

## CONSENSUS AND DISSENSUS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: HOW EAST ASIAN ASSOCIATIONS USE PUBLICITY

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Jürgen Habermas has developed a model describing how civil society can use the public sphere to influence politics. Habermas assumes that, because discourse in the public sphere is open, inclusive, anonymous, and autonomous, the public sphere is best setting in which to develop consensus about common affairs. However, when this model is examined in the context of political advocacy by East Asian associations, the public sphere turns out to be characterized by dissensus rather than consensus. Consensus is enabled by trust, shared aims, exclusions, bargaining and exchanges, predictable decision-making procedures, or authority. These conditions helpful for consensus building are often lacking in the public sphere. Nonetheless, civil society can be politically influential because it can use minority influence and cross the state-society boundary.

### INTRODUCTION

This study examines how public opinion is mobilized to effect policy change in East Asia.<sup>1</sup> It evaluates Jürgen Habermas's model for the circulation of political communication from the lifeworld, the realm of everyday experiences, to political decision-making institutions via civil society and the public sphere. Habermas (2006) assumes that public opinion guides policy making by influencing the beliefs of decision makers and voters, but he is relatively vague about how this actually occurs. Using the experiences of East Asian advocacy nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), this study traces the movement of ideas “from everyday talk in civil society, through public discourse and mediated communication in weak publics, to the institutionalized discourses at the center of the political system” (Habermas 2006: 415) and examines how, in the case of East Asian NGOs, demands from civil society actually become transformed into political influence.

For Habermas (1996), the political public sphere is an intermediary arena of communication between the lifeworld and the state. In his model, civil society gives rise to what Habermas calls “episodic and occasional publics” (1996: 374) that remain peripheral to the core where political decisions are made. In the public sphere, media, state actors, and civil society actors all participate in public opinion formation. Because civil society is rooted in people's actual experiences in the

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1 This study was written at the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, and the Chang Jung University (Taiwan). In addition, the following institutions made the fieldwork possible: the Korea Foundation, the Taiwan Fellowship, the Academy of Finland, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

lifeworld and is free of bureaucratic barriers that block the expression of critical opinions, it feeds the public sphere with new ideas. The public sphere thus becomes a place to identify problems, discover new approaches, assess public values, and evaluate the overall rationality of various policies. The public sphere also provides a platform to test competing claims. This testing is ideally done in deliberations in which participants use rational argumentation, unbiased by economic or political influences, to reach a consensus about the common good. During deliberations in the public sphere, some arguments become so widely shared that the political system will respond. Habermas champions democracy in which public agendas open to citizen participation guide political agendas. According to Peters (1993: 549), democratic government as conceived by Habermas “rests on a posited link between the people and the state via the public sphere: the state opens itself up via *publicity*, and the people respond with *public opinion*.”

Habermas understands the public sphere as a decentralized network of discussions and discursive places. It includes arenas created both by “physical presence” and by the “virtual presence of scattered readers, listeners or viewers linked by public media” (Habermas 1996: 361). These two types of presence differ in terms of the styles of communication and the scope of distribution (Peters 1993). Therefore the overall public sphere should be analytically distinguished from the mosaic of publics composing it. The overall public sphere consists of a web of discursive arenas, including associations, which develop and enrich common meanings (Hauser 1998). These arenas would remain factionalist and fragmented without the overarching public sphere opening them to one another (Rehg & Bohman 1996: 42). There would be only public sphericules, but no unitary public sphere (Gitlin 1998). This distinction only partly encompasses the distinction between interactive publics and media publics (Schulz 1997; Castells 2008) because both assemblies and mediated communication can open publics to one another, and many texts circulate within a particular public only. The overall public sphere consists of a) discussions that reach across all of society and b) discussions which resonate in various publics. It consists of macro discourse in the public sphere in contrast to communications on micro deliberative forums (Hendriks 2006). The overall public sphere is not just the totality of public discussions, but it is also the arena where various interactive publics open up to one another to generate public opinion. It involves not only “the communicative generation of public opinion” but also “the mobilization of public opinion as a political force” (Fraser 2007: 7–8, 11).

This study tests the Habermasian stratification of lifeworld, public, and state spheres and examines the styles of communication involved in processes that make governments responsive to social demands. According to Habermas (1996; 1997), communication in the lifeworld is personal and permeated with private obligations and interests. Compared to discussions in the lifeworld and in the state, discussions in the public sphere are more open, inclusive, anonymous, power-free, and autonomous, and thus less vulnerable to distortion. Therefore, Habermas sees the public sphere as the most promising sphere for finding common understandings about the public good. In the state system, communication is decision-oriented, regulated by procedures, and compartmentalized. These communications are infiltrated with bureaucratic logic that is insufficiently responsive to rational persuasiveness and the public good. On the state level, public influence is transformed into communicative power and finally into administrative decisions.

Although this study generally affirms the Habermasian model, it challenges two assumptions of that model. First, it tests the assumption that the public sphere is the most promising place for forming consensus. Second, it tests the assumption that deliberation is the most promising form of

communication for reaching agreement about the public good. This article will, therefore, focus on communications leading to agreement, consensus and dissensus as communicative strategies for political influence, and the stratification of consensus and dissensus within different publics and spheres.

## THE SAMPLE

Testing of Habermas's model requires a sample with sufficient coherence, variation, and representativeness. Therefore, this study examines a single type of association in a single region: advocacy NGOs in East Asia.

According to Habermas (1996; 2006), associations are among the active participants in public deliberations, in contrast to the majority left to watch modern mass-media dominated publicity from the gallery. In the formation of public opinion, associations have a role as deliberators, as introducers of new ideas, and as creators of a sense of urgency. According to Habermas, civil society associations are attuned to experiences and societal problems in the lifeworld, interpreting and amplifying them before translating them into political issues in the public sphere. Associations provide ordinary people with opportunities to participate in public deliberations and lend continuity to their conversations. Civil society actors are essential for an authentic public sphere because they emerge from the public and make the public sphere more inclusive to new ideas and new social groups. In contrast, political and economic actors appear in the public sphere but rely on power outside this sphere. According to Habermas (2006: 416), actors in the public sphere include journalists, politicians, lobbyists, advocates, experts, moral entrepreneurs, and intellectuals. Of these, East Asian NGOs appear in the public in the four latter roles: they represent the general interests and marginalized groups, give professional advice, and generate public attention for neglected issues. Some NGO activists **who** comment issues as public intellectuals. According to the criteria listed in Ferree et al. (2002), NGOs qualify as actors in the public sphere because of their expertise, as well as their ability to discuss issues more freely and represent people more authentically than bureaucratic state institutions, to introduce alternative political visions, and to speak for people who are insufficiently represented in mainstream politics. In addition, NGOs are constitutive elements of the public sphere because they fit so well with Habermas's understanding of the public sphere as a decentralized network of discussions and discursive places.

Among the various associations of civil society, this study examines advocacy NGOs in particular. Advocacy NGOs are active in public spheres, use them to promote policy change, and are found around the world. This choice brings coherence to the sample, as different types of associations, for example self-help groups, charities, and professional associations, have different publicity strategies.

The region of East Asia was chosen to provide sufficient variation among representative local samples to permit generalization of the results beyond a single country. Examining a region instead of a country helps exclude the possibility that results are specific to one institutional or cultural setting. Within East Asia, there are one-, two- and multi-party systems, politicized and commercialized media systems, and Confucian and Catholic cultural backgrounds. To establish that preferences for consensus or dissensus in the overall public sphere are not determined by local political culture or journalistic standards, the countries selected differ in these respects too. They range from China, where consensual messages are preferred, to Taiwan, where public quarreling is not shunned, either in political arenas or in the media. The ways of expressing

consensus and dissensus vary from country to country, but the stratification and strategic use of consensus and dissensus do not. In all these countries, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines, NGOs use publicity to challenge the official consensus and seek no closure within the public sphere. The degree of open conflict does not automatically translate into effectiveness: in highly consensual Chinese political culture, even relatively small indicators of dissensus can cause the government to re-examine its plans.

The sample has also been selected to prevent misinterpretation of patterns determined by organizational culture as products of publicity. Internal consensual decision-making combined with confrontational tactics, known to characterize some movements (della Porta 2009), would produce a stratification of consensus that is similar to stratification found in this study to occur in different types of publics. To avoid such predetermination, this study includes some NGOs that are quite democratic, others that have a working style which is voluntaristic or participatory but leaves the main directional decisions to leaders, and some that centralize power to the leader. Despite these differences, certain patterns of NGO behavior emerge.

This article is based on interviews of 144 persons active in 92 different advocacy NGOs in four East Asian countries. Some NGOs invited the author to observe press conferences, meetings for soliciting their members' opinions, inter-organizational NGO forums, NGO-organized seminars, preparations for inter-organizational campaigns, and even contacts with politicians. These NGOs work on a wide variety of issues, such as environment, women, migration, political transparency, poverty reduction, and consumer rights. They all seek to change policies or social practices beyond their own membership. Therefore, they seek access to the public sphere. This study includes interviews with 29 people in mainland China, 69 in South Korea, 11 in the Philippines, and 35 in Taiwan. It involved 12 months of fieldwork in mainland China, eight in Korea, 19 in Taiwan, and one in the Philippines.

This sample includes many of the leading NGOs to have emerged from the democracy movements in Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines. Many early independent and influential advocacy NGOs, known in China for making public environmental problems and health issues, contributed to this study. Within the sample are many NGOs responsible for some of the most influential campaigns, reaching wide audiences through the public sphere in various East Asian countries. The author's reliance on their networks in the search for interviewees makes the sample somewhat slanted towards influential NGOs, but these same networks and personal participation in NGO forums also facilitated contacts to smaller grassroots NGOs. Due to limited time in the Philippines, the author focused on only one influential movement there, namely community organizing, but again moved between small grassroots organizations and the umbrella organization working in this field.

Due to the use of participatory observation as a research method and the fact that influential NGOs are overrepresented, the author is familiar with NGO networks and NGO strategies for political influence, not just with their media strategies. Consequently, this research is able to document NGO activities not only within, but also outside, the public sphere. However, in Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines, the reliance on NGO networks and the need to establish trust for participatory observation make these findings specific to progressive factions which emerged from the democracy movements. Generally speaking, progressive NGOs are more likely to have a constant presence within the public sphere than pro-government forces, but some conservative civil society forces, often with religious backing, rely on authentic civil society activities and form an influential voice within the public sphere.

## THE CONTEXT

In the Philippines, Korea, and Taiwan, successful democracy movements in the 1980s created opportunities for establishing and registering independent NGOs (Schak & Hudson 2003). Thereafter, NGOs have expanded opportunities for political participation for ordinary citizens beyond the state and party systems and held the state institutions accountable (e.g. Etemadi 2000; Qian 2009). This background of democracy movement explains why many NGOs have maintained their oppositional stance and readiness to challenge the political elites from outside (e.g. Kim 2009). Many other NGOs, however, now have allies within the political system, and some even promote their agenda in partnership with the state (e.g. Lee 2011). Democratization likewise created more independence for the media.

In contrast to the other nations included in this sample, China is an authoritarian country that limits both independent organizing and press freedoms (Wu & Chan 2012). That said, there did start to be space for organizing in society after the economic reforms, when the government reduced its direct involvement in many social affairs and when independent, and even foreign, resources became available. Although many of these new organizations are organized by the government or linked themselves to an official organization in order to realize registered status (Wu 2003; Ashley & He 2008), many independent and often unregistered NGOs became active as well (Spires et al. 2014; Hildebrand 2011). Economic reforms have likewise made the media more dependent on commercial profits, which, together with a more persuasive style of propaganda, has expanded the scope of what it is possible to publish (Zhao 1998; Chan 2007). Many Chinese NGOs work closely with the state media (Yang & Calhoun 2007; Ma et al. 2008). Chinese interviews for this study confirm that most NGOs do not find it difficult to attain media publicity in China. Obviously, the Chinese NGOs generally know what kind of media system they are working with and know how to use it for their own aims. However, only in China do NGOs sometimes find that the state has forbidden the media to publish anything about a given issue (NGO interviews, 30 May; 28 July 2013).

Although previous writers have expressed doubt about the applicability of Habermas's model in East Asia (Wakeman 1993; Lee 1993) and Habermas (1996: 369) himself has doubted its applicability in non-liberal settings, this study found Habermasian patterns of communication in all four countries. In all four countries, associations introduce problems rooted in the lifeworld to the public sphere in order to influence state policies. Although the communication of lifeworld needs to policymakers often skips the public sphere and takes other less public forms (Shi 1997), even in China the media sometimes gives publicity to citizen deliberations and all the elements of a public sphere are discernible (Pan & Jacobson 2009). The Chinese media is capable of generating public controversies (Zhao 2008: 245), and sometimes the Chinese state is responsive to the pressure of public opinions (Shirk 2011). In addition, the Internet has produced at least public space, if not an outright public sphere, for Chinese NGOs to campaign publicly, and often successfully, for social change (Liu 2011). Since no real public sphere matches the Habermasian ideal in all respects, Habermas's model is helpful in analyzing those public discussions in the Chinese media that are relatively open and politically influential (McCormick & Liu 2003).

All of the four countries have witnessed influential campaigns, organized by NGOs, reaching wide audiences in the public sphere through the mass media. These campaigns include the black-listing campaign during the Korean elections in 2000 (Kim 2006), the anti-nuclear movement

in Taiwan (Ho 2003, Huang et al. 2013), the movement against damming the Nujiang River in China (Chan & Zhou 2014; Xie & van der Heijden 2010), and the movement to support victims of domestic violence in China (Zhang 2009).<sup>2</sup> Sometimes campaign issues have divided civil society and caused disputes in the public sphere (for example, when liberal and more conservative voices confronted one another over sexual norms in Taiwan) (Ho 2010; Chang & Chang 2011).

East Asian NGOs not only push issues on the agenda for deliberation in the public sphere, but they sometimes also try to shape publication practices and institutions themselves. Founding independent outlets, such as newsletters and websites, is one strategy to directly access an audience via the public sphere. In addition, NGOs sometimes consult with mass media and train news outlets to report issues from a desirable angle (e.g. Cai et al. 2001). For example, individual feminist organizations in all of these countries recounted that they have made considerable efforts to teach the mass media to report sexual and domestic violence from the perspective of the victims, in contrast to the eroticizing and moralizing messages often present in the news. Sometimes the mass media even becomes the target of NGO campaigns in these countries. Both in Taiwan (participatory observation) and in Korea (30 Nov. 2010), NGOs have protested corporate influence in the mass media, and Taiwan has an NGO that is specifically focused on promoting public television in order to balance market-oriented coverage by the commercial media.

In all of the four countries, many issues fail to gain publicity on each of the levels of the Habermasian model. NGOs do not have capacity to deal with all lifeworld problems. Political interference, economic calculations, and journalistic priorities prevent some NGO issues from becoming published in the media. Finally, governments ignore many social demands. This study is about the process. The dissensual and consensual strategies during this process appear surprisingly consistent regardless of the political or the media system in a particular country.

Although the NGOs interviewed and observed for this research were from East Asia, the results of this study can likely be extended to NGOs in other parts of the world, due to the development of what Salamon (1994) has called “a global associational revolution”. Global NGO culture is spreading through transnational NGO forums and networks and new international aid practices. Despite local variations in civil societies and media systems, advocacy NGOs use surprisingly similar strategies to tackle analogous problems. The ability of Habermas’s model, originally put forth to describe eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, to capture NGO practices in twenty-first-century East Asia is a result of the diffusion of the mass media, modern state institutions, certain associational forms, ideas of citizenship, and awareness of specific social and environmental issues far beyond the sites of origin.

## COMMUNICATION WITHIN OCCASIONAL PUBLICS

As Habermas (2006: 359) predicts, NGOs aggregate problems that arise in daily discussions in the lifeworld and present them in a more generalized and sophisticated form to public debate. Some NGOs are rooted to communities and have direct contacts with the groups they speak for. Apart from contacts with people who have personally experienced needs and problems, the choice of issues arises partly from the ideology, interests, and values of NGO activists. Lifeworld communications form a repository of ideas, some of which are adopted by NGOs and translated into discussions in the public sphere. However, East Asian NGOs do not make

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<sup>2</sup> The leading NGOs responsible for organizing all of these campaigns are included among the interviewees of this study.

as strict a boundary between private and public as Habermas does. Departing from the ideals of deliberation, NGOs admit private experiences, identities, interests, and roles to public discussions. Sometimes they make issues of these; sometimes they use personally-felt injustices to illustrate public problems.

NGOs provide ordinary people with places to meet, both physically at events and virtually on the discussion forums on their homepages. NGOs thus give rise to the “episodic and occasional public spheres” (Habermas 1996), but also provide more permanent platforms for discussing politics. To borrow Haug’s (2010) terminology, NGOs work simultaneously through public encounters among citizens, through assembly public (face-to-face meetings organized around specific topics), and through the mass media. Episodic and occasional publics take place both through public encounters among citizens and through assembly publics.

Occasional and episodic public spheres are useful for reaching out. During their public events, NGOs invite journalists, policymakers, and members of the groups these NGOs speak for and give them opportunities to discuss issues with audiences that include both supporters and passers-by. When NGOs provide a platform for people to discuss issues, consensus is not always sought. When a Korean NGO invited its members to discuss a desirable electoral strategy, the meeting with netizens did not produce agreement about the preferred style of online electoral campaigning but it helped the NGO (10 July 2007) understand the Internet system and its potential. These meetings connected organized civil society with the lifeworld and brought together people who identified with the aims of this particular NGO. This shared purpose was conducive to creating an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual learning.

When NGOs hold seminars and invite people from various backgrounds, including administrators, experts, and members of the affected groups, diverging views are often articulated. However, the aim of such activities is rarely to build consensus. Rather, it is to share information, build networks, and persuade decision makers of the importance of the problem. Many Korean NGO interviewees mentioned conferences and seminars as methods for lobbying the government. They use them to sensitize bureaucrats or politicians about an issue by providing information and advice. Even when a meeting is designed to recommend one alternative over others, NGOs provide opponents and administrators opportunities to voice dissenting viewpoints.

The communication in many occasional publics is quite deliberative. In these face-to-face encounters, participants tend to show respect to others with whom they may disagree. This is the kind of civility between strangers that was central for early modern civil society theory (Seligman 1992). By maintaining an atmosphere of courtesy, some more institutionalized publics, including many communal associations in East Asia (Le Blanc 1999; Marshall 1984), play down differences in order to cooperate for shared aims. These associations make decisions, but one explanation for the tolerance for pluralism exhibited by advocacy NGOs is the lack of decision-making mechanisms in these occasional publics.

Advocacy NGOs do not continue to be as consensual and receptive to other viewpoints when they move to more inclusive assembly publics within NGO circles and to consultative platforms institutionalized by the state. This seems to indicate that face-to-face contacts do not generate a singular style of communication. Face-to-face meetings take place on various levels: in occasional publics, in organized civil society publics, and in institutionalized consultative publics. East Asian advocacy NGOs communicate differently in these different types of assembly publics. Assembly publics are tools used for different purposes: NGOs use them to

persuade strangers, to amplify NGO messages among supporters, and to make demands for changes in state policies.

### COMMUNICATION WITHIN NGO PUBLICS

NGOs are concourses for people interested in similar questions to exchange opinions. They thus constitute publics in themselves. Together, NGOs can constitute a specific public sphere with relatively similar values. Many NGOs participate in interorganizational conferences and campaigns, issue-based NGO alliances, umbrella organizations, and transnational NGO networks. In this NGO public, compatible issues are considered important, and ideas, experiences, and news travel fast. In the Philippines and Korea, a shared background in democracy movements makes networks especially close and strong. Although interorganizational meetings and conferences are one tool for maintaining and expanding these NGO public spheres, they are based on decades of cooperation and acquaintanceships and are far more organized than episodic and occasional public spheres.

NGO publics often aim at consensus among their members and with their NGO allies. East Asian NGOs commonly recognize the need to cooperate in order to be taken seriously by politicians who easily ignore a voice of a single organization. However, arriving at consensus is time-consuming. Advocacy requires consensus not only over the issue but also over the ways it is going to be promoted. The presentation of message and the strategy are potential grounds for disagreement within and among NGOs. Sometimes disagreements over strategy prevent cooperation. Taiwanese NGOs planning campaigns often distance themselves from activities and groups that share concerns similar to their own but have agendas that are either too radical or partisan. Several interviewees in the Philippines related to me how the democracy movement split in the post-Marcos era after lengthy discussions. One dividing line was the acceptance of armed struggle; those groups that viewed armed struggle as acceptable opted out of the alliance.

NGOs prefer shortcuts that allow them to demonstrate substantial citizen pressure without spending too much time and effort in consensus building. In NGO alliances, consensus seldom results from rational deliberation, but quite often is the precondition for cooperation. Two elements are simultaneously at work in consensus building: shared issues and personal networks. Both challenge Habermas's assumption that openness is beneficial for consensus building. In forming issue-based and affinity-based NGO publics alike, East Asian NGO alliances limit membership to make consensus possible. They seek consensus among likeminded people.

Consensus based on shared issues restricts openness from the start. It causes disagreeing organizations to opt out of alliance instead of engaging them in discussion. NGOs may search for a common ground about details and wording, not about the overall stand. An example is the issue of free trade agreements (FTA) in Korea. The NGO alliance rejected the pro-FTA stand outright, but decided to concentrate on the FTA negotiations with the US, as this permitted the alliance to maximize its size by including not only groups opposing free trade but also groups critical of the US influence in Korea (27 Feb. 2007). However, sometimes commitment to a shared issue makes cooperation possible among organizations which differ in terms of orientation and organizational culture (Chinese NGO network, 3 Jan. 2008).

Issue-based events and demonstrations sometimes make quite surprising bedfellows. When residents of the Korean village of Daechuri struggled against the annexation of village lands to a US military base in 2006–2007, a wide spectrum of groups came to their support: anti-

American leftists, right-wing nationalists, Christian groups, and anarchists who admired the village's self-government. However, exclusions made this plurality possible. As villagers decided matters exclusively in their own meetings (4 Feb. 2007), mutual schisms among the supporters or disagreements between villagers and outside supporters were avoided. Exclusions helped to produce consensus, as activists agreed that the villagers' own decision was conclusive. Furthermore, these exclusions kept the power in the hands of those who had to live with the consequences. A more open structure of deliberation not only would have brought in conflicts arising from the diverse ideologies and motives of the supporters, but would have risked leaving villagers at the mercy of outsiders who sometimes formed the majority.

Interpersonal trust based on past NGO alliances facilitates consensus building. In Cebu City, a long history of NGO collaboration has generated a "culture of cooperation" (9 Apr. 2010) which was evident at a meeting observed by the author (13 Apr. 2010). On several occasions, participants first announced their disagreement openly but then proceeded to modify this disagreement towards a mutually acceptable position. Here, the exclusive factor was not dissensus but unfamiliarity. Long-term friendships make some Taiwanese and Korean NGOs cooperate regularly, even when it means that a human rights organization promotes social security or an environmental NGO protests political violence in a neighboring country. Familiarity creates trust and a willingness to continue working with others who disagree in some ways. For example, a Taiwanese umbrella organization (12 July 2010) does not even try to form a united stand on some controversial issues that divide its member organizations. The benefits of cooperation on issues that all groups can agree on explain its tolerance of disagreement.

Moreover, mutual trust among NGOs permits agreement on certain principles of the division of labor to avoid disagreement over details. In Taiwanese NGO alliances, each organization does what it can for the cause on its own and respects the contributions and expertise of other groups because none of the groups have sufficient resources to run the campaign alone. Korean NGOs commonly divide general NGO statements into smaller parts and let relevant organizations compose among themselves the demands that concern their own field.

Exclusion arising from affinities does occur among East Asian NGOs. Some Korean and Philippine NGOs that do not belong to the core of associations setting agendas and initiating the most influential NGO alliances criticized inequalities and exclusions. As the core is formed around shared identities and histories, it discriminates against newcomers and small organizations without these ties. Some NGOs have voluntarily dropped out of alliances because they do not share the principles of the core or because they deal with issues that gain no hearing in this core. These inequalities are partly traceable to homogenizing values within groups challenging the hegemonic order (McLaughlin 1993). They also arise because organizational and mobilizational needs clash with deliberative openness.

When disagreements arise, NGOs often prefer a fragmentation that respects pluralism over consensus. A Taiwanese feminist group (13 Oct. 2010) encouraged members having different visions to set up their own organizations, which still cooperate across the organizational boundaries on shared issues. The preference for authentic voices over consensus is also a question of representation. After the peoples forum organized alongside the G20 meeting in Seoul in 2010, Korean globalization-critical activists (4 Dec. 2010) complained that the clauses demanding more gender equality in the G20 structures, written by feminists to the final communique, in fact recognized the legitimacy of the G20 despite its social and national unrepresentativeness.

They felt that their voices had been silenced by the issuance of the common communiqué and would have preferred separate statements authentically representing different stances.

In summary, communication within and among NGOs is consensual. However, Habermas's (1996) assumption that openness, inclusiveness, and anonymity increase the chances of attaining agreement on public matters is not true in NGO publics. Instead of deliberation, consensus in NGO publics relies on personal bonds and preexistent values. Disagreement is reduced through exclusion. Not only do NGOs choose their partners, but members likewise choose the voluntary associations they join. Those who disagree can, and sometimes do, walk out (Korean organizations, 30 Jan.; 4 Feb. 2007). Most NGO publics obviously are not open to all ideas. Habermas (2006: 360) sees lifeworld bonds riddled with private interests directing the focus away from the public good, but he forgets that consensus building often requires trust that is not automatically there. NGOs are other-regarding and still rely heavily on personal bonds. All this suggests that Habermas might be placing contradictory demands on deliberation when he wants both openness and agreement.

### COMMUNICATION IN THE OVERALL PUBLIC SPHERE

Entering the overall public sphere means that participants need to rely more on mediated communication and that they face more heterogeneous audiences. The media is one important element in the overall public sphere, but does not form it alone. Although the mass media is a natural site of public opinion formation, it needs to be supported by actual meetings where people can hear and develop alternative voices (Leys 1999; Habermas 1989). East Asian NGOs provide platforms to meet both for discussing issues before they appear in the media and for making sense of media-distributed information. Public NGO platforms are significant channels by which societal opinions and alternative information reach the media.

Although the majority of citizens must rely on the mass media for participation in the public sphere (Schulz 1997), East Asian NGOs are differently positioned and can advance their views through assembly publics both within society and with the state. When Habermas (1996) uses the analogy of the arena and the gallery, the impression is that actors in the arena can speak directly to one another while their communication to the audience is usually unidirectional. The audience can, at best, reply in the public sphere, not in person. Civil society, according to him, works in this way. East Asian NGOs, however, use both interactive and unidirectional forums. Often they use both at the same time. News reports often broadcast NGOs voicing their opinions in assembly publics, such as conferences and demonstrations. In terms of power, NGOs are sometimes included in dialogical encounters with the state, but if they are excluded, they have to talk to politicians through the media.

East Asian advocacy NGOs gain a hearing in the media quite often, although not as often as they would like to. In interviews, some NGOs reported satisfaction with the publicity they had received. Many complained about the content of reporting, but only a few felt that the media system was biased against them. Almost all reported that media publicity required planning and effort, and many expressed that it was not easy to attract media coverage. East Asian media systems, however, are receptive to NGO messages.

Hence, although NGOs form alternative publics that challenge dominant social interests and perceptions, NGO publics are not excluded from the overall public sphere. NGO publics lack the subaltern character of counterpublics (Fraser 1990). When they open media contacts for the marginalized, East Asian advocacy NGOs, already skilled in articulating their stance credibly

in public, relieve the marginalized groups of the need to learn these skills among themselves in counterpublics before entering to the overall public sphere. However, this is not to say that the term counterpublics would not be appropriate for some other types of civil society groups in East Asia. During the dictatorships in the Philippines, Korea, and Taiwan, the predecessors of the present-day advocacy NGOs had to form counterpublics which were often forced underground (Lee 2007). Some NGOs still prefer to promote change through alternative lifestyles inside counterpublics rather than to engage in political advocacy.

NGO publics contribute to the overall public sphere where consensus is seldom attainable. Within the overall public sphere, different civil society groups encounter both potential supporters and adversaries. The overall public sphere is the arena in which associations' voices become audible to politicians and the public, but simultaneously associations become exposed to their opponents. To use Schudson's (1997) terminology, having forged their stances in homogeneous conversations in which all participants can agree on fundamentals, NGOs now enter heterogeneous conversations in which they are exposed to those who might disagree. Again the difficulty of building consensus in arenas open to all opinions actualizes, but in a different way. Habermas sees openness as conducive to rationality because the public can receive unbiased information and draw conclusions not distorted by powerful political and economic interests. However, it is not guaranteed that receiving multifaceted and even conflicting information will help to form consensus.

Habermas (1992) would prefer that participants in discussions within the overall public sphere seek consensus and impartiality, but East Asian NGOs do not. Instead of deliberating and listening, they are advocating. NGOs enter the overall public sphere in order to promote and defend their viewpoints, not to listen impartially to other opinions. NGOs are convinced of the rationality of their own position and are not prepared to be persuaded by their opponents' arguments. Consensus based on selective inclusion within NGO publics helps them take a clear position and speak with an uncompromising voice in the overall public.

NGOs are comfortable with discord in the overall public sphere. Often, it is they who are challenging the existing consensus. As many Korean NGOs stress, NGOs are there to provide alternatives. They are ready to face strong opponents, such as corporations and conservative forces of civil society, in the overall public sphere. Often NGOs can identify their allies among journalists, politicians, and civil society organizations from the start. Instead of persuasion by the power of argument, NGOs use public attention to demonstrate to decision-makers the inducements and constraints involved (Gamson 2004). After all, attempting to persuade pro-development politicians and companies to change their priorities is futile, but they may agree to reduce environmental or health-related costs. However, time-consuming persuasion is worthwhile for NGOs when it is directed toward changing the values and behavior of ordinary people.

Often NGOs show contempt for compromise. For example, Korean NGO activists commonly criticize former NGO leaders who have entered politics for diluting their stand and asking for understanding of unsatisfactory policies. Some NGO activists (22 Mar. 2007; 31 Aug. 2010), nevertheless, criticize their colleagues for inflexibility and for failing to understand that the government needs to listen to all sides, not just to theirs.

## **TRANSFORMING PUBLIC DEBATES INTO POLITICAL INFLUENCE**

With dissensus predominant in the public sphere, the political system is again a place for forging consensus. This consensus is usually an agreement about the legitimacy of decisions made in

accordance with acceptable procedures rather than agreement resulting from reasoned deliberation. This stratification differs from Habermas's understanding that public discussion ideally produces outcomes, even consensus, already within the public sphere. The kind of political talk used to reach agreement inside the political system is called bargaining. Bargaining bows not to better arguments but to instrumental political calculations of what can be gained. In contrast to deliberation, which downplays differences in order to seek shared understanding (Hillier 2003), bargaining recognizes differences and seeks acceptable compromises that will satisfy diverse needs. These compromises do not take place in the overall public sphere but in face-to-face settings, such as negotiation tables or consultative bodies.

Although policy making requires compromise, it is politicians, and not NGOs, who make them. Usually advocacy NGOs do not bargain. Advocacy NGOs enter consultative settings, such as public hearings, to make demands rather than to listen. The occasional publics that these NGOs hold with politicians are either joint advocacy activities by actors across the state-society boundary or tools for delivering NGO demands to decision makers. As a Taiwanese activist explained (1 July 2010), although compromises are inevitable when NGO demands are incorporated into policy, NGOs work to maximize their influence on the policy. Only a few NGOs are so deeply involved in consultations that they have compromised to inadequate but improved laws. Others (Korean NGOs, 30 Jan.; 18 June 2007) either leave if they have no chance of advancing their demands through consultation or enter the public sphere to challenge governmental plans revealed to them during consultative processes.

One reason that NGOs refrain from bargaining is that participants in consensus building are usually required to abide by the outcome; NGOs, however, usually want to continue criticizing any flaws they perceive in state policy. If consensus building is externalized to parliaments and other state organs, civil society can legitimately voice criticism and speak for those whose interests are violated in decisions that benefit the majority. Regardless of whether NGOs recognize the government's legitimacy or not, they retain the right to criticize government decisions and the negative impacts of these decisions in the public sphere.

Most NGOs, naturally, do not even have power to bargain. However, others can use dissensus. NGOs helped to surface as a bargaining tool. Bureaucracies working with NGOs sometimes have their own reasons for wanting NGOs to speak in uncompromising voices in a dissensual overall public sphere. As these bureaucracies often have a weak position in inter-bureaucratic bargaining tables, they wish to use public opinion and even social pressure to enhance their negotiating positions. In China, some bureaucracies even tip NGOs off about problems they want to make public (Lu 2007), since bureaucrats themselves cannot publish their views about issues under preparation. Taiwanese NGOs (27; 30 Dec. 2010) relate how officials privately encourage NGOs to oppose policies when it is inexpedient for the officials to do so themselves for various reasons: they cannot publicly oppose authoritative policies that are harmful to their specific areas of responsibility, they are not permitted to question laws they are assigned to implement, or they want to avoid becoming publicly targeted. When decisions are made by bargaining rather than by deliberation, it makes sense to advocate rather than persuade. Dissensus can thus be a tool for using public opinion to pressure decision makers.

Much of the impact of NGOs on policymaking comes not from public argumentation but from direct, often non-public interactions with politicians. Mediated publicity for attracting national audiences is only one NGO strategy. NGOs commonly describe a two- or three-pronged strategy that combines publicity with direct contacts with the government and often

with social pressure. East Asian NGOs access the state frequently, through the kind of interpersonal communications that Habermas regards as typical for civil society. In contrast to the impersonal Kafkaesque bureaucracy that an amateur might encounter in a state agency, intakes of NGOs into the state system are often personalized. NGOs gain entry into the state systems through sympathetic policymakers or through meetings in which they have opportunities to engage in personal dialogue with potential allies in state organs. In addition to NGO conferences and institutionalized consultation processes, occasions at which NGO members interact directly with policymakers include *non-public* meetings aimed at persuading policymakers, joint participation in public advocacy activities, or NGO-run trainings attended by individual administrators. On all these occasions, communication extends across the boundary between civil society and the state.

Habermas (1996) places associations at the periphery of the political system and in weak publics, but in East Asia, some NGOs also have influence in strong publics. Habermas wants to keep public deliberations clearly separated from the deliberations taking place inside political institutions, in order to guarantee that the public sphere bows to rationality, not to power. He sees the public sphere as an arena of free discussion, in contrast to the state system, where power and bureaucratic conventions hamper autonomous expression. Habermas (1996) prefers a system in which the public sphere programs political power communicatively, but does not rule.

For East Asian NGOs, incorruptibility means speaking with an uncompromising voice, not keeping strict boundaries with the state. By crossing the boundary, NGOs receive a hearing for their demands and gain actual political influence. NGOs maintain the boundary between themselves and the state, not by refusing contacts, but by dissensus expressed in the public sphere. Many influential Korean NGOs mention protest as a way in which they preserve their nongovernmental identity and independence from the state. These same NGOs sit with the government in conferences and consultations and even write policy proposals, but they use dissensus to declare their civil society status.

Sometimes persuasion does indeed happen in the public sphere, and the resulting value change leads to policy change, just as Habermas hopes. For example, Korea has seen institutionalization and routinization of gender and human rights agendas that were originally advocated only by civil society (26 Mar.; 9 Jan 2007). However, this has not stopped the need for NGO advocacy. Value change does not mean that the state always upholds these values in practice and that there are no powerful opponents within the political system and in society continuing to challenge these values (Moon 2003). Obviously, the role envisioned by Habermas for the public sphere would leave civil society very weak in actual politics. East Asian NGOs, understandably, prefer much a stronger role.

## **STRATIFICATION OF CONSENSUS**

East Asian NGOs work within two distinct publics – NGO publics and the overall public sphere – and they behave differently in the two. They systematically seek either consensus or dissensus. In the NGO publics, pressure and conflict are downplayed to facilitate cooperation; however, in NGO deliberations in the overall public sphere and in their relations to the government, they are commonly present. Although NGOs continue advocating throughout the policy-making process, the state is ultimately the place where agreement is formed, although it seldom is consensual agreement. There are reasons why agreement on political issues is very unlikely in the overall public sphere.

In his newer works, Habermas does not deny the “unavoidability of endemic disagreement” (2003a: 194). He (2003b: 227) accepts “reasonable disagreements” on moral questions, but he (1992) believes that consensus is usually attainable. In his view, it fails to be reached only because of time limitations and an insufficient predisposition to rationality among participants. He (2006) recognizes that ideal communication that produces rational agreement is rare; in real life, satisfactory deliberations only produce several informed stands that can serve as the choices offered to voters. However, people deliberate differently when they are seeking mutual agreement and when they are informing others about alternatives. Discussers who are seeking consensus need to downplay differences in order to find mutual ground, while those who are attempting to make credible policy stands emphasize differences. East Asian NGOs tend to emphasize differences in the overall public sphere. Because the style of deliberation varies depending on whether the aim is to provide information for rational choice among alternatives or to reach consensus, these two types of deliberations can be separated into different spheres.

Practical evidence for deliberation comes mostly from citizen assemblies or other small-group situations (Fung 2003; Mendelberg 2002; Barnes et al. 2004). However, the style of discussion in face-to-face meetings is a poor predictor of the style of discussion in the overall public sphere. Some previous writers have suggested reasons for the difference in communication styles between face-to-face meetings of citizens and the overall public sphere. According to Mansbridge (1983), shared interests permit consensual decision-making, but democratic solutions to conflicts of interest require measures that recognize differences and establish a fair procedure for resolving them. Shared interests are common in face-to-face situations, but rare in society at large. Schudson (1997) distinguishes between face-to-face conversations regulated by sociability among people with more or less shared values and democratic conversations involving potential disagreement regulated by norms of civility. Accordingly, shared interests and values make it possible to opt for consensus inside NGO publics, while in the overall public sphere. NGOs speak to heterogeneous publics including people who oppose their views. Sartori (1987) argues that face-to-face interaction within a durable group with many issues to decide may develop consensus on the basis of long-term mutual benefit. When large numbers of people are involved, however, there is no guarantee that giving in now will pay off later. Therefore, participants seek to prevail rather than to compromise.

Consensus within groups can incite dissensus in the overall public sphere. After a group has deliberated its position, its representatives in larger deliberative arenas are accountable to other group members to represent the common position accurately (Levine & Nierras 2007; Ryfe 2002). In addition, limitations of time discourage deliberating the position always anew, especially if the first position is already rational. Moreover, within groups, both deliberative and emotional impulses encourage agreement, but the same in-group mentality tends to reduce receptivity to outsiders’ opinions (Mendelberg 2002; Shiffman 2002). This tendency may be exacerbated in NGOs, which are associations of people who already share a certain outlook. As politics involves contestation and uncertainty, the social groundlessness that it creates can be distressing (Warren 1996). In this context, the affinities and solidarity within NGO publics bring emotional rewards which foster identification with the internal position and prepare members to face external antagonism and uncertainty.

Furthermore, publicity undermines the chances for reaching agreement because participants are appealing to the audience simultaneously. It is easier to compromise in private than in public before an audience who admire determination. (Chambers 2005) Cicero long ago distin-

guished private discussions allowing nonpassionate pursuit of truth from communication in public arenas for popular audiences. Since politics is about reaching decisions that leads to action, public speech aims at beating opponents and appeals to both reason and emotions. (Remer 1999) Debates to win over the audience and agitprop inspiring people to form political identities and act together are more typical modes of political communication than deliberations (Walzer 1999). It is perhaps no accident that decisions are reached in spheres which permit face-to-face meetings, while the overall public sphere, which relies on publicity and mediates discussions to audiences, turns out to discourage agreement.

Obviously, the way in which East Asian NGOs stratify arenas of consensus cannot be a mere imperfection of their conduct or of existing public spheres. The scale of publics affects communication styles, making it unlikely that Habermasian will-formation aiming at mutual understanding will dominate in the overall public sphere.

Although Habermas (2003a) recognizes the existence of different opinions in the public sphere, he presumes that there can be consensus on constitutional matters. However, in East Asian civil societies, even this basic consensus is lacking. Some NGOs demand electoral and judicial reforms that question constitutional provisions. Other groups are working through the public sphere for the time being, but regard the system as illegitimate and have revolution as their ultimate goal (Pak 1998). Just as revolutionaries frequented early bourgeois public spheres in Europe and North America and contributed to the political discussions of that time, they are also present in contemporary East Asian public spheres.

## **BOUNDARIES AND IMPACT**

The second boundary between dissensus and consensus is located between the overall public sphere and the state. Clear, even uncompromising, voices can be expressed in the public sphere if compromises are left to the political system. Procedures for determining outcomes affect the process of deliberation itself (Ferejohn 2000): there is little incentive to work for agreement within the overall public sphere since it has no decision-making mechanisms. In contrast, the state has decision-making procedures. NGO publics are accustomed to making many decisions together when they formulate statements, plan campaigns, and organize events.

For Habermas (1996) the political system is also a place for agreement and decision-making. There is ideally (and he recognizes that this ideal situation is not very common) a continuity of consensus from the public sphere to the political system. In his model, the public sphere has political influence because publicly developed positions either have wide resonance among the citizenry or a supreme quality of reasoning and thus persuasiveness. Therefore, Habermas needs consensus. However, these are not the only ways in which public discussions can have political impact. East Asian NGOs often influence through dissensus. Dissensus demonstrates that the dominant position can be doubtful, conflictual, and costly. Instead of persuasion, NGOs thus use minority influence. Consistent minorities can make the majority rethink alternatives, including ones not on the minority agenda (Moscovici et al. 1985). By making issues controversial, East Asian NGOs make the government feel that it has a problem it needs to solve. Consequently, governments sometimes reformulate policies.

Distancing public opinion from decision making within democratic states can be both legitimate and democratic, as Plamenatz (1977) shows. He maintains that responsibility, not responsiveness, to the people characterizes democracy. In order to act responsibly, democratic governments need to hear well-informed criticism and be exposed to diverse social demands,

but they have authority to weigh, balance, and select from the publicly expressed demands. By leaving the evaluation of societal demands to governments instead of the public sphere, Plamenatz appreciates the diversity of social pressures and the plurality of collective wills. Here the state acts as an umpire. According to Gaus (1997), appointing an umpire is the method for solving rational disagreement without sacrificing sincerity in public deliberation. While Habermas seeks sovereignty in communicatively generated power, Plamenatz leaves authority in democratic institutions. East Asian NGOs, knowing that it is often easier to convince politicians than their adversaries in the public sphere, mainly side with Plamenatz. Habermas (1997: 56) himself seems to agree when he states that the public sphere provides “the pool of reasons from which administrative decisions must draw their rationalizations”.

Furthermore, politics typically involves situations in which there is more than one rational, public-interested solution. Rational persuasion is unlikely when benefits are incommensurable, as they are in clashes between economic development and environmental protection, or between flood prevention and the residential rights of slum-dwellers. While it is possible to make a policy that weighs these different rationales in a somewhat balanced way, it is not possible to conclude that any one of these rationales is less reasoned. Often there is no disagreement over abstract values, but this does not help one choose between them in practical situations in which they are in conflict (Taiwanese official, 30 Mar. 2012). Multi-peaked preferences are not brought closer through persuasion but through bargaining or through regulating them through two different sets of policy standards. A typical example of the latter is the use of both environmental and economic regulations to oversee industrial projects. One solution to multi-peaked preferences is to separate deliberations into different arenas. This is exactly what both NGOs and states actually do. Civil society divides problems and interests among different organizations; states deal with them in different subsystems. Bargaining between state agencies then produces a single policy. Some Korean NGOs described to me how, in policy negotiations, NGOs and the environmental ministry together promote one stance against growth-driven rationales given by economic ministries and corporate power. This may fragment deliberation (Habermas 1996), but bureaucratic division within the state is a way of finding a single solution concerning multi-peaked public goods.

## CONCLUSION

This study has observed East Asian NGOs to determine how public spheres actually operate. The ways in which East Asian NGOs communicate within assembly publics, in the overall public, and in encounters with the political system do not completely fit the Habermasian model. First, locations of consensus and dissensus differ. Habermas expects that the overall public sphere, where people must speak to those whose interests and views differ from their own, will be the most suitable arena for reaching consensus. In fact, it seems to be the last place where agreement and persuasion are likely to take place among discussers. The overall public sphere is more like a public marketplace of ideas. NGOs go there to sell, not to buy. Some reasons for the prevalence of dissension in the overall public sphere have also become evident: Openness is not necessarily helpful for consensus building because mutual trust and long term pay-offs, exchanged for accommodating the wishes of others, are more typical of more closed groups. Dissensus can be an effective tool for change through the psychological process of minority influence and the decision-making process of bargaining. Often, pressure is the only

resource NGOs can put on the bargaining tables. Moreover, the overall public sphere gives no incentive to work for agreement since it lacks decision-making procedures.

Second, in none of the spheres rational-critical deliberation is the main communicative strategy used to solve disagreements. In NGO publics, mutual understanding is built on shared views and affinities involving trust and mutual respect. The method the state uses to balance various ideas is bargaining. Politics is about interests and about value conflicts, which are solved not through rational persuasion but through compromises that take all parties into account. The overall public sphere has no overarching affinities and no power to distribute resources and commitments through bargaining. Assuming that communication generally seeks mutual understanding, Habermas expects that lifeworld communications (Habermas 1983) and bargaining (Habermas 2005) can produce agreement. However, he (1996) expects lifeworld ties and bureaucratic fragmentation to obscure the search for the public good. Nevertheless, when politics requires action and timely solutions, these factors instead aid East Asian NGOs and state institutions reaching an agreement.

As long as the public sphere is based on pluralistic civil society, as it is in Habermas's model, the public sphere is likely to reflect this pluralism. Habermas values civil society for the alternative views it introduces, but it is difficult to see how civil society can play this role if its plurality is not recognized (Phillips 1996; Rehg & Bohman 1996; Habermas 1989: 250). There is a contradiction between homogeneity in the public sphere and diversity within civil society (Dean 1996; Flyvbjerg 1998). Consensus works against the inclusion of diverse social experiences (Young 2000; Ranci re 2004; Eley 1992). Instead of rejecting the public sphere as some, including Dean (1996), have done, it should be recognized that public spheres are authentically multivocal and cacophonous places. They not only contain many voices and many styles of communication but also provide many outlets for making these voices public. East Asian NGOs often receive more space and more sympathetic reporting in smaller media outlets than in the mainstream media. This multivocality provides opportunities for fragmentary inclusion, even of marginalized groups that are seldom heard in the mass media. In the dynamic and congested contemporary political and media environment, cacophony can be so prevalent that not only deliberative closures but even the formation of a few policy options fail. In this cacophony, registering opposition is easier and often a more effective communicative strategy than persuasion.

Dissensual public spheres are not disadvantageous for democracy (Mouffe 1993; Shiffman 2002; Shalin 1992; Rescher 1993). They assign an active role to ordinary citizens left to watch from the gallery. It is they whose opinions are formed and changed when elite actors speak to the audience. This arrangement leaves much room for public processes of opinion and will formation, precisely because it does not expect agreement among the vocal actors in the public sphere. In addition, multivocal public spheres can increase the inclusiveness and responsiveness of policy making. The ideal Habermasian deliberation would most likely increase the quality of decisions, but probably it would not make decision making more accessible or alternative voices more effective. This study has demonstrated that the public sphere exerts social influence even though it rarely produces deliberative closure.

Discrepancies with empirical evidence cannot falsify a normative theory. However, a theory cannot be held immune to all empirical findings because it is not descriptive. Normative theory can be idealistic, but it should not be unrealistic. Furthermore, auxiliary features of a normative theory should be modified if empirical evidence shows that these modifications can enhance its

primary normative aims. What is essential in Habermas's theory in a normative sense is democracy. He seeks to improve democratic inclusion by promoting citizen participation in the processes of agenda setting and the legitimation of policy choices. Recognizing the multivocality of the overall public sphere does not harm any of these aims. However, there is another normative aim in Habermas's theory. He prefers conducting public discussions in the communicative style of deliberation. In contrast, East Asian advocacy NGOs would rather trade off rational persuasion for influence and moral integrity. From their perspective, deliberation is sometimes in tension with Habermas's democratic aspirations. These assertive organizations, many of which have roots in democracy movements, do not shun controversy and seek to maximize the influence of civil society in political processes. Hence, they are not willing to limit their political articulation to deliberation or their channels to decision-making to the public sphere only.

However, the Habermas model does supply something that is lacking in the model presented in this paper: a *critical* theory. Habermas sought to provide insight into how our democracies could be made authentically participatory and responsive. Additionally, a legitimization of existing democracies and media systems would misrepresent the viewpoints of East Asian NGOs, many of which are highly critical of the lack of inclusiveness and representativeness in state and media systems. This study suggests that critical theory should strive to strengthen the public sphere but that this pursuit should be separate from attempts to enhance deliberation. The public sphere is not necessarily the best location for attempts to perfect deliberation. As the public sphere and deliberation are distinct, there may even be trade-offs between multivocality and deliberative closures. Multivocality would probably not suffer from attempts to improve deliberative quality. Many East Asian NGOs actually wish that the mass media were more informative. However, if deliberation leads to a decision, a single position, it unavoidably loses some of the benefits of multivocality. Multivocality brings inclusiveness, alternatives, reactivity, and agility, features that are often regarded as the strengths of civil society. These qualities are especially needed in an age when contemporary states simultaneously process more issues than any individual group can handle and produce new policies at a rapid pace. Inclusiveness, the offering of alternatives, and the ability to confront the government whenever needed are values cherished by advocacy NGOs, many of which place a higher priority on maintaining a voice for those who are opposing injustice than on reaching agreement. If forced to choose between multivocality and deliberative closure, many NGOs would choose multivocality. This study suggests that the public sphere should stay on the side of civil society and not venture onto the side of the state and the power of decision making.

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