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**Populism in East Asia's New Democracies:
An Analysis of the Taiwanese Discourse**

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The rise of right-wing political leaders and movements in advanced European democracies at the end of the last century has triggered numerous debates about populism, its causes, and its role in modern democracies. Through these debates and through previous studies, we have gained a profound knowledge about populism in Europe and the Americas. Nevertheless, comparatively little research has been carried out on the nature, scope and development of populism in the new democracies of Asia. In this article, I would like to look at the discourse of Taiwanese intellectuals on the development and implications of populism in Taiwan. In the final section, I list a number of shortcomings of the Taiwanese discourse and point out several areas of possible future research on populism in Taiwan.

1.1 Defining populism

What is populism? In 1981, one of the most comprehensive books on populism was published. Margaret Canovan, the author, notes in the introduction to her book that the 'term is exceptionally vague and refers in different contexts to a bewildering variety of phenomena' (Canovan 1981: 3). Notwithstanding, I

should like to briefly explore the original meaning of the term populism and explain its current usage, which should enable the reader to obtain a clear and distinct understanding of the definition used in this study.

The existence of populism as a political ideology can be traced back to the early 1870s, when members of various agrarian organisations engaged in a social analysis of contemporary American society and wanted to reform the societal structure. Lawrence Goodwyn (1991: 854) writes, ‘Populist reformers felt that business domination of the political process—through massive campaign contributions to friendly officeholders and persistently effective lobbying in the national Congress and the state legislatures—had proceeded to the point that the practice had begun to undermine the democratic idea itself.’ Populists at that time held that elite circles in society oppressed the common people, and they made it their mission to grasp the power from these self-serving elite circles as to use it for the benefit and advancement of the oppressed masses. At its early stages, populism was believed to be an ideology capable of solving the various societal problems that existed in late nineteenth century America. Goodwyn notes that it was, however, soon blurred with primitive and demagogic elements, and finally developed into a mere political instrument to instigate the masses. It regressed into a vehicle of racism, anti-Semitism, or and other similarly repugnant concepts. The demeaned form of populism is ‘a behavioural manifestation of deep-seated prejudices and ‘status anxieties,’ not a sensible product aimed at correcting unbalanced or generally

exploitative economic practices pervading American society' (Goodwyn 1991: 855).

The modern usage of the word populism mainly reflects Goodwyn's description. The Collins English Dictionary, for example, defines populism as 'a political strategy based on a calculated appeal to the interests or prejudices of ordinary people.' According to this definition, a populist is someone, especially a politician, who appeals to the interests or prejudices of ordinary people as to obtain his or her (political) objectives.

1.2 The global discourse on populism

In recent years, international academia has addressed three sets of research questions dealing with the concept of populism. The first set of questions has dealt with the factors behind the emergence of populist leaders and movements. The vast majority of literature related to this issue specifically looks at the phenomenon of growing right-wing populism in late twentieth-century Europe. The second set looks at the question whether populism poses a threat to democracy, and the third endeavours to define and classify populism into several different types.

As to the first area of research on populism, there have mainly been four different sub-groups of scholars. The first sub-group of scholars, such as Goodwyn (1991), Benett (1969), Lowndes (2005), and Ware (2002), have looked at the origins of populist leaders and movements in American political history and tried to establish the reasons for their success and eventual

downfall. The literature related to the second sub-group of scholars enriches the knowledge about the phenomenon of growing right-wing populism in late twentieth-century Europe. Scholars such as Betz (1994, 2002), Biorcio (1991/92), Surel (2002), and Tarchi (2002) may be included in this sub-group. The third sub-group has published extensively on the causes of what is usually termed populist authoritarianism and the rebirth of populism in South American countries. Among this group we find scholars such as Knight (1998), Conniff (1999), and Di Tella (1965). The fourth sub-group has worked on establishing non-country specific causes behind the evolution of populism in modern democracies.

The second set of research question deals with the question of whether populism poses a significant threat to liberal democracy, and has been addressed by scholars, such as Mair (2002), Canovan (1999, 2002), Müller (2002), Panizza (2005), Papadopoulos (2002), and Taggart (2002).

The third set of research questions seeks to define a generic concept of populism and to set up a thorough theoretical framework allowing scholars to categorise the various forms of populist movements and leaders that have existed over the last two hundred years in democratic and authoritarian polities in Europe and America. Among other scholars, such as Berlin (1968), Di Tella (1997), Ernst (1987) and Laclau (2005), Canovan (1981, 1999, 2002, 2005) has been the most influential. Her seminal work on populism was first published in 1981 and has since been the basis for further theoretical analysis of typologies of populism.

2. Populism in Taiwan

Taiwan is the world's thirteenth largest economy. It has a population of about 23 million people. The People's Republic of China, which considers Taiwan a renegade province, questions its sovereignty. Nevertheless, Taiwan is de facto an independent island-state. Between 1895 and 1945, Taiwan was part of the Japanese empire. In 1945, the Chinese Nationalists (generally known as the Guomindang, GMD also KMT) under Chiang Kai-shek seized power over the island. After Mao's victory in the Chinese Civil War, Chiang Kai-shek and his supporters fled to Taiwan and imposed martial law, which was finally lifted in 1987. Subsequent political reforms paved the way for democracy. In recent years, Taiwan has been internationally praised as one of the most stable and vibrant democracies in the region. Democratisation has fundamentally changed the island's political landscape and culture. Increasing electoral competition among the different political parties and their candidates led to a more voter-oriented campaign environment. More and more politicians have become aware of how powerful public opinion can be and how easily it can be used to defeat political enemies. It did not take long for populism to emerge as a catchword used by journalists and the local academia. Over the last decade, Taiwan has experienced an intensified discussion on the rise of populist leaders and the possible implications for the island-state's future democratic development.

2.1 Research questions and methodology

In this article, I would like to analyse this discussion by addressing the following set of research questions:

- How do Taiwanese intellectuals define populism?
- Do they consider it a threat to liberal democracy?
- Has the attitude towards populism changed over the years?
- What are the shortcomings of the Taiwanese discourse on populism?

To answer these questions, I have searched for articles about populism in back issues of local academic journals and browsed the databases of leading newspapers for news stories and commentaries containing the term *mincui*, which is the Chinese equivalent of populism. Newspaper archives have been particularly helpful in my attempt to trace the changing attitude towards populism over half a century. This is especially true for commentaries in the morning editions of Taiwan's leading newspapers, where Taiwanese scholars in the fields of social and economic sciences tend to publish commentaries about recent political, legal, and economic issues. Such commentaries may either be summaries of research results or simply outline the author's own 'professional' opinion. (A number of leading local scholars have hardly any other publications than these newspaper commentaries.) The United Daily News (*lianhebao*, UDN) and the China Post (*zhongguo shibao*, CP) are Taiwan's largest print media groups and have the most influential commentaries in their morning editions.

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2.2 Research findings

The electronic database of the United Daily News covers editions back to the early 1950s, whereas the China Post electronic archive only allows browsing back to 1994. In total, I have found 1,462 articles and commentaries in the UDN and 958 in the CP (see Figure 2.1). The very first article appeared in 1952 and in the following three decades only a few more instances can be counted. It was only in the 1990s that the term populism frequently appeared in the observed newspapers. A considerable proportion of observed cases appeared in that decade, roughly one third for the UDN and one fifth for the CP. The majority of news items containing the term *mincui* have, however, been published more recently: about 65 percent of all observed articles in the UDN and approximately 80 percent in the CP (see Table 2.1).

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2.2.1 Early debates on populism

Between the early 1950s and the late 1970s, only nine articles published in the UDN contained the word *mincui*, all of which were written by local scholars. In their contributions, the authors wrote about Communism rather than elaborating

on the concept of populism. The term *mincui* was mentioned in a historical context, mostly with reference to the Russian populist movement of the nineteenth century, the *narodnichestvo*.

2.2.2 Destructive populism

In 1980, the concept of *mincui* appeared for the first time in Taiwan's mass media in connection with domestic social and political developments. During the electoral campaign period of the 1980 national election, the UDN printed in two editions the research findings of Huang Ji, a graduate student of National Zhengzhi University. (Although martial law was in effect until 1987, local elections, and to a limited extent national elections, were held regularly throughout the island.) The conclusions made in Huang's articles were drawn from his master's thesis. Huang's work dealt with the growing electoral competition between the authoritarian GMD and the rising opposition. To now, his commentaries have remained among the very few published that use the concept of populism in analysis of Taiwan's opposition of the late 1970s. He pointed out that the opposition movement at that time believed in the mobilisation of the masses as to bring about political changes. Huang felt that the opposition misused the rising social problems to gain political power. In his writings, populism was portrayed as an enemy to the state. Huang's position was that an opposition has to oppose but not obstruct the government. He argued that populism is obstructive because it disregards the opinion of experts and solely relies on the mobilisation of ordinary people who lack the ability to

formulate reasonable economic, social and political policies (UDN 30 November 1980: 2; UDN 1 December 1980: 2).

2.2.3 Populist Jiang Jing-guo

Several years later, scholars and journalists began to write about the *mincui* character of then President Jiang Jing-guo (Chiang Ching-kuo). Chen Yang-de, professor at Donghai University and member of the National Assembly, wrote in a commentary published in the United Daily News about the success of the seventh National Assembly session in enhancing constitutional rule in Republican China. He positively appraised Jiang Jing-guo's contributions and concurred with the view expressed in an article published in the US weekly *Newsweek*, which lauded Jiang Jing-guo's populist leadership style. In Chen's view, it was Jiang Jing-guo who had accelerated the political reform process. Chen attributed much of Jiang's success to his populist leadership style, that is Jiang's closeness to the ordinary people (UDN 20 February 1984: 15).

Zhou Yang-shan, another scholar, came to similar conclusions in his commentary published after the death of President Jiang Jing-guo in 1988. One of the most discussed issues at the time was Jiang's leadership succession and the formation of a new cabinet. Zhou expressed his hope for a leader who would preserve Jiang's populist spirit (*mincui jingshen*) and a cabinet that was close to the people (*qinmin neige*). He described Jiang Jing-guo as an authoritarian leader who would listen to the hearts of ordinary people, the *laobaixing*, and would draft his policies according to their wishes (UDN 26 July

1988: 2). The 1988 commentary was Zhou's first to deal with the concept of populism and for years it remained one of the only commentaries with an overtly positive connotation. Over the following years, he would become one of the most outspoken critics of populism. He later authored dozens of commentaries in the United Daily News and the China Post on democratic rule and the evils of populism.

The discussion about Jiang Jing-guo's populist character continued until early 1990, when the UDN printed a summary of Ray S. Cline's book entitled *Chiang Ching-kuo Remembered: The Man and His Political Legacy* (UDN 14 January 1990: 28). Cline worked as a CIA agent in Taiwan in the late 1950s and became a close friend of Jiang Jing-guo (Chiang Ching-kuo), or CCK as he called him. He firmly believed that CCK had been very concerned about the lives of the ordinary people of Taiwan. Moreover, he saw in CCK a populist whose policies and achievements should serve as a role model for the People's Republic of China. Cline's book summary was the last news item describing CCK as a populist.

2.2.4 Radical populism

At the end of the 1980s, the concept of *mincui* was also raised in public debate and published commentaries on the proposal to introduce party primaries advanced by key GMD bureaucrats. Party reformists, such as Guan Zhong, vigorously agitated for party primaries, whereas other intellectuals, such as Lin Shui-bo, professor of political science at National Taiwan University, argued in

a commentary in the United Daily News that party primaries represented ‘radical populism’ (*jiduan mincui zhuyi*), which he thought would provide greater political participation but circumvent organisational rules and circumscribe the power of the party leadership. Without being specific, Lin saw in party primaries a contradiction to Chinese cultural traditions and believed that they would have overtly negative effects on inter-party stability (UDN 4 June 1989: 10).

Public discourse on populism intensified with the rising confrontation between the mainstream and the non-mainstream factions of the GMD over the question of whether Taiwan’s future presidents should be directly elected by universal suffrage or indirectly by the National Assembly. The mainstream faction led by President Li Deng-hui (Lee Teng-hui) supported constitutional amendments stipulating direct presidential elections, whereas members of the non-mainstream faction voiced opposition to such plans and insisted on the continuation of the current electoral procedures, that is indirect elections. Zhou Yang-shan, for example, authored a series of commentaries in the United Daily News opposing direct elections on the grounds that they would imperil democratic order and stability. He referred to Russia and Poland as examples of countries where direct elections had caused political observers to question the stability of these new democracies. In his writings, Zhou drew a distinction between representative democracy (indirect elections) and populist democracy (direct elections) and outlined several differences. First, representative democracy centres upon political parties and parliament. Populism mistrusts

these two institutions and relies on charismatic and powerful leaders to rule the country. Second, established representative democracies are mostly parliamentary systems and their leaders (prime ministers) are indirectly elected. In several democracies, such as Austria, Iceland and Ireland, presidents are directly elected, but they only represent their countries in international affairs and do not play any role in determining national affairs. Zhou argued that direct presidential elections in new democracies, such as South Korea, the Philippines and Poland, only caused severe political and social problems. Third, representative democracy is based on constitutionalism and places importance on rationality and co-operation between different political, social and economic entities. According to Zhou, populism lacks those characteristics and instead uses racial and emotional appeals (UDN 5 August, 1991:4; UDN 10 April, 1991: 4).

2.2.5 Populist authoritarianism

The discussion about the populist character of direct presidential elections continued until major constitutional reforms in 1994 paved the way for Taiwan's first direct presidential election in March 1996. The amendments meant a victory for incumbent President Li Deng-hui. However, his rising appeal to people of various social strata and political orientations soon became the target of mainstream academia. Several scholars anticipated the formation of a new authoritarian state led by Li Deng-hui. Wang Zhen-huan and Qian Yong-xiang were among the first scholars to discuss in public the rise of Li

Deng-hui and the dangers he posed to Taiwan's young democracy. Wang and Qian wrote in a commentary in the UDN about what they termed a drastic shift from Chinese to Taiwanese nationalism in Li's speeches. Wang and Qian asserted that in the past the GMD had represented China and that the people of Taiwan had been educated that they were ethnic Chinese and that Taiwan was part of China, whereas GMD Chairman Li Deng-hui more and more tended to echo the voices of the opposition and frequently challenged the one-China concept to gain popular support. The two scholars warned about the emergence of an era of populist authoritarianism (UDN 21 January 1995: 11; see also Wang and Qian 1995).

Huang Guang-guo, professor of psychology at National Taiwan University, elaborated on Wang and Qian's observations in his book *About Populism and the End of Taiwan*, which was discussed not only in several newspaper articles but also in academic forums. Huang branded Li Deng-hui a populist who would in the end bring about the collapse of the country. He believed that Li's democratic reforms were nothing but populism and claimed that Li as well as others misunderstood the true meaning of liberal democracy. In a liberal democracy, he argued, the government should protect the rights of individuals. The rules and regulations concerning the question of how to protect those rights are obtained through a democratic process. The task of the government is to guarantee the execution of those rules and regulations. Elections are only part of the democratic process, not the ultimate goal. Huang believed that in Taiwan elections were viewed as the core value of democracy,

which he thought was a misconception that would finally lead to populist authoritarianism and the end of the rule of law and social justice (UDN 11 October 1995). The discussion about Huang's book intensified in 1996, the year the first direct presidential election was held.

2.2.6 Populist fascism

In 1998, the focus turned away from Li Deng-hui to other politicians, such as Chen Shui-bian of the DPP. Chen (unsuccessfully) contested for re-election in the mayoral election of Taipei and his campaign was criticised for focusing too much on ethnic issues, i.e. telling the people that they were Taiwanese rather than Chinese. Apart from that, journalists, political observers, and opponents extensively criticised his leadership style as being too populist. Chen defended himself by saying that his form of governance was democracy not populism. In his view, the government should serve the people rather than a particular group of people. Chen argued that during the martial law period and to a considerable extent after that, the GMD had regarded the government as a party organ to serve its own interests rather than those of the people. The government should put the people at the centre of attention and not at the periphery. Moreover, Chen said that his aim was to train public servants to serve the people and to interpret laws and regulations to the advantage of the people rather than to the advantage of the state (Li, 1998).

Despite all the criticism, Chen Shui-bian's popularity increased steadily and led to his victory in the presidential election of March 2000. While Western

observers and media outlets praised Chen's victory as a crucial development in Taiwan's democratisation, the majority of influential local scholars and media outlets regarded it a major setback. Before and after the election, commentaries and news items attacking Chen Shui-bian reached new heights. In the mid-1990s, Li Deng-hui was accused of using his charisma and Taiwanese nationalism as means to increase his popularity and political power. He was believed to be the nation's new authoritarian leader—an authoritarian populist. Following his election, Chen Shui-bian found himself confronted with even more criticism in the same vein. Scholars explained in newspaper commentaries and academic journals that Chen Shui-bian would have to depend far more on populism than Li Teng-hui, since the latter controlled a party that had a majority in parliament while Chen did not. Lin Bing-you (2000), for example, wrote that Chen's so-called government of the people (*qinmin zhengfu*) in fact meant populism, i.e. the circumvention of democratic institutions, such as parliament. He asserted that Chen's minority government depended solely on populism. He accused Chen of using the power of the people to suppress (*yazhi*) the democratic process, which, Lin Bing-you asserted, was a clear contradiction to the basic principles of representative democracy and 'very dangerous.'

Chen's intention to newly define Taiwan's identity and his call for transitional justice intensified the discussion about his government's anti-democratic character. The following is a summary of the most often voiced concerns about Chen's 'populist' policies.

Nan Fang-shuo, a leading social critic, saw in Chen's leadership and policies the emergence of what he termed state-seclusionism (*suoguo zhuyi*) and populist fascism (*mincai faxisi zhuyi*). Nan (2002) and others argued that Chen's emphasis on a new Taiwanese identity had created ethnic tensions between the Taiwanese majority and the Mainland Chinese minority. Chen's 'populist fascism' was asserted to have instigated the masses to follow his "subversive politics of national identity," which attempted to legitimise racial hatred and turn it into a moral obligation. As a consequence of such 'despicable' tactics, relations with China were said to have worsened and international companies were claimed to have turned their backs on Taiwan and relocated to China. In his writings, Nan warned that Chen Shui-bian's 'fascist' policies would further accelerate the process of Taiwan's isolation and marginalisation, and he saw a need to put an end to Chen's 'dictatorship' (Nan 2002).

Nan's theory of state seclusionism (*suoguo zhuyi*) and populist fascism was shared by a considerable part of Taiwan's intelligentsia and soon became a key concept of mainstream academia in Taiwan. Huang Guang-guo included the concept of state seclusionism in the 2003 revised edition of his influential work *About Populism and the End of Taiwan*.

A year later, the people of Taiwan elected a president for the third time. Chen Shui-bian won his re-election bid by a very small margin the day after a failed assassination attempt. The GMD and its supporters claimed that the election was rigged and the assassination attempt staged. In addition, two

referenda held on election day were claimed to be illegal and considered to be yet another of Chen's populist election gimmicks.

As shown in Figure 2.1, the number of news items containing the term *mincui* reached their height in 2004. The presidential election and subsequent disputes were the prime reason for all the enthusiasm to talk about populist fascist Chen Shui-bian primary motivations for public commentaries regarding Chen's 'populist fascism.' Even months after the disputes, Taiwan's intelligentsia continued to lash out on Chen not only in newspaper commentaries of Taiwan's leading newspapers, but also in political talk shows and a variety of mainstream academic and non-academic journals. One of the key mainstream intellectuals of the time was political activist and writer Huang Zhi-xian, who authored a number of books and articles in influential periodicals. Her writings indeed reflected the thinking of the supporters of what the Mainland Chinese media termed the new democracy movement. On various occasions, she asserted that Chen's re-election was the result of populist manipulation and that his policies had brought the country to the brink of collapse. Under Chen, she wrote, economic development came to a standstill, democracy decayed, and Taiwan was transformed into a fascist one-party dictatorship. Furthermore, she claimed that Chen had brought about the death of the Republic of China, which not only meant the end of a nation but also the end of the Republican Chinese value system. According to her, the Republic of China was Asia's first republic and a nation that had been striving for ethnic harmony and peace. Under GMD leadership, the Republic of China had moved

from authoritarian developmentism (*weiquan jinzhan*) to democracy, whereas under Chen, the Republic had turned into an isolated and marginalised piece of land. She further stated in her writing that Chen's 'fascist populism' had led to four regrettable phenomena (Huang, 2004a: 53-64):

1. Skilled and talented people had become disillusioned about Taiwan's future and left for other countries.
2. Taiwan had gradually isolated and marginalised itself (state seclusionism)
3. Social and economic development had come to a standstill.
4. And because of the above-mentioned developments, an alarming number of people had fallen victim to Chen Shui-bian's populist rhetoric, triggering off a vicious circle that would eventually lead to Taiwan's self-destruction.

The academic discourse on Chen Shui-bian's fascist populism entered a new stage with the founding of the Democratic Action Alliance (*minzhuxingdong lianmeng*) in April 2004. Huang Guang-guo (National Taiwan University), Li Ming-hui (Academia Sinica), Xie Da-ning (Zhongzheng University), Guo Zhong-yi (Soochow University) were among the founding members of the Alliance. The aim of the alliance was to 'put an end to fascist populism in Taiwan' (Tong 2004: 54). Lao Si-guang, the spiritual father of the Alliance and a leading scholar at the Academia Sinica, said in an interview with the

influential Hong Kong weekly *Yazhou Zhoukan* (YZZK) that Taiwan's political landscape had been plagued by two phenomena, the commodification (*shangyehua*) and utilization (*gongjuhua*) of politics. Society, he stated, does not bother to separate right from wrong, but pursues selfish goals. Democracy in Taiwan came overnight. Although all of the formal institutions of democracy exist in Taiwan, people lack understanding about democracy's role and nature in a modern society. Politicians and big business corporations work together in an effort to enlarge their power and profits. Under such a system elections no longer serve their original purpose. They become a 'tool' for greedy politicians and big business. Lao stated that Jiang Jing-guo applied the same strategy. While emphasising the importance of elections in the democratic process, he used them as tools to preserve his political power without attempting to nurture a democratic culture. Lao asserted that unscrupulous politicians work hand in hand with gangsters and dubious local faction leaders to maintain the electoral machine. For these reasons, Lao's position was that society lacks a self-regulatory mechanism that would ensure deepening respect for the rule of law. Lao advanced Singapore and Hong Kong as models for Chinese societies with a profound respect for the rule of law and a common value system, even though he agrees that the laws and regulations themselves are flawed and anti-democratic. Lao claimed that the people in Taiwan lack that sort of common understanding and shared value system. Instead, society merely focuses on the binary question of whether something is beneficial to them or not (*youli* vs. *wuli*). The basic intention of all members of society is to turn each other into

tools that may ultimately be used to obtain individual goals. Lao believes stated that this process of *gongjuhua* leads to a society without human values, a society in which voters are proud to elect gangsters into office in exchange for a few cents and promises. Moreover, Lao asserted that Chen Shui-bian used the concept of *gongjuhua* to control the masses and to turn democracy into fascist populism (Tong 2004: 54-6; see also Lao 2004).

Lao and his Alliance strongly influenced (if not controlled) the mainstream academic discourse on populism in Taiwan. Taiwan's mainstream mass media extensively covered the activities of the Alliance and provided them with a forum to present their ideas about 'fascist-populist' Chen Shui-bian. Newspaper commentaries, articles in magazines, and books authored by members of the Alliance and their supporters virtually flooded Taiwan's print media market. Among other publications, the alliance released two books, one in July and another in September 2004, that became very popular. The first was authored by political activist and writer Huang Zhi-xian (2004) and the latter by one of the Alliance's founding members, National Taiwan University Professor Huang Guang-guo (2004). Both publications attempted to provide scientific evidence for what GMD political strategists had claimed in a series of political advertisements during the presidential election: Chen Shui-bian was more than a fascist populist; he was Taiwan's Adolf Hitler. Both scholars noted 'striking similarities' in the way Adolf Hitler and Chen Shui-bian rose to power by using populist strategies, such as stirring racial hatred and emphasising the superiority of the Aryan/Taiwanese race.

A year after the presidential election, the discussion about populism continued and still focused on 'fascist populist' Chen Shui-bian as Taiwan's Hitler. While a year earlier scholars dominated the discourse, it was now journalists and political commentators who elaborated on Chen's 'fascist populism' and his striking resemblance to Adolf Hitler.

Moreover, Taiwan's mainstream intelligentsia began to draw comparisons between Chen Shui-bian's lavish private life and those of former dictators. In June, Chen's son married and a glamorous wedding took place. As it happened, heavy rainfall around the island caused severe damage and the deaths of twenty people, which overshadowed the ceremony. The wedding was cited as a further sign of Chen's repugnant populist rule. For example, highly respected political commentator Nan Fang-shuo (2005) lamented in an article entitled *The Last Stage of Populism* that while Chen was enjoying his extravagant life style, the common people had to cope with the disastrous consequences of the floods. Nan depicted Chen as a man of evil character who did not care about ordinary people. In the article, he painstakingly described every detail of the 'wedding of the century.' Nan questioned how Chen and his family could possibly enjoy a glittering wedding when people were dying in the heavy floods. Populism, he ascertained, requires neither ability, knowledge nor a feeling of appropriateness. On the contrary, one only had to know how to use the weaknesses and blind spots of others as to get unlimited control. Nan regarded Chen's wedding as an extreme form of populism. In his view, Taiwan's financial situation deteriorated daily solely because Chen's

government had lavishly spent money. He compared Chen with Imelda Marcos, wife of former Philippine's dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who like Chen came from a low social stratum and worked her way to the top. For the purposes of his comparison, Nan detailed how Imelda Marcos had abused her position as First Lady and became a spendthrift. Nan contrasted her lavish lifestyle with the poverty of the Philippine people and repeated the story of her possessing 3,000 pairs of expensive shoes. Photos juxtaposing Chen's wedding with flood victims and their demolished homes were added to Nan Fang-shuo's analysis of the last stage of Taiwanese populism.

3. Conclusion

The Taiwanese discourse on populism can be separated into six periods. During the first, populism (*mincui*) was hardly discussed by local scholars and was only mentioned in reference to agrarian movements in Russia.

In the late 1970s, local intellectuals used the term populism for the first time in connection with the rising opposition movement (see Table 3.1). Several years later, the term appeared more frequently in academic writings and in the mass media. Scholars and journalists made use of the term *mincui* whenever they would describe the leadership style of President Jiang Jing-guo. At that time, there was a positive connotation attached to the meaning of populism and phrases like *mincui jingshen* (populist spirit) and *qinmin neige* (government close to the people) were commonplace.

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The lifting of martial law in 1987 paved the way for democratic reforms and further increased the interest of the local academia in discussing the concept of populism. Parts of the Taiwanese intelligentsia regarded the growing demand for direct presidential elections and party reforms as calls for radical populism (see Table 3.1). During the fourth period (1995-1997) of the Taiwanese discourse on populism, mainstream intellectuals warned about the possible occurrence of a further dictatorship. They were concerned about the growing popularity of President Li Deng-hui and his utilisation of Taiwan's quest for identity. In their eyes, Li was nothing but a populist authoritarian ruler who tried to circumscribe democratic institutions by directly appealing to the people. The last period of the discourse began in 1998, when a group of local scholars foresaw the end of a democratic Taiwan and the emergence of a populist fascist dictator. Former human rights lawyer and democracy activist Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party more and more became the target of the mainstream intelligentsia who described Chen as promoting populist fascism by attacking the mainland Chinese ethnic minority and calling for the establishment of a Taiwan nation. The Taiwanese discourse on populism has several severe shortcomings.

Firstly, there appears to be no clear concept of populism. Taiwan's mainstream intellectuals have differently interpreted the meaning and impact of

populism on the island's political and social landscape over the last few decades. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, populism was seen as something harmful to the political process. Scholars, such as Huang Ji, accused the growing opposition movement of using social problems to stir up the masses as to gain electoral support. A few years later, populism had a positive connotation and was exclusively used to describe the leadership style of President Jiang Jing-guo. At the end of the decade, the negative connotation returned. It appears to me that that the definition of populism and its role in the political process has merely depended on the political affiliation of the observed politician, which has caused several paradoxes. Although Jiang Jing-guo was an authoritarian leader, mainstream intellectuals never used the term authoritarian populism to describe Jiang's leadership. He was simply referred to as a populist. When President Li Teng-hui succeeded Jiang Jing-guo and voiced his support for groundbreaking democratic reforms, such as direct presidential elections, local scholars began to worry about the emergence of a new form of authoritarian rule, namely populist authoritarianism. The election of former democracy activist and human rights lawyer Chen Shui-bian as head of state in March 2000 intensified assertions of the evil character of populism. Chen's disputed reelection in 2004 triggered a new wave of attacks on Chen and his 'populist authoritarianism.' A so-called 'new democracy movement' emerged with the founding of the Democratic Action Alliance in April 2004 with the sole aim of putting an end to what the movement termed 'fascist populism.'

Secondly, most of the arguments found in the literature on populism, especially those contributions about populist fascism, tend to be mere populist rhetoric. Nan Fang-shuo's article about the final stage of populism in Taiwan (Nan 2005) is a good example of this.

Thirdly, there has not been any systematic and scientific attempt to analyze populist leaders and movements in Taiwan. By scientific I mean an analysis based on logic rather than on political preferences. As I have shown earlier, the discourse on populism has been mostly restricted to analyzing the leadership styles of presidents. This rather arbitrary approach has prevented any meaningful discourse on the various forms of populism and their impact on Taiwan's political and social development.

Productive future research and academic discourse on populism in Taiwan may include examination of the following four periods:

- 1977-1980: Growing opposition movement, such as the Meilidao group, and leading politicians, such as Taoyuan county magistrate Xu Xin-liang.
- Late 1980s: Local and national politicians, such as Wang Yi-xiong, supporting the labor and environmental movements.
- 1998-2005: New powerful and more radical populist leaders, such as former Provincial Governor Song Chu-yu and former Vice-President Lian Zhan.

- 2005-2006: Former democracy activists who after being politically marginalised turned against former comrades, such as Xu Xin-liang and Shi Ming-de.

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Table 2.1: Articles containing the term *mincui* in leading newspapers (1950-2005)

Year	United Daily News		China Post	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1950-1979	9	0.62	-	-
1980-1989	20	1.37	-	-
1990-1999	479	32.76	198	20.67
2000-2005	954	65.25	760	79.33
Total	1,462	100.00	958	100.00

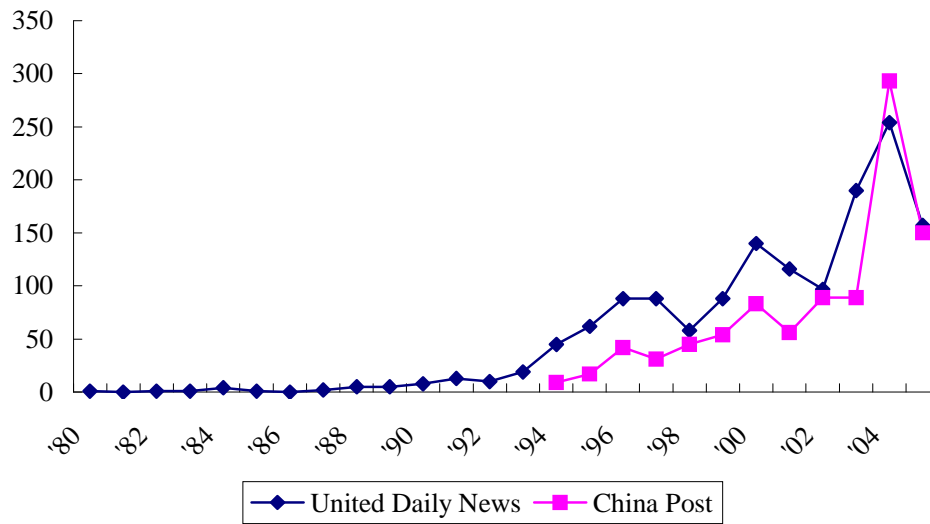
Source: Author's own calculation based on databases of the United Daily News and China Post

Table 3.1 Discourse on populism in postwar Taiwan

Period	Major theme	Leading intellectuals	Connotation
1945-1977	<i>mincui</i> only with reference to Russia	-	neutral
1977-1980	Destructive populism	Huang Ji	negative
1984-1990	Populist Jiang Jing-guo; <i>mincui jingshen</i> and <i>qinmin neige</i>	Chen Yang-de and Zhou Yang-shan	positive
1989-1994	Radical populism	Lin Shui-bo and Zhou Yang-shan	negative
1995-1997	Populist authoritarianism	Wang Zhen-huan, Qian Yong-xian and Huang Guang-guo	negative
1988-present	Populist fascism	Zhou Yang-shan, Lin Bing-you, Nan Fang-shuo, Huang Guang-guo and Huang Zhi-xian	negative

Source: Author's own research

Figure 2.1 Number of news articles containing the term *mincui* (1980-2005)



Source: Author's own calculation based on archives of the United Daily News and China Post