

## Cultural Mobilization in Reinvigorating the Rural Society in Taiwan: The Case of the Wanbao Community

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**ABSTRACT** Cultural mobilization matters in the process of reinvigorating rural development. Its effectiveness can be well promoted, as the public participation in the locality is included. This paper discuss the operative rationale of reinvigorating a rural society from the perspective of public participation and cultural mobilization, in particular, with a successful case study of the Wanbao Community in Taiwan. It seeks to explore how local governance works and meets its challenges by describing how a socioeconomically disadvantaged community has been able to fortify the main power supporting community development. Based upon the researchers' fieldworks and in-depth interviews, this paper argues that the cultural mobilization of Wanbao experience turns agricultural development and agricultural products into a symbolic mechanism to resist the developmentalism driven by land expropriation, which overcomes the risk of community breakdown.

### INTRODUCTION

Rural issues are crucial to contemporary development studies as well as the studies of public governance (Cheshire et al. 2007; Sajaniemi 2010; Milone et al. 2015). While Asian countries are proactively promoting economic integration, shortening the development gap becomes a political challenge for these governments in terms of performance and the pursuit of good governance (Balisacan and Fuwa 2007; Pawar 2010). Developing countries in Southeast Asia, for example, are actively promoting regional integration and maximizing the positive effects of economic integration. Economic integration, however, will inevitably impact rural society, which has been developing at a relatively slow pace. In return, rural society becomes a drag on growth in terms of capitalist modality. To address the issue, international organizations in Southeast

Asia such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are assisting developing countries in their capacity for building projects targeting rural society through various proposals and programs. The hope is to improve the standard of living, increase the income of rural people, and bring more fairness and justice to social development (Islam and Morgan 2012; Asian Development Bank 2012).

Besides the aforementioned support and assistance from international organizations, China, the largest developing country in Asia, is also realizing its vision of "a well-off society" through reinforced rural reforms. Addressing the three long-standing issues, namely rural society, agriculture, and farmers, in particular, has become the most important mission for Xi Jinping, the newly inaugurated Chinese president whose term lasts till 2021. Innovative initiatives towards urbanization and local economic growth have been promoted for the past years, showing the political determination of Chinese leadership to enhance local development (Kondapalli 2012; Wang 2013; Teets and Hurst 2015).

Among these Asian countries, Taiwan is considered to be the most successful example with its rural reform policies in 1990s (Ho 1979; Park and Johnston 1995). In 1994, Taiwan launched

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its national policy of Integrated Community Building (ICB) by sponsoring a nationwide movement for invigorating local communities. ICB was targeting at establishing local identity and grass-roots democracy, encouraging citizens to participate in community development. The purpose of ICB is straightforward, that is, to address the social upheavals caused by rapid economic growth (Liu 2008).

Rural society was where economic and cultural developments in Taiwan began. Despite the fact that the industrial and service sectors are the mainstream of Taiwan's economic development at present, the long-term national development policies of Taiwanese political leadership to help with agricultural transformation and upgrade have never changed and have also brought about impressive results (Wu 1982; Woo 2004; Peng and Hsieh 2008; Boestel et al. 2013).

Nevertheless, previous literatures have shown the challenges of Taiwan's ICB policy, such as the failure of state intervention, uneven resources distribution, and the leadership deficits at localities, which hindered citizen participation in community affairs (Lai and Nepal 2006; Tai 2007; Ho 2012). Apart from this, a more critical issue of regenerating rural communities emphasizes the construction of new bottom-up modality that can mobilize and consolidate local actors to actively engage in community governance (Liu 2008). As Taiwan is aging as a society, it is imperative both, for the government and society to reinvigorate and transform the aging social force within local communities to a more energetic one.

This paper discusses the operative logic for the reinvigoration of rural society from the perspective of public participation and cultural mobilization, in particular, with a successful case study in Taiwan. It begins with the theoretical concept of democratic administration proposed by Elinor Ostrom (1989), which revolutionized the top-down hierarchic public affairs management typical of traditional bureaucracy. Ostrom emphasized that a bottom-up administrative modality can more effectively realize public value and the democratic spirit that can portray the transformation of rural development in Taiwan. Based upon this, this paper advances the study of local governance with specific focus on how diversified patterns of community governance have taken shape and why they are effective

(Baden and Noonan 1998; Lamphear 2001; Lynn 2003; Pini 2009).

Communities are the most fundamental interactive venue for individuals to be connected to both society and state. They are unique in terms of socio-geographical settings and economic patterns. Communities are the places where common identities and interests among residents are identifying and shaping. As the residents are pursuing better lives, they would voluntarily return to and care for the locality by utilizing limited resources effectively to resolve the common issues and brainstorm solutions to self-management (Lamphear 2001; Tang and Tang 2014). In other words, how to reinvigorate rural communities to foster the close interpersonal relationships, and to improve local quality of life are not only core issues to address in community research, but are also crucial in the discussion of democratic administration.

As Taiwan started to proactively establish ICB policy, its goal is to honor the spirit of democracy, to return power to local communities, and to realize a transparent, fair, and just "governance-participation" process (Tang and Tang 2000; Liu 2008). With prior public governance reforms in the 1990s, empowering local communities are exactly what are being emphasized in community development at the moment. It becomes a means to break away from the limits set for public participation during the authoritarian age and to facilitate reorganization of the central-local and community relationship. Moreover, it is aimed at realizing diversified public participation and partnership for the purpose of removing the unitary power structure in bureaucratic administration that has been in place since a long time ago, and the various loopholes as a result of top-down public administration (Pierre and Peters 2000; Skelcher et al. 2005; Hall and Kennedy 2008).

Residents in rural society known to be politically and economically disadvantaged in the past, in particular, are no longer passive recipients of national policies after the ICB campaign of the 1990s. Instead, they are encouraged to proactively rebuild their own style of life and pattern of interaction at localities. Moreover, they are also stimulated to identify the scope of their consensus-based group, to spontaneously take action to help comprehensively improve the life of their own and other residents, including improved socio-economic conditions, and to fur-

ther realize social justice, history and culture, local identity, and environmental ecology by means of community movement. These policies and ideals are also guiding Taiwan to become “a nation of communities” (Lu 2002).

ICB policy as an important initiative in Taiwan’s public policy reform has been challenged from time to time during the past few years, showing the contradiction between policy and reality. With developmentalism as the main train of thought, in particular, central and local governments in Taiwan are accustomed to adopting the logic of developmentalism in the policymaking process, that is, economic growth as the most important achievement for governmental performance and land development as the main appeal to local prosperity (Ho 2010, 2012). For the sake of economic development, it may be deemed acceptable to ignore and destroy a community environment and culture that was difficult to reinvigorate. That contraction is without a doubt undermining community policies of democratic significance as well. How exactly can Taiwan continue to develop toward a nation of communities? This has become a pragmatic challenge, which, to be investigated, is formulated into a substantial question here: *What will be the challenge faced by the local governance when community development is met with local development and how will it be addressed?*

This paper explores how local governance works and meets its challenges from the perspective of cultural mobilization in the context of revitalization of Taiwanese local communities. First, the role of cultural mobilization in the policy context will be discussed. Second, the operational logic and effect of cultural communication at a local level will be further clarified. Finally, the development of Wanbao Community in Miaoli according to the fieldworks will be used as an example to exhibit how the rural community has been able to fortify the main power supporting community revitalization by turning agricultural development and agricultural products into symbols.

## Literature Review

### *Policy Context of Cultural Mobilization*

Much attention has been attracted towards the studies of local governance over the past decades. Related literatures tried to rediscover

the importance of locality in the process of governance. With the new mechanism of governance developed, more stakeholders are included in the governance network in order to successfully put related policies into practice (Skelcher et al. 2005; Tang and Tang 2014). In this regard, the community becomes the key unit of analysis. Studies on the essence and synergy of local governance (or grass root governance) have also been prioritized among the academics (Crispin 2001).

The role of a community has been hotly debated in European and American academics (Pawar 2010; Ledwith 2011; Mayo et al. 2013). Most scholars look at a community (including a tribe and a village) as the fundamental venue or interpersonal network for social interaction that has a specific geographical territory, economic pattern, and social or cultural connections (Korff 2003: 3). All the issues surfacing within this network have to do with its members. To pursue a better life, these members will also have abundant incentives for them to stipulate solutions for or ways to manage their issues. To conceptualize, there are at least three important aspects at the core of community development: (1) economy: it emphasizes how a community should utilize local resources, (2) governance (or politics): it emphasizes how a community should realize autonomy, and (3) culture: it emphasizes how members in a community should interact with one another or with the whole community (Lamphear 2001: 15). These factors are also important for community revitalization.

There have been many studies exploring the first two factors, but not the cultural factor. In Taiwan, the development of the cultural feature of community development is aimed at proactively developing local communities and building Taiwan into a nation of communities (Lu 2002). With regard to the origin of ICB campaign in Taiwan, most of the prior studies focused on specific political developments in the 1990s. In particular, the perestroika movement spearheaded by the Council for Cultural Affairs under the Executive Yuan focused on cultural construction and emphasized autonomy of individual communities and public involvement in joint developments, and creating cultural characteristics for communities. The ideas of *Machizukuri* were also introduced in Japan in order to distinguish from the term “community building” in the 1960s that focused on local economic development and social welfare significance. This movement is

hence referred to as the community development movement (Ho 2012).

In other words, the expansion of community research topics have also come to focus on how to effectively promote “re-communitization” among community members that lack interaction with one another. Accordingly, such research orientation realizes empowerment of democratic value and social justice during the process. It then creates a group that was “in” the community and is now “for” the community with new capabilities to take the leadership with regard to its lifestyle, community participation awareness and the actual participating behavior (Aiken 1969; Chen 1996; Tang and Tang 2000; Tang and Lu 2002; Lu 2002; Ho 2012; Griggs et al. 2014).

A concept that is closely related to the aforementioned argument is community or group mobilization, that is, the process to form a collective entity (a group) by organizing community residents (McNutt and Boland 2007: 166). In substantial implementation, community mobilization can cultivate collective resistance against or challenge external intervention through the integration of individual powers. Adriance (1994) further indicated that community or group mobilization is to cultivate a collective entity by organizing people for a common goal and action, including to support land utilization, revolutionize land movement, and to develop ideological social changes during the process (Adriance 1994: 164).

By the same token, Treno and Holder (1997) believed that community mobilization depends on organizing community members for their support and implementing joint goals in order to maintain the integrity of the community. They also emphasized that community mobilization can be done either using the bottom-up or the top-down approach. With the bottom-up or grassroots approach, community mobilization is designed and enforced spontaneously by community members. Nevertheless, the top-down approach features objectives set either by elites outside the community or self-selected leaders within the community for the purpose of mobilizing community movement (Treno and Holder 1997: 173–174).

Since Taiwan’s Martial Law was lifted in 1987, the democratization process has been encouraging bottom-up community reinvigoration. That is, local communities are empowered to gradually develop effective self-reliance mechanisms and

to foster solid local identity through which their residents can be easily integrated to tackle with governance issues. New forms of community reinvigoration not only facilitate the pursuit of democratic participation but also aim to realize governance efficiency at localities. In other words, mobilizing local communities becomes a key issue to be addressed in realizing grassroots governance.

The consequentialism approach is often adopted in existing studies to analyze local governance models of benchmark autonomous community organizations to accordingly explain the theoretical significance of a specific local governance model. In addition, the analysis of local governance models often focuses on the effective incentives in order for egotistic individuals to take part in and form an effective governance initiative. However, these studies may ignore the fact that many communities have been victimized and even lost their original collective awareness and cohesion.

One specific concern in Taiwan’s community development and revitalization relates to how local communities, having gone through multiple political changes and cultural colonization, can resume their emphasis on identity culturally and socially. In other words, re-coherence and re-communitization based upon initiatives and campaigns among community members become critical issues. After the lifting of the Martial Law, the policy focus of community development in Taiwan has been redirected to the reconstruction of community culture in the context of democratic governance. Hence, most of the literatures with any explanations regarding these communities lack in resources and sufficient economic incentives can still be rebuilt.

When cultural resources are utilized in the process of effective propagation, communication, and interaction, to rebuild collective identity among community members becomes feasible. Therefore, the community would be able to restore social networks and interpersonal relationships as those in the rural society as in the old days. Even if communities are faced with fierce external impacts and challenges, rebuilding community culture can be utilized as a bargain chip for mobilization, especially to those community residents lacking in political and economic resources, yet willing to proactively participate in collective action that protects their community.

### *Cultural Communication at Locality*

Culture matters in communication among local communities, but not many discussions on how culture can be reshaped to mobilize community development take place (Sjöberg 1993; Zavos et al. 2004; Jung 2013; Magliacani 2015). Staggenborg (1998) believed that culture helps maintain and foster a sense of community, which is key to community networking. Here, culture can be defined as a meaningful system of symbols, rituals, values, and ideologies. For community members, it relies on whether this specific group can share and continue to implement and develop community culture. It is a lasting collective identity that consolidates its members. It would become a substantial driving force that facilitates the formation and maintenance of the “we group.”

When applied to rural society with specific emphasis on locality, culture should be attached to its local contexts. That local culture can be further conceptualized as the common experiences of specific group within a limited geographical setting, with a shared value system and interests. As far as a highly local rural society is concerned, individuals and groups in a community need to keep track of local cultural resources, which will then be the basis for the linkage and communication within the social network. Participation and engagement in local cultural events, for example, will accordingly generate and enhance collective identity.

What is the link between culture as an abstract significant system and action? Recent discussions tend to regard culture as the underlying resources for action. That is, culture refers to knowledge and skills required to take action on the one hand, and limited resources on the other hand (Sewell 1992; Swidler 1986; 2001; Neuhausser 1998; Watkins and Swidler 2009). Nevertheless, culture does not guide action by providing specific purpose and value, but by providing the repertoire or toolkit of habits, skills, and lifestyles in order to be the basis for people to form action strategies on their own (Swidler 1986: 273). In other words, local culture acts as the key mechanism in favor of community development and revitalization.

Nagel (1994) argues that either in the form of abstract concept, substantial action or interactive modality, local culture by all means acts to manipulate the contents of action. Therefore, at the community level, local culture as a unique

resource offers possible contents and significance for collective action among community residents. To the contrary, as a common action to be integrated and combined, community development relies on the transmission or construction of cultural contents in order to facilitate mobilization in favor of community development.

Interestingly, what local culture offers is an identity bargaining chip that helps individuals to play the role that they agree with well. The resultant mobilization, on the other hand, can further create a high level of approval of cultural contents among individuals so that the cultural resource returns to form the cultural identity required for a collective community action (Neuhausser 1998: 351–352).

What is more important, to effectively turn local culture into a resource that facilitates collective community action and helps create common cognition inevitably involves the process of cultural communication. In the context of community development and revitalization, the communication process for the said local culture indicates that the community utilizes existing local culture resources to carry on community development campaigns, particularly with the emphasis on highlighting local culture. It is a long-term process of building or reshaping identity, value, and interest shared among community residents.

The Norwegian Immigration Association, for example, exactly utilized cultural communication in realizing community mobilization. They communicated with each other on the common cultural heritage of immigrants and the intimate collectiveness, while at the same time addressing the internal demands of community members and facilitating substantial dialogues between immigrants and the society (Meadwell 1983; Predelli 2008: 253–258).

Among related empirical studies on community development in Taiwan, quite a few works emphasize that local non-profit organizations or communities take the lead in the process of cultural communication and interaction. They are, to some extent, screening and restructuring the local culture, and accordingly, preserving those specific local cultural elements. Their efforts are the typical cases for revitalizing local communities using the bottom-up practice. Interesting cases show the success of community culture preservation and natural resources protection at localities (Tang and Lu 2002; Lu 2004), the role of

local media in fostering cultural identity (Lin 1998; Wu 1998; Tsai 2010; Sun 2011), and the interaction between economic development and local culture (Chiang and Chang 2008).

These case studies revealed the importance of non-profit organizations as the main actors pushing for community revitalization. They can take advantage of diversified cultural communication strategies featuring “rebirth,” “innovation” and “opportunities” to accomplish community mobilization, especially in the process of rural reconstructing process (Jacquelyn 2015). They also activate collective actions as the process of cultural communication and construction, despite limited economic and human resources. The goal is to fulfill community development and revitalization in an independent, factitious, and autonomous manner.

This paper argues that cultural communication at localities herein actually refers to a useful mechanism for mobilizing the community. Cultural elements, extracted from localities, that are reinforced, controlled, and screened through various communication process become the key to the purposeful collective action for community revitalization. Utilizing those cultural resources will attract and encourage community residents to engage in reshaping common interest, identity, and sense of community.

### METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts participatory observation, fieldworks, and interviews as its research method. A case study on Wanbao Community where the researchers conducted fieldworks and interviews investigates actual cultural mobilization and projects of community development and revitalization in Taiwan. From November 2009 to March 2010, the fieldworks had been conducted by the researchers, meeting and interviewing more than 20 stakeholders at the localities, including members of the Wanbao Communication Association, local social elites, and community volunteers.

Through the intensive fieldworks and participatory observation in Wanbao community, the researchers were exploring insider stories different from the publicly released information by the local government and mass media. It was found that community residents who were socioeconomically disadvantaged would gradually regain their collective community awareness and iden-

tity, while community development organizations emphasize and manage local culture. Community residents maintain a close relationship with one another and attract more people to jointly take part in community revitalization in fighting against development, blocking community land from expropriation, and overcoming the risk of community breakdown.

## OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

### Revitalizing Wanbao Community

Despite the fact that Taiwan has been proactively developing its local governance modality of respecting local culture since the 1990s, the common value of community building and community culture reinvigoration promoted by ICB policy has been continually facing the challenges of economy-driven developmentalism. It is imperative for the academics to explore how the ICB practice at localities can balance the economic developmentalism and continue to push for community revitalization (Liu 2008; Ho 2012). The revitalization process of the Wanbao Community in Taiwan and its successful strategies against developmentalism without a doubt makes an extremely symbolic case.

The Wanbao Community revitalization campaign can be traced back to 1996, when the Wanbao Community Development Association was founded. Actually, the Association did not launch any specific development project and communication initiatives in the beginning. It was founded on a background similar to that of most communities nowadays under ICB policy spearheaded and implemented by the contemporary Council for Cultural Affairs (now Ministry of Culture) chaired by social anthropologist Chen Chi-Nan. He introduced the ideas of rural building and *Machizukuri* from Japan to promote ICB policy.

The “Outline of Community Development” promulgated by the Ministry of the Interior more specifically stipulated that community development associations could be legally established to promote local development campaigns. Therefore, almost every local community and village would establish its community development association, which becomes crucial to the subsequent development and revitalization campaigns throughout Taiwan (Chen 1996; Tsai et al. 2007; Wang 2007; Lee et al. 2012).

It is worth mentioning that a year prior to the establishment of Wanbao Community Development Association, the Wanbao area faced land expropriation that was included in the expansion project of the Hsinchu Science Park. Due to the land expropriation with low price, which did not meet the expectations of community residents, there were collective struggles and petitions against the initiative. To effectively mobilize the protesting organizations, the residents jointly formed the "Right Protection Committee for the Kulingjiao Section in Houlong Township, Miaoli County" and successfully filed a petition that prevented Wanbao Community from being expropriated. Members of the Committee such as the Vice Chairman Chen Xing-Xong and Member Hong Xiang served as chairman of the Wanbao Community Development Association one after the other on a later date and became core leaders in promoting community development movements (Chang 2007).

An overview of important statements during this anti-land expropriation movement in 1995, including petitions filed on February 16, March 23, October 16, and October 27 in 1995, respectively, revealed that none of them used the term "community" in protests. Contents of these petitions only emphasized how unfair it was for the administrative district of Wanbao Li to be expropriated and Kulingjiao, the historical site, as the main venue for the collective struggle. As far as the performance of the movement is concerned, the close and significant combination of the traditional name of a geographical location, cultural cognition, and the collective struggle can be said to have exercised a preliminary effect in gathering the collective awareness among residents and then forming effective collective actions.

Fast-forwarded to 2009, when faced with the second land expropriation, the symbolic concept of collective identity of Wanbao Community was also constantly and specifically emphasized during multiple mobilizations. Interestingly, during the interviews for this study, local opinion leaders that took part in the struggles and mobilizations in both land expropriations consistently included the first land struggle as part of the experience and history of community mobilization experience. To fight against external intervention in local development marks the beginning of the Wanbao experience.

### **Reproduction of Community Tradition**

Although, as is mentioned that the Wanbao Community Development Association was es-

tablished in as early as 1996, strictly speaking, its community development and revitalization campaigns did not begin until 2003, followed by gradual deepening and initiation of the first cultural communication and mobilization effort.

In 2003, Wanbao Community proactively took part in the comprehensive community development rating initiated by the Council for Cultural Affairs out of the motive that generally involved the fight for political and economic resources needed for community development. It was exactly during this process that answered to the ICB policy that Wanbao Community started to cultivate its connotation of community development. The head of neighborhood together with the Association began to plan local cultural communication activities, mobilizing local residents to take part in these events for better understanding the grassroots culture and the configuration of localities.

While the documentary of accomplishments was being filmed, the interview with Xie Xiu-Yi, then head of Wanbao Neighborhood, revealed to a certain extent that the idea of community development still needed to be reinforced at the time. On the other hand, several years after the initial development of ICB, most of the local communities in Taiwan are trying to compete for resources by highlighting the uniqueness and specific features of their own localities (Council for Cultural Affairs, 2003; Interviewee A, interview data, December 18, 2009).

The Association, at the same time, echoed the policy by promoting cultural traditions in the context of community revitalization. It first collected old photos and displayed them as a cultural communication strategy of telling different stories of the neighborhood, reproducing the history and human landscape, and constructing a sense of local culture and community during the storytelling and listening process. It is important to note that effective cultural propagation and communication were the key foundations to promote joint participation of community residents in collective action. Cultural communication through the old photo campaign is without a question able to arouse memories in residents as they see those that tell a detailed history of what had happened to the community. In the reminiscence of the good old times, community members can also communicate and interact with one another in a way conducive to revitalizing community, accordingly reinforcing community-based common cognition.

In effect, the Association refreshes collective local memories by publishing records and exhibiting old photos, among other cultural communication events. By not only triggering shared memories among old members, the said cultural communication events help remember human landscape and heritage of the old days and enable residents of the new generation to reinforce their connections to the past. The reconstructions of old memories become new opportunities for community revitalization (Jacquelyn 2015). The researchers visited members of the Association, including the chairperson in 2009 and 2010. Coincidentally, all of them mentioned the significance of the old photo campaign, showing the positive effect of cultural communication to community mobilization (Interviewees B and C, interview data, December 18, 2009).

In fact, any collective feeling relies on shared cultural significance as a mechanism that helps promote interaction and communication among members to take shape (Swidler 1986, 2001). An interactive process like this between cultural objects and descriptions of culture and history helps spread and disseminate and exercise collective psychological infection to further consolidate community members, appreciate the sense of the “we group,” and enable them to deeply integrate into the community campaign. It also helps community members stay together and fight against external suppression (Sewell 1992; Neuhouser 1998; Swidler 2001; Watkins and Swidler 2009).

### **Symbolization of Local Economic Crops**

Since Wanbao Community is a rural community, it is famous for local economic crops and fruits such as peanuts, sweet potatoes, rice, and watermelons. As the community was built, watermelons were chosen to be a symbol of deepening local culture and tradition. They not only are configured with and attached to the geographical, humanistic, and historical complex towards Wanbao Community, but also have gradually transformed into a most symbolic cultural symbol in its communication campaigns. In other words, watermelons turned from an economic commodity to a local symbol, which exactly reflects the fact that the local cultural communication is a key mechanism for community revitalization to be successful or not.

On the floor of the Wanbao Watermelon Festival in 2003, the then chairman of the Association specifically emphasized that the festival is held for marketing local watermelons. The Festival echoed governmental policy on promoting local industry and culture in the late 1990s, particularly those initiatives proposed by the Council for Cultural Affairs and the Council of Agriculture of Taiwan. Although the Festival was continuously set to promote local fruits, it brought about quite different and significant changes during the subsequent community revitalization campaigns. Several years later, its significance switched from being an event conducive to economic development and the promotion of a local agricultural product to becoming an important cultural campaign contributing to foster collective identity.

The consecutive festivals have been considered as an exclusive cultural moment of Wanbao Community full of cultural inspirations for people returning from other places to their hometown. Community residents regard the festival as a local cultural gathering that has been going on for more than three hundred years (Interviewee C, interview data, December 18, 2009). Activities such as carrying watermelons and spitting watermelon seeds are meant primarily to enable children returning to their hometown and make community members to relive the old life in Wanbao. Because of the event, returning young students also invite their friends from other neighborhoods to share the delight of this local carnival (Interviewee D, interview data, January 31, 2010).

Watermelons as a cultural symbol not only become a cultural theme that spread awareness of Wanbao Community and strengthen cultural relay and belief in their land among farmers (Interviewees E, F, G, interview data, January 31, 2010), but also constitute an effective cultural communication and mobilization means for the community to join forces with its members and supporting groups from outside the community in the face of external force that brings about a crisis.

In 2008, the Miaoli County Government embarked on the Houlong Science Park Development Project that was expected to develop over 362 hectares of land and expropriate more than 150 hectares of quality agricultural land that would later be changed to industrial land. Agri-

cultural land and houses in Wanbao Community account for eighty percent of the land expected to be expropriated (minutes of the 256<sup>th</sup> review meeting of the Regional Planning Commission under the Ministry of the Interior). In other words, this project would nearly destroy the Community, making it difficult to reconstruct. Accordingly, it gave rise to fierce social struggles among residents. Old farmers, once being obedient citizens and content with their lifestyle, allied proactively to defend their localities, by putting up white banners and repeatedly protesting in front of the Miaoli County Government.

Regardless of their unsuccessful effort, they even travelled to Taipei for protesting in front of different central government agencies, appealing to the media and seeking support from civil society groups. Nonetheless, these struggles resulted in the local government discontinuing its fiscal sponsorship to the Festival. Due to limited resources, members of the Association and the neighborhood head took initiatives to raise funds wherever possible. Passionate, spontaneous and voluntary participation of community residents also made sure that the Festival was successfully held again in Wanbao Community. It attracted younger generations to return home for the campaign. Groups such as the Taiwan Rural Front and Homemakers Union Consumers Cooperative also participated and showed their supports.

These community movements and protests through self-organized collective mobilization in Wanbao Community finally made the Regional Planning Commission overrule the land development project, exhibiting a successful case of bottom-up resistance towards external intervention and challenges. The movements were promoted mainly by old farmers, demonstrating their determination to safeguard their homeland.

It is important to note that the most challenging tasks for realizing ICB policy for the past years happened at localities. First, the over-reliance on government sponsorship and fiscal support, to some extent, limits the capability of local communities. Communities in Taiwan are used to competing for fiscal support from governmental sectors. If the government, either central or local ones, do not assist them, they would tend to be inactive, which disobeys the original rationale of self-reliance set in ICB policy.

Second, the process of mobilization should

be localized. In Taiwan, local communities favor external leadership such as young social movement activists, public opinion leaders, or the intellectuals. These outside supporters are enthusiastic about advising community development and revitalization, however, the lack of intensive interaction, common identities, or shared memories with community residents still discourages local engagement in mobilization.

This paper argues the economic development agenda driven by external political intervention will not arbitrarily overrule community development and revitalization centered by the promotion and preservation of local culture as shown in Wanbao experience. Through cultural communication and mobilization in the spirit of rural traditions and heritages, local events and activities become the means of fostering a sense of collectiveness and reshaping of common identities. A more culturally cohesive and socially bonded community shaped by intensive communications among residents is therefore in the making. Though facing the severe land expropriation challenges, these socially disadvantaged old farmers and local community associations successfully take the lead in networking and fighting against developmentalism, helping the community from benignly collapsed.

The Wanbao experience becomes a typical case for community development and revitalization in Taiwan. It not only demonstrates the grassroots momentum of the Taiwanese society to move forward to a nation of communities, but also highlights the importance of cultural communications and mobilization in the making of a self-reliant community.

## CONCLUSION

Rural governance and development experiences are important issues concerning government capability in socioeconomic reforms at localities as well as grassroots participation in democratic governance. It not only sheds important light on economic development, but the emphasis over locality and the inclusion of local engagement and inputs can also better strengthen the realization of a self-reliant community.

Wanbao experience in Taiwan is important and unique for rural society reinvigoration and local community revitalization. The process of cultural communications and mobilization, in particular, help reshape a new sense of commu-

nity centered on local identity, culture, memories, and values, which are pronounced in Taiwanese civil society. Wanbao experience also reflects the fact that even rural development has to pursue the goal of economic development, and it should seriously incorporate the real localities that is cultures, traditions, and heritages into the process of community revitalization. As argued in this paper that successful cultural mobilization was exactly the key to the effective resistance towards developmentalism.

The case of the Wanbao Community provides a solid example that communal mobilization can be driven by cultural essences with local traits. The successful development of any local community should be motivated and invigorated using the bottom-up approach, despite any governmental supports. However, if the government is willing to facilitate the invigoration of a local rural community, a new mode of co-governance should be regenerated and reinforced.

It is argued in this paper that the new phenomenon of agricultural governance in Taiwan has surpassed the traditional context where the local government fought against the central government and also the restriction that the local government had to abide by central policies to accordingly demonstrate new collective action logic. Through a program activated in the locality, the central government started to learn how to get along with the local society and more diversified energy has begun to be instilled in democratic governance in Taiwan. The development of rural society should not become a burden for the government to pursue economic rationality and growth data. If the (cultural) regeneration logic can be reinvigorated in rural society, it will naturally more effectively transform rural society into a new engine that drives national development through more effective narrowing of the development gap.

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