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Taiwan's Millennial Generation: Interests in Polity and Party Politics

Ryan BRADING

Abstract: The political strategies used to attract Taiwanese Millennials is a puzzling topic. This article analyses the strategies the two main political parties have implemented in recent years to do so. In the literature on youth attitudes in Western democracies, politics is described as “boring,” a “big turn-off,” and a “killjoy.” I examine to what degree these theoretical terms can help define the youth’s perception of politics and I describe the youth-led demonstrations that have taken place. Using primary sources, this analysis unfolds the objectives, successes, and failures of the youth wings of two political parties founded in early 2006. The 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns are considered in relation to the theme of youth engagement. A key event in recent years was the March–April 2014 Sunflower Student Movement. The impact of this event and youth politics leading up to the 2016 presidential and legislative elections is discussed.

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Keywords: Taiwan, youth, party politics, student movements, Millennial Generation, Taiwanese Consciousness

Dr. Ryan Brading is a teaching fellow and research associate in the Department of Development Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, United Kingdom. His research focuses on populist politics and youth movements.

E-mail: <rb57@soas.ac.uk>

Introduction

An analysis explaining how young Taiwanese, with different needs, views, and interests than those of older generations, support and participate in party-political activities is currently missing from the literature. This article aims to highlight the efforts that have been made since 2006 by Taiwan's two leading parties (both of which formed youth wings) to reach the "hearts and minds" of the country's Millennial Generation – that demographic consisting of those born between 1980 and 2000. This paper outlines the key historical, nationalistic, and economic factors that have helped shape both Taiwan's current political landscape and the composition of its two main political parties.

This paper draws on a series of fieldwork interviews with various activists and young voters as well as with members of the Kuomintang's (KMT, 中國國民黨, Zhongguo Guomindang, GMD) Youth League (YL, 青年團, *qingniantuan*) and of the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP, 民主進步黨, Minzhu Jinbudang) Youth Council (YC, 青年委員會, *qingnian weiyuanhui*) in order to provide a rich account of the ways in which young people are encouraged to get involved in party modernisation, the events that took place, and why these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful. I discuss the electoral damage in 2008 caused by Chen Shui-bian's (陳水扁, Chen Shuibian) corruption scandals, young activists' support for the DPP, and the impressive victory of the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九, Ma Yingjiu) in the 2008 presidential race. I go on to examine the leadership shift in the DPP shortly after the party's 2008 electoral defeat, the role of youth politics in Taiwan's recent political development, Ma's second-term win (by a smaller margin) in January 2012, and the Sunflower Student Movement and 2016 presidential and legislative elections.

The present analysis consists of nine sections. The first addresses theoretical observations of young people's apathy towards politics. The next section reviews the KMT's authoritarian past, its gradual acceptance of local opposition groups, and how the young Taiwanese eventually made their demands for a fully fledged democracy heard. The section after that describes the political capital of youth (trendy politics), humbleness, being the underdog, and exuding "cleanness" during the 2000 presidential campaigns. Thereafter, how this humble and moderate approach differs from the radical anti-Chinese nation-

alistic approach the Green camp organised for Chen's 2004 re-election strategy will be demonstrated. Using primary sources, the section that follows that presents the KMT's Youth League, formed in January 2006 as a consequence of the party recognising the need to attract young voters, to have them participate in party politics, and to secure the next generation of political leaders. The section after that discusses the DPP's Youth Council, which was formed five weeks after the KMT's youth wing. The section thereafter examines the successes and failures of each party's youth strategies, drawing on the views of a young, pro-independence activist and the results of the 2008 presidential election. The last two sections discuss a number of topics: Ma's administration; the Wild Strawberry Student Movement (野草莓運動, *ye caomei yundong*); remarks made in England on 9 June 2011 by the new leader of the DPP, Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文, Cai Yingwen); Taiwan's politics after the continuation of a KMT leader in the presidency; the Sunflower Student Movement (太陽花學運, *taiyang hua xue yun*); and the addition of two new youth political parties, the New Power Party (NPP, 時代力量, Shidai Liliang) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP, 社會民主黨, Shehui Minzhudang), to the electoral ballots, which contributed to the KMT's humiliating defeat in the presidential and legislative elections held on 16 January 2016.

Young People: Disengaged and Apolitical

O'Toole et al. claim that the current democratic deficit is associated with young people having little interest in voting and in formal politics in general. They argue that the notion of politics "is constrained by a narrow definition of political participation and a top-down research methodology" which results in only two categories: political participation and political apathy (non-participation) (O'Toole et al. 2003: 45–46). These results are gathered by employing "quantitative methods, which, in striving for parsimonious explanatory models, can make crude simplifications." O'Toole et al. describe this methodological flaw through the following example:

An individual who does not vote, or engage in other conventional activities, but who is active informally in the local community campaigning against racism, might be characterised by mainstream research as politically apathetic. This ignores and misclassifies a range of individuals and, furthermore, comes close to setting the

boundaries of what is to be considered as legitimate political participation. (O'Toole et al. 2003: 48)

O'Toole et al. also point out that much of the mainstream literature of political participation fails to assess "particular circumstances and issues that affect young people." There is no differentiation "between the arenas in which young people, as distinct from adults, might be engaged" (O'Toole et al. 2003: 48). In other words, attempts to understand why this new generation are simply not interested in politics fail to answer this question because existing methods and their scope are self-limiting, thereby excluding and dismissing young people's legitimate political concerns, expectations, and choices.

In trying to explain youth political participation in the United Kingdom, Madsen Pirie and Robert Worcester refer to the "Millennial Generation," which they define as "young adults who reach the age of 21 just before or just after the turn of the millennium" (Pirie and Worcester 1998: 8). Pirie and Worcester claim that the idea of having a job for life is something of the past for the Millennial Generation. They are "more ferociously brand-conscious than their predecessors," and they are "the first Internet generation" (Pirie and Worcester 1998: 9). Regarding their attitude towards politics, Pirie and Worcester's research reveals interesting findings. Their surveys show that "young people are not deterred from voting in local elections because it is difficult or awkward, but because they cannot be bothered" (Pirie and Worcester 2000: 13). Young people have little time to think about the future of political processes from a national perspective or to participate at a local level (Pirie and Worcester 2000: 13).

Young people want to be "the doers and the go-getters who will transform tomorrow's world" (Pirie and Worcester 2000: 24); however, they are not interested in being the activists "on a social or community level" (Pirie and Worcester 2000: 24). Pirie and Worcester suggest that their "findings indicate that the ignorance which they [young people] profess about community and social institutions is indeed based on their low valuation of them" (2000: 24) – primarily because young people think there is no need to know. "Citizenship, insofar as it involves participation in the community, is the big turn-off" (Pirie and Worcester 2000: 24).

Rys Farthing rightly argues that there is a democratic deficit in Western democracies. Through education, there have been attempts

to “fix’ the deficit in young people,” and “make politics ‘cool’ to seduce young people” (Farthing 2010: 183). Farthing notes that “cool” musicians have helped to build a political brand, rather than reflect the voice and concerns of this generation.

This cool hunting is at best an inauthentic exercise that runs the high risk of being counterproductive, as young people become even more cynical about the value of their “culture” and opinion. (Farthing 2010: 183)

Farthing refers to civic education programmes in England, Scotland, and Australia and discusses efforts to teach “apathetic young people about the importance of politics” (Farthing 2010: 184). Politicians have also tried to “sell” themselves by appealing to a youthful market” (Farthing 2010: 184) through popular music, such as Tony Blair’s Britpop movement using Oasis and Blur, Italy’s Silvio Berlusconi using Bono, and the holding of popular music events in the United States and Australia (Farthing 2010: 184).

According to Ulrich Beck, young people “practise a highly political disavowal of politicians” and “hate organisations for their formalism and their convoluted and dishonest call for ‘selfless’ commitment” (Beck 2001: 158). Beck suggests that

all parties are suffering because the “me generation” may participate in demonstrations and in circulating petitions, but it finds the business of organised politics, with its debates on agendas and proposals, intensely boring. (Beck 2001: 158–159)

Beck also states:

Young people have finally discovered something for themselves, something to make adults panic: fun, fun sports, fun music, fun consumption, fun life. But politics, as currently practised and represented, has nothing at all to do with fun. On the contrary, it acts like a dead-certain killjoy and hence young people are unpolitical, according to superficial impressions and in their own understanding, but in a very political way. (Beck 2001: 158–159)

Even though Beck is referring to young people in Western Europe, and the other authors speak of youth in Western societies, these theoretical observations could still shed some light on youth attitudes towards politics in Taiwan. They could help explain why Taiwan’s Millennial Generation appears to be apolitical and disengaged in party politics and political affairs in general. In what follows, I argue that in

spite of differences between the West and the East, modern global societies share striking similarities, particularly as Asian societal and cultural trends have shifted due to the gradual implementation of consumerism as an ideology (the embodiment of neo-liberal attitudes) and as a way of life around the world.

Using primary and secondary material, in the coming empirical sections I draw on Pirie and Worcester's use and definition of the term "Millennial Generation" and on Farthing's observations about the use of "cool musicians" for party campaigning, and I further highlight parallels between Taiwan's youth and Beck's "fun" and "me generation" commentary. The next section reviews the increase in youth involvement in Taiwanese politics and examines Taiwan's shift from an authoritarian system to a democratic one. Drawing upon my extensive research on party modernisation strategies aimed at increasing young people's political engagement, I analyse the relationship between young people and politics in this new Asian democracy – a democracy built on party modernisation strategies that seek to encourage young people to take an active role in party politics.

Historical Background

Following the KMT's exile to Taiwan in 1949, its main priority was to rebuild its military power and return to the mainland. As a consequence of the one-party system, via local elections, Taiwanese were incorporated into the KMT apparatus. Martial law provided the regime with a legal framework for repressing dissent, censoring publications, and outlawing new political parties (Long 1991: 189). By the late 1960s, Taiwanese were permitted to elect a small number of legislators, thus giving the opposition a platform to demand democratic reforms and intellectuals a platform to launch pro-democracy publications. These two groups later formed the *Dangwai Movement* (黨外運動, *dangwai yundong*, "outside the party movement") (Rigger 2001: 7).

The movement attracted people from all sectors of Taiwan's society. Shelley Rigger notes that "their backgrounds and ideologies varied widely." Nevertheless, they "shared one common goal: they wanted the Taiwanese to throw off centuries of foreign domination and rule themselves. They wanted democracy" (Rigger 2001: 7). In December 1979 a demonstration commemorating International Human Rights Day in the city of Gaoxiong (高雄) turned violent and became

a key event in the history of Taiwan's democratisation. Eight Dangwai members were indicted on subversion charges and tried in military courts. Future key political figures Chen Shui-bian, Frank Hsieh (謝長廷, Xie Changting), and Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌, Su Zhenchang) were part of their legal defence team (Rigger 2001: 20–21). In September 1986 Dangwai members founded the DPP.

When martial law (known as the White Terror, 白色恐怖, *baise kongbu*) ended in 1987, the KMT was a fundamentally different party. As Dafydd Fell puts it, the KMT

had almost ceased the slogan of recovering the Chinese mainland; instead it increasingly based its legitimacy on its economic record, democratic reforms and electoral performance. (Fell 2005: 12)

The Taiwanese-born president, Lee Teng-hui (李登輝, Li Denghui), accelerated the institutional changes Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國, Jiang Jingguo) had started. In March 1990 the Wild Lily Movement (野百合學運, *yebaihe xueyun*), made up of university students, demanded that Lee Teng-hui further dismantle the KMT's authoritarian structure and advance democratic reforms.

Constitutional revisions concluded with the first direct presidential elections in 1996. Nonetheless, despite Lee Teng-hui's popularity and ability to push through institutional reforms, corruption scandals gave the KMT the shameful "black gold" image (Fell 2005: 12). Internal party conflict also fragmented the party. During the 2000 presidential election, the DPP benefitted from an internal KMT rift between Lien Chan (連戰, Lian Zhan), the party's presidential candidate, and James Soong (宋楚瑜, Song Chuyu), a maverick who decided to run as an independent (Mattlin 2004: 168).

Taiwanese were successfully indoctrinated into China's National Consciousness, which the KMT had been implementing since 1949. Nonetheless, the KMT recognised that reinforcing an authoritarian one-party system was an unsustainable strategy. This opened the door for Taiwanese citizens to politically express their views, which eventually led them to form the DPP, which was considered a "local" political party. Reference will be made to the historical context presented in this section. As the main goal of this analysis is to highlight the relationship between young people and party politics, the next section examines how Taiwan's Millennial Generation voters were

attracted to the message the DPP used to promote its 2000 presidential candidate.

Young and New: The Electoral Strategy

The DPP's 2000 presidential campaign used various techniques (e.g. television ads) to portray their 49-year-old candidate, Chen Shui-bian (A-Bian), as a humble Taiwanese, a famous dissident lawyer, and a trustworthy leader. Gary Rawnsley (2004) claims that the decision to use Chen's nickname A-Bian as a brand was a political and financial success. A-Bian-branded merchandise included everything from T-shirts to dolls, coffee mugs, key rings, and more. The Bianmao, "an olive green hat with a tag featuring A-Bian, a small, cute character that represents but bears no likeness to Chen Shui-bian" was an easily identifiable product that united Chen's supporters (Rawnsley 2004: 214–215). According to Rigger,

the A-Bian epic encompasses his rise from poverty, his wife's devastating injury and dogged recovery, his jail sentence, unexpected victory in 1994, and unexpected loss in 1998. For his supporters, Chen Shui-bian, the self-styled "Son of Taiwan," is an icon whose personal struggles over the past fifty years mirror those of his country. (Chen 2000: 52; cited by Rigger 2001: 189)

A-Bian products were identity symbols that charmed young Taiwanese voters with their rather innocent and cute designs. They brought together common Taiwanese – especially the young, who were captivated by the hopes and dreams A-Bian represented. Chen's own political persona was a symbolic construction that provided hope and an imaginary promise for the common people of Taiwan. During the 2000 presidential election campaign, A-Bian was effectively marketed as the epitome of many Taiwanese. With a moderate, cute, and harmless symbol (similar to Hello Kitty), the DPP managed to create a powerful electoral ticket. Internal conflict in the KMT and allegations of corruption also boosted the leadership change A-Bian represented.

An opinion poll conducted on 23 January 2000 revealed that 43 per cent of 20- to 29-year-olds would vote for Chen Shui-bian; 30 per cent, for James Soong; and 15 per cent, for Lien Chan (the KMT candidate) – 10 per cent were undecided (TVBS Poll Centre 2000). The polls proved to be quite accurate, as Chen Shui-bian won with 39.3 per cent of the vote, while James Soong and Lien Chan secured

36.8 per cent and 23.1 per cent, respectively (CEC 2000). The young vote played a key role in the DPP's first presidential victory. On 23 October 2001 Tien Hsin (田欣, Tian Xin), the DPP's director of the Department of International Affairs, said that

if people are satisfied with the present economic development and are unwilling to destroy the status quo, then we know we do not need to go that far yet. In this situation the DPP must take a more pragmatic position, a more flexible position. (Fell 2005: 122)

The possibility and realisation of electing a young leader previously excluded from a position of power presented an opportunity to construct a new hegemonic project in Taiwan. Those who had previously challenged the system became victims of the White Terror. Thus, Chen's victory in the 2000 presidential election effectively symbolised the emergence of a new Taiwan. By the 1990s, the KMT's Chinese hegemonic identity had started to blur, being slowly displaced by a new form of political identification (e.g. the Wild Lily Movement) that demanded fully fledged democracy. As Rigger puts it, "Chen Shui-bian's political career spotlights key elements of the A-Bian phenomenon like 'joy, passion, and tears.'" Chen became the man who captured "the most true feelings and devotion of the Taiwanese people" (Rigger 2001: 189–190).

A-Bian's presidential victory was of great socio-political significance for Taiwanese society. As one young Chen supporter was quoted in a BBC interview as saying, "Maybe 10 years from now, I'll be able to show this A-Bian T-shirt to my children and say: Ten years ago, Taiwan experienced people power." The article went on to state, "Chen's campaign focused on the issue of money, politics, and corruption, pervading the KMT's decades-long rule" (*BBC News* 2000). However, A-Bian fever quickly subsided. In January 2001 an assistant manager of the A-Bian Hat Factory said it was "a bad time to talk about any products related to President Chen, especially with the unfavourable situation and bad economy" (*Taipei Times* 2001).

Understandably, Chen's 2004 re-election campaign required a new form of narrative that carried a radical and direct message. The newly unified KMT (for the first time in opposition) used Chen's poor handling of the economy to appeal to young voters. Youth support for the DPP had been natural because young people either challenged the KMT's authoritarian, corrupt, and Chinese past or fol-

lowed family political lines. Hence, targeting Taiwan's Millennial Generation was not required at this stage.

The 2004 Presidential Election: “228 Hand-in-Hand” and Taiwanese Consciousness

Four years of DPP incumbency created the opportunity for Taiwanese democracy to engage in fundamental debates about national identity, the past, and the future of this rather undefined nation/province. Governmental power gave pro-independence political forces the opportunity to finally define the meaning of an independent Taiwanese hegemonic identity.

For the 2004 presidential election, the DPP discursively articulated a clear message to the nation: reflect on the country's horrific past, bring to an end the authoritarian structure that forced people to identify themselves as Chinese, defend Taiwanese land from a potential military invasion, and protect Taiwan from pro-unification mainlanders. This was a radical campaign strategy that sought to crystallise the meaning of Taiwanese Consciousness. By reviving and reinterpreting previously suppressed emotions, the DPP apparatus successfully mobilised Taiwan's popular base at the national level.

The 228 Hand-in-Hand Rally (228 百萬人手牽手護台灣, *baiwan renshou qianshou hu Taiwan*) was a Chen re-election campaign strategy that was organised by the pan-Green camp, which consisted of the DPP and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU, 台灣團結聯盟, Taiwan Tuanjie Lianmeng, a party founded in 2001 by Lee Teng-hui, the former leader of the KMT and ex-president of the Republic of China). This peaceful demonstration consisted of more than one million people creating a human chain nearly 600 kilometres long to protest China's military threat (*Taipei Times* 2004). Living in the south of Taiwan (Gaoxiang) in 2004, I observed that this form of political campaigning was promoting more antagonism and mistrust in society. My reading was that the pan-Green machinery, now without fear of consequences, wanted to mobilise the masses to finally express their previously repressed Taiwanese Consciousness. The image of the humble and cute A-Bian from the 2000 presidential campaign was transformed for his 2004 re-election bid, and his politics changed accordingly.

The pan-Blue camp in 2004 was an alliance between presidential candidate Lien Chan (KMT) and vice-presidential candidate James Soong (People First Party, PFP, 親民黨, Qin Min Dang). Each had previously run for president in the 2000 elections, combining to win 61.9 per cent of the vote, which, though it led to the eventual DPP victory, also laid the groundwork for the future pan-Blue alliance. According to a poll during the run-up to the 2004 election, however, the pan-Blue camp was performing poorly amongst young voters: only 38 per cent of 20- to 29-year-olds said they would vote for Lien, whereas 48 per cent indicated they would vote for Chen (despite his “us–them” nationalistic campaign); the remaining 14 per cent were undecided (TVBS Poll Centre 2004). This 10 per cent difference proved key on election day, as Chen won re-election in a close contest, with 50.1 per cent to Lien’s 49.9 per cent (CEC 2004) – a difference of only 29,518 votes. However, the opposition claimed that Chen benefitted from sympathy votes after he and his vice-presidential candidate were shot whilst campaigning. On 4 November 2004 the High Court confirmed Chen’s victory, but by the smaller margin of 25,563 votes. On 17 June 2005 the Supreme Court further examined problematic votes and again reduced the margin of victory, this time to 16,109 (Supreme Court 2005).

The combination of a pro-independence president, divisive anti-pan-Blue discourse, electoral events commemorating Taiwan’s traumatic past, and Taiwanese nationalism gave the people of Taiwan the opportunity to brush aside Chinese doctrines and collectively express what Taiwanese Consciousness (台灣意識, *Taiwan yishi*) meant to them. A fundamental shift occurred when Chen, the “Son of Taiwan,” was democratically elected as president: it initiated a phase of national identification. The awakening of Taiwanese Consciousness in 2004 unveiled new ethnic and socio-political terrain. The question is, however, did young voters support this new interpretation of Taiwanese Consciousness? In the following sections, I aim to identify the extent to which Taiwanese Consciousness has influenced the country’s Millennial Generation (from a party-political perspective).

After Chen’s re-election in 2004, the KMT formed a youth wing in order to forge a direct link to young voters. The party hoped that the popularity of Ma Ying-jeou (part of the KMT’s new generation), who had been mayor of Taipei since 1998 and would become party chairman in July 2005, would modernise the party’s image. In January

2006 Ma announced the launch of the KMT Youth League (Young KMT). Five weeks later, the DPP responded with the DPP Youth Council. To explain the methods and the aims of these competing “youth” wings, I draw on interviews conducted with party organisers from both the KMT and the DPP between 2006 and 2008.

KMT Youth League

After the party’s narrow defeat, Ma – the new KMT chairperson and 2008 presidential candidate – identified the need for a youth wing that could persuade young Taiwanese to support the KMT, participate in party politics, and take a leading role in the modernisation of the party. In order to compete with the DPP’s natural ability to attract young supporters, the KMT had to find ways to exploit Ma’s youth, good looks, and popularity. After two presidential defeats, the KMT recognised that as a political brand the party had to change its image to resonate with the electorate – similar to how the British Labour Party successfully did in the 1990s with its motto “new Labour, new Britain.”

Cementing the youth vote has been of great importance in Taiwan’s presidential elections since 2000. Table 1 gives an outline of the changes in Taiwan’s electoral market and the numbers of new eligible voters (20 is the minimum voting age) that political parties have to persuade to support their presidential candidate:

Table 1. New Voters

Year	Registered voters	Voter turnout (%)	New voters
1996	14,313,288	76.04	
2000	15,462,625	82.69	1,149,337
2004	16,507,179	80.28	1,044,554
2008	17,321,622	76.33	814,443
2012	18,086,455	74.38	764,833
2016	18,782,991	66.27	696,536

In my view, youth support played a key role in Chen’s ability to increase the number of votes he won from 4,977,697 in 2000 to 6,471,970 in 2004 – an increase of nearly 1.5 million votes. He achieved this feat despite running a nationalistic campaign and over-

seeing a sluggish economy during his first term in office. Lien and Soong received a combined 7,590,485 votes in the 2000 presidential election. However, the Lien–Soong ticket garnered only 6,442,452 votes during the 2004 election, representing a loss of 1,148,033 votes for the pan-Blue camp. It is possible that a considerable chunk of the 19.72 per cent (3,255,460) of registered voters who abstained were only “moderate” pan-Blue supporters. After all, the Lien–Soong alliance essentially lacked a convincing narrative. Still, I argue that effective campaigning strategies targeting young voters were, and still are, key determinants in Taiwan’s presidential elections. It seems that political leaders from the KMT’s old guard failed to resonate with young voters. It is with this in mind that Chairman Ma organised the formation of the Young KMT (*People’s Daily* 2006). To shed some light on the objectives and strategies of this new KMT youth wing, I carried out interviews with Young KMT organisers five months after its foundation.

According to Lee Je Hwa (李哲華, Li Zhehua), the executive officer of the Young KMT,

Chairman Ma aims to establish change in the party with youth participation. He wants to touch people’s hearts through the Young KMT. Unfortunately, senior party members are still sceptical about the Young KMT. Attempts to modernise the party are seen as nasty retirement tactics. (Interview 1 2006)

Lee went on to say,

[The way the KMT] communicates with young people is dull compared with the DPP. Our objective is to improve our presence in universities and organise campus tours with Chairman Ma delivering speeches. (Interview 1 2006)

Lee also noted that “national identity and employment influence one another. We support the status quo. Government policies must help increase employment opportunities for young people” (Interview 1 2006).

As Lin Yi Shih (林益世, Lin Yishi), a KMT legislator and head of the KMT youth wing, pointed out,

The KMT lacks young people’s involvement because it is regarded as old and conservative. When the KMT was in power, it was difficult for young people to participate in community affairs. Politicians were re-elected again and again, and hence blocking oppor-

tunities for newcomers. This explains why the DPP has been so successful in attracting young people. (Interview 2 2006)

Lin went on to say,

We want to show that the KMT is changing. Ma's clean image and popularity can make the difference and attract young people. However, using "Ma" as a brand will only help us get the votes we need to win the 2008 presidential election. Our main objective is to transform the KMT's reputation. (Interview 2 2006)

Referring to the pan-Green camp, Lin added,

There are politicians promoting divisive conflict using national identity for party electoral propaganda. Previously, some Taiwanese felt [they were] being treated unfairly and discriminated [against] by the Chinese. However, why are they encouraging young people to hate Chinese today? This is a difficult task because there is no logic or reason behind it. (Interview 2 2006)

These interviews reveal interesting aspects about the Young KMT. Its main focus was to market Chairman Ma's image at universities and open a channel for young Taiwanese to get involved in party affairs. By using Ma, they hoped to finally get rid of that ghost of authoritarianism – evidenced by events such as the 228 Incident (二二八事件, *er er ba shijian*) and the era of the White Terror – that still haunted the KMT's image. I got the impression that the KMT's White Terror apparatus was seen as something of the past and should therefore not interfere with current politics, and that it is unlikely to be used to persuade young Taiwanese. In terms of national identity, the KMT takes an indefinite status quo position.

Referring to the nationalistic identity, the KMT claims to be Taiwanese. This is interpreted as a shift from Chinese Consciousness to Taiwanese Consciousness. Still, the party was founded in China, and leaders like Lien Chan, James Soong, and Ma were born on the mainland. Moreover, internal party practices are still influenced by the operational mechanisms (关系, *guanxi*) the KMT employed when it was forced into exile in 1949. In order to win the hearts and minds of the electorate, the KMT has been trying to shake off its Chinese past and reassure the populace that it is protecting Taiwan's national interests and has no hidden reunification agenda. The DPP, the true Taiwanese homegrown party, has successfully exploited these salient differences to mobilise the masses. It has portrayed itself as the under-

dog and crafted divisive political rhetoric and campaigning events that resonate with nationalistic sentiments. Shortly after meeting with members of the Young KMT, I interviewed the director of the DPP Youth Council.

DPP Youth Council

Thirty-six days after the Young KMT was formed, the DPP launched their Youth Council. A *Taipei Times* reporter noted that the aim of this new committee was to encourage youth participation in political affairs and further develop the DPP (*Taipei Times* 2006).

According to Tseng Wen-sheng (曾文生, Zeng Wensheng), director of the DPP's youth development activities,

The idea of the Youth Council is to organise young people and give them proper training. Previously, young people have helped a lot; however, the DPP never had a training programme for those interested in politics. (Interview 3 2006)

It is evident that the DPP greatly benefitted from the full engagement of young Taiwanese in the phase of political change the DPP strived for. However, once in government, the supply of enthusiastic young volunteers dropped. Offering young people a specialised political training programme was an attempt to market the party and revive the extensive support it previously enjoyed amongst Taiwanese youth.

This training programme will carefully explain the economic and social policies the government has taken in the last six years. We can learn a lot from young people. Training young Taiwanese is important for the future of the party. (Interview 3 2006)

Tseng also lamented the unfortunate “recent news about Chen’s family corruption scandals” – not only was it “something that is against the DPP’s values” but it “could affect the support we get from young people” (Interview 3 2006).

With regard to the timing of the announcement of the Youth Council, Tseng bluntly replied:

The KMT started with the “China Youth Corps” [中國青年救國團, Zhongguo qingnian jiuguotuan]. Now they are trying to copy us. The KMT is trying to win the youth vote. The truth is that Ma

Ying-jeou is ignoring the past. He secretly thinks Taiwan is part of China. (Interview 3 2006)

Tseng continued,

We are promoting Taiwan's national consensus (Taiwanisation). Foreign people have ruled Taiwan for many years. The DPP advocates for the right of Taiwanese to govern this island, not those foreign invaders. (Interview 3 2006)

Tseng added,

In our recent surveys, young people don't consider the status quo a problem; however, if Taiwan has a war with China, they would support Taiwan's independence. National self-determination is of great significance to the DPP. Most of the KMT's political agenda is connected with China. They are not Taiwanese. (Interview 3 2006)

Tseng's comments appear to reveal a well-embedded party template to depict the KMT as a representative of China.

Youth support and a desire to be part of the DPP's anti-KMT, anti-corruption, and pro-democracy struggle was essential for the expansion of the party. However, after defeating the KMT in two presidential elections, the political attraction of the DPP began to erode. It seems that Chen's corruption charges did in fact seriously affect the DPP's image. As Fell rightly argues,

The DPP's failure to really deal with its image of political corruption meant that the issue remained the dominant issue for the remainder of the DPP's second term. The KMT was able to win in 2008 by framing the election as a referendum on Chen's corruption scandals. (Fell 2014)

Furthermore, Taiwan's Millennial Generation is not like previous generations: they appear to be bored with politics, paying more attention to urgent issues related to employment prospects and economic growth.

The next presidential election was to take place in March 2008. It would provide a unique opportunity to assess which youth-wing strategy was more effective. The following section draws on field-work conducted during the 2008 presidential campaign to discuss the development of the Young KMT and the DPP Youth Council, the activities of young pro-independence supporters, and the election results.

Youth in the 2008 Presidential Election

There were 1.8 million more young votes up for grabs (more than 10 per cent of registered voters) in 2008 than in 2000. Therefore, both the KMT and the DPP faced constant pressure to recruit young activists and modernise the image of their parties, both of which were showing signs of detachment from the needs and aspirations of young Taiwanese.

According to Chen Ping (陳江彬, Chen Jiangbin), executive officer of the Young KMT,

Chairman Ma's visits to university campuses took place. However, we failed to get the participation and feedback the Youth League was hoping for. It is very difficult for us. Students know that the KMT Youth League is trying to reach them. (Interview 4 2008)

Chen estimated that

90 per cent of young people are not interested in participating with us. They just don't care. However, they are very concerned about the economy. They want an economy that offers job opportunities and chances to develop their professional skills. (Interview 4 2008)

As Chen noted,

Economic growth is the key. There is no need to compete with the DPP in organising events. They make excellent events and emotional speeches in Taiwanese (not Chinese). They are not interested in policymaking at all. The DPP is not a political party, but a political marketing public relations company. Young people support the DPP because there is a lot of "passion" involved. (Interview 4 2008)

However, Chen argued that

because of corruption charges against A-Bian, young people will reconsider their support for the DPP. Our message is very simple: inform young people that with the KMT it'd be easier to find work. (Interview 4 2008)

As Tseng himself admitted, the DPP's Youth Council strategy "got nowhere" (Interview 5 2008). Nonetheless, the DPP did enjoy noticeable youth participation during its 2008 presidential campaign in spite of the Youth Council's failure. This included a group of 15 young Taiwanese campaigning with a clear message (in English):

“Love of Taiwan. Reversing the Tide. Protecting Taiwan.” They conveyed their concerns about Taiwan to the people during a 22-day, 510-kilometre walk round the island. The group’s objective was to persuade undecided voters to support the DPP. As Samuel Lang (郎恩祺, Lang Enqi), one of the 15 youngsters, stressed,

This journey wasn’t political propaganda, not even when the DPP presidential candidate, Frank Shieh, visited us during our long walking trip. Our message was to inform people that we care about Taiwan. (Interview 6 2008)

Another youth-related activity that supported the DPP was “Freddy Action.” Freddy Lin, the lead singer of a rock band called Chthonic, was the director of the DPP’s youth campaign. Some of the band’s lyrics refer to Taiwan’s “loss of national identity and the sometimes turbulent history of their homeland recurring themes” (Chthonic 2009). They make reference to the infamous “228 Incident,” the deadliest massacre in Taiwanese history. “Tens of thousands of Taiwanese were killed by the Chinese army” (Chthonic 2009). Still, it is not clear if these youth activities, which are infused with nationalistic sentiments, convinced young people to vote for the DPP. Nonetheless, the intention of “Freddy Action,” to use music and celebrity status to remind Taiwan’s Millennial Generation of the KMT’s repressive past was to divert attention from the employment challenges young people were facing and from Chen’s corruption scandals. As Farthing suggests, politicians use “cool” musicians to build a political brand but this does not necessarily mean the voice and concerns of a generation are represented.

According to an opinion poll conducted on 21 March 2008, 53 per cent of 20- to 29-year-old voters would vote for Ma, while 38 per cent would choose Frank Hsieh; 10 per cent were undecided (TVBS Poll Centre 2008). The polls showed that young people were changing sides. The election results confirmed this, with Ma Ying-jeou (KMT) winning 58.45 per cent of the vote, and Frank Hsieh managing only 41.33 per cent (CEC 2008).

It appears that the Young KMT’s tactic of focusing on Chen’s poor economic performance was effective. Their claim was that with Ma in government, economic development and employment opportunities were possible – something which had been seriously hindered by Chen. Furthermore, Ma’s clean image vis-à-vis Chen’s embarrassing corruption allegations seriously damaged the DPP’s Hsieh–Su

ticket, and Ma's "new" KMT reaped the electoral rewards. Some of the debatable sympathy votes Chen received after the shooting incident before the 2004 election became protest votes in 2008. I argue that had Chen not been facing corruption charges, the DPP would have been able to maintain its 2004 electoral base (1,027,021 votes were lost in the meantime) and, potentially, beat the KMT in the presidential race for the third time in succession. Instead, they were defeated by 2,214,065 votes in what can only be described as a humiliating loss. After the DPP's eight years in power, Taiwanese politics underwent a great shift.

Ma's Government, the Wild Student Strawberry Movement, and the 2012 Re-Election

Ma's prime objective was to revive the sluggish economy he inherited. Nonetheless, the attempt to improve Taiwan's economy was slow, due to an unprecedented global recession. President Ma instigated a set of economic ties with China to redress the imbalance in the trade flow between the two sides in order to boost Taiwan's economy. However, Ma's quick decision to improve relations with China opened a set of criticisms about his true intentions for Taiwan and, in turn, his plans to initiate a re-unification process with the mainland.

Less than six months after taking office, students showed their discontent with Ma's administration. On 6 November 2008, some 500 university students from the National Taiwan University organised a sit-in protest in front of the Executive Yuan to demonstrate against the visit of Chen Yulin, the chairman of China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits. Eventually, the students were violently cleared by the police. The movement was sarcastically called the Wild Strawberry Movement by students, capturing the older generation's perspective of the younger generation as being soft as strawberries – pampered consumerists who lacked political beliefs. The Wild Strawberry Movement went on to protest against the recently approved Assembly and Parade Law (*Taipei Times* 2008). According to Lin Huan-yi (Lin Huanyi), a member of the Wild Strawberry Movement, following these initial demonstrations, "Student protests extended to other cities of Taiwan. Students organised themselves using an online student BBS blog forum" (Interview 7 2009).

Lin Huan-yi notes that

the DPP tried to blend in with the students and introduce political practices into the movement. We made it clear to the DPP, we didn't want to be part of their political agenda. (Interview 7 2009)

By June 2009, however, Lin says that

it became obvious that the movement lacked radical objectives. There was no clear direction and students no longer paid any attention to the organisers [...] even the government ascribed no importance to our claims and demands. We wanted to reconstruct the Wild Lily Student Movement. The difference is that Wild Strawberry students mainly came from a middle-class upbringing, and didn't have a clear socio-political agenda. Wild Lily students were different. (Interview 7 2009)

Students wanted to be part of something “cool” and challenge the establishment; however, when the novelty factor wore off, students found no reason to protest. In other words, when that element of “fun” Beck describes died out, the Millennial Generation (the soft, pampered consumerists) returned to their “me generation” world of selfies and ideological consumerism.

Even though these theoretical observations refer to the behaviour of youngsters in Western liberal democracies, I argue that these viewpoints travel and thus provide valuable insights into how this student-led event started, spread, and declined in this democratic Asian society. The Wild Strawberry Movement provided Taiwan's “Internet Generation” with exciting moments, making them feel like the “doers and the go-getters” in a society where traditional political parties had failed to provide a stage for citizens to openly express their views and actively influence government policies.

According to one member of the Young KMT, young people joining the Young KMT with the intention of moving up the political ladder will be disappointed, as those without family connections in the KMT have no room for progress. At present, young people who move up through the selective KMT party structure are those with the right family connections (*guanxi*). Within the KMT, it is difficult to express one's views to senior party members. The DPP still has a flat structure and thus provides opportunities to young people. However, as the DPP party structure matures, young people with strong party connections could overshadow any newcomers (Anonymous 1 2009).

The DPP has also had to go through a process of diversification in order to revive its popularity, as a result promoting a more suitable political approach to a rapidly changing society. After the rather embarrassing defeat in the 2008 presidential election, the DPP selected Tsai Ing-wen as the chairperson of the party. Unlike her predecessors, Tsai was not involved in the political struggle during the White Terror period. Instead, she had pursued an academic career before joining the DPP in 2004. Tsai faced veteran Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌, Su Zhenchang) in a close race for the presidential nomination. The decision to select Tsai was a clear sign that the DPP wanted to evolve and transcend its political platform. The DPP's emphasis on Tsai's status as the first female presidential candidate and her academic background reveals the party's attempt to rebrand itself and be seen as the less agonistic "new DPP." This change in approach could signal the end of anti-KMT and anti-China discourse as well as indicate the DPP's attempt to mobilise the masses by demonising a constructed enemy (rather than a political opponent), using the Hoklo dialect (閩南語, *minnanyu*) as a tactic.

During a speech at SOAS, University of London, on 9 June 2011, Tsai pointed out that "there used to be a qualification for Taiwanese politicians to become a leader; that is, you have to spend some time in jail before you get elected." She went on to say that since the 2008 defeat, however, that "even though the old guard still [hasn't] accept[ed] change, many other DPP members [have] recognised that change is needed." Tsai argued that "the DPP is primarily dominated by men who communicate using Hoklo." Tsai said of the beginning of her tenure, "My Taiwanese was poor. I could hardly communicate with people. However, after three years as chairperson, I have learned Taiwanese. Now, I can speak to the public. This is another qualification to be a leader of the DPP." She acknowledged that her selection as came under fire due to her "language inability" and lack of "revolutionary" credentials. Nonetheless, she contends that many "have recognised that it is time for the party and Taiwan to change. Electing a woman educated abroad shows that the DPP still is a progressive party" (Tsai 2011b).

In a presidential campaign ad, Tsai tried to capitalise on her academic background and experience overseas. The video clip starts with shots taken during her visit to Europe from May to June 2011 – accompanied by messages in English stating: *Where are you? Taiwan, what*

do you want? Taiwan, where are you going? What's next? TAIWAN NEXT. Tsai reminisces about her days in London and what she learned during her doctoral studies at the London School of Economics. She recollects that a particular professor had stressed that rational thinking and respect ultimately brings prosperity to a society. She also highlights the importance of integrating Taiwan into the world (Tsai 2011a). This ad attempted to demonstrate that the DPP's political platform had been modernised with a new type of leadership. Its objective was to convince voters that Tsai, a Taiwanese woman who has an international, rational, and progressive outlook could make Taiwan a prosperous country. Tsai using the English language, studying overseas, and being a Taiwanese representing the country abroad all served to carefully target new voters.

In the seminar and campaign ad, Tsai tried to market the DPP as a new and moderate political party. Her story about the party-internal resistance to change and how she could revive the DPP into a progressive party once again has opened a new phase of this “pro-independence” political project. She claimed that none of her “revolutionary” predecessors had actually offered anything new. Tsai wanted to connect with Taiwanese – using a different approach. Without having to mobilise the masses with a “previously repressed” Taiwanese Consciousness discourse, the electoral backing of grassroots supporters is guaranteed. Tsai's strategy is to convince Taiwan's Millennial Generation, whose views of politics and whose individual needs and desires differ from those of older generations, of the merits of the DPP. Tsai's “non-revolutionary” and international academic background, her moderate outlook, and her being the first woman to run for the presidency offered a new form of politics in Taiwan.

According to a 29 December 2011 opinion poll, 44 per cent of 20- to 29-year-olds said they would vote for Tsai; 38 per cent, for Ma; and 10 per cent, for James Soong – the other 14 per cent were undecided (TVBS Poll Centre 2011). Nonetheless, Ma was re-elected with 51.60 per cent of the vote (6,891,139), which represented a loss of 767,875 votes from 2008. Tsai received 45.63 per cent of the vote (6,093,578), which was 648,629 votes more than the DPP got in 2008. Soong received 2.76 per cent of the vote (369,588) (CEC 2012). For the 2012 election, 764,833 new young Taiwanese were included on the electoral register. In 2008 the polls stated that 58 per cent of 20- to 29-year-olds would vote for Ma. However, Ma's popularity

with young voters seemed to have dropped by 20 per cent by 2012. Student protests (e.g. the Wild Strawberry Movement), direct economic accords with China, and an inability to turn the economy around were factors that contributed to the decline in Ma's approval rating.

Tanguy Le Pesant notes that even though Tsai was leading in the polls, Ma somehow managed to obtain a slight lead over his rival less than a week before the election. Based on interviews and discussions conducted in the framework of his research on young voters, despite those voters agreeing with Tsai's campaign – which consisted of criticising Ma's broken promises – Tsai failed to win over part of the young vote because she did not offer an alternative, but simply attacked Ma's record, a strategy which was initially very effective but in the end fell short (Le Pesant 2012: 79). Understandably, a proportion of young voters expected a clearly articulated government plan rather than attacks days before they cast their votes. Nonetheless, compared with previous DPP candidates, Tsai brings a new leadership style. Young people are more likely to connect with Tsai's moderate, studious, international, and modern political approach than they are with the emancipation and independence narrative her party predecessors used to stoke people's emotions.

The advancement of the DPP greatly depends on it continuing to modernise, which is based on balancing radical groups with a new generation of moderate forces in the party and rejecting the divisive "us–them" politics seen during 2004 presidential campaign. In line with the changing dynamics of the world economy, the DPP has to articulate rational party policies and define how all Taiwanese can be part of and participate in the growth of a stable country, irrespective of political colour.

Before concluding this analysis of youth movements, it is necessary to examine the Sunflower Student Movement, which emerged after Ma's 2012 re-election. Although this anti-KMT movement was based in part on youth uncertainty and identity, it was actually unexpected and generally non-partisan in nature. It is thus considered important because it gives us a glimpse of how Taiwan's youth might participate in party politics and vote during the 2016 presidential election.

The Sunflower Student Movement and the KMT's Electoral Defeats

On the night of 18 March 2014, more than 200 (mostly college) students broke through the police line guarding Taiwan's Legislative Yuan and occupied the Legislative Chamber. Students wanted to lodge a protest against the KMT's cross-Straits Service Trade Agreement (STA) bill. The next day, approximately 20,000 gathered outside the Legislative Yuan to support the student protest. Five hundred police officers confronted the protestors but failed to expel the students from the Legislative Chamber. Bill Cho (卓士昭, Zhuo Shizhao), vice minister of the Ministry of Economics, claimed that if students continued to block the cross-Straits STA in the Legislative Yuan, South Korea would accelerate their negotiations on a free trade agreement with mainland China, and Taiwan would lose a precious opportunity to gain the upper hand. Cho explained that employers found it difficult to raise wages because Taiwan's service industry is limited to a small domestic market and that the ratification of the STA would enable young Taiwanese to find additional job opportunities on the mainland (*All Taipei Newspapers* 2014a).

Five days after students occupied the Legislative Yuan, Premier Jiang Yi-hua (江宜樺, Jiang Yihua) went there to speak with the students and underline the importance and necessity of the STA that President Ma was proposing. However, the student protestors rejected the president's defence of this controversial agreement and demanded Jiang's resignation and an apology from Ma. The protestors later demanded that Ma withdraw the STA and "legislate a 'Statute Governing Oversight on Cross-Straits Agreements' as a precondition to start dialogue" (*China Times* 2014a). Ma responded with a press conference describing the role of the STA, failing to address not only the protesting students, but the Taiwanese people as a whole. Ma was speaking to those individual taxpayers working hard to elevate Taiwan's competitiveness. They have no time for Internet forums or engaging in online debates. The student occupation might cultivate a few new-generation DPP candidates and remind Taiwan how divided this society is – for example, reunification versus independence, Blue versus Green, northern versus southern Taiwan, old versus young, and rich versus poor (*China Times* 2014b).

Ma responded to student representatives by inviting them to the Presidential Palace for talks. The student leader Lin Fei-fan (林飛帆, Lin Feifan) replied, stating that he was willing to engage in dialogue with the president in an open forum to break the deadlock over the STA. Still, Ma's administration knew the students were opposed to matters other than the STA, such as the KMT government's perceived cosyng up to the mainland and failure to obtain the best terms for Taiwan. According to the KMT, such accusations are simply not true. Government agencies have held a total of 110 small-scale seminars with representatives from the domestic finance, video game, exhibition, shipping, printing, cosmetics, food, travel, advertising, and logistics sectors. Also, in 2013 three meetings were held in the Legislative Yuan in which the terms of the STA were discussed with the DPP, the KMT, the TSU, the PFP, and independent legislators. Ma has repeatedly emphasised that the Legislative Yuan must pass the agreement "solely for the sake of the future of Taiwan's economy." For the government, these are merely "policy" issues. "But for the DPP and the protesting students, these are reunification vs. independence issues" (*China Times* 2014a).

The perception that Ma and the KMT have a "Chinese Consciousness" and have thus failed to protect and secure Taiwan's interests seems flawed. It would perhaps be more appropriate to describe the Ma administration as having a "Taiwanese Competitiveness" mindset. As Sunflower students continued to occupy the Legislative Chamber, people opposing the protest began to voice their disapproval. On 3 April 2014 the National Development Council released the results of a survey showing that 57.6 per cent of respondents hoped the students would leave the Legislative Chamber to allow the Legislative Yuan to resume normal operations, while 48.6 per cent of the respondents agreed that the STA should be returned to the Interior Committee (內政委員會, *neizhang weiyuanhui*) and reviewed article by article. Furthermore, 69.3 per cent of respondents denounced the students for occupying the Cabinet House, destroying and stealing public property, and clashing with the police (*The United Daily News* 2014a).

Anti-Sunflower rallies were organised by people calling themselves "Carnations," a flower representing motherhood. They called on the students to leave the Legislative Chamber so that the public might consider the issue calmly. They also expressed their disapproval

of the students' decision to hang the national flag upside down (*All Taipei Newspapers* 2014b).

David Brown, a former US foreign service officer and a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, wrote in a letter to the Nelson Report that in the week before 17 March the DPP had repeatedly prevented the planned article-by-article review of the STA at the Legislative Yuan committee level. The student occupation of the Legislative Chamber suited the DPP's agenda to prevent the planned review of the STA. Brown claims in the letter that "the KMT has accused the DPP of instigating this action" (*The United Daily News* 2014b). According to the KMT's official website, "many believe the accusations" (*The United Daily News* 2014b). The day after the students stormed the Legislative Chamber, Su Tseng-chang, Tsai Ing-wen, Frank Hsieh, and Yu Shyi-kun (游錫堃, You Xikun) joined the students in support outside the Legislative Yuan (*The United Daily News* 2014b).

Whether there was contact between Sunflower leaders and pro-independence parties before and/or after the occupation is still unclear. Nonetheless, theoretical observations can help us explain the Sunflower Movement from a different angle and thus better comprehend what makes Taiwan's Millennial Generation tick. Following the start of his first term in 2008, Ma implemented a clear trade policy with China. He also had to deal with students protesting trade pacts with China. The Wild Strawberry Movement offered students a trendy, controversial, and exciting medium through which to challenge the authorities. However, when the frenzy faded, students lost interest. Drawing on Beck's theoretical use of "fun," students involved in the Sunflower Movement had fun besieging the Legislative Chamber for 23 days and demanding the resignation of the premier, an apology from the president, and the withdrawal of the STA.

The Sunflower Movement was better organised than the Wild Strawberry Movement and effectively challenged Ma's administration. It enabled students to express their concerns that the KMT government was gradually accepting further integration, therefore complying with China's hegemonic economic superpower operations – something which could ultimately limit Taiwan's ability to manoeuvre and independently decide its economic and political future. However, the Sunflower protestors lacked an understanding of the economic significance of the STA for Taiwan's future and disregarded the small-scale

seminars with industry representatives and the meetings in the Legislative Yuan. Regional integration (e.g. the European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the Mercado Común del Sur) is generally beneficial for all countries involved, whereas isolation in an ever-growing globalised world could seriously affect Taiwan's long-term competitiveness.

My reading is that, for the protestors, the STA became a symbol of Taiwan's future subordination to its powerful and threatening neighbour. They were convinced that they were defending the underdog against the KMT's hidden reunification agenda. The STA represented not a policy issue but rather an unfavourable direct economic link with China. The whole issue became a manifestation of the battle between those who champion reunification versus those who champion independence. By besieging the Legislature Chamber, "go-getter" students believed they were at the forefront of defending the nation. As Brown notes, on 18 March high-ranking DPP politicians showed their support for the students in the gathering outside the Legislative Yuan. The DPP used this anti-KMT protest as a strategic opportunity to be seen and to recruit more Millennial Generation activists.

As Pirie and Worcester argue, involvement in the community and being interested in social institutions is a "big turn-off" for the Millennial Generation. They want to be the "go-getters who will transform tomorrow's world"; however, participation and direct engagement "on a social or community level" is not for them. Even though the students' strategy succeeded in challenging Ma's administration, they had no desire to take their protest further by using established anti-KMT party machinery. Instead, student leaders opted to campaign for seats in the 2016 legislative election by forming their own alternative political parties (this will be discussed later). As Beck states, the "me generation" may take part in demonstrations and rallies, among other things, but organised politics and participation in debates on agendas and proposals is "intensely boring" for them. It seems that the Sunflower Movement had no intention of engaging with the political establishment through formal policy and political processes after occupying the Legislative Yuan chamber. Instead, by forming new political parties, students were able to keep and, ultimately, transcend that element of authenticity and Millennial Generation rebelliousness.

The victory of Ko Wen-je (柯文哲, Ke Wenzhe), an independent (backed by the DPP), in the mayoral election in Taipei less than two years before the 2016 presidential election could be widely interpreted as a test of confidence in Ma's China-friendly government (Hung and Gold 2014). Also, between 28 September and 15 December 2014, more than 30,000 protestors (known as the Anti-China Umbrella Movement) illegally occupied the centre of Hong Kong. The protestors campaigned for fully free elections to be held in the city. Beijing showed no willingness to compromise on the issue of universal suffrage. (Hong Kong's Chief Executive is picked by an election committee – with members most of whom are loyal or sympathetic to Beijing. Hongkongers want to elect the Chief Executive themselves.) The narratives of these anti-China student protests in Hong Kong are geopolitically different from those in Taiwan; however, Taiwanese “doers and go-getters” may understandably foresee a similar abuse of democratic rights in Taiwan should China's gradually increasing involvement in Taiwanese domestic affairs not be contested early on.

Nevertheless, facing a situation that many other countries in the world have struggled with, Ma had little option but to trade and establish direct links with China, an emerging economic superpower. The fact is, many taxpayers and other individuals and business sectors that depend on the mainland to expand their business activities (i.e. in the generations older than the Millennials) share Ma's “Taiwanese Competitiveness” logic. In this context, nationalism becomes secondary.

For the 2016 presidential and legislative elections, student leaders formed two political parties in early 2015 and became legislative candidates. The New Power Party (NPP) won 5 of the 113 seats in the Legislative Yuan, receiving 6.11 per cent (744,315) of votes cast (CEC 2016). In addition to various Sunflower student leaders, Freddy Lin – the lead singer of the rock band Chthonic and the director of the DPP's 2008 youth presidential campaign – also became an NPP legislator. The second new party was the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which advocated around issues such as economic development, social equality, and the environment. The SDP had a smaller campaigning force and thus decided to form an alliance with the Green Party (綠黨, Lüdang). Of the 11 district candidates of the alliance between the Green Party Taiwan and Social Democratic Party (綠黨社會民主黨聯盟, Lüdang shehui minzhudang lianmeng), six were SDP members.

Despite receiving 2.52 per cent (308,106) of the vote, the alliance failed to win a seat in the Legislative Yuan.

According to an opinion poll conducted on 12 January 2016, 62 per cent of 20- to 29-year-old voters said they would vote for Tsai Ing-wen (DPP); 13 per cent, for the KMT candidate Eric Chu (朱立倫, Zhu Lilun); and 10 per cent, for James Soong (PFP). Fifteen per cent were undecided (TVBS Poll Centre 2016). These figures suggest that young voters wanted another party in power. The election results revealed just how unpopular the KMT had become. Tsai won with a comfortable majority of 56.12 per cent (6,894,744), whereas Chu received only 31.04 per cent (3,831,365) of the vote. Meanwhile, the veteran Soong received 12.84 per cent (1,576,861) of the vote in what was his third attempt at winning the presidency. Of the 64 seats the KMT had won in the 2012 legislative election, it managed to keep only 35 in 2016. The DPP won 68 seats; the NPP, 5; the PFP, 3; and an independent, 1. Turnout was 66.27 per cent, the lowest in Taiwan's history (CEC 2016). Due to the set of circumstances discussed earlier, Tsai and the other legislative candidates representing the DPP, NPP, SDP–Green Alliance, and so on, were more attractive nominees for Taiwan's 696,536 new voters.

An interview with Shaina Wang (王寶萱, Wang Baoxuan) – a former independent candidate who joined the SDP when she decided to campaign on the SDP–Green Alliance ticket in Taoyuan City (桃園市) (Constituency 1) – after the January 2016 elections reveals key aspects about people's perceptions of traditional party politics and the need for alternative political movements. Wang decided to join because “the policies of the alliance focused on local issues” (Interview 8 2016). Whilst campaigning, some voters had told Wang: “We are not going to vote because we don't have anyone to vote for. There is no difference between the KMT and the DPP” (Interview 8 2016). Wang also said that

many people expected change when a DPP candidate replaced a KMT mayor in December 2014. However, nothing has changed. People now think that politicians are only concerned about their interests and how to make money. (Interview 8 2016)

Wang noted that

being young and educated was a plus point. Some of my 15,802 (8.68 per cent) voters were KMT supporters. Indeed, I contributed to the defeat of the KMT incumbent. (Interview 8 2016)

Wang also pointed out that

the NPP got elected because they have “stars” and they speak simple things like “we need to give the power back to the people” and “we need to stand up for Taiwan.” They also had a successful campaign because they had a lot of resources. (Interview 8 2016)

Although both youth-based political parties had different policy strategies, it seems that the NPP’s success consisted of “Taiwanese Consciousness”-charged slogans advocated by student/musician “stars” who enjoyed media-driven “doer and go-getter” celebrity status and ample campaign resources.

Less than a month before election day, I asked young people in the south of Taiwan about their views on the political system. Disappointed with the KMT, Joanne Wang (王裕棻, Wang Yufen) said,

I voted twice for Ma and the KMT ticket. Now, I feel that they seem to be more interested in protecting the interests of powerful business tycoons – for example, the Wei family oil cooking scandal. (Interview 9 2015; see Huang 2014)

Wang also said:

I cannot accept the way they changed a leader. The KMT nominated Hung Hsiu-chu [洪秀柱, Hong Xiuzhu] as the party’s presidential candidate; however, shortly afterwards Eric Chu replaced her. The party is in a shambles. Thus, I’ve decided not to vote. (Interview 9 2015)

Chris Tang (唐其祿, Tang Qilu), a young Taiwanese in his early thirties, said:

I have two young kids and I am very concerned about the future of Taiwan. The KMT is a liability for Taiwan because they seem to be more interested in pleasing China [...] than representing and protecting us. (Interview 10 2015)

Against this backdrop, the KMT has been forced to do some soul searching after an embarrassing defeat in the 2016 presidential and legislative elections. Before looking to attract young and new voters, the party needs to examine what the KMT represents as a political brand in Taiwan’s vibrant democratic society. The DPP electorally

exploited this unique opportunity to return to the presidency and secure its first-ever majority in the Legislative Yuan. Outside traditional party political structures, Taiwan's Millennial Generation has found a platform to challenge the KMT and make politics fun. Nevertheless, the decision of 6,334,689 (33.27 per cent) potential voters not to vote suggests that people generally are disillusioned with the political system and how democracy is evolving.

Conclusion

The relationship between youth and politics in Taiwan has gone through different phases in the last three decades. Young Taiwanese played a crucial role in forming and expanding the Dangwai Movement, forming the DPP, and demanding a fully fledged democracy during the 1990 Wild Lily Movement. I have argued that the cute and fresh A-Bian brand helped the DPP to gather youth electoral support in the 2000 presidential race. In order to win the “hearts and minds” of the country's youth, Ma organised the formation of the KMT Youth League in January 2006. Shortly afterwards, the DPP launched its own Youth Council.

In spite of the KMT's efforts to convince young people that political participation is not “boring,” a big “turn-off,” or a “killjoy,” the party's attempt to modernise failed. Interviewees pointed out that the majority of young people have little interest in participating with the KMT; those who do are blocked by the engrained party *guanxi* principles: without family connections, there are no opportunities. The KMT's century-old baggage has made it difficult for the party to truly reinvent itself and create a strong youth base. The DPP Youth Council's “specialised political training programme” also failed. Furthermore, Chen's corruption scandals damaged the DPP's image and credibility and turned off Taiwan's Millennial Generation. Nonetheless, following its 2008 presidential election defeat, the DPP, with its Taiwanese roots and swift decision to recast its political stance through a change to its leadership, became better placed to win the “hearts and minds” of young Taiwanese. With an approval rating at above 60 per cent among from voters aged 20 to 29 in the lead-up to the election, it is near certain that young voters played a key role in Tsai's presidential victory and the DPP securing a majority in the Legislative Yuan in January 2016.

Two anti-China trade-pact protests (the Wild Strawberry and Sunflower Movements) organised and carried out by Taiwan's Millennial Generation during Ma's administrations are key indicators that youth participation in and electoral backing of the KMT are less likely in the near future. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Ma promised both economic growth and employment opportunities for young people. The combination of Ma failing to deliver on his promises and the potential risks of the trade pacts that Ma and the KMT wanted to sign with China provided the DPP with an ideal political climate in which they were able to exploit the KMT's falling popularity and succeed in the January 2016 presidential and legislative elections. Young people were disenchanted with the establishment, corrupt practices, and self-interested politicians, which resulted in young Taiwanese forming new political parties and having "fun" campaigning and – for some – winning Legislative Yuan seats. Ultimately, these events have opened up exciting fast-track career opportunities for a new breed of Taiwan-conscious politicians who have bypassed the organised candidate-selection processes in traditional political parties. These new political movements have provided voters of all ages with the opportunity to cast a protest vote and support a new era in Taiwanese politics.

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