Constructing a “Common Field” Across the Taiwan Strait via Environmentalism? Case Studies of Cross-Strait Environment NGO Exchanges

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This paper examines cases of exchange among environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) between Taiwan and China. Based on interviews with three Taiwanese ENGOS and five Chinese ENGOS, this article has come up with the following preliminary observations. First, Chinese ENGOS have already built widespread connections with international community and developed good partner relationship within international groups. The exchange between the ENGOS across the Taiwan Strait is part of such a global network. Second, unlike other external or international actors, the Taiwanese ENGOS rarely provide direct financial support to the Chinese counterparts. Instead, the most important impact the Taiwanese ENGOS have brought to their Chinese counterparts are their accounts of ideas and their experiences of practices. Third, due to similar language and cultural backgrounds, Taiwanese ENGOS have a more important role in influencing their Chinese counterparts in comparison with other international connection. These direct contacts have contributed to form a “common identity” of environmentalism among the ENGOS across the strait, which actually is also part of a “global identity of environmentalism”. Exchanges across the Taiwan Strait among ENGOS have provided a case in which cross-strait relations can be constructed and construed beyond nationalistic or economic context. ENGOS of Taiwan and China are developing a “common identity” as partners in a global community via “environmentalism”.

Keywords: environmental NGO, cross-strait relation, civil society, Taiwan, China

Introduction

Literatures studying the cross strait relations between China and Taiwan usually adopt either politics or economics centered perspectives. Among the political analyses, international relations, domestic politics, and identity politics are the most frequently used explanatory factors. When it comes to social analyses on the cross-strait relations, national identity is the dominant analytical variable. This paper intends to approach the relationship between China and Taiwan from a brand new perspective, the perspective from the civil society across the Taiwan Strait. This paper focuses on the exchange relationship between the Environmental Non-governmental Organizations (ENGOS). Based on interview with three Taiwanese and five Chinese ENGOS, this paper intends to probe how the exchange relationships among the ENGOS across the Taiwan Strait help form a cross-border civil society community, and to some extent develop a common identity based on a universal-oriented environmentalism.

As China's economy has earned amazing growth in the past three decades, environmental pollutions and ecological damages have also posed daunting threats to the future of the country. While globalization has allowed China to reap rich economic fruits, it can also provide tremendous resources and supports for China to utilize to meet the environmental and ecological challenges. Literatures studying China's environmental protection have already recorded the developing linkage between the environmental activism of Chinese burgeoning civil society and the international resources and actors (Wu, 2003; Economy, 2004; Yang, 2005). International NGOs and other non-profit organizations have also been observed to have helped China's civil society organizations or the third sector to develop (Hsia & White, 2002; Wang, 2009, 2012). However, among these literatures, little was mentioned about the role Taiwan plays in this regard.

This paper will examine the exchange and engagement of ENGOs across the Taiwan Strait on three issues: the “anti-waste incineration”, the “Leave No Trace (LNT) training program”, and the “environmental education camp”. Interviews of Chinese and Taiwanese ENGOs were conducted in 2012 and 2013. The views of Taiwanese ENGO will be presented first and followed by the contrasting views of the Chinese ones. In the end of the article, some discussions and observations will be provided based on the views of ENGOs on both sides.

Case I: Anti-waste-incineration Groups

The Taiwanese ENGO

There are two approaches to solve the problems of environmental pollution. One is “end-of-pipe” method, and another is “source reduction”. In the 1980s, the ideology of “developmentalism” was dominant in Taiwan, and cases of environmental pollution caused by projects of development were rampant. Most of the solution at that time adopted the “end-of-pipe” method, which in turn caused the concerned local communities to adopt resistant strategy of “not-in-my-back-yard” (NIMBY). These resistances usually were accompanied with local NGOs contending against the local governments and public authorities on the installation of concentrated pollution processors in their neighborhood. In 1990s, the approach to solve the pollution problems changed to “source reduction”, and the contention by the social groups against the state was replaced by social forces trying to affect the government in forming new policies as this solution approach is more concerned with scientific debates and discussions.

Both the government and the civil society of Taiwan have accumulated a lot of experiences in the field of solving the problems of environmental pollution. When China comes across similar issues, both the government and the society in China are eager to find solution by learning from Taiwan's experiences. Mr. Lin (pseudonym), in his late 40s, has been an environmental activist in Taiwan since he was young. He himself has experienced both the periods of the “end-of-pipe solution” and the “source reduction solution” in handling the environmental pollution. In recent years, he has started to pay attention to and also get personally involved in China's similar problems. The big cities in coastal China are stepping into the stage of “end-of-pipe” solution and the accompanied contention of the society against the local state. Under the authoritarian regime, the Chinese social actors usually appeal to the slogan of “defending their environmental rights” to legitimize their contentions. Gradually, however, many contention leaders have also become aware that “source reduction” is also an equally, if not more, important strategy in solving the problem they face. To realize the “source reduction” goal will need the societal actors and the government to joint together to solve the problem.

Mr. Lin's rich experiences in Taiwan soon become a valuable asset when he is engaged with the Chinese environmental groups and movements. He has been involved in activities such as NIMBY contention of local

communities as well as developing policy pamphlets regarding source reduction. A local environmental activist in Southern China benefits from his cooperation with Mr. Lin, by learning ideas as well as strategies from him, was able to be placed importance upon by local government and thus co-opted as a member of local environmental policy consultative committee.

Mr. Lin found from his experiences in China that it would be easier for the local government to accept the “source reduction” idea advocated by the environmental activists if one of the latter happen to be party member. In such circumstance the government tends to be more open minded. Mr. Lin found this was quite different from his experience in Taiwan. Usually the government would change their mind if the society becomes vocal and confrontational. The state society relationship in China is not that dual and confrontation as we see in Taiwan.

Mr. Lin remembered once he was invited as a discussant in a conference. After the session came to an end, a local journalist would like to interview him. During his interview, the Chinese journalist asked him to share his experience on how the Taiwanese NGOs provide assistance to their government. Mr. Lin was very confused by such a question and replied: “NGOs in Taiwan do not “assist” the government. They usually protest against or criticize the government”. The Chinese journalist, in turn, was appalled and confused. He said: “What, NGOs in Taiwan do not assist the government? Are you sure?” Mr. Lin said that after this interview he came to understand that how different the state society relationship in China is from that in Taiwan.

Based on these reflections, Mr. Lin gradually came to the idea that we Taiwanese should not arbitrarily impose our experiences and models upon the Chinese society. Mr. Lin stayed in China for few years working with Chinese local ENGOS. He said he was very cautious not to overplay his own role when in China. He gave one example of this. He was once helping a local environmental movement leader to hold an open forum to debate with local officials on anti-pollution policies. This local environmental movement leader also would like to invite Mr. Lin to participate in this open forum, particularly to talk about the successful “Taiwan experience” on the “source reduction”. Mr. Lin accepted local activist’s invitation but insisted to conduct rehearsal with his activist friend before the forum. He did so because two reasons. First, he was aware that not all the successful experience in Taiwan can easily be applied to China. Second, he learned that there would be some local officials present on the forum and that actually local government provided some support for that particular event, which made this even semi-official. As a Taiwanese, it would be risky if good ideas were put in inappropriate tones. Mr. Lin thus wanted to make sure the Taiwanese good experiences were understood in appropriate and constructive context, and easier to be accepted by the local officials. One of his strategies was to tell the present officials how the Taiwanese civil society interacted with the government and then jointly reached positive solution of the problem. He thus discussed with local activists and then came up with more concrete and acceptable policy recommendations on the forum.

For example, the local activists said the Chinese government was worried that as the “source reduction” approach requires the cooperation of the society, the society might dislike such an approach since it increases burden on each individual citizen. Mr. Lin cited Taiwan’s experience that the government in Taiwan did this in an incremental manner. First the government did some experiment in one or few community, and then expand to a larger scale. He also explained to the Chinese officials that the contention by Taiwanese ENGOS on this issue actually helped the government in speeding up the implementation of the policy since the contentions pointed out the increasing costs and unfeasibility of the “end-of-pipe” solution. ENGOS also became government’s partners when the government invited ENGOS to supervise itself when it publicized the

monitoring information, because ENGOS' involvement made such publication more transparent and credible. If ENGOS did not contend against and criticize the government in the very beginning, the government would not be able to have ENGOS help it to build a transparent and credible monitor system in the later stage. Furthermore, the government found the ENGOS also could help the government to educate and mobilize the local communities to assume their own responsibility, and to come up with their own local strategy to cope with the problems.

After the forum, the government invited Mr. Lin to be interviewed by a local official newspaper. Mr. Lin turned down the invitation. He was worried about any unintended consequences of such an interview. One of the possible unintended consequence was that the local official newspaper might describe him as endorsing the local official policy lines. This might hurt the autonomy of his local activist friend.

In sum, Mr. Lin did not directly put forth criticism to the Chinese local government. He first praised what the positive steps adopted by the local government, and then taught them with Taiwanese experience how and why ENGOS could be a constructive force without becoming merely a submissive role. By doing that, Mr. Lin believe he could help the local ENGOS and changed the local government. He also encouraged the local ENGOS and the local government to transcend the Taiwanese experience to create their own local strategies of cooperation and solution. He believes the most important task of his was not to tell them what to do or what policy to pursue, but what the roles the government and civil society should be. For example, he recommended his Chinese ENGO partner that they need to have more advanced and leading thinking on environmental issues and policy alternatives than the government. Otherwise, (for example, if the ENGOS could only conduct research for the government) the ENGOS would not have the moral position to supervise and lead the government to move forward.

Mr. Lin believes that China has its own policy and political tempo as well as different space for environmental space. Taiwan's experience of environmental movement may not be easily or immediately applicable to China. Chinese ENGOS should come up with their own strategies to fit their own local context and to let the Chinese government to accept more easily. However, Mr. Lin still admits that the core and the nature of the environmental problems are the same across the Strait. The direction of the policy and the movement we developed in Taiwan still has steering effects for China. However, one precondition is that for Taiwan's experience to have steering effects, we need an open-minded government to be willing to interact with civil society and ENGOS in China. This may not be the case in all provinces and localities in China. Many ENGOS are suppressed and excluded from policy process. It shows that ENGOS in China face much greater constraints and challenges than in previous stage of Taiwan when confronting the similar issues.

The Chinese ENGOS

Three Chinese ENGO individuals are interviewed for this study. Two were from Beijing and another from a southern city. All of them have contacts with Mr. Lin in the context of anti-pollution in China.

Mr. Liu (pseudonym) works for a renowned Chinese ENGO. One interesting point he mentioned was that in China, ENGOS have no problem acquiring information and knowledge from the western world. However, when they applied what they learn from the West, the Chinese government usually said the western experiences are not applicable to China and thus neglect those suggestions. Nevertheless, when the Chinese ENGOS raised the experience of Taiwan, the government cannot use the same excuse to reject the idea. Mr. Liu said this is an unexpected value of Taiwan's experience for China. Except for that, Mr. Liu said Taiwanese are easier to

communicate with not only because of the convenience of similar language and background, but also because usually Taiwanese volunteers are more willing to spend more time to get along with Chinese ENGO friends. In comparison with other foreign ENGO volunteers or partners, it is much easier to understand what Taiwanese are thinking and thus can build better mutual trust. For Mr. Liu, Taiwan's experience of recycling is very worth learning. But he also observed that certain methods or public measures quite commonly used in Taiwan cannot be copied to China. For example, in Taiwan's residential committee, “voting” is frequently adopted as a decision making mechanism in residents' public meeting. The residents' meeting therefore is able to make authoritative decisions to promote recycling measures. Mr. Liu said such decision making mechanism was rarely used in Beijing, or when it was adopted it was only a form. Furthermore, he said in Beijing whenever NGOs or community residents wanted to promote some project, they would have to first consult and seek permission and cooperation from the “residential committee”. In Taiwan there is no such a thing and residents have much open and wider space to take initiatives for action. In comparison, initiatives for autonomous actions are very difficult to realize. On top of all these observations, he also regrets that he has no chance to go to Taiwan personally, and therefore he can still not fully grasp or have deeper understanding of those policies or methods introduced by Mr. Lin. He complained that the governments (particularly the Chinese government) have set lots obstacles for ENGOS on both side to have deeper and longer engagement. He praise the Hao Ran Foundation for supporting cross-strait ENGO exchanges, and hope there could be more chances for Mainland ENGO personnel to be able to stay in Taiwan for longer time.

The second ENGO person is Mr. Fan, also from Beijing. He said the successful experience of Taiwan in recycling and reduction of the waste volume gives the Mainland Chinese ENGOS great confidence that such efforts are possible in the “Chinese” society (against the background of similar dining habits and the different components of household waste from the western world). He also praised that Mr. Lin has made great contribution in introducing Taiwan's policies and methods in great detail. He particularly appreciated that Mr. Lin introduced the fact that Taiwan has built too many incinerators when recycling was not implemented and now many incinerators have not enough waste to burn. This is an important lesson for Mainland China. He mentioned that a Mainland Chinese private foundation, the Society of Entrepreneurs & Ecology (SEE), has organized several trips to Taiwan to study and learn the methods of recycling. Mr. Fan pointed out that even though many background factors are similar; there still are big differences between Mainland China and Taiwan. The most important differences for China's ENGO are twofold: first, they cannot easily go to street to protest as the Taiwanese do; second, there is no free media in China that can be utilized to voice their advocacies and accusations like Taiwanese do. However, he also pointed out that once they successfully make an event reported in media under the authoritarianism in China, the impact usually could be greater than in a democratic society. He thinks the nature of the pollution problems in China and in other countries or areas such as Taiwan are actually the same. The tempo of the environment movement may very well be different in different countries, but they face the same challenges. He also thinks that Taiwanese are much easier to get along with and to understand in comparison with foreign environmental NGO people.

The third person, Mr. Bo, is an anti-pollution activist from a big southern city. His exchange experience with Taiwan is very rich. Although he has not been to Taiwan, he has been able to get acquainted with four ENGO persons from Taiwan on the anti-pollution issue. He said because of the deeper understanding of Taiwan's experience, he became clearer about the logic and the political context behind the policies in Taiwan. He held that Taiwan's political context of democratization and party politics is very important why ENGOS

were able to change the policy agenda from “end-of-pipe” to “source reduction”. This understanding makes him more cautious in expecting a change of policy in Mainland China. He also became aware that certain measures or methods adopted in Taiwan may not necessarily be applicable to China, not only because of different political systems, but also of different scale and type of urban development. For example, in Mainland China there is a huge migrant population in the big cities and they are difficult to be mobilized or educated to implement new recycling policies. In comparison with foreign countries, Mr. Bo thinks Taiwan and Hong Kong are better examples for China’s reference in relevant policies because of similar types of residence community and life style.

In short, for all these Mainland Chinese ENGO people, they all think the Taiwanese experience are better examples for them, and Taiwanese ENGO people are easier to communicate and get along with. It seems that the “Chinese” factor is an important one. These Mainland Chinese activists think Taiwanese are also “ethnic Chinese” sharing similar cultural background, life style, and language. They seem to assume that Taiwan’s experiences are more advanced and the policy ideas more superior. They basically see what Taiwan has come across in the past in the anti-pollution problem is what China is running into today. Nevertheless, they also understand that what Taiwan has developed may not necessarily be applicable to China. Such a “particular” yet also “universal” linkage between Mainland China and Taiwan makes Taiwan’s case more valuable than the western ones.

Case II: Leave No Trace (LNT) Training Program

The Taiwanese ENGO

In the 1960s, due to the increasing outdoors recreation population in the US, natural resources were severely damaged. The idea of outdoor ethics of minimal impact on environment was thus widely promulgated, with LNT as its most important educational principle and programs. These ideas also help to create social organizations teaching people with certificates aiming to change people’s behavior in outdoor recreation.

Mr. Dong (pseudonym) got his postgraduate degree from the US where he learned the idea of LNT. When he came back to Taiwan he was engaged in promoting such idea in Taiwan’s mountain hiking community. Couple of years ago, in response to the increasing outdoor recreation population due to the two-day-weekend break, he started to help the government to introduce the ideas and the educational programs of outdoor ethics which can issue certificates. He has put a lot of emphasis on incorporating the indigenous people’s traditional culture into the outdoor ethics education program. In 2011, he was invited by Chinese environmental education organization to give lessons to the seeded teacher programs. As there has not been any formal training program in China, Mr. Dong needed to apply for special certificate for such a course.

Mr. Dong emphasized in his class that although the idea of LNT came from the west, the problem of damaging the nature is the same for all modernized society. He insisted that it is important to look for principles and solutions from traditional wisdom left by our ancestors. He said there may very well be some common basic rules for environmental ethics across culture, but the concrete solution should always be “localized”. Mr. Dong would like to bring such ideas to China, and would like to change the “modern idea of development” to a more traditional philosophy emphasizing the value and ethics of land.

When he talked about the first year training courses he gave in China, he was full of delighted memory. He said the students came from various civil society organizations and media. From the report of the students, he found that they were really touched by the values of “simplicity, humbleness, and respect for the land”, and

they were all very willing to devote to promoting the idea of LNT. Some students thought the value of ecological ethics is exactly what the Chinese society needs now. Some students even organize their own study group. They translate and discuss related articles they can find from websites of US and Taiwan, and then they went to local enterprises to promote these ideas. However, when they were promoting these ideas to the society they frequently faced misunderstanding and frustration.

Mr. Dong also found that his effort of spreading the idea was not all that smooth. As mentioned above, he put a lot of emphasis on incorporating indigenous people's tradition into his classes. One of the traditions was the "ritual of entering the mountain" which he modified from indigenous people's culture. Through such ritual students are supposed to develop a deep linkage of emotion to the natural environment in the mountain. To some extent, this ritual assumes there were spirits in the mountain and people develop some inner connection with them. However, not every Chinese student Mr. Dong encountered was able to accept such an idea of animism. Many seeded teachers also reflected that when they brought this back and taught to their own students, they faced many resistances. Mr. Dong found such a ritual was more easily accepted in northern China. In southern China, the reaction was mixed. Some students who hold regular jobs in urban areas in the south are least receptive to such ideas. Mr. Dong also found that in many southern urban areas in China a lot of ideas and approaches from Hong Kong were already introduced.

Mr. Dong felt that in the communication and exchange regarding LNT or ecological ethics education, he has not encountered any major difficulty or obstacle. When he and his students live together in the mountains, he found it was much easier to develop mutual trust among people and were thus more able to share deeper feelings and thoughts.

After several rounds of these training programs, Mr. Dong found that the Chinese ENGOs have developed a very pro-active attitude. They have not only developed more similar courses around the country with their seeded teachers, they also have trained their 2nd tier seeded teacher by themselves. They then sent these self-trained seeded teachers to Taiwan to take certificate verification exams. The expenses of all the above mentioned events were paid by the participants themselves, and this keeps them relatively autonomous from the state.

Mr. Dong believes that ecological ethics is a relatively safe issue for cross-strait exchange. For issues such as environmental contention, said Mr. Dong, cross-strait engagement between ENGOs would more likely run into obstacles. Ecological ethics programs, in comparison, discuss and convey much more abstract principles. These programs can be very flexible and adjustable for local practices, whereas it can also be related to a very wide range of environmental issues at the same time. Therefore ecologic ethics education can be very soft but still powerful. According to his personal experiences, he has almost never run into political interferences. Sometimes the police were present at the event, but they just observed. Educational programs held in China like these usually would not touch upon the dark side of the current conditions, and they went much more smoothly than Mr. Dong expected.

If there is any obstacle he could think of, according to Mr. Dong, it came from the prejudice of the dominant Han culture. As mentioned above, Mr. Dong put a lot of emphasis on incorporating and respecting minority's culture and wisdom about preserving the environment. However, many Han participants still have very strong Han-centered view of superiority. They tended to despise the minority culture and were not willing to appreciate the wisdom of the minority tradition. Mr. Dong found it difficult to overcome such cultural prejudice in the short run.

However, Mr. Dong also has observed the strengths and great potentials of the Chinese participants. When he was responsible for receiving Chinese participants to the outdoor ethics camp in the indigenous people's tribe in Taiwan, he found that those Chinese trainees were very eager to learn and well prepared before they came to Taiwan. And therefore, according to him, the Chinese trainees were able to appreciate the knowledge they learned from the Taiwanese trainers and also came to understand the gap of development stage and the level of awareness between Taiwan and China.

The Chinese ENGOs

Mr. Zheng (pseudonym) works for a major ENGO in China and is in charge of cooperating with the Taiwan organization to host the LNT training camp in Mainland China. He has come to Taiwan twice in recent years. The first time he attended a conference and second time for the LNT advanced training course. The camps held in Taiwan are for those who would like to acquire advanced teaching license. In such advanced training camps, there are usually not only Taiwanese teachers but also American ones. Mr. Zheng felt he benefited a lot from such training courses and hoped such programs can continue so that more Mainland Chinese trainees can come to participate in. In these camps, Mr. Zheng observed that the environment of Taiwan was much different from that of the northern China. The differences between Taiwan and northern China, according to Mr. Zheng, lie not only in nature, but also social backgrounds. There are no indigenous people in northern China as in Taiwan, and thus they have to find other cultural resources for the traditional wisdom back in northern China. He found that not only many factors are different between China and Taiwan, but even the teaching methods that Taiwan developed were different from the US ones. He believes the training methods or teaching plans therefore must be changed when he went back to China to teach. However, he also believes that the basic principles or ideas are common, that is, human society must keep a harmonious relationship with the nature.

Mr. Zheng thought the exchanges with Taiwan are much more useful and deeper than with ENGOs of other foreign countries. It was not only because the similar language and cultural backgrounds, but also the working styles. Many western volunteers who came to work for his organization in Beijing usually did not spend too much time there, probably one to two days a week. In comparison, the Taiwanese volunteers usually spend all five weekdays, and their stays were also longer than the western ones. He appreciates the opportunities to go to Taiwan for the training camps, but he also hopes that the Mainland Chinese ENGO members also have opportunities to go to Taiwan to work longer period with Taiwan's ENGOs like the Taiwanese do in Mainland China. Mr. Zheng also mentioned Hao Ran Foundation's project supporting Taiwanese ENGO workers to go to China to work with Chinese ENGOs (usually for one or two years). He said there is no parallel supporting projects in Mainland China.

Case III: Environment Education Camps

The Taiwanese ENGO

Parallel to the environmental contentions on the street, another line of environment movement developed in the 1990s, that is, the rise of environment education. This line of environment movement intentionally avoided actions on street or discussing issues or principles related to politics or religion. It focused on leading the participants to pay attention to the beauty of the nature and then develop deeper knowledge and understanding of the environment. Eventually it aimed to cultivate lasting concern and sharp awareness of

environment protection among ordinary people.

Environmentalists in China also have stepped into similar stage as Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s in recent years. The fast economic development and the vast scale of constructions have caused many incidents of destroying fragile ecological environment and threatened the survival of many endangered species. Many leaders of civilian environmental groups in China have deep feeling of urgency to promote environmental education, to propagate environmental knowledge, and to raise environmental awareness in the society. They have chosen university campuses as one of the most important channels to conduct their educational programs. The leaders of Chinese environmental groups found that due to the cultural and geological affinity, many teaching plans developed by Taiwan are very easily applicable in China. In comparison with teaching plans developed by western countries, those developed by Taiwan can save time and cost for the Chinese ENGOs. Furthermore, Taiwan has experienced all those environmental problems that China is currently confronting, and ENGOs in China thus can learn a lot from Taiwan's partners to avoid making the same mistakes or to prevent from going through the same erroneous path.

Cross-strait collaboration between ENGOs on promoting environmental education in China's university campuses has actually taken place for more than ten years. The leaders of certain Taiwan's environmental education groups have led a team of volunteer teachers with various specialties to China and helped their partners in China to set up a series of environmental courses. Ms. Bai (pseudonym) is one of those vanguard Taiwanese teachers. She is in charge of teaching the course of "green map system". This system was originated from the US. It requires participants to observe and document the environmental features of their own community from ecology-friendly perspectives and via participatory group discussion. As the local groups create a green map of their own community, they can raise the community environmental awareness by paying attention to the change features of ecological and cultural sceneries.

After several years of teaching green map in China, Ms. Bai has observed a vivid difference across the strait. She found that the development of this movement is much easier and stronger in China than in Taiwan. The reasons are not only that the population in China is much bigger, but also that the learning incentives of Chinese people are much stronger. There have been around eight thousand people participating in this movement whereas still very few in Taiwan.

Ms. Bai's course has been very popular in China. She has been invited as trainer or lecture by grassroots ENGOs as well as official or semi-official organizations. She was once invited by an education bureau of a coastal province to train school teachers about environmental education on a no-man island. In that program, she was amazed by the fact that participants were all very formally dressed when they first arrived. They did not seem to understand the nature of the course before they came. Their formal dresses were very incompatible with the environment of the island since there was no electricity or any modern facilities. She gave each trainee a nature name and let them forget about their "titles". Trainees experienced totally unexpected training and were quite impressed, according to Ms. Bai.

Ms. Bai said training programs like this in China were very often funded or supported by foreign foundations. Hong Kong organizations were one of most frequent sources. In recent years, they also started to seek help from Taiwan's organization. One of the reasons why Taiwanese organizations have become more popular in recent years was because Taiwanese speak Mandarin and it is convenient to communicate. She observed that in comparison with Taiwan's ENGOs, it is much easier for the Chinese ENGOs to acquire resources and supports from international community.

The organization that Ms. Bai works with has helped training Chinese college students for more than 10 years. Some of those students became environment activists in various provinces after the graduate from school. They still keep connection with Ms. Bai's organization, and the invitations to teach in training camp have thus multiplied in recent years. In the past, there would be a cross-province major training camp at the every year held in one province. In recent years, due to increasing demand, many provinces hold their own training camps. So Ms. Bai's organization usually has to attend four to six camps each summer.

Similar to the observation of Mr. Dong, Ms. Bai also found the Chinese participants are full of zeal in learning. Sometimes the teacher taught a night course about wild life in outdoors, and when the course is finished around 11 PM, some Chinese students even demanded the teacher to teach extra course. Usually other students tend to welcome such extra training and are willing to stay until midnight. These students then copy what they learned from this camp back to their campuses and start their own local training camps. They usually came from the major universities in their province, and students from campuses of other cities and counties in their province then copied what they learn and organize more local camps. The course Ms. Bai taught thus has been multiplied to an extent well beyond her own imagination. She once ran into some students using the same teaching plan she used, but did not remember she has taught them. She then found out that they were actually the "second hand students" who learned the course from somewhere else. There are also student club almost copied the whole website of her Taiwanese organization to their own, including the images they use and the way they organize their own club. It is difficult for her to give an overall evaluation of the impact her organization has done for China's environmental education, but according to what occasionally came across her, she believes the impact must be quite vast and deep.

In recent few years, there has also been some voice among the Chinese ENGOs that they should reduce reliance on Taiwanese organizations for such training. They think they should develop their own autonomous model. There have also been rumors that the government may have concerns about such large scale cross-strait NGO engagement. One or two camps were canceled with short notice, but she was not sure if it had to do with such a background.

After many years of teaching experiences in China, Ms. Bai found that there is certain difference in the culture of environment education across the strait. In Taiwan, environment education emphasizes interaction between trainer and trainees, as well as interaction between people and the nature. The teaching plans are more flexible and plural. The Chinese are more used to fixed teaching plan and unilateral teaching. But when she applies the Taiwanese interactive teaching approach, the Chinese students can still gradually get used to it, and later on they are also able to feel how nature can touch the deep soul within them. Ms. Bai thus believes, when facing the nature, there is no difference of the basic nature of human beings between people across the strait. There is therefore no obstacle for Chinese students to learn what we learn in Taiwan about environmental education. However, she does observe that there is some degree of difference in receiving new approach or new perspective of environmental knowledge between students from difference background in China. She found minority students tend to have stronger feeling about natural environment and are easier to develop an inner linkage to the nature, whereas those from large cities are more eager to learn "hard knowledge". When the training course touched upon environmental issues in the communities, Ms. Bai found that many students frequently felt frustrated because it is difficult for them to take to streets to pressure the government as people could do in Taiwan.

For Ms. Bai, environmental education may be a very simple task, but Chinese government may not think

so. She mentioned that some Chinese staffs of the education program were once followed and their room searched, probably by local police. Some college students were even banned from attending the training course. In the beginning they thought it was probably the Taiwanese status of the teacher, but later they found that the public security department was worried that this camp intended to “draw maps” which was deemed politically sensitive. After they contacted and explained to the public security bureau, such harassment and monitor were removed.

Talking about politics, Ms. Bai said when she was in China, she always kept low profile and avoided talking about politics. Sometimes she even try to speak in more standard Mandarin lest people found her Taiwanese status. But still she once in a while bumped into some awkward condition due to political reason. For example, in a government environment education camp, she tried to explain to the students the different weather condition between China and Taiwan on the lunch table. She said: “Taiwan is a country with island type climate”. Immediately someone challenged her that Taiwan is not a country. Half of the people on the table echoed the challenge while another half tried to smooth out the accusation. This was probably the only political confrontation she had with local people in China.

Another “political” incident she ran into occurred in a border city of a Southwestern province. After the training course, local students took her to some historic sites of anti-Japanese war left from the Nationalist Era. Ms. Bai could feel that local people were still very reminiscent of and appreciated that good old time. She found that local people seem to have a strong local identity, and were very eager to share with her the “Nationalist” element in her identity with her as a person from Taiwan.

The Chinese ENGOs

Mr. Luo runs an ENGO dedicated to protect certain endangered plants in the southern coastal China. He has been. When he was still a college student, he had already participated twice in the environmental education camp that Ms. Bai’s organization was involved, in 2001 and 2007 respectively. Except for his participation in the educational camp held in Mainland China, he has also traveled three times to Taiwan, mostly for conferences. Before he was able to go to Taiwan, his knowledge about Taiwan was limited to what he learned from the educational camp. When he had the chance to go to Taiwan, he was able to use the time after conferences to travel around the island and had more observation on various dimension of environmental education and protection activities. He was very impressed by the activism of many local communities in Taiwan. Mr. Luo has been to many foreign countries for conferences and training programs, such as US, GB, and Korea. He was more impressed by what he saw in the Korean trip than in the US and GB ones. He thought western experiences such as of GB are much more difficult for China to emulate or follow, due to the huge gap and difference on development stage and cultural backgrounds. For him, experiences of Taiwan also have the advantage that the cultural and social gaps are relatively small. However, even with such similar backgrounds, he still found many things from Taiwan are difficult to be copied in China. For example, he mentioned that Taiwanese groups frequently took to the streets for demonstration. Although there have been many incidents of “mass strolling the streets” in many cities in China (such as in Shanghai, Xiamen, or Dalian), taking to the streets is still much more difficult in China than in Taiwan. But Mr. Luo thought in the case of environmental education, most of the teaching plans developed by Taiwan can be applied to Mainland China. The difference on this does not lie on the cultural backgrounds, but on the fact that the average educational standards of people in Mainland China are lower than in Taiwan, said Mr. Luo.

Conclusive Discussions

Based on interviews with three Taiwanese and five Chinese ENGO cases, we can come up with the following empirical findings. First of all, from both the Taiwanese and the Chinese perspectives, the basic values and principles in the cross-strait exchanges of ENGOs are generally "universal" or "common", not only between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, but also between China and the western world. The Chinese ENGOs fully understand what Taiwan knows was also from the West, but that Taiwan has adapted what they learn to fit what the Mainland Chinese believe to be the "Chinese" social and cultural context. Those differences that the Chinese found which cannot easily be copied to China are those different "methods" or "strategies" due to different political or social contexts. These political and social contexts are either because the Chinese system is not a democracy, or because the different social context such as migrant residents or perceived educational level of the population.

Second, Taiwan seems to be a very useful bridge between the global (mostly western) ENGO community and China. For the Chinese ENGOs, the Taiwanese ENGOs are much easier to communicate and get along with than the westerners. The Chinese ENGOs thus can learn more from and thus tend to be more deeply influenced by the Taiwanese ENGOs than the western ones.

Third, the advantage of Taiwanese experiences seems to come from the following reasons: First, there is affinity of language, culture, and life style between Taiwan and Mainland China. The Mainland Chinese ENGOs take Taiwanese also as "Chinese" people. Second, Taiwan learned the environmental knowledge from the West, but has already adapted to local conditions in their practices and also developed local methods and strategies. It is much more efficient and convenient for the Chinese ENGOs to learn directly from Taiwan than from the western ones. Third, the Taiwanese partners are more willing to spend time with spend time with the Chinese ENGOs than the western ones. Fourth, the Taiwanese experience is not only more receptive to the Chinese ENGOs, but provides also more convincing examples for the Chinese government than the western ones. Fifth, there are commonalities of the problems that China runs into today with those in Taiwan in the past decades.

Fourth, the Chinese ENGO members, when comparing the conditions between two sides, frequently become aware of the political and social factors, particularly the non-democratic elements in China's system, which contributed to such a difference. The communication, exchange, and the engagement between the ENGOs between two sides of Taiwan Strait have created some political ramifications for the Chinese society. However, such impact does not immediately prompt the Chinese NGO members to challenge the nondemocratic political system. Instead, they have chosen to develop strategies and capabilities to be more active and more deeply and efficiently participate in the public affairs.

The implications of this study are multiple. As have been found in existing literatures, the Chinese ENGOs have already built widespread connections with international community and developed good partner relationship international groups. The exchange between the ENGOs across the Taiwan Strait is part of such a global network. Taiwan's civil society has played a bridging and facilitating role in connecting China's civil society to the international community. Unlike other external or international actors, the Taiwanese ENGOs rarely provide direct financial support to the Chinese counterparts. Instead, the most important impact the Taiwanese ENGOs have brought to their Chinese counterparts are their accounts of ideas and their experiences of practices.

Due to similar language and cultural backgrounds, Taiwanese ENGOs have a more important role in influencing their Chinese counterparts in comparison with other international connection. These direct contacts have contributed to form a “common identity” of environmentalism among the ENGOs across the strait, which actually is also part of a “global identity of environmentalism”. Exchanges across the Taiwan Strait among ENGOs have provided a case in which cross-strait relations can be constructed and construed beyond nationalistic or economic context. ENGOs of Taiwan and China are developing a “common identity” as partners in a global community via “environmentalism”. Such an identity has double layers of meaning. On the one hand, the “Chinese” element that the Chinese society usually attaches to the cross-strait relations actually helps the Taiwanese to influence the civil society in China, despite the possible different identity the Taiwanese may have. The “Chinese” identity element provides legitimacy as well as convenience for the Taiwanese to influence the Mainland China civil society groups. However, on the other hand, within such a “Chinese community” of ENGOs, if it exists, the common ground of values and principles are yet universal instead of “Chinese” (or particularistic). Via “environmentalism”, Taiwanese ENGOs help the Chinese partners to become a member of “transnational civil society” (Batliwala & Brown, 2006) without losing its “Chinese” identity. From the perspective of the “cultural hegemony theory” or “cultural imperialism” (Smandych, 2005; Tomlinson, 1991), the value and practices of environmentalism developed first in the western world may very well be seen as an unfriendly cultural intrusion into a developing country such as China. In that regard, Taiwan, unwillingly as she may be, plays a buffer for China to more smoothly merged into such a universal culture and global community.

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