



## My Wild Lily: a self-criticism from a participant in the March 1990 student movement

Hsin-Hsing Chen

To cite this article: Hsin-Hsing Chen (2005) My Wild Lily: a self-criticism from a participant in the March 1990 student movement, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 6:4, 591-608, DOI: [10.1080/14649370500316927](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370500316927)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649370500316927>



Published online: 16 Aug 2006.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 136



View related articles [↗](#)

## My Wild Lily: a self-criticism from a participant in the March 1990 student movement<sup>1</sup>

Hsin-Hsing CHEN

**Editor's note:** The 1990 *Wild Lily* movement was an important event for advancing Taiwan's democracy. At that time, Hsin-Hsing Chen was a central figure in the left-leaning wing of the student movement, leading the one-week sit-in demonstration on the Chaing Kai-shek Memorial Square. A decade later, after the ex-oppositional Democratic Progressive Party took over the regime in 2000, many student leaders active in the late 1980s and early 1990s have been occupying government offices, while others have chosen to work in the movement sector. In March 2004, when the controversy over the result of the presidential election broke out, a group of university students returned to the Square to protest against the mysterious gun-shut event that happened one night before the vote, which led to the election of the current President. It was in this conjuncture that the meaning of the *Wild Lily* was struggled over, to legitimize or attack this wave of student movements. A public forum was organized by the *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* group, which invited ex-student leaders who are still active in the oppositional social and political movements to reflect back on their own involvement in the *Wild Lily*. Hsin-Hsing's self-criticism essay was a result of that gathering, which has attracted heated attention within the critical circles in Taipei. To publish this essay in the special issue on Bandung/Third Worldism is to invite intellectual communities to re-examine the student movements across Asia, which have contributed to the building of democracy in the region.

**ABSTRACT** *The 'Wild Lily' student sit-in in March 1990 was often praised in the later political transformation process as a crucial moment when the 'pure and innocent' students facilitated democratization in Taiwan. From the perspective of a participant in the protest, the author argues that the sit-in was actually a failure of the 'popular democratic' wing of Taiwan's student movement in the 1980s, which championed a more radical vision of democracy. The idea of 'popular democracy' was an anti-elitist ideology arising from critiques on the elite-led political reform movement. However, due to its historical constraint, practices along this line were unable to alter the bourgeois democratic character of 1980s' democratization process in Taiwan.*

**KEYWORDS:** Student movement, popular democracy, populism, social movements, democratic transformation in Taiwan, the 'wild lily' student sit-in

All claims of repetition of historical events inevitably draw sarcastic comments using the famous phrase from Karl Marx's 'The Eighteenth of Brumaire' – 'the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.' In Taiwan, these words have never before been so frequently quoted as in April of 2004.

Hours before the voting on the Presidential election began, the incumbent DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) candidate Chen Shuei-Bian and his running mate were shot without sustaining any serious injury. Late in the afternoon next day March 20

protestors swarmed the streets around the presidential palace and local courthouses after the ballot count showed that Chen, with a slim margin, defeated his opponents from the 'Pan-Blue' camp which consisted of the old ruling party KMT (Kuomintang) and the People First Party, which had split from the KMT after Chen's last victory. Wave after wave of protestors came out in the weeks that followed, condemning the suspicious shooting incident as a dirty scam that had stolen the election. On 2 April, two college students sat in and started a hunger

strike at the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Square. Later, the number of student protestors increased to eight. At one time the police tried to haul the hunger strikers out. This outraged many people and some professors and students came out to show their solidarity with the sit-in protestors. The banner that students hung over them read 'Revive the Wild Lily,' which was a direct reference to another much larger student sit-in with more than 10,000 participants 14 years earlier at exactly the same location. Some participants at the earlier sit-in are now holding important positions inside the DPP and the government. Their slighting of today's protesting students stimulated even more intense public debates from all sides.

Has the Wild Lily bloomed again on the Square 14 years later? For the whole of April, people with all sorts of standpoints elaborated their arguments like they were acting in a play. The themes of this play were innocence and betrayal, youth and sophistication, ideal and the dirty partisan politics etc. And then, as though trying to follow the arrangement of characters and plots, people argued whether this or that group of people fitted into the script of the play or not.

The large sit-in 14 years ago, featuring young students, was arguably the zenith of the 1980's street protests demanding democratic reforms. After that, Lee Teng-Hui, who had inherited his presidency from the last of the Chiang rulers, held a multi-party political negotiation and started a series of political reforms.<sup>2</sup> In the following decade, the parliament was completely re-elected, the president was elected by popular vote, and the rotation of ruling parties began. The 'Wild Lily' student protest marked the beginning of the end of the 'Permanent Parliament' and other institutional legacies of the 38-year long martial-law regime. According to one popular belief, Taiwan's current political system and government were formed during a decade-long process that began at the moment of that student protest. The image of the pure and innocent sit-in students as a prominent totem in the

history of democratic movement in Taiwan has now become an inseparable part of the legitimacy of the DPP and its allies. In this sense, the debate about the Wild Lily is a debate about the legitimacy of the ruling political authority today.

For people like me who had lived through that historical moment and actively participated in it, the stripped-down institutionalized version of the Wild Lily is hardly satisfactory. The many details that were discarded could have made the whole incident even more profound than what is being told now. Thus, the story told now becomes pale and lifeless, just like the hagiography carved on the stone tablets in temples honoring the presiding deities – abbreviated and full of euphemism. If we don't want to be put on the pedestal and become silent statues or mindless puppets following the plot written by some invisible playwright, we, the thousands of now forty-something participants in the Wild-Lily student sit-in, have to dig up our memories from the past. Not for nostalgia's sake though. We are too young to be nostalgic. This is simply to prevent our past from being made into a lab sample.

First of all, the first time anyone ever quoted 'first as tragedy ...' when talking about the Wild Lily protest was definitely not in April 2004, but in March 1990 at the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Square! The 'tragedy' was in fact not referring to our protest, but to the 4 June incident in the previous year.

Everyone at the Square in 1990 had lived through the last martial-law-era anti-Communist campaign of the KMT's propaganda machine in the spring of the previous year. The downfall of the 'Bandit Regime' of the Communists in mainland China was broadcast live 24 hour a day. KMT's party branches on campus and its youth organization aggressively mobilized rallies in support of our compatriots in mainland China. On the campus of National Cheng-Kung University in Tainan, where I was a student, small groups of dissident students took the chance to erect a 'Democracy Wall' on which everyone

could put up posters and express his or her opinion without being censored. That was the first time we could say to the university administrators: 'If there can be a Democracy Wall on the Tiananmen Square, why can't there be one on the University Avenue in Tainan?' Before martial law was imposed in Beijing, people here in Taiwan watched with amazement at the sight of policemen of the 'Vicious Regime of the Communist Bandits' linking hands in a rather civil fashion trying to stop the protestors on Tiananmen Square, while military police from our 'Bastion for National Revival' greeted protestors with truncheons and shields. One had to wonder, who was the Bandit?

Of course, after the June 4th massacre, dissident students in Taiwan could no longer speak as loudly as we had during May 1989. No matter how barbarous the KMT had been, it had, after all, never tried to crush us with tanks. However, in March of the following year, symbolisms from the Tiananmen Protest were revived one after another on the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Square: the 'Square Commanding Center,' the hunger strikers, a flyer that said 'Stop the 27th Army,'<sup>3</sup> etc. My comrades' tearful farewell to their parents before the hunger strike looked like documentary footage from the previous year. Even the totem we chose, the Wild Lily, was a reference to Tiananmen. The students on Tiananmen Square erected a statue of the 'Goddess of Democracy' as their totem. The goddess looked too much like the Statue of Liberty and we did not like it. The Wild Lily made of canvass and bamboo we made was a better alternative that some art students came up with.

The part of the story that befits the quote '... the second time as farce' most neatly in my recollection was *The Internationale*, which I led my fellow students to sing again and again during the sit-in. Left-wing students had always sung this anthem quietly in private. Amidst the atmosphere of the March sit-in, *The Internationale* became a hymn that could conjure up the ghosts of Tiananmen to protect us. When asked by

fellow students about the origin of the song, many student activists replied with blinking eyes and a sly smirk, 'Why, this is what the Tiananmen student protestors sang.'

The student activists in March 1990 did not deliberately copy the symbolisms we saw on Tiananmen Square on TV, but it was natural, as Marx said a century and a half ago, for people to play out new historical scenes in costumes borrowed from the revered dead. It is only in this age of media frenzy that a costume could become a 'time-honored disguise' in just one year while before it would take generations. The use of these symbolisms, consciously or not, attracted enormous public attention. Before the March student sit-in, no mass movement had ever received such feverish attention from the Taiwanese media. Protestors were watching live coverage of their protest on TV right on the spot. This somewhat surreal scene would play out countless times on numerous mass protests in the following years.

On the other hand, symbols are not something one can pick and choose and discard with one's free will. Symbols are associated with certain meanings in history. They acquire particular socio-political characters through human practices and they are effective only at certain historical conjunctures. On the Square of the March student sit-in, one of the most annoying symbols is the 'class demarcation,' the line that separates students and professors on the inside from 'the masses' on the outside. The line revealed important characteristics of the student movement and the democratic movement at that time, and these characteristics are still taking effect today.

### 'Purity' and the class demarcation

At the beginning of the 1989 democratic movement, when university students marched on Tiananmen Square, there was a rope surrounding the marchers. Student marshals were busy keeping 'the citizens' out and the students and professors in. The line defined the main body of the movement as the 'pure' students and intellectuals, not

the 'complex' mobs on the street. Hence the Tiananmen protest possessed, among all sorts of complicated characteristics, a rather traditional flavor of Chinese scholar-gentry. It was, among other things, a rebellion of the future and potential operators of the state apparatus, not a resistance of the ruled commoners – just like ancient scholars' critiques of the emperor or imperial examination's participants' boycott of the examination and other forms of scholar-gentry rebellions, which had always been integral parts of state politics in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Scholar-gentry rebellion was a headache but non-threatening to the rulers. It was a headache because problems happened within the rank of the ruling class. It was non-threatening from another perspective because the purpose of the protest was usually to enhance and defend the dominant social order, not to overthrow it as the peasant rebellions usually implied. The 1989 democratic movement was, of course, not simply a modern version of scholar-gentry rebellion. Such an interpretation was nevertheless very widely received in Taiwan through layers of representation and translation.

I arrived at the Square and took over the work of one of the commanders-in-chief of the student protest on the third day of the sit-in. At that time, the Line had been drawn for two days. Student marshals dutifully checked the student and faculty IDs of people coming and going. Conscious of our membership in something bigger than our individual selves, the cadre of the sit-in students who belonged to major student activist groups never challenged the existence of the Line during the protest, considering it as a collective decision. Criticisms of the class demarcation came only after the sit-in ended, in the internal assessment meetings and in the preparation meetings for a new national student movement alliance. As a result, the Line was cancelled in the following May Protest march against the appointment of army general Hao Po-Tsun for premier.<sup>4</sup>

Reporters at that time loved that Line. It represented a sharp contrast: in the circle

were the 'pure,' innocent, idealistic and politically unsophisticated students and intellectuals. Outside was a world for the corrupted adults, whose minds were filled with plots and conspiracies, as well as scheming opposition politicians and irrational mobs that follow them blindly. Such media representation of the student protesters prompted thousands of students and college professors who had never dared to stand up against the martial-law regime to join in. It also allowed them to bask in the glory of the rather old-fashioned aura of the intellectuals. It was the first 'media mobilization' in the history of social movements in Taiwan. We were to witness many more in the coming decade.

In contrast to the students who came to the protest via existing student activist groups, participants who joined in through 'media mobilization' often came to consider the Wild Lily as an immensely significant turning point in life. The most memorable example of this in my mind was a young professor. He registered to give a talk during my watch on stage. He was stuttering and having a hard time starting his speech. But then his speech suddenly became more and more fluent, eloquent, intense and full of funny jokes and allegories. Thousands of people on the Square cheered and laughed and his speech ended with roaring applause from the audience. The young professor stepped down with a glow on his face. And then he collapsed on the ground and started to sob uncontrollably. It turned out that that was the first time in his life that he had dared to criticize the KMT in public. He was excited and frightened at the same time. In the following decade, this man was to become one of the most popular MCs in political rallies. People such as the young professor were especially upset when we decided to withdraw from the square on the seventh day. They just could not bear to end a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

However, probably no member of existing activist organizations could be ecstatic. The most important groups included the Big Two – the Democratic Students' Union

(DSU) and the National Taiwan University student government led by the 'Love for Liberty' faction – and also some other smaller organizations such as the 'New Youth.' Members and associates of the activists groups made up the backbone of student volunteers who handled everything from logistics to decision making. To most of us, this was not our first protest action and probably not the last either. The movement neither started nor ended there and then. This was, however, the first time we handled a protest action of such magnitude. What we were most concerned with was how to keep up and go through the protest in a way that could generate more energy for future actions so that the collective enterprise we had devoted years of our lives to through our respective organizations could move one step forward.

#### **Student-masses relations: two views on student activism in the 1980s**

While the class demarcation line was later considered odd by the student activists, at the beginning of the Wild Lily student sit-in it was actually perceived as quite compatible with our diverse political stances. The pivotal issue for debates within the student movement in the 1980s was defined by two different views on the relations between the students and the masses (hence the relations between the elite and the masses within the democratic movement). At some moments in the movement, different views often turned into intensive struggles between different lines and factions. For many people outside the factions, the struggle appeared unnecessary and unprincipled. Media coverage and later historical accounts further disregarded the question of principles from which factional struggles arose and left us with only open squabbles and back-room dealings to remember by. In my view, even though most of the tiring and negative aspects of the factional struggles were true, there were real issues involved in the very core of the struggles. The issue was about two different visions of democracy and of the future Taiwanese society. This is

still very much relevant today, and I hope rekindling these old debates could help bring back the necessary debate.

#### *The elitism of the 'Love for Liberty'*

In the late 1980s, the view held by student activist groups headed by the 'Love for Liberty' faction of NTU fits the original meaning of the Line best. This faction included people such as Lin Jia-Lung and Lo Wen-Jia who are now being praised and criticized in the name of the Wild Lily.

The first articulated expression of their view on the question of student-masses relations appeared in the 'Manifesto for a New Society' issued by the Love for Liberty in 1987. The Manifesto was read at a press conference where members of the faction publicized the result of a survey they conducted in Lukang on the residents' attitude toward a proposed Dupont chemical plant. In the preceding months, Lukang residents had waged a massive protest against the Dupont investment for environmental reasons. The student survey largely confirmed that most of the residents did oppose Dupont. The publication of the anti-Dupont survey was a concerted effort with the NTU students' freedom-of-speech struggle on campus against the administration's shutting down of the student-controlled *University News*.

Other student-activist groups, which were consolidated into the Democratic Student Union (DSU) the next year and engaged in sometimes-fiery debates with the Love for Liberty activists interpreted the Manifesto in the following way: beneath the obscure language full of quasi-leftist terms, it actually advocated a kind of utilitarian ethics. Reading this document again 17 years later, I still agree with this interpretation.

The main thesis of the Manifesto for a New Society, at least according to the interpretation of the DSU members, was the following. University students in Taiwan were disenfranchised under the legal regime of so-called 'Special Power Relations.' They were not regarded as individuals with full



civil rights. Instead, they were by the University Law ruled subjects of the university administrators who were vested by the state with the authority to guide and discipline the students under their supervision.<sup>5</sup> The primary goal of the student movement was to resist such oppression on students, not to pursue ultimate visions such as socialism or to fulfill traditional intellectuals' obligation as tribunes for the people. Even so, student activists needed to 'go to the people' for three purposes: first, to gauge the pulse of the society; second, to acquire tangible and intangible resources for students to use in the on-campus democratic struggles; and third, to prove to the administration that college students were fully-qualified members of the society by playing the role of 'objective, neutral and rational' intellectuals outside of campus.

The Manifesto and related interventions of the Love-for-Liberty activists repeatedly called for 'dropping the posturing of the intellectuals.' Concretely, this meant giving up beliefs in any ultimate ideals and becoming shrewd managers of resources, taking all alliances as transitory, and mobilizing all kinds of resources to fulfill their own (temporary) goals. DSU members believed that such an idea degraded the relationships between intellectual elite and other social groups to sheer cynical mutual exploitation: the intellectuals used their endowed aura to legitimize social movements of the masses (although the effectiveness of such a move was questionable), and the masses in return raised the status of the intellectuals with their support. In essence, this is elitism par excellence.

Such elitism was usually taken for granted by members of the DPP leadership. I can still recall a speech by one of them in a student-activist summer camp. He explained to us that different people carry different weight in any given society. Those with lower status and less knowledge are less important and they need to exert more effort in order to make changes, just like those grassroots DPP supporters who fought the police on the street. Those with higher status and more knowledge such as univer-

sity students can make the same impact by making less effort. This, he believed, is why the student movement is useful.

The utilitarian elitists were not 'pure' and 'idealist' students. They were not wicked by essence, but they clearly believed that any claim of idealism was merely a temporary means to an end. Groups or even individuals might have vastly diverse goals and interests, and they come together only in transitory alliance. The aura of 'idealist' intellectuals helped themselves and their allies at the time to achieve our goals, and therefore they should make full use of it.

Student activists taking such a position later came to be most successful in their political careers inside the DPP camp. They may admit unabashedly that they were partisan from the very beginning and that they had never been 'neutral' in their political opinion. However, in March 1990, they supported erecting a line between the students and the DPP supporters. Without this symbolic line, which emphasized the pretense of the 'pure' and 'idealistic' intellectual elite, the student protest could not have been so valuable to the DPP-led movement for democratic reform.

#### *The anti-elitist DSU line*

Ironically, the Democratic Student Union at that time also agreed to erect that Line but for a seemingly opposite reason: to prevent the DPP leadership from taking the initiatives of the student protest.

I witnessed the founding of the Democratic Progressive Party as a jubilant supporter in my freshman year, thinking that the democratic movement finally had an institution that could bring about fundamental changes. Then, like many of my fellow supporters, I became disillusioned through personal experience in one after another mass protests led by the DPP. Since the mid-1980s, passionate calls of 'we as Taiwanese' from the elite leaders of the opposition had rallied thousands of people to the street and marched toward the truncheons of riot police for the cause of human

rights and democracy. They came to be treated as cannon fodder. The most zealous of the DPP supporters who came to be used to fight the police in the street protests were called '*Chiong-Tso*,' the Assault Troop. They made numerous sacrifices in vain and were constantly betrayed by their leaders. Every now and then, after these people were beat up and arrested by the police, the lawyers, politicians and party workers who led the demonstration would turn their back and blame the masses they rallied for being irrational and sabotaging the peaceful demonstration. This was a shining example of the phrase 'bourgeois democracy'.

One such case of the frustration the mass movement suffered was the 20 May Farmers' March of 1988. This tragedy brought an abrupt end to months of escalating massive peasant protests. Today, ironically, it is often presented as the zenith of the peasant movement of the 1980s in many mainstream recounts of the event!

The three massive street protests of the peasants before 20 May 1988 were mainly organized by grassroots DPP party workers in the countryside who were outside the New Wave faction.<sup>6</sup> Student activist groups from universities throughout the island aided them with great enthusiasm. In the (maybe vague) consensus of those who worked to bring about the peasant protests, the immediate goal of the peasant movement was to fight for the survival of Taiwanese farmers against the threat of imported US agricultural produce. What was most significant about the protests was that the peasants who had been conservative and submissive for four decades under the dominance and exploitation of the pro-US KMT government could now stand up for their own interests. In this light, the central task of the protest organizers was to seek the broadest possible alliance in organization. In terms of tactics, the organizers needed to try their best to bring the participating peasants back home safely after the violent demonstrations, and to bring the movement forward on the basis of the existing conscious level of the peasant masses, so that more and more peasants could become unafraid to join the fight.

The 20 May demonstration led by the New Wave Faction broke the consensus inside the peasants' movement. The overly provocative tactics of the New Wave organizers and supporters led to one of the most violent clashes between the police and the demonstrators. Hundreds were arrested and scores of them sent to prison. The jailed leaders became celebrities and were eventually elected to public office, but the grassroots organizing campaign could never regain its strength because too many peasants were too scared of being sacrificed again. Whatever the subjective purposes of the 20 May leaders were, they had gained fame and advancement in their political career at the cost of the masses. Not only had the masses paid with their own flesh and blood, they also lost the opportunity to organize and empower themselves through meaningful collective actions. Rather than a democratic movement, this was a movement for the elite, which we came to call 'populism' in the 1990s. What it eventually empowered were the representatives of the masses, not the masses themselves.

The democratic movement of the 1980s was multifaceted and rich in contradictions. It was composed of all of the following and more: the struggles of the opposition elites to contending power with the KMT, the realization of the ideological hegemony of liberal democracy established through the US hegemony in Taiwan, the demands of the emerging Taiwanese industrial capital to break the restrictions of the KMT party-state on their continued accumulation, the discontent of an urban working class facing oppressions in their day-to-day work and lives, the Taiwanese identity borne out of a renewed cultural vernacularism, which was in turn a product of the abrupt industrialization of the island, and so on. All these complex elements found their representations in the newly-founded DPP in 1986. Rarely appearing as a unified entity, the party was a coalition of many diverse anti-KMT tendencies and factions. However, what gradually took the initiative in the movement was undoubtedly a populist style of politics.



The basic operation of a populist style of politics is the following. The leading elite of the movement presented the society as simply consisting of two classes: the ruling class and 'the people,' which included the movement leaders. All the diverse experiences of oppression of the groups who made up 'the people,' along this line, had to be transformed into resistance against the ruling class. The only hope for the oppressed was to let 'our' headmen have state power, and then the headmen will solve all the problems for the masses. Myriads of social contradictions, especially the contradictions between different classes among 'the people,' were absorbed, incorporated, and covered up in this way. This kind of politics-by-headmen suppressed possibilities of democratization on multiple aspects of social lives, although such democratization was promised by the movement to its supporters. What remained for the movement to pursue was a stripped-down version of democratization: restructuring of the political regime through electoral politics.

On the issue of politics-by-headmen, there had been a debate within the opposition movement in the early 1980s, the so-called 'Chicken-and-Rabbit Debate.' Using an allegory from the grade-school math textbook, young activists sarcastically called the opposition camp 'chicken and rabbits in the same cage,' that is, a combination of two different species: the genuine 'mass-line' democratic activists and the 'electoral-line' opposition politicians. The former would like to bring down the KMT by any means necessary, especially by mass demonstrations, which were forbidden under the martial law. By comparison, the latter only wanted to get elected lawfully to public offices so that they could push for democratic reforms, even though the election under the martial-law regime was obviously a sham. However, with hindsight, disagreements between two sides in the debate were not as radical as they thought at that time. This was more a debate about means, not political lines. Despite their disagreement on the necessity of 'unlawful' means, both sides tacitly agree with one another that the immediate goal was for the

elite representatives of 'the people' to acquire political power in order to solve other problems for and on behalf of the masses.

Critical to the populist line, the DSU activist groups gradually developed our own way of thinking and practices different from that of the Love for Liberty groups. We wanted to help the masses to gain their rights, not to speak for the masses. In practice, the DSU advocated for student participation in the labor, peasant, and grass root environmental movements as members of the movement, instead of analyzing and researching the movements from a 'neutral' and 'objective' standpoint. In our thinking, students' struggle for freedom and democracy on campus was basically the same as other burgeoning social movements in Taiwan. We were all sectors of a larger movement that is challenging injustice in the Taiwanese society. Anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist tendencies, though still not well-articulated, increasingly appeared as the mainstream beliefs in the DSU. We came to call our line 'popular democracy,' which was very vague but seemed sufficient to distance ourselves from 'bourgeois democracy.'

Activist groups in the DSU were still concerned with the movement for political democratization, in which the DPP was clearly in the lead, and the democratic reforms on campus, which the Love for Liberty tendency took for its main concern. Yet we regarded these issues as only parts of our broader concerns and oftentimes not our central concern. 'Social movement versus political movement' was a dichotomy frequently used in the DSU discourse, and we support the former for the following reason. In the populist-style political movement, individual supporters of democracy are often reduced to faceless members of 'the mob,' whose sole reasons of existence as far as the elites are concerned were to echo the high-minded slogans their leaders chanted and support the leaders with their vote. They could not speak on their own behalf and formulate resistant discourses and paths for practice, which corresponded to their own objective conditions. By comparison, social movements started with

immediate issues in the daily lives of the participants – excess exploitation, environmental pollution, and so on. Therefore, most participants could more easily understand the struggles in which they took part. And in the process of collective struggle, the masses could form their own opinions, strategies, and even brand new worldviews. We believed the masses in social movements would no longer be passive individuals waiting to be mobilized, but active participants who share the power of the whole movement. After all, who could feel more closely what environmental degradation was than the people whose communities were constantly filled with industrial pollutants? And who understands what it is like to be exploited better than the exploited workers and farmers? Instead of becoming spokespersons for the masses, intellectual activists and other educated participants of the social movements could play more democratic roles such as facilitators or companions with the masses.

While the DPP elite operated by elevating all concrete issues to the level of political struggle with the authoritarian regime and demanded the masses see the world through the eyes of the elite, the DSU activists, regarding ourselves as the opposite of the former, wanted to take the issues down to the level of what the masses thought they were and demanded that the elite see the world as the masses saw it. Respect for the spontaneity of the masses was one crucial spirit of the ‘social-movement’ line the DSU supported. What we envisioned in a democratic movement was not the democratic headmen taking state power. Instead, it should be a process whereby the masses educated themselves and developed their own collective capabilities to counteract any future rulers in the form of alternative worldviews, political skills, and grassroots organizations. Every Taiwanese could thus become true masters of the country. This was what we wanted: a radically democratic society.

One of the most important undertakings of the DSU was the so-called ‘work teams’ in every school vacation. The teams consisted of students from different univer-

sities and they reached out to various grassroots social-movement organizations throughout the island and did support work for the grassroots groups such as farmers’ organizations, grassroots environmental groups and trade unions. Through the exposure to the ‘work teams’, students could acquaint themselves with activists and rank-and-file participants of the then burgeoning social movements. And by building such a line of ‘popular democracy,’ we believed we could find a way to transcend the narrowly-defined bourgeois parliamentary democracy. With our movement, we would be able to deepen democratic values in all aspects of the social lives in Taiwan: class, environmental justice, gender, ethnicity, etc.

Did the DSU live up to its expectation? With hindsight, no, far from it. Too many subjective and objective constraints prevented the realization of such an ideal. Young university students in the post-World War II Taiwan were hardly raised to become good grassroots activists. We were mostly from middle-class families and had been confined to our schoolwork in our formative years and lacking in necessary social skills. Even today, very few people of my cohort can unabashedly call themselves good grassroots activists. Our slogans, doctrines, and practices were also rife with problems and inconsistencies. Among them, the emphasis on the masses’ spontaneity was to become most troublesome. Even so, we sincerely believed that we were on the right track. Such a belief was neither from our imagination nor from any book we read but from the result of the debates we engaged in. It was a product of the Taiwanese society undergoing democratic transformation.

Being the only student-activist factions with a highly developed intramural network, the DSU was always present in student democratic struggles on and off campuses, even though the organization does not regard these struggles as its central task. When the student sit-in of March 1990 started, the DSU hastily mobilized its members from many universities to take part. In cooperation with rival factions and many more students who did not belong to

any faction, we tried our best to operate this massive undertaking beyond the scale anyone had ever encountered. Aside from the students, more people on the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Square were traditional supporters of the DPP. In the minds of the DSU decision makers at that time, separating ourselves from the DPP supporters could help to maintain a degree of independence and prevent ourselves from being outmaneuvered by the more politically savvy DPP leaders. Thus, the DSU consented to 'that Line.'

As far as I know, there was only one student-activist faction at that time that should have opposed 'that Line.' It was the 'New Youth,' a youth organization of the DPP New Wave faction. Members of the New Youth identified themselves as an integral part of the political democratic movement led by the DPP. From their standpoint, both of the aforementioned positions were ridiculous: the desire of the 'Love for Liberty' to separate the 'pure' students from the 'complicated' masses, and the DSU's attempt to raise a line between the 'popular democracy' of ourselves and the 'bourgeois democracy' of the DPP. I myself have no idea why they never opposed 'that Line' then. However, another perspective may shed some light. The DPP did have a command center set up on the opposite side of the Square. Their politicians, activists and supporters were present all the way through the student sit-in. However, they kept an extremely low profile and never attempted to take over the situation or to outshine the students. Perhaps when facing a democratic protest which enjoyed unprecedented friendly treatment from the mass media, the DPP decision makers also thought it a good strategy to keep the appearance of an independent student movement which was allied to the cause of the DPP.

### **The conjuncture and the 'subjectivity'**

One of the favorite buzzwords of all student activist factions of the 1980s was 'Zhutixing,' a translation of the English word

'subjectivity.' The original meaning of the word is already complex enough, but the complexity was aggravated many times over in the Taiwanese context to connote individual and collective freedom from suppressions of all sorts and independence from authoritative influences of all kinds. When the professors, the military instructors or KMT government agents on campus treated us like children, they were violating our 'subjectivity.' In a coalition, if the voice of our faction was suppressed, our names were not mentioned, or our demands ignored, our 'subjectivity' was also being violated. Inside the activist groups, often-times the junior or women members would be suppressed by the seniors or the men. That was also a serious infringement on the 'subjectivity' of others. This vague and endlessly meaningful (and essentially autochthonous) word might well sum up the *zeitgeist* of Taiwanese intellectuals at that time, while previously any expression of the self had been seriously inhibited.

In April 2004, the vague normative scale of 'subjectivity' was once more dug up to measure the few sit-in students. Some former participants of the 1990 protest criticized today's protestors for their lack of 'subjectivity,' meaning they were inadvertently used by the 'Pan-Blue' politicians. However, one needs to ask: was there really a 'subjectivity' for the student protestors back in 1990?

First of all, on the Square in March 1990, in all occasions of mass protest, there was indeed no one single subjectivity and definitely no one single will. The two different political tendencies in the student movement were but one example. And these two tendencies were but a small part of the student masses. My position as one of the 'commanders-in-chief' of the students left many indelible memories. Aside from the continuous chants, songs, and speeches, the most memorable task was to facilitate a seemingly never-ending collective decision making process. Again and again, issues and proposals were handed to small-group discussions among students. Representatives were elected from each university. A

decision-making committee was formed. And then the proposal the committee came up with was rejected by the mass of student protestors. The decision-making body resigned and plebiscites were held. Then the whole process was repeated. The sanctity of the voting process might be one of the most notable characteristics of the Taiwanese experience of democratic movement. In March 14 years ago, we pushed that sanctity to the extreme so much so that one can feel a sense of absurd beauty. Do we move forward? Do we move backward? Do we end the protest? Do we accept this or that proposal? Never before had the 'subjectivities' of the participants in a protest been so revered, especially on the tactical-level issues. Yet one still needs to ask: does this mean that the students at that time were especially fond of 'independent thinking', as we thought we should be?

It may go without saying that critical independent thinking is precious and tremendously important for a modern society. However, a big group of people doing one thing in concert with each other in a particular time and space never happens through a process in which individuals do their thinking independently and then gradually allow their consensus to crystallize out of immensely diverse individual ideas through some sort of scientific process. Rather, consensus is often given by shared history and dominant ideology. This is especially the case where people take the issue for granted without disagreement or debates.

There were four major demands in the 'Wild Lily' student sit-in: (1) abolishing the provisional amendments to the constitution, (2) completing the re-election of the parliament, (3) a multi-party political negotiation, and (4) a schedule for political and economic reforms. How did these demands come about? Definitely not through intense debates as to what the tactical issues were. I was not in the decision-making committee and only knew about this afterward. To my knowledge, the only minor disagreement in forming the four demands was on the fourth item; the rest of the demands simply passed

without much discussion. The proposal from the Love for Liberty was initially to demand a schedule for 'political' reform. DSU representatives wanted to bring in our concern for class, environment, and other social issues. These issues did not, however, fit into the highly political theme of the protest. As a compromise, the demand became 'a schedule for political AND economic reforms.' For all the disagreements we thought we had with our rivals, our political differences boiled down to only ONE word.

Why? Why was there so much consensus among people who regard themselves as fundamentally disagreeing with each other? By then, the question of democratic reform in authoritarian Taiwan had been formulated, debated and struggled on for at least 30 years and two or three generations. A structural reform through complete re-election of the parliament had long been the consensus of opposition movements. There was simply no need for further debate. Compared with its later imitations, the 'Wild Lily' might appear to be clearer in its demands and visions and broader in its social basis. This was so not because the students in 1990 were more thoughtful. Rather, it was the fruit of a long democratic movement to which thousands of people devoted their lives. The students just happened to be there at the right place at the right time in a historical conjuncture.

The historical conjuncture in 1990, as a sundry of later analyses have indicated, can be described as layer after layer of political struggles on top of each other. Inside the KMT, there was the struggle between the 'mainstream' of Lee Teng-Hui and the rest; outside, there was the struggle between the KMT and the DPP; further out, there were the massively discontented Taiwanese people rising against the establishment. All actors in this historical play, political parties and factions and politicians, like the student activists, regarded their actions at any particular conjuncture as reflecting their subjective will, judgment, beliefs and strategy. Yet these motives and strategies were formed in a larger historical context. With

hindsight, 1990 marked a turning point in the establishment of formal democratic state institutions. At the same time, it was also the turning point where the emerging power of big local capitalists outgrew that of the authoritarian KMT state, which had been for the previous three decades fostering capitalist economic growth, and gave rise to the power of the capital. After 1990, big corporations replaced state and party bureaucrats and became the most powerful decision makers in government policies as well as in the marketplace. Simultaneous with what happened in many other places in the world, while the Cold-War authoritarian machinery was replaced by elected parliamentary democracy, privatization, deregulation and capitalist globalization combined resulted in an even more stringent dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and intensified polarization between classes. In such a historical process, the 'subjectivity' of every individual actor is bound to be limited.

Judging historical actors and their actions with the criterion of 'subjectivity', i.e. asking whether they are actually 'used' by others, presumes that individuals can act only according to their own free will, which is generated only inside their own heads and largely independent of outside interventions. Such free will also has to reflect faithfully the objective conditions the actors face so that they can achieve what they intend to achieve. These kinds of actors and actions simply do not exist. Is it not the case that history is always rife with unintended consequences? Do not people always have to think and act in the confinement of historical constraints? Arguing on the level of 'subjectivity' does not shed any light on the matter.

However, what I mean is not that we should, or we can only be pushed around by alienated historical forces. It is the hope of every earnest person that, even with all those given historical binds and our own particular shortsightedness, our own practices can eventually lead to the realization of our beliefs and visions, which we thrive to choose deliberately. It is in this spirit that we whole-heartedly sing in *The Internationale*,

'... Let the ideas set us free ...' If there is something valuable in what the Taiwanese intellectuals wanted to convey through the buzzword 'subjectivity,' it is the desire for intentionality, the desire of the actors to know what we are doing in order to allow our actions to actually change the reality as we intend to. Judged by this criterion, anti-elitist student activists like myself and my comrades in the DSU failed in our movement in 1990.

On 21 March 1990, the day the 'Wild Lily' student protest ended, what I felt was not joy but a deep and humiliating sense of powerlessness, and I know many others who shared the same feeling. It took several years for me to understand what that feeling was about.

### **Why the students?**

Frankly, a student activist like me was not that special in Taiwan in 1990. There were so many people who had devoted more and contributed more to the 30-some years of democratic movement, and they were from every walk of life. Why were these several thousands of students hailed as the conscience of the society and the maker of history, as if our student ID had given us some sort of divine authority? This question bothered us then as well as now. A joint student-DPP march against the appointment of General Hao Po-Tsun as the premier two months after the March 1990 sit-in largely concluded the mass-movement phase of that year's struggle. After that event, I wrote:

Idealist views of the society hold that some ultimate values exist and transcend history, such as heavenly-endowed human rights, truth, justice, the God, ... They are eternal and they never change. Thus they cannot be produced by living human beings. A vulgar application of this doctrine is this: whoever is involved in real and concrete struggles in the society can never hold the ultimate values. Only a neutral, 'objective,' i.e. unearthly person can become the incarnation of



the ultimate values. The KMT constantly use this reasoning to assail the political opposition, because the opposition politicians are competing for their earthly power. (Although, at the same time, they use the opposite reasoning to divide and conquer the social movements, claiming that only those whose direct interests are at stake have the right to involve in disputes and all others are 'alien forces,' 'fake peasants,' 'fake workers,' and such.) Throughout the years, the demand for 'the neutral and objective' has become an integral part of the mainstream ideology in Taiwan.

And now, the students, a social group who have long been confined to their quarters on campus, isolated from what is going on outside and not yet part of the system of social production thus less involved with day-to-day social struggles perfectly fit the expectation of the mainstream ideology for an 'incarnation of the justice.' Thus, people who are fed up with bickering in the political arena for the past months project their earnest wish for political reform and their will to participate in such a reform on this small group of students.

I still think my analyses valid even now. Perhaps this also explains why the mass media, in an equally suffocating atmosphere of political bickering, is so obsessed with the question about the authenticity of the student movement and its antithesis.

Yet, following my cautious analyses, in the same article, I rejoiced in counting one after another signs that indicated the student movement's potential to break its own limitations: The students might shake the foundation of the ideological state apparatus; the rebellion of the ruling class's own reserves could mean a fundamental challenge; the children could mobilize their parents and call them onto the street; there were even one guard at the presidential palace who wrote to the students in support. Thus, I called the student masses 'the vanguard of anti-establishment.' I expected, in the following stage, we ourselves would 'not only further challenge all undemocratic

political institutions, but further spread the fruits of democracy. We will let the flesh of the Wild Lily become nourishing fertilizers and spread it on the soil of the people.'

Fourteen years later, hardly any part of my optimism and arrogance as a student activist was realized, if at all. Why?

### **The limits of 'popular democracy'**

It takes a much longer analyses on how the 'popular democratic' line failed. I can only provide something I came to realize later.

In the 'popular democratic' line, student activists regarded ourselves as members of the social movements. There is a triple requirement for an adequate activist: a critical thinker, a compassionate person, and a clear-headed strategist. First, I have to be a thinking person, critically and self-critically measuring everything against our principles. Yet I also have to be a member of the society, which requires me to identify myself with the oppressed masses on one hand, and analyze the situation and formulate a best strategy to win the struggle for the masses I identify with.

When I first decided to devote myself to the movement, a pastor gave me a quotation from the Bible: 'Jesus said unto Peter and Andrew: 'Come with me. I shall make you catchers of men' (Mathew, 4: 19) Catching men (and women and children and all who are downtrodden) is the most obvious task in all political actions including the social movements. How shall we go about doing it then? By any means possible, including the mainstream ideology! In the following years of activism, in every struggle against the authority and rival factions, the situation constantly revealed to us all sorts of opportunities and necessities in which we did not seem to have any alternative but to use this and other means in order to 'catch men.'

Paradoxically, the DSU's popular democratic spirit, respecting spontaneity of the masses and seeing the world through the eyes of the masses, allowed us to compromise with the mainstream ideology quite easily. Generally, anti-elitists in the DSU regarded 'incarnation of justice' and



'pure and innocent students' as dirty phrases. However, we had to use them if the situation called for it. It was the masses who needed 'pure and innocent' students, not us ourselves, right? Was not a good activist always looking out for the demands of the masses in order to advance the movement?

Faced with the opportunities and challenges that appeared constantly, the strategist in the triple role of an activist often grew so large that the other two roles were reduced to pale shadows. And student activists often appear as shrewd strategists rather than self-critical thinkers or passionate members of the masses. Ironically, the DSU had formed its line based on criticizing the utilitarian ethics embedded in the 'Manifesto for a New Society,' but at the end, we became the most earnest practitioners of that Manifesto.

Thus, once the 'Wild Lily' sit-in started and the role of 'pure and innocent students in a nasty political struggle' was cast by the media, we jumped in and played our roles dutifully in this written play without second thought. We played that role from March to May in the frenzy of the movement. When we finally had some time to look back, we found ourselves looking exactly like 'them.' We had become the kind of elitists we had been criticizing for the previous years. We had longed for an egalitarian society where no one needs a spokesperson, yet in the end, we became spokespersons for the whole people.

The frustration of the 'Wild Lily' was just a beginning. In the following years, the 'popular democratic' line whose critical edge was based on resisting an elite/masses dichotomy became increasingly inadequate. From a certain point of view, Taiwan's mainstream political opposition from the 1960s to the 1990s was a product of the KMT authoritarian regime. It advocated realization of parliamentary democracy, human rights, civil liberty, and capitalism. These ideas had always been present in KMT propaganda to differentiate its regime from the Communists. In practice, the opposition used KMT sanctioned elections as the central means and used street protest as the auxiliary. In turn, the notion of 'popular democracy' is a product of the mainstream

democratic movement, which resulted in the founding of the DPP. It demanded the realization of the slogan also chanted by the DPP: 'Power to the People!' In addition, the 'popular democracy' focused on organizing the masses to protest as its major method for practice, while mass protests were previously initiated by the DPP. The popular democratic discourse repeatedly called for awareness of the diversity of lively social contradictions other than the one between the state and 'the people.' However, it never really transcended the state/people contradiction.

The anti-elitist stance of the DSU was one aspect of the anti-state line of the 'popular democracy.' For us, the elitist appearance of student-intellectuals was revolting because it was a posture for people waiting in line for a place in the state authorities. By contrast, 'the people' who had neither intention nor possibility to share the state authority, especially the toiling masses, but not so much the bourgeoisie, were much more likeable in every respect: their sweat and blood, love and hatred, style and language, etc.

However, in the 1990s, the relevance of anti-elitism decreased drastically. The Taiwanese regime and the political parties competing for it have all transformed their appearance: from condescending rulers to marketing strategists whose main purpose was to plead and beg and cheat for the votes of 'the people.' The apparent difference and even some real boundaries between the elite and the masses became blurred. In addition to summoning the collective sentiments of the people through the concepts of a naturalized community, the politicians are now even accustomed to dress themselves up and entertain the voters in all sorts of folk and popular festivities. All those cultural symbolisms condemned by the old rulers as vulgar and belonging solely to the underclass have now been picked up by our new rulers. Furthermore, the state now champions for 'vitality of the people' as a cure for the inefficiency of bureaucracy. On one hand, it privatizes large portions of public assets and hands them to the big corporations. On the other hand, more and more policy measures

are incorporating NGOs and other civil-society groups in all levels of the administrative machinery of the state. In a condition like this, who exactly is the 'state apparatus' and who is 'the people'?

### The authentic Wild Lily?

After the first time I talked in public about what I wrote in this article, a friend reminded me that I am exaggerating when I said that the Wild Lily has become a lab sample. For many students whose first experience in political protest was on the Square in March 1990, the burst of passion they experienced was alive and genuine. For many of them, such experience inspired them to devote themselves to participate in social movements throughout Taiwan. Indeed, the meaning of an event naturally varies for different participants. Part of the glory imbued on the Wild Lily is real for many of us and contributed to some real and positive social changes. The March student sit-in was a milestone in the founding process of our current parliamentary democracy and the end of the authoritarian regime, although its significance has been overstated.

Even so, as a member of the collective leadership of the student movement in 1990, I should take the responsibility for what I regard as failure, the vanity and absurdity of the event, just as I share what was precious and inspiring about it.

Frederic Jameson once said, 'History is what hurts.' I take it not as an advice about self-indulgence, but as plainly stating a truism about social practice. In order to achieve a degree of social transformation beyond our immediate experience, we always start with what we inherit from the past and from what was revealed to us as natural choices. Yet such spontaneous actions would eventually reach its limits and ended with unintended consequences. It is in self-criticism, in courageously facing our own failure, that we can move one step forward in the long march from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.

The Wild Lily student protest took place in the context of a democratic move-

ment mired with intrinsic elitism. Such a movement promised to resolve immediate grievances of 'the people' through a path in which the movement leaders took state power and solved and redressed the grievances of the followers on their behalf. Such a moment of truth finally came four years ago when the DPP won the presidential election. Thus, on the tenth anniversary celebration of the Wild Lily, after singing *The Internationale* with our characteristic raucous mood, many of my former fellow student activists, now serving the DPP camp, happily sang their party anthem without a trace of our old grudge with the party. There might be some grounds for celebration. Indeed, the martial law, the permanent parliament, the ban on freedom of speech and many other conditions my generation shared with our predecessors had all but vanished by the year 2000. However, after four years without the KMT as our ruler, I wonder whether there will be more of my former comrades who would agree with me now. When we withdrew from the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Square in 1990, we chanted the slogan: 'The search for democracy will never end!' This slogan is becoming ever more relevant.

Clearly, a change of government does not necessarily mean a change of the ruling class. During the martial-law era, party bureaucrats ruled the country in their brazen authoritarian style; now it's the big capitalists' turn to rule. When the DPP government met the first economic crisis, the first reaction was to convene capitalists from all sectors and strata. Along with some token labor representatives, they held an 'Economic Development Convention,' and the government vowed to serve the needs of the capital better than their KMT predecessors did. The democratic government supposedly belonging to the people is increasingly a government belonging only to the Taiwanese bourgeoisie. The election of 2004 appeared to be an opportunity for us to rethink what it means to politically reform. However, the two camps look so much alike that the election bore scarcely any relevance to genuine social reforms. The mainstream tradition of democratic movement in

Taiwan has ceased to be a critical force that can address our immediate condition of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and other central goals for struggles in the martial-law era have now been achieved. There ceased to be any massive protests regarding human rights, although infringements on human rights, even institutional ones, still exist in the margins of Taiwanese society. The restructuring of the political institutions created a playing field where major parties and powerful players can compete with relative fairness according to their own standards. But election become less about competition between different views, policies and visions, and more about who, among those who share the same positions on practically everything, can hold the state power. Just like the dying symbol of the Wild Lily, human rights and democracy are now established as venerable concepts but deprived of the vigor they once had during the democratic movement.

Fourteen years after the Wild Lily, many of the social movement activists and the students who sat on the Square are still working diligently in grassroots organizations and movements, attempting to grasp the spirit once represented by the slogan 'Popular Democracy.' And we have witnessed many occasions in which Taiwanese people came together for causes other than that of the bourgeois political movement. These can be something as small as participatory design of a communal hall and as large as a march of 100,000 farmers. And in every one of these occasions, some optimistic leftists and radical democrats would happily cry out, 'Here comes the Power of the People!'

Indeed, for the past 14 years, the characters of the Taiwanese people have undergone tremendous transformation. Most of us were timid, reticent, avoiding politics and blindly trusting the authorities. In the 1990s, we became more talkative, hopelessly addicted to political talks and skeptical of the authorities. However, from what happened before and after the 2004 presidential election, the previous talks about the

rise of 'people's power' in Taiwan were exaggerated. Picking an agent for the capitalist among those who differ only in their trademarks is still the game that can arouse the most passionate response. There has not been any single policy debate in this election, but the passionate dispute about the election result almost tore the whole society apart, as if it were a life and death struggle. Where are all those people's power and grassroots vitalities?

### **Under the shadow of the Wild Lily**

The wild dream of a coming democratic and egalitarian society we once had during the Wild Lily protest has by now mostly gone. Yet, in the absence of any sincere criticism, the shadow of the March sit-in has been haunting the popular democrats. For the student activists who were later involved in electoral politics, the Wild Lily became a badge of honor of the whole generation, ready to be used in their campaign advertisement. Ironically, even some old KMT youth cadre who opposed the student movement now also use the Wild Lily symbol. Other participants of the 1990 sit-in may not agree with such a superficial interpretation of the Wild Lily, yet the desire to 'Revive the Wild Lily' is often suppressed deep in the minds of many in a wide variety of crooked ways. Such suppression resulted in some unsettling behavioral patterns.<sup>7</sup>

The popular democrats argued that the main value of social movements lies in the process of self-education and self-organization of the oppressed masses. In this view, whether participants have achieved collective empowerment through their protest actions is more important than whether the particular demands of a struggle is achieved or widely publicized. This view is still held by many activists. However, under the shadow of the Wild Lily, a flamboyant publicity campaign often outweighs other aspects of the movement. This is aggravated by cable news channels with teams of SNG trucks roaming the street of Taipei everyday hunting sensational footage. Many social-movement activists in

various sectors believe that the masses can be mobilized if and only if we have good media coverage – just like what happened during the Wild Lily sit-in.

Therefore, the more difficult it is to mobilize the masses for a certain campaign, the bigger and catchier we should make the props for our street drama, and more carefully we shall design the set and the shot for the livecast so that we get better media coverage. The better the coverage, the more pressure we can exert on the particular government agency we are protesting against, and we can get the policy measures we advocate with more possibility. Inadvertently, the social movement of the masses becomes the publicity campaign of the pressure group; the radical democratic movement critiquing the limitations of the bourgeois democracy becomes NGOs who supplement the bourgeois state apparatus; and the social-movement organizations becomes agencies competing for resources and a franchise in a certain cause or representation for certain groups. Following this logic, the only difference between social-movement organizations and the politicians is that while the former claim to represent only a sector of the Taiwanese society, the latter claim to represent everybody. Thus, it is no wonder that social movements are often degraded to merely representing some ‘special interest,’ merely one of the many voices the powers that be need to strike a balance between. And a weaker voice, that is.

In the 1980s, when we used the dichotomy between social movements and political movements, we were sensing a coming degeneration of the bourgeois democratic reforms. Our advocacy for social movements was an attempt to seek a more active and lively vision for democracy. Yet, at least for now, the social movements in Taiwan are not yet what we dreamed of. If this kind of movement is the only counterweight to the bourgeois politics, isn’t the degeneration of politics just to be expected?

I understand that many of my old comrades will take my criticism as unfair. Even if what I say makes sense, how can a person like me who also has the badge of

honor of the Wild Lily pinned to my lapel criticize my companions as if I were not part of the problem? I admit that as a member of the social movements in Taiwan, I cannot avoid the inadequacies I mentioned, just like I cannot disown the vanity and failure of the student activism of the 1980s. Yet if we still hold the callings we sensed back then to be worthwhile, what alternative have we but to face our mistakes honestly and learn from them?

## Notes

1. The Chinese version of this article has been published by *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly for Social Research* and partially by *The Coollouder*, *TW Blog*, *The South* and other net publications in Taiwan.
2. Self-proclaiming its sovereignty over all China, the KMT government retained mainland representatives who were ‘elected’ in 1947 during the civil war of the three representative bodies. Those representatives were never held accountable to the population of Taiwan and served as rubber stamps for the KMT. As of early 1990, these virtually permanent members accounted for 632 of the 712-seat National Assembly, 144 of the 274-seat Legislative Yuan, and 20 of the 51-seat Control Yuan. Martial law was declared in Taiwan in 1949 and was not lifted until 1986. Even after the martial law was lifted, provisional amendments made in 1948 under the pretext of national emergency had effectively suspended the civil rights provided by the Constitution. The provisional amendments were eventually abolished in 1991 thus allowing a complete re-election of the three representative bodies.
3. It was a reference to the first army entering Beijing to enforce the martial law.
4. As a compromise to the hard-line old guards of the KMT, Lee Teng-Hui appointed General Hao as his premier after Lee was ‘elected’ by the national assembly. The decision was made after Lee promised the protest students to initiate political reforms. The appointment was therefore perceived as a backlash. After Hao was sworn in, he implemented a series of measures to crack down on the social movements.
5. For instance, the election laws at that time barred students, regardless of their age, from running for public office or even participating in election campaigns in any form.
6. In the formative years of the DPP, there were mainly two factions in the Party. The more

organized but less powerful one is the New Wave faction. It consisted mainly of the younger intellectual activists who initiated the so-called 'Chicken-and-Rabbit' debate in the early 1980s and criticized the old opposition politicians for their obsession with electoral politics. The other is the Formosa faction, a loose but more powerful coalition centered on opposition politicians who held public offices.

7. My colleague Hou Nien-Tsu and Chen Cheng-Liang have argued that the 'shadow of Wild Lily' exists not only for those who participated in the event, but even more so for later members of student and social-movement activist groups. Envy for those who had been there often resulted in all sorts of unhealthy

complexes in the internal dynamics of such groups.

### **Author's biography**

Hsin-Hsing CHEN 陳 信 行 served as one of the 'commanders-in-chiefs' of the student protestors in the mass movement in March and May 1990 and is a professor in the Graduate School for Social Transformation Studies at Shih Shin University.

**Contact address:** Shih Shin University, Graduate School for Social Transformation Studies, No. 1, Lane 17, Sec. 1, Muzha Rd., Wenshan District, Taipei City 116, Taiwan (R.O.C.).