, the festival was cut down to 5 days (Houchin Temple Property Committee, 1995: 29). There was another piece of evidence to show the legacy of state repression. My interviewed temple manager in Houchin kept reminding me that asking for annual peace talisman was not an act of superstition, but just for "inner calmness."

Despite the KMT's invigorated control, folk religion did not wither away but functioned as a site of popular resistance. The practice of Universal Salvation (*pudu*) continued to dramatize the dangerous and unsocial ghosts, which were easily translated into political criticism (Weller, 1985, 1987: 17-25). To circumvent the state bans, the "Slaughter of the Honorable Pig" (*thai ti kong*) was disguised as an agricultural contest of pig raising with the overt connotation to criticize the mainlanders' dominance (Ahren, 1981: 416-425). Both cases showed the tenacity of folk religion to meet the repression from the above. What were at stake here were ritual activities that explicitly expressed the communal solidarity. The state sought to atomize the local community by forbidding the religious practices, while the latter, in turn, tried to uphold their common membership by ritual disguise.

In Houchin, the similar scenario of repression and resistance could also be found in the anti-FNC protest. But in this case, the bone of contention is different. Villagers rose in protest against a state-endorsed project by a state-owned enterprise. The identities of oppressor and the oppressed facilitated the easy adoption of religious elements in protest. As the next section is going to argue, folk religion was by no means a mere instrument of mobilization. What was endangered was the communal solidarity itself, and the religious practices were of vital importance in this regard.

### Houchin Protest as Community Revival

In 1941, the Japanese imperial navy installed the first petrochemical refinery in Taiwan. The so-called “sixth navy fuel refinery” was built in the southern Houchin farmland near the Kaohsiung navy base. From the very beginning the refinery was a symbol of state violence. The factory land was commandeered by the military, and only some of the landowners were compensated by land barter. The villagers saw the refinery as an unwelcome encroacher that not only seized the land by force, but also destroyed the good *fengsui* that led to the bad fortunes of the village ever since.<sup>5</sup>

In 1946, the heavily bombed refinery was reallocated to the China Petroleum Company (CPC) by the KMT government. The postwar reconstruction and expansion has made the Kaohsiung Refinery among the world’s top ten in capacity (China Petroleum Company, 1981: viii). The petrochemical industry was declared as strategic in government planning in the 1970s, and the state-owned CPC was the commanding height for policy implementation. With the upgraded productivity, the Houchin community bore most of the externality. Underground water and air was polluted and the noise in the night kept the entire village sleepless. Villagers attributed their poor health and bad harvest to the pollution. Before the construction of FNC in 1990 there was no pollution monitoring in Houchin. Thus it was impossible to quantify the environmental degradation there prior to the rise of protest in 1987. Nevertheless the Kaohsiung Municipal Government provided a record of pollution compensation for the Houchin people’s crops. In 1982-1986, there were 15 cases of settled compensation in which the CPC had paid NT\$ 7,610,895 in total, or NT\$ 47,867 per household, based on data in Lu (1992: 38).

Aside from pollution, another grievance of the Houchin people came from the CPC’s negligence and even discrimination. Only a few Houchin people worked in the refinery because the required education level for factory operatives was a senior high school degree since the 1970s. The CPC employees enjoyed many benefits of company welfare. They lived in a company residence community that bordered on Houchin, where there was a hospital, school, library, sports yard and swimming pool. The CPC was pleased to declare its company welfare as “nationally famous” (Employee Welfare Committee of Kaohsiung Refinery, 1989: 5). In contrast, the Houchin community was not blessed with governmental attention. There were but few public provisions of collective goods,

<sup>5</sup> *Liberty Times*, January 21, 1990.

and even worse, Houchin people were barred from enjoying the CPC company welfare in the vicinity. Many people bitterly remembered how the CPC residence area guards, who had keen eyes to tell who were uncivilized boys from the outside, scared them away. There was no possibility of watching the open-air screening of movies, buying ice from the company cooperative, and swimming in the pool.<sup>6</sup> In sum, the Houchin people felt treated as second-class citizens by the CPC. As a comparison, the state authorities also set up the nearby Nantze EPZ (Export Processing Zone) by purchasing land from the Houchin landowners. Nevertheless, the EPZ did not incur villagers' antipathy because the light industry produced less pollution and gave local unskilled labor chances of employment. Houchin villagers did not feel direct discrimination as a result.

It is easy to interpret their grievance as a sort of relative deprivation and explain the subsequent uprising as a result of an imbalanced psychological state. While there is no denying of this psychological discontent, the deep-seated source of strain consists in the contradiction between community and state power. So when the decision to expand production by building a newer naphtha cracker was made known in Houchin, it became the cataclysm for collective action.

In the mid-1980s, the FNC case was heatedly debated among officials and experts. The opponents doubted the economic benefit from this project (NT\$ 15.3 billion in cost) and the viability of the government's investment.<sup>7</sup> In this planning stage, the Houchin people did not care much about the FNC. What triggered their animosity was a clumsy maneuver by the CPC. On June 20, 1987, the CPC invited the local leaders to visit the factory and explained the coming FNC project in a gesture of good willingness. The invited leaders were mainly pro-KMT, who also had personal interests in being contractors of CPC (Lu, 1993: 45). As this piece of news was broadcast through neighborhood grapevines, what Jasper (1997: 106) called "moral shock" resonated in the community. How could these leaders "sell out" Houchin's interests? If a community could tolerate its leaders' violation of the shared moral vision, there would be no community anymore. At this critical moment, some younger people in Houchin, who were more anti-KMT (thus supporting the Democratic Progressive Party, or DPP) and less socially established, organized a series of marches, speeches, and distribution of leaflets. These activists, later called "radicals" by journalists and researchers as

<sup>6</sup> *Central Daily*, January 9, 1990; *Commercial Times*, May 17, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> *Independent Evening Post*, October 16 and December 23, 1985.

well, made use of the embittered communal opinion by stressing the fact certain persons “flirted with the CPC” and were “traitors of Houchin” (Lu, 1993: 47).

Beginning in the late-1980s, there was a visible affinity between the DPP and local anti-pollution protests. Since many protests targeted at development projects promoted by the KMT government, the opposition DPP found it politically convenient to support the former. By sponsoring these local protests, the DPP succeeded in obtaining better electoral performance in the pollution-ridden areas (Ho, 2003: 50-51). Further, during this period the DPP adopted the strategy of ideological mobilization to compete with the KMT’s entrenched factional rule in local politics (Bosco, 1994). In this context it was understandable why Houchin radicals were pro-DPP while the doves were largely pro-KMT.

Clearly, radicals have sought to preempt the good moral sense of community. The senior leaders were discredited for they held a dubious attitude on the FNC and did not stand up for the community in the beginning. Owing to the mobilization of radicals, an unconditional opposition to the FNC was taken to represent the community’s best interest. Radicals refused to compromise or negotiate with the CPC for that would be an unworthy gesture of the Houchin people. On July 24 it was rumored the Minister of Economic Affairs was going to pay a visit to the CPC. With the intention to make a collective petition, the Houchin people gathered at the west gate of the CPC, but failed to meet the Minister personally. On the next day, villagers began to set up camps and blockaded the traffic (Hsiao, 1988: 101). Unexpectedly, the blockade lasted more than three years, which is still the longest in environmental protest in Taiwan. During the following course of stalemate, the blockade became the symbolic representation of communal resistance to the FNC. Villagers kept day-and-night watch in shifts and they nicknamed their camp as “hotel of west gate.” The CPC knew the significance of the blockade, too, and sought to break free several times to no avail. In the end, after the collapse of protest, the blockade was finally removed in November 1990.<sup>8</sup>

On August 5, the Houchin Anti-Fifth Naphtha Cracker Self-Help Committee (the SHC for short) was set up to coordinate the collective efforts. A closer look at the SHC leadership revealed the community power hierarchy in Houchin. The list of SHC’s twenty one members included five lichangs (ward heads) and two city councilors, one director of the local farmers’ association, two day laborers, one peddler, one

<sup>8</sup> *United Daily*, November 7, 1990.

contractor, one fisherman, one artisan, one tailor, one shopkeeper, one fortune teller, and four unidentified persons. All of them were locally born males (Han, 1988: 117; Lu, 1992: 50). In this underdeveloped area, community leadership rested with formal political positions. The lichangs, city councilors, and the director of the farmers' association were looked upon as patrons who served as brokers between the external world and their local clients. Like other rural places in Taiwan, the local headmen built their power by redistributing the resources from outside as their personal favors. Therefore, throughout the anti-FNC protest, the CPC sought to co-opt the leaders with material benefits in the hope that they could leverage Houchin opinion.

Politically, the SHC leadership was largely divided between "doves" and "radicals." Doves were mostly established elders who tended to favor negotiation over confrontation. At the beginning, doves and radicals were almost numerically equal in the SHC, but the latter held the sway of communal opinion and masterminded the course of protest (Lu, 1993: 50-51). But in the latter period of movement, owing to the combined pressure of the CPC's bribing through contracting, local toughs' intervention, and reinforced policing, radicals' influence in the SHC grew weak. Doves tried to steer the movement goal from unconditional opposition to negotiation over compensation.<sup>9</sup> To reduce the local opposition, the government promised to upgrade pollution control, provide handsome material compensations, and re-allocate the entire refinery in 25 years.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the internal weakness, the political climate shifted to a new brand of conservatism in 1990, as a military strongman, Hau Pei-tsun, was nominated as the Premier. Hau viewed the rise of social protests as a deplorable consequence of crisis of public authority and avowed to "adopt a tougher stance towards the demands of the labor and environmental movements" (Hsiao, 1997: 14). The delayed construction of FNC was especially singled out by Hau as a priority to "reassert the public authority." Therefore, the Houchin movement also collapsed under the increasing pressure. To announce the beginning of FNC construction, the government deployed more than ten thousand policemen in this small village, and protest leaders were put under reinforced surveillance.<sup>11</sup> Thus, under these unfavorable circumstances, the Houchin community lost the energy to be oppositional in deeds. The FNC pro-

<sup>9</sup> *Economic Daily*, May 7, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> *Liberty Times*, September 15, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> *Liberty Times*, September 23, 1990.

ject was formally declared in September 1990 and put into operation in 1994.<sup>12</sup>

This paper is not intended to analyze the entire process of movement, as it has been studied in detail (Han, 1988; Wang, 1989; Lu, 1992; Huang, 1993; Hsu, 1995). The following discussions will focus on some aspects pertaining to the question of community and religion.

(1) *Folk Religion as Movement Resource?*

As villagers rose to oppose a state-endorsed project of development, the temple organization has been the integral part of the movement. Temple yard has been the gathering place for Houchin people. There was a community broadcasting system station in the Fengp'in temple, which played a significant role for mobilization. More important, the TPMC earmarked NT\$ 2 million for movement purposes in August 1987, which provided the material sinews for staging protests both in Kaohsiung and Taipei. Since the temple and religious activities occupied a central place in Houchin, the CPC and government also sought to turn them to their advantage. A portion of CPC's "good-neighbor" (*mulin*) fund went to sponsor temple activities.<sup>13</sup> In 1990, when the Minister of Economic Affairs and Prime Minister went to visit Houchin as a gesture of appeasement, both of them went to the Fengp'ing temple to offer their respect and money contribution.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to providing material resources, folk religion permeated in protest activities. During many critical moments, gods' opinions were often asked for. Unusual signs were seen as expressions of deity's encouragement or warning. For example, the radicals' claim to use temple property was buttressed by the divine will. The original chair of TPMC refused the radicals' proposal by citing a prohibition ordinance by the municipal government. But the radicals cited a miraculous sign several days later, which was freely interpreted as the deity's promise of coming success in opposing the FNC. As the radical faction questioned, how could a mortal creature oppose the divine will?<sup>15</sup>

How can we interpret meaning of religion in collective action? From her field observation, Professor of Journalism Yun Peng in Taiwan's National Chengchi University commented that the Houchin community had a "special human ecology" for they are less educated and "more

<sup>12</sup> *China Times*, November 9, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> *China Times*, January 17, 1990.

<sup>14</sup> *United Daily*, July 13, 1990; *China Times*, September 14, 1990.

<sup>15</sup> *Independent Evening Post*, August 12, 1987.

indigenous,” and that was the reason why they resorted more frequently to religion.<sup>16</sup> This was just another way to say they were stupid and ignorant. Obviously, this view simply fails to take notice of the intrinsic connection between community and religion.

Another more sophisticated explanation reads the religious elements as kinds of resources used by the radical faction to strengthen their cause (Lu 1993: 71, 81, 87). This view is highly credible for one of the radical leaders was very knowledgeable in religious matters. In my interview, he even confessed that he was often suspected of manipulating behind the scene, which he denied categorically. However, while agreeing religion might add strength to the movement mobilization on some occasions, this paper argues a pure instrumentalist perspective is defective in some ways.

First, for religion to have mobilizing effects, it assumes the same religious belief among the mobilizers and the mobilized. Minimally, the leaders have to appear as pious believers otherwise they will be easily discredited. This prerequisite constrained the range of manipulation and falsified the thesis of naïve instrumentalism.

Second, it is interesting to look into the actual effects of religious belief. There are two documented cases relevant here. First, when a woman went to a local temple to ask for the divine advice about her illness in June 1987, the thrown “moonblocks” (*chia*)<sup>17</sup> stood erect instead of lying flat as usual. People were bemused, and asked the annual master of incense burner to try again in the Fengp’ing temple. Asking the question whether the Houchin community should be united and oppose the FNC, they got nine rounds of “holly blocks,” (*shengpei*) which meant affirmative. With this divine encouragement, local people organized the SHC with enthusiasm (Wang 1989: 42; Lu 1993: 78). Thus, people were encouraged to organize the SHC (Wang 1989: 42; Lu 1993: 78).

The second case happened on May 5, 1990, just one day before the referendum.<sup>18</sup> On the night, the incense burner in the Fengp’ing temple

<sup>16</sup> *United Daily*, May 9, 1990.

<sup>17</sup> A pair of moonblocks or moonboards is a common device to seek the opinion of a patron god. Once thrown and fallen to the ground, there are usually three possibilities. First, “the holly block,” one inside up and one inside down, means confirmative. Second, “the laughing block,” (*hsiaopei*) two insides up, means a retry. Third, “the covering block,” (*kaipei*) two insides down, meant negative. Thus, by the principle of probability, it is easier to have an affirmative answer than a negative one. See Jordan (1985: 61-64).

<sup>18</sup> Before the enactment in 2003, referendum was not acknowledged as legally binding in Taiwan. Many local protests used the form of referendum to express their collective will, including the Houchin movement.

miraculously flared up, and then some of the on-lookers knelt in prayer. More than 300 villagers came to see the unusual sign together. Upon suggestion, one of the SHC members sought the divine message by throwing moonblocks. The first question whether the Houchin people should stand united was affirmed. Then the question whether the Houchin people should reject the FNC firmly was not given a clear answer after several rounds of throwing. Some suggested the next question should be whether the Houchin people should negotiate with the CPC, but the move was rejected. The whole situation plunged into confusion, when some kept paying their worships to the incense burner, and some proposed to seek the advice from the spirit medium (*chit'ung*) (*United Daily*, May 9, 1990; Lu, 1993: 80-81).

These two cases were significant in that while the actual divine intentions were far from clear, the pious villagers themselves provided the answer, "the Houchin community should be united." In the end, the only accepted interpretation was the theme of solidarity, which in fact was already implied in the act of collective worshipping. Further, what they needed was not necessarily a definite indication. In the latter incident, the non-affirmation of the second question was not viewed as negation. Last, the timing to seek divine direction was also an important cue. Both cases took place just right before the moment when the community was about to take an action against the external threat. In these critical situations, the need for being and feeling together came up. Durkheim (1951: 208) wrote on the effect of national wars on suicide rate, "As they force men to close ranks and confront the common danger, the individual thinks less of himself and more of the common cause." The same model of group dynamic applied here, as the Houchin villagers were ready to meet a new challenge as a body.

All in all, if folk religion was a resource that came in handy for the movement, it must be a special kind, or better, a meta-resource that engendered other resources. With the shared belief, the Houchin people were organized into a bona-fide community, and thus, capable of collective action. Thus, strictly speaking, no one made use of the Houchin villagers' religiosity for an exterior end. The theme of communal self-defense was already implicitly implied in their religious belief.

## (2) *Ritualized Repertoire of Contention*

In the Houchin movement, one could not fail to notice the intensive use of religious rituals in protest. The following two cases are exemplary:

On September 30, 1987, local leaders mobilized three busloads of villagers to make a collective petition to the Kaohsiung city council. Though accompanied by two city councilors, policemen barred the crowd from

entering the council hall. At this moment, five or six men who carried deity's sedan (*shenchiao*) suddenly convulsed and rushed against the police's cordon line. A minor physical clash resulted and some Houchin people were injured. Prior to this confrontation, the crowd organized a short parade in the downtown. As they marched, members of the martial arts troupe carried their weapons in public display. However, SHC leaders persuaded them to lay aside the weaponry for safety reasons.<sup>19</sup>

The second case is more complicated. On December 30, 1987, the Houchin villagers found their flags and signs decorating the barricade at the west gate were gone. They suspected the CPC did not keep their promise. Outraged, they decided to arrange a funeral ceremony for the CPC. Four coffins, conventional sacrificial offerings, and "soul-calling banners" (*chaohunfan*) were put at the west gate. Loudspeakers broadcast the funeral music to "guide the deceased souls" (*ch'ienwangko*). As villagers threatened, if the CPC insisted on building the FNC, they will die together.<sup>20</sup> On the next day, as the anti-riot policemen tried to terminate the mock funeral and to disperse the crowd, the martial arts troupe rushed forward and got ready for armed combat. The commanding officer decided not to cause further antagonism and bloodshed and ordered deployed policemen to retreat.<sup>21</sup> After two days of negotiation, the police offered an informal apology in exchange for termination of the mock funeral. On January 2, 1988, a Taoist priest (*taoshih*) presided over the final ceremony of farewell (*ch'ushan*), and later, the crowd escorted the coffins to the public cemetery where the coffins were burned.<sup>22</sup>

These two cases vividly portrayed the situation when villagers employed ritualized performances against the state power. The mock funeral was used to bid farewell to the state-owned polluter, and the martial art troupe was the village's self-defense against the policing power. Especially in the latter case, the participant villagers were thrilled to scare away the armed-to-teeth policemen. For them, the victory demonstrated their superiority in force and morality. Till recently, my interviewees stressed the fact the deployment of the martial arts troupe was not premeditated, but came spontaneously.

Indeed, contextual meanings here were very rich. As mentioned in the previous section, state officials used to stigmatize the native ritual practices as vulgar and superstitious. According to Scott (1977a, 1977b),

<sup>19</sup> *Liberty Times*, October 1, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> *China Times* and *United Daily*, December 31, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> *Liberty Times*, January 4, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> *Liberty Times*, January 3, 1988.

the acts of resistance from the little people were often involved with profanation, *i.e.*, an alternative and challenging interpretation of elites' world-view. In the Houchin protest, the act of profanation was carried to the extreme form. Villagers not only rejected the elites' value judgment, but also directly imposed their ritual culture on various agents of state power. As Odysseus outwitted Cyclops, the little person triumphed over the mammoth state.

Functionally, these ritualized repertoires made local people's participation in the protest easier. Carrying deity's sedan, performing martial arts, and staging a funeral ceremony were present in their pre-existing common culture. Even a casual bystander knew her or his role expectation when some ritual was transplanted into the scene of conflict. Further, these rituals were performed only in the sacred time of village life, when the entire community was expected to make something together. Community membership entailed one's obligation to abide by the common rule. Needless to say, this cultural overtone was also carried to the protest spot. Probably, the clear distinction between means and end existed only in the minds of very few leaders. For the rank-and-file villagers, they just followed a habituated script of action, that is, to act in the way others act.

### (3) *Communal Solidarity as Fundamental Consensus*

In the previous studies on Houchin, the final collapse of movement was attributed to the factional infighting and the subsequent decline of the radicals (Lu, 1993; Hsu, 1995). The doves were purported to have business deals with the CPC, and thus intended to settle the dispute by compensation. The radicals were more idealistic and aimed to stop the FNC construction. Despite the sharp disagreement among leaders, there existed an overarching consensus of communal solidarity.

Solidarity in a communal setting was narrow and localistic. As stated in the above, the radicals' early predominance in the SHC came from their successful campaign to taint the senior leaders as betrayers of Houchin. Their connection with the CPC was described as "selling out." Here, the communal loyalty was defined exclusively. Not to contact with the CPC was one of the preconditions of being a worthy Houchin person. Therefore, the radicals made a principle not to negotiate, contact and compromise with the CPC in the initial stage. Instead, radicals sought assistance from outsiders, such as the DPP and environmentalists, to oppose the FNC. From the beginning, the doves did not welcome the outsiders' involvement. They argued the outsiders should not mess with Houchin's affairs (Lu, 1993: 57; *United Daily*, May 6, 1990).

In the latter period, doves capitalized on the radicals' propensity to work with outsiders and staged an organizational coup d'état. On March 25, 1990, radicals staged a protest gathering at the north gate of the CPC. Only few Houchin residents took part, while the sympathetic college students in Kaohsiung organized most of the activities. Despite the favorable media coverage, the local people did not have a high opinion of this event. This became the *casus belli* for doves to clear the house and reorganize the SHC in the way they liked (Lu, 1993: 65). The same logic of narrow solidarity now worked to the radicals' disadvantage.

On the eve of referendum on May 6, 1990, doves were confident the majority of residents would opt for "agreement to negotiate (with the CPC)," instead of "firm opposition (to the FNC)." The CPC has used a huge sum of money in bribing, and the SHC then was in the hand of doves. On the previous day, the locally elected Legislator Huang T'ien-sheng revealed his attitude of opposition through the community broadcasting system. Huang's move broke the mutual promise not to solicit for votes openly, and one local tough in the opposite faction instantly humiliated him. The senior people gathering in the temple yard witnessed the nasty scene. They were outraged by the fact one Houchin tough mistreated another Houchin boy brutally. Immediately, they organized into a position to advocate the opposition stand.<sup>23</sup> Radicals also successfully organized an offensive of rumors and unsigned flyers to expose the dirty business between the CPC and some doves. The latter were described as "colluding with the CPC and the criminal elements."<sup>24</sup> As the referendum came out, the radical scored a major victory by 4,499 to 2,900, startling for the CPC and doves.<sup>25</sup>

There was another interesting episode in this referendum. Prior to the voting day, radicals had justified reasons to worry about the newly independent *li*, Ts'ui'ing, for there were mainly immigrant workers for the Nantze EPZ. As it turned out, the Ts'ui'ing *li* produced a remarkable rate of 83.2% for agreement to negotiate. The result was taken as an insult to the other original 5 *lis* in Houchin. Even the pro-negotiation doves were infuriated about Ts'ui'ing's uncooperative behavior. Some claimed Ts'ui'ing residents were not real Houchin people and they had been bribed by the CPC.<sup>26</sup> In the subsequent two meetings of SHC, in which radicals refused to take part, committee members concurred to

<sup>23</sup> *Liberty Times*, May 6, 1990.

<sup>24</sup> *United Daily*, May 7, 1990.

<sup>25</sup> *Liberty Times*, May 7, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> *Independent Morning Post*, May 8, 1990.

draw a line between Houchin and Ts'ui'ing, for the latter had no right to decide on the future of community.<sup>27</sup> Apparently, the unsocial conduct of Ts'ui'ing has hurt the good moral sense of the Houchin people. The Ts'ui'ing's mistake consisted not so much in their agreement to negotiate as in their different voice in this critical moment of communal solidarity.

These stories revealed primacy of solidarity. No faction or subgroup could violate this sacred norm in public without incurring punishment. Even some Houchin people had morally questionable business relations with the CPC, and they couldn't afford to be exposed openly. Their hypocrisy was the homage of evil paid to the communal virtue.

(4) *Success or Failure?*

If this central theme of solidarity is taken seriously, the failure to stop the FNC does not mean an unequivocal setback for the whole community. What matters is the Houchin people stood together and tried their best to meet the external threat. In this regard, success or failure is only secondary. As Durkheim (1915: 445-446) took mourning as a duty of a family member for their loss, "A family which allows one of its members to die without being wept for shows by that very fact it lacks moral unity: it abdicates; it renounces its existence." The same reasoning can be applied here. A community is defined by its capability and duty to act together when needed. The scenario of a community that rose in collective action is comparable to how it organized a festival or how it faced a disaster, for protest is nothing but a community revival.

With the resumption of construction of FNC, the government earmarked NT\$ 1.5 billion as "feedback" (*huik'uei*) for Houchin. The money was deposited in a bank and its annual interests are used for a variety of purposes. To oversee this fund, a Houchin Social Welfare Foundation was established, with joint participation by local leaders and the CPC representatives. A modern community center was built with a library, swimming pool, conference room and kindergarten. Houchin residents also enjoyed the benefits of subsidized water, liquidized natural gas, and electricity. In addition, the CPC also enlarged its good-neighbor programs. Despite the manpower freeze, the CPC now began to employ dozens of Houchin residents. Companies registered by Houchin residents also enjoyed priority in receiving outsourcing contracts. Apparently, all

<sup>27</sup> *China Times*, May 8, 1990; *United Daily*, May 13, 1990.

these material rewards were intended to appease the Houchin community. Further, the CPC has kept its promise to lower the level of pollution by upgrading its emission-control facilities. Most residents agreed on the reduced level of pollution.

True, the Houchin movement collapsed under a host of unfavorable factors including the government's growing intolerance and internal factionalism. The religious belief by which the community protest was built upon only provided an ambiguous support, and that explained why the generous program of compensation worked to break the local opposition. While it would be an overstatement that Houchin people as a whole have been bribed into quiescence, none of the community leaders I interviewed had negative feelings over the failure to prevent the FNC from construction and operation. In fact, at least one of the radical leaders was put into prison for one and half years after the collapse of the protest. To my original surprise, they reflected on the past protest with calmness and viewed the present state with satisfaction. After the protest, Laotsu granted them a better living environment and modernized social welfare. Now, Houchin was no longer a backward village with poor living standards. Their community library, swimming pool and kindergarten were better equipped than those for the CPC employees. These material improvements were justifiable by folk religion, which stressed the ambiguous notion of "protection of neighborhood (*paoyu hsiangli*)."<sup>7</sup> Folk religion might encourage the protest participation when villagers actually suffer from pollution, but its message was equivocal when environmental rights could be bartered for material prosperity. To a certain extent, the predominance of traditional religion hindered the growth of a more progressive form of environmentalism.

The limitation of folk religion was more visible in its localistic orientation. In the popular conception, patron deity's grace did not extend beyond the community borders. The insider-outsider distinction was one of the *raison d'être* of communal religions. On the problem of how to distribute the CPC's benefits, the Houchin Social Welfare Foundation adopted the same principle of religious particularism. Only those who had official registered residence before July 1987 were eligible for the benefits. Excluded were those immigrant workers who might have lived there for decades without changing their registration and the more recent immigrants. This rule also unfairly favored those Houchin people who had moved to other places but still kept their homeland registration. The Foundation justified this principle by citing reasons of limited resources. None of the interviewed leaders questioned this nativist exclusion and some even claimed other neighboring communities are "greedy" to ask for their share. Here, one could see the criterion to define Houchin

identity was ascribed, not acquired. The phenomenon further showed how awkward the localistic folk religion fit into the modern society of high mobility.

### Conclusion

This paper offers a new interpretation for one local environmental movement in Taiwan. Folk religion was an integral, yet neglected element throughout the mobilization period. The localistic orientation of religion defined the boundary of communal membership and also the meaning of their protest. The actual protest repertoire took scripts from the religious ceremonies. Ritualized protests were intended not only to threaten the opponent, but also to boost the emotional attachment of community members. Beneath the faction-ridden movement, there existed an overarching consensus of being united. In this regard, though the movement goal to oppose plant construction failed, the solidarity of community was sustained during this critical period. The expressive logic of communal solidarity was often neglected in the past studies.

On the Taiwanese environmental movement, most of the works used the macro-structural approaches, with little attention to how the local participants actually think in their own terms (Williams, 1992; Tang and Tang, 1999; Hsiao, 1999; Terao, 2001). Except for some notable examples (Lii and Lin, 2000; Weller, 1998), few scholars have raised the questions concerning culture and collective action. On the Houchin case, previous works either used the resource mobilization model (Wang, 1989; Huang, 1993) or political process model (Hsu, 1995) to explain the rise and fall of protest movement. The linkage of religion and community has not been sufficiently grasped. There is one disciplinary barrier to explore this issue: while the anthropologists were trained to understand communal dynamics in a traditional setting, only a few of them found their objects of research capable of staging a “modern-style” movement, the sociologists of social movement suffered from the opposite limitation in that they offered a too modern interpretation which slights the importance of religion.

The Houchin case is by no means a lone example. There are many environmental protests that are equally locally-embedded, religiously-oriented, and communally-based. But certainly, the Houchin movement is among the best-documented ones, which facilitates this re-interpretation. If the arguments so far are acceptable, many of the Taiwanese movements could be rewritten in a different light.

“There is a ‘shadow history’ which remains to be written for almost every mass movement in the Third World,” writes one great connoisseur

of little persons' resistance (Scott, 1977b: 211-212). In Taiwanese anti-pollution protests, the shadow history means the underlying religious dynamic that gives rise to the community collective action. In the past, villages were organized through religious faith and rituals to strengthen their solidarity in the struggle against hostile outsiders and state control. In the anti-pollution protests, folk religion became the spiritual weapon of the weak to fight against the encroaching polluters. The continuity of religious elements deserves more comments.

The worldview of folk religion is necessarily premodern in that it proffers a particularistic and localistic orientation. The ideological support it gives for anti-pollution protests is naturally different from the land ethics and environmental justice envisioned in the mainstream environmentalist practices. The Houchin story reveals the possibility to mobilize the traditional cultural resources to build a new form of modernity. Traditions are not too intractable to resist learning new lessons.

Weller (1999) raises the question whether the traditional cultural resources in Chinese societies are proper materials to build a democratic civil society. He rejects the fashionable attempt in the 1990s to portray the Confucianism as inherently authoritarian. On the other hand, he insists on persistence of traditional elements, which makes the Chinese associational life look somewhat different from the western model. In contrast to what the modernization theorists have claimed, the cultural tradition still plays an important role. In the case of Taiwan, traditional cultures are constitutive of an "alternative civility" that is both democratic and modern. Still, one may as well continue the question of how alternative it is. If Chinese cultural resources can be mobilized in the service of democracy in the same way as Protestant individualism, how many kinds of democracy do we have?

The Houchin story reveals the immanent tensions between traditional culture and modern environmentalism. For villagers, environmentalism translated in the local dialect means protection of their own land and grandchildren. Folk religion with its explicit messages of communal solidarity and hostility against outsiders becomes the suitable medium to convey the gospel of environmentalism. The resonance of this religious frame can be seen in the prevalence of local anti-pollution protest in Taiwan since the mid-1980s.

Nevertheless, one cannot fail to notice the shift in meaning in this indigenization of environmentalism. Houchin villagers' solidarity is also expressed by their distrust of outsiders and intolerance on dissent. Most of the Houchin protestors seem oblivious to the fact that environmentalism is an inherently universalistic philosophy. Also, the exclusive reliance on local identity frustrates the involvement of conscience constituents

and renders the protest isolated and vulnerable. All these show the persistence of premodern cultural elements in a collective challenge against industrial pollution. And it also explains why prevalence of local environmental protests does not lead to fundamental change in the relation between industry, civil society and state in Taiwan. Too often, villagers are satisfied with monetary compensation, rather than sticking to strict environmental concerns.

During the authoritarian rule, folk religion sustained a modicum of associational life for the Taiwanese when the formal public sphere was greatly proscribed. As the democratization began in the mid-1980s, anti-pollution protests animated by folk religion spearheaded a practical critique of authoritarian capitalism. On the one hand, we can see the malleability of traditional culture for building local democracy, but on the other hand, the pre-modern limitations are too obvious to be ignored. The role of folk religion is ambiguous because it is undergoing a process of social transformation. As the Taiwanese society is experiencing more democratic life, folk religion will have to learn to accommodate itself to the new situation without losing its own identity.

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