

Benefits beyond boundaries: A slogan or reality? A case study of Taijiang National Park in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Taijiang National Park, established at the end of 2009, brought about a structural change from a top down to a bottom up policy process and marked a turning point in the establishment of national parks in Taiwan. This paper used a political ecology perspective and analytical matrices of stakeholders to discuss the creation of Taijiang National Park, and also attempted to establish an assessment structure and indicators to assess whether Taijiang National Park has gradually become a provider of “benefits beyond boundaries” or not? Finally, the authors identified that involving the local community to integrate Taijiang’s ecotourism with local values should be Taijiang National Park Headquarters’ main strategy and primary responsibility for future sustainable development of ecotourism.

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1. Introduction

In the early development stage of national parks, many countries followed the US Yellow Stone National Park model in designating national parks to incorporate large isolated areas through direct government management. As the preservation areas increased, problems arose as well. One main problem is the conflicting relationship between designated preservation areas and the local communities. Examining the issues of the Fifth World Parks Congress, held every 10 years since 1962, we can find that the values and paradigms of international preservation areas have changed from a “preservation doctrine” which excludes human society in creating a pure island of preservation, to an integration of the “human ecosystem.” Meeting the needs of people is emphasized.

The Fifth World Parks Congress was held in 2003 in Durban, South Africa, and the theme of the conference was “benefits beyond boundaries.” The Durban Accord stated “In this changing world, we need a fresh and innovative approach to protected areas and their role in broader conservation and development agendas...We see protected areas as providers of benefits beyond boundaries—beyond their boundaries on a map, beyond the boundaries of nation states, across societies, genders and generations.” (IUCN, 2005:220). To a certain extent, it sets the tone for the developing direction of global preservation areas in the beginning of 21st century.

Taiwan’s central government has promoted the system of national parks since the 1970s. The process of establishing Taiwan’s national parks was deeply shaped both by the central government’s structural

control and strong citizen’s awareness for local rights. It came to fruition through interactions of ramified political, social, cultural, and even ethnic interests. Such development is a rare phenomenon in western experience. With Martial Law and the authoritarian regime led by the ruling dictatorial party then, the creation of national parks was typically top-down. The administrative authority for national parks strictly executed national policies to increase the amount of national parks. After Martial Law was lifted in 1987, as competition among different political parties intensified in the late 1980s and as civic awareness increased, the creation of new national parks by the National Park Administration resulted in conflicts of interest with the local communities.

Faced by the increasingly complex problems, the Construction and Planning Agency Ministry of the Interior (CPAMI), the competent authority of national parks, has turned from a more active to a more passive approach to establishing national parks. Consequently, until 2002, there was a stagnant phase of 10 years without any establishment of new national parks. Then, Taijiang National Park, the first national park proposed by a local government, showed a glimpse of hope, despite the protests of farmers and fishermen who worried about the impact of a national park designation on their livelihoods. The question is, does this structural change of policies from the bottom-up become a turning point for establishing national parks in Taiwan?

Using Taijiang National Park (Fig. 1) established at the end of 2009 as a case study, this study has the following objectives:

- 1.1 This paper used a political ecology perspective and analytical matrices of stakeholders to discuss the creation of Taijiang National Park, to understand the competing interests, conflicts,

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compromises and interactions between those stakeholders in the process of establishing Taijiang National Park, and to clarify the important development issues and local opinions. The authors hope to understand whether the establishment model of Taijiang is beneficial for future national parks in Taiwan.

- 1.2 This paper aims to develop an analytical framework to assess whether “benefits beyond boundaries” have gradually been accomplished or whether this term has been nothing more than a slogan in this case of Taijiang National Park. The assessment will be beneficial to examine whether the paradigm of international

preservation areas led by those continental countries like the United States, is applicable to small island countries such as Taiwan, which are characterized by high density development and severe struggles among ramified political, social, cultural, and even ethnic interests.

- 1.3 Based on the aforementioned analyses in 1.1 and 1.2, the authors further examines what are the key strategies, including types of development and tourism activities, that can facilitate Taijiang National Park to become a provider of “benefits beyond boundaries.”

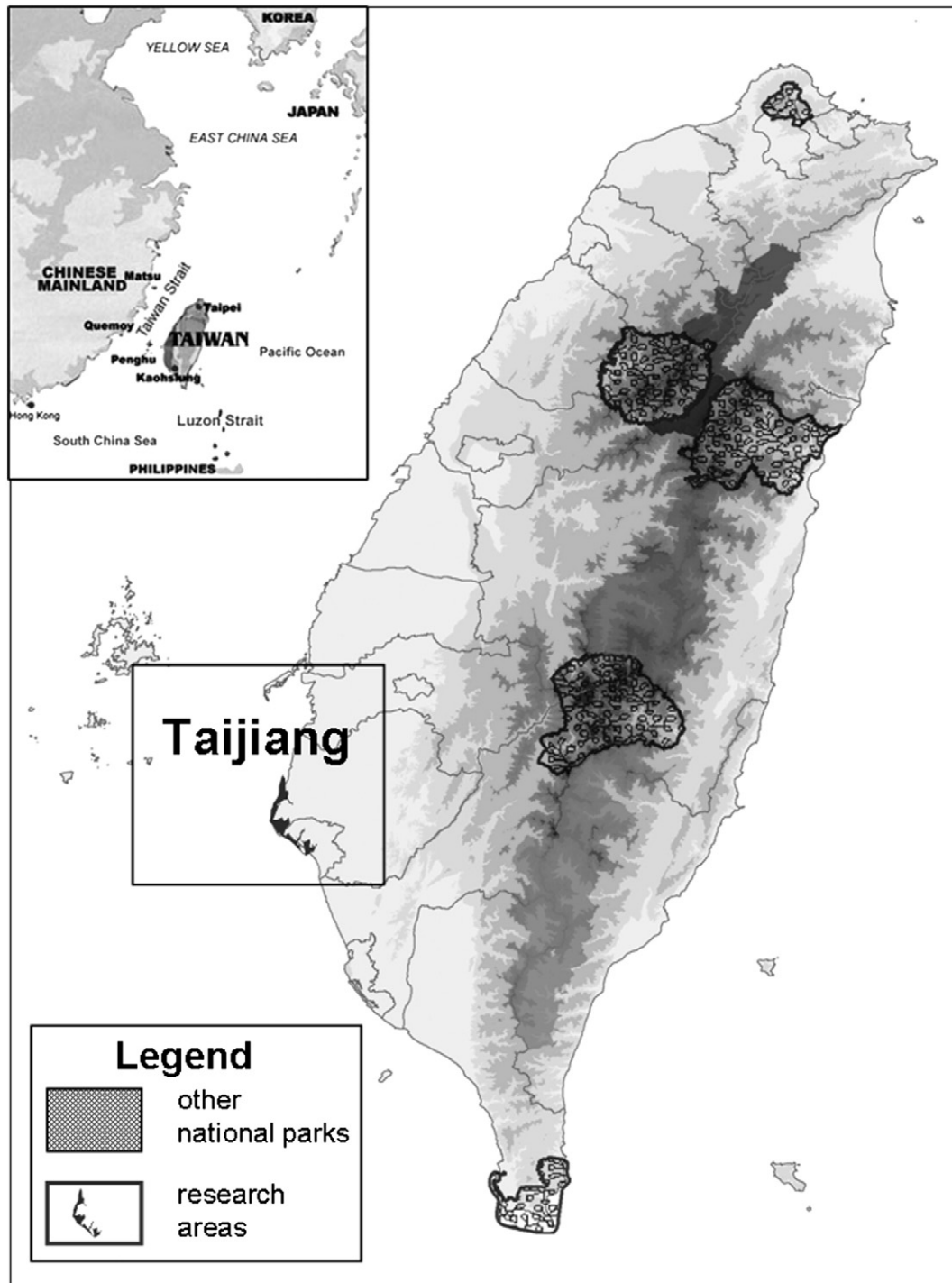


Fig. 1.

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