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Groups Interviewed

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Introduction

"A heart loves the earth; a pair of hands protect the environment."
— Wang Chung-Ho[1]

Environmental degradation and social injustice continue to impact people all over the world, leading to a wide range of approaches in creating a sustainable environmental ethic. Historical and cultural studies, religious interpretations, philosophical interpretations, and science and technology are just a few of the standpoints from which to address the problems that have haunted the globe for the past half-century. In Taiwan specifically, women activists have created a number of movements that liberate them from traditional patriarchal structures and that empower them to become agents of change engaged in initiating environmental reforms. Their courage, insight, and persistence have allowed them to develop a unique perspective on environmental activism.

The relationship between women's activism and environmental movements commonly is referred to as "ecofeminism," a categorization that includes the mutual victimization of women and the natural world. However, Western notions of feminism and ecofeminism do not necessarily suit the cultures and traditions of Eastern societies. This work examines women's activism in Taiwan and proposes the novel analytical framework of *ecofamilism* to illuminate Taiwanese women's understanding of their roles in the environmental movement. The term *ecofamilism* can be defined as the responsibility of an individual to care for the larger ecological family. Through the lens of ecofamilism, this study explores the culturally distinct perceptions of feminism, family, and environmental protection in Taiwan and the West.

This book does not propose to be an exhaustive study of environmental activism in Taiwan. Rather, through six Taiwanese non-government organizations (NGOs), it presents a unique view into the birth of new movements. Research on the six NGOs span over two decades from 1990-2015, while the majority of the fieldwork took place between 2000 and 2009. This book is a document of the historical emer-

[1] *Yike xin ai diqiu, yishuang shou zuo huanbao* 一顆心愛地球，一雙手作環保, environmental protection slogan created by Wang Chung-Ho 汪中和, an environmental scholar at Academia Sinica.

gence of an environmental consciousness in a newly industrialized country, as well as of the dynamic role of women as activists and leaders.

Central Themes

I began this project to respond to the concept of ecofeminism developed in the U.S. and Europe. Ecofeminism focuses on the relationship between the unjust treatment of nature and the suppression of "women, children, people of color, traditional people, and poor people" (Nhanenge 2011, 98). Its ethics include "care, non-violence, love, and friendship" while highlighting interconnections among women, others, and nature (2011, 145). Although some Western cultures embrace these ideals, ecofeminism is far from a universal concept and has less meaning to women activists in the East.

The theologian Jay B. McDaniel notes that most prevalent ecofeminist perspectives rely heavily on theoretical models developed by Western scholars, grown in the Western sociocultural milieu. However, he asks, "what are we to make of those non-Western peoples whose concrete bases, whose living ecologies, are broader and more imaginative, less scientific, than our own?" (1994, 59). The explosion of environmental actions on the part of women has been an interesting and inspiring trend for students of social change in both the developing and developed world. This book seeks to answer questions as to what motivates previously socially inactive sections of society to participate in a movement.

In addition to describing the activities and ideologies of these groups, this work also takes a theoretical question. What are the theoretical and practical commonalties and differences between Taiwanese and Western brands of feminist ecological activism? Most importantly, is the concept of ecofeminism a useful theoretical construct at a global and cross-cultural level? To what degree is it preferable to think specifically in terms of the Taiwanese context? To address these issues, I propose the concept of *ecofamilism* to signify the interrelationship between concerns for the environment and those for the entire family of planetary life.

Driving forces of social activism, feminism, ecology, and religion intersect in this study at various levels. Understanding their relationship to ecofeminist philosophy is important both for telling Taiwan's story and for making it relevant within the context of contemporary social and religious activism. Feminist and ecological connections to ecofeminism are obvious, but religion is also a fundamental dimension of human re-

sponsibility and accountability. Exploring the connections between religious ideology and environmentalism throughout the case studies presented here, I discuss the multifarious and often discordant relationships between feminism, ecofeminism, and ecofamilism as they arise in the Taiwanese context.

Terminology

Ecology

Ecology (*shengtai xue* 生態學) refers to the study of *oikos*, Greek for home or "household" (Eblen and Eblen 1994, 171; see also Kormondy 1976). As a science, it is concerned with the study of the interrelationships of organisms in their home environment (Hinsdale 1995, 196). Once regarded as a branch of biology, it is now categorized as a separate discipline consisting of a combination of "socio-economic and biological study" which often examines "how human use of nature is causing the destruction of [the] nature system" (Ruether 1994, 45).

The Norwegian thinker Arne Naess coined the two key terms "shallow ecology" and "deep ecology." The first refers to the "anthropocentric view that nature exists solely to serve human ends and purposes," while the latter represents "self-realization, which goes beyond the modern Western self" as well as "biocentric equality," which regards all entities of the ecosphere as interrelated and "equal in intrinsic worth" (Hinsdale 1995, 197). According to the Methodist theologian John B. Cobb Jr., the ecological movement supported the emergence of a new worldview. It is a worldview determined to bolster the deep ecology view, analyzing the way in which individual activities combine to contribute to the whole (1995, 243).

Beyond deep ecology, other radical environmental analyses include those of eco-Marxists, eco-socialists, Greens, social ecologists, and ecofeminists (Birkeland 1993, 31). Each takes a different route and focuses on different concerns, instruments of social change, and desired ends. In this study, I distinguish between ecology *per se* and its derivative, environmental ethics. If ecology is a science that seeks to uncover "basic ecological principles and laws underlying the sustainability of life on earth," environmental ethics is the application of these principles in the "human system," involving agriculture, industry, trade, and so forth (Nebel 1990, 10).

While the former is the study of how nature works, the latter seeks to implement procedures to develop and apply a sustainable lifestyle, aligned with the workings of nature. In other words, environmental ethics is the

"application of social ethics to questions of correct behavior toward the environment" (Art 1993, 187). The environmental protection movement, then, acts in support of such ethics—hence the term "environmental activism."

Environmental Protection

Environmental protection (*huanbao* 環保), according to the *Dictionary of Ecology and the Environment*, is the "act of protecting the environment by regulating the discharge of waste, the emission of pollutants, and other human activities" (Collins 1985, 83). As such, it manifests in "environmental politics," a phenomenon that emerged in the 1960s in the West over differences between ecologists and those who use (or abuse) natural resources, thereby affecting the ecosphere (Bocking 1997). Thus, the polity must concern itself with scientific discourse and supporting increasing numbers of institutions that directly or indirectly deal with environmental issues.

Environmental protection has three branches: government, grassroots, and professional. The governmental role is evident in organizations such as the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States of America and the Environmental Protection Administration in Taiwan, whose primary functions are to monitor and regulate environmental quality. The second branch comes from the grassroots level, or NGOs, by these organizations taking specific charge of, and action for, particular environmental concerns, including anything from nuclear waste to animal protection. The third is the professional branch, or education, where those who study the environment and its protection share this knowledge with others, both in schools and in the community. Each of these three units is necessary for the protection of the environment in any geographical context.

My primary focus in this book is the conservationist and environmental activism of women's organizations. I will not specifically address ecology as a science or environmental politics.

Social Movements

Sociologist Sidney Tarrow defines social movements as "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (1998, 4). Matching this definition, many social movements have arisen in Taiwan since the large-

scale social and political changes in the 1980s, including movements concerned with consumers, labor, women, aborigines, farmers, students, teachers, and human rights in general.[2]

The social psychologist Yang Kuo-Shu notes four characteristics of a social movement. First, it involves a certain social problem and the corresponding set of related values. Second, people involved express a unique consciousness in identifying and acting on what others fail to see as the root of the problem. Third, it attracts and engages conscientious people on a long-term basis and is effective in producing results and influencing society in a meaningful way. Fourth and finally, it remains strong at the grassroots level and avoids becoming dependent on governmental or corporate assistance. The first three characteristics are essential for the growth and survival of any social movement, while the fourth reflects the growing importance of NGOs in the world today (1996, 312).

NGOs and Grassroots Organizations

Yang Guobin, a cultural sociologist, outlines three characteristics of global environmental movements: organizational base, critical green discourse, and collective civic actions. The organizational base includes both formal and informal organizations (NGOs) that run on a routine basis regardless of formal registration status given by governments, but which all support a relationship between the regulations of the state and the non-governmental political culture (2010, 122-23). In Eastern cultures, the term "non-governmental" is sometimes read as "anti-government," an implication that may create problems for organizations operating in a relatively restricted political environment. Because of these negative associations, many groups identify themselves as "non-official" organizations (2010, 126).

Linguistically, the term "grassroots" has two readings in Chinese. One is *jiceng* 基層, literally "foundation," which relates back to Chinese revolutionary history (Yang 2010, 127). The Taiwanese more frequently understand it according to its second meaning, *caogen* 草根, a literal translation of the word "grassroots."

Taiwan has many grassroots organizations and NGOs that dedicate their resources and efforts to environmental protection—about 232 in 1997 (Hsiao 1997, 3). That number slowly increased to reach about 300 organizations by 2007.[3] Both grassroots organizations and NGOs have

[2] See ch. 1 for more on the history of Taiwan and its social movements.

[3] Hsiao Hsinhuang, director of and distinguished research fellow at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, e-mail communication, 8/20/2007. Most

been active and effective in promoting awareness of environmental protection and advocating for improvements. These organizations collect information, host public hearings, and persuade legislative committees to take action. They also exploit the power of the media and of the Legislative Yuan (*lifa yuan* 立法院, Taiwan's legislature) to promote environment activism. Activists represent a diverse range of people, including those in the middle class, scholars, and more.

Some Taiwanese NGOs have had difficulty being accepted by the general public or gaining financial support. Regardless, they inspire numerous volunteers to become involved in environmental work. They foster ecological awareness and ensure that environmental protection is prioritized at the governmental level (Catholic Bishops 2010, 372). Over more than two decades, these organizations have gained increasing public acceptance, shifting the locus of environmental protective power from the government to the public sphere.

This book primarily addresses the way Taiwanese NGOs and grassroots organizations affect environmental policy and protection. Prior to the 1970s, Taiwan's government dictated environmental policy and imposed it on the people. This book demonstrates the reversal of the source of environmental activism, which now lies predominantly in the hands of private citizens and organizations dedicated to effecting a transformation in governmental environmental policy.

Ecofamilism

The environmental philosopher Dale Jamieson notes that environmental problems are complex and multidimensional. He hopes that an ideology will arise in the future that not only encompasses the scope of the environmental crisis at hand, but also proposes attainable solutions (2008, 24). Matching his vision, I propose the concept of ecofamilism, first coined by sociologist Wang Juju Chin-shou in 2001, as a novel lens through which to examine environmental activism. Against the backdrop of ecofeminist theory as a dominant Western philosophy, ecofamilism arises from a comparison between Western and Eastern feminist ideologies.

Wang Juju Chin-shou has suggested that ecofamilism is somewhat similar to the Gaia theory in that it sees humans as part of the environmental community with the responsibility to value and care for the en-

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of the new environmentally oriented NGOs are local and community based, and from 1997 to 2007, no new major island-wide environmental NGOs were established.

tire ecological family (2001, 71). Barry Commoner describes the first law of ecology as an idea that "everything is connected to everything else" (1971), which also resonates with the slogan "Humans are part of nature" (Jamieson 2008, 2-3). Both phrases suggest that human beings, animals, and nature form one ecological family.

Western sociology defines "familism" as a social system in which family interests are ascendant over those of the individual (Merriam-Webster 2003, 452). While familism research has largely focused on normative, nuclear families, here I expand the concept to extend to a larger, ecological family and espouse female-male equality.

Familism, therefore, includes the responsibility of the individual to care for and tend to the values and needs of family, society, and nature. This echoes aspects of Chinese Confucian philosophy, which stresses the importance of the family, but does not regard it as more important than the individual, emphasizing self-cultivation as much as human relations. While individuals must care for their families, self-interest is also a cherished value. This means that the Confucian understanding of familism does not necessitate the subordination of the individual to the family (Tu 1993, 219).

However, here I broaden the concept of familism to encompass the individual's responsibility not only to the immediate family but also to every manifestation of a larger ecological family, such as the environment, plants, animals, and other people, including all the communities and countries they comprise—in other words, ecofamilism.

The Scope of this Study

This book discusses the various activities of Taiwanese grassroots groups, including many motivated by religious beliefs. They include Buddhist organizations such as the Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation (Tzu Chi) and the Life Conservationist Association (LCA), as well as the Taiwan Ecological Stewardship Association (TESA).[4] I also include three other groups that do not have any predominant religious leanings: the Homemakers United Foundation (HUF), the Conservation Mothers' Foundation (CMF), and the Return Our Land Self-Help Association (ROL) of the aborigine Taroko people. Geographically, LCA, TESA, and

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[4] Not all members of these groups, strictly speaking, identify as Buddhist or Christian. Also, TESA, was originally known as the Taiwanese Christian Ecological Center.

HUF are based in the north, Tzu Chi and ROL in the east, and CMF in the south. Their demographics are diverse, comprised of both Han Chinese and minority populations, thus constituting a close representation of environmental activism in Taiwan as a whole.

Among Buddhists, Tzu Chi plays a major role in religious and grassroots environmental activism, undertaking environmental activities as a means of self-discipline and thrift. With a focus on recycling, it has been a powerful social movement since 1991. Women are essential in the movement, and its leader, Dharma Master Cheng Yen 證嚴, is a Buddhist nun. Among its almost four million followers, 80 percent are women.

LCA was founded by the Buddhist nun Shi Chao Hwei 釋昭慧 in 1993. Involved with numerous movements that seek to prevent the killing of animals and raise awareness of their rights, she has published widely on the theory and practice of Buddhism, regularly contributing essays to magazines and newspapers to promote environmental protection.

Among Taiwanese Christians, environmental leadership is partly in the hands of women, such as the leaders of TESA, who are involved in many organizations with differing ideologies. Some focus on eco-justice and others on eco-spirituality. Founded in 1992, TESA is a major Christian organization that promotes a greater awareness of eco-justice and the benefits of simple living. The founder of TESA, Chen Tzu-Mei 陳慈美, is an educated woman and a mother who was initially attracted to ecological activism out of her concern for her family.

TESA has published a bimonthly newsletter since 1993 and has many other publications related to consciousness-raising for environmental protection. Chen Tzu-Mei hopes that it can play three roles: those of think-tank, critic, and educator. In Christian terms, its advocates combine the roles of priest, prophet, and teacher (7/16/2000). [5] Examples of TESA's advocacy groups include the Environmental Protection Group, the Ecological Literature and History Group, the Publications Group, and the Communication History Group. The main focus of their activities is to promote a dialogue surrounding the oft-neglected relationship between religious and environmental concerns.

HUF began with a group of women who call themselves homemakers. In 1987, they realized that environmental degradation was a major problem and began to assume responsibility for the use of natural resources in their daily life. An NGO run by women who function as a team, it has no hierarchical structure and functions as a cooperative. Among its 1,200 members,

[5] Dates in parentheses refer to interviews with members by the author.

90 percent are women, including both housewives and career women. Since one of HUF's goals is to provide women with opportunities for developing leadership skills, the organization's bylaws state that only women may stand for election to its directorial or supervisory board.

HUF hosts numerous activities and programs for environmental protection. In addition, it has a special branch, the Homemakers Union Consumer Cooperative, which maintains thirty stores in various locations that focus on selling organic foods and pesticide-free products for the family. It has over 23,000 members and is rising in popularity (Chen Wanjun, e-mail, 8/22/2007).

CMF began in 1990 with the goal of promoting local environmental protection activities. As its name suggests, most members are mothers who were inspired by the story of by its founder, Chou Chun-Ti 周春蒂, a simple housewife from southern Taiwan. The group provides extensive education through various environmental protection activities for families, schools, and community groups. Their work has enabled people to see the potential for housewives to change the world.

ROF was founded in the summer of 2000, when Igung Shiban, a female member of the aboriginal Taroko Tribe in Hualian County, led her people in a fight to save their land. Together, the Tarokos fought the Asia Cement Company for the rights to their land. Their struggle is remarkable for its stand against the prevailing tide of breakneck economic growth that held little regard for environmental issues. An important case of grassroots environmental protection, the aboriginals' fight is both a microcosm of the suffering of indigenous people around the world and a disquietingly familiar example of the environmental damage caused by industrialization. It is also an example of the good that can be accomplished through social movements, as well as of the degree to which a single individual can affect change within a community.

Studying these six women-led environmental movements enables a critical analysis of the intersection of gender, culture, religion, and environmental activism unique to the region. Furthermore, these groups exemplify the principles of ecofamilism in action.

Methodology

The work begins by tracing the origins of the six groups, including analyses of both theory and praxis for each while concentrating on "contextual ethics" (Primavesi 1994, 187). Contextual ethics reflects both the diversity of human voices at a given place and time and the specific environmental relationships in which the human dilemma is embedded. Three of the six groups are religious; three are secular. All female interviewees, whether

housewives, middle class workers, clergywomen, or members of the elite, are leaders or hold important positions in their groups.

Although feminist theory may provide a valuable framework for discussing and comparing the work of these six organizations, the women involved do not primarily draw their inspiration from a feminist theoretical base, but rather from religious or folk wisdom. Their experiences determine the theoretical framework in which they operate. In other words, their work is first experiential and only then theoretical. Consequently, the critical emphasis in this work is on women's participation in earth-healing practices. Buddhists call this "acting with compassion" (Kaza 1994, 55). Christians, too, have widened their agenda of theology and religion to include the context of our habitat, reflecting a paradigm shift and placing greater focus on praxis (McFague 1993, 88).

The focus of this study is on "feminist action research" (Reinharz 1992, 175-96), highlighting the actions of women that contribute, directly or indirectly, to social and individual change, especially in the lives of women and society in general. The collected data are new in Western scholarship, as is their analysis. The work relies heavily on organizational case studies and individual interviews. Case studies involve the six groups: analyzing the transformation of their ecological concerns, their significance for the future, and their interrelationships. Interviews focus mainly on group leaders and local women: determining their relationship to feminism, environmental values, ecofeminism, and ecofamilism. [6]

All translations from Chinese interviews and Chinese texts are my own unless otherwise noted. All Chinese names are transcribed in pinyin, except for those of leaders and founders of Taiwanese organizations, where I follow official use (commonly a version of Wade-Giles).

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[6] My interviews included five with men, seeking to understand how they felt about the women's environmental protection activism in Taiwan. The majority had positive things to say about activism, and were quite receptive toward the activities of women and overall cooperative.