

Taiwan's party system and political culture (1945-2005)*

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There have been three stages of development in the history of Taiwan's political party system since the Nationalist Chinese takeover in 1945: (1) Limited pluralist authoritarian party system (1945-1986), (2) pluralist party system with one dominant party (1986-2000), and (3) polarized pluralist party system. A limited pluralist authoritarian party system developed in Taiwan under the KMT regime between 1945 and 1986. During that time the KMT government allowed opposition candidates to take part in local and national elections, and to form loosely connected political organizations, but restricted the political power of the opposition. A pluralist party system with one dominant party evolved in liberalizing and democratizing Taiwan between 1986 and 2000. During that time, the regime tolerated the formation of political parties, and a number of parties took indeed part in the political process. Nevertheless, the KMT still held an absolute majority in key decision-making bodies due to its continuing control over important institutions, such as the parliament, the media, the military, and the judiciary. In the December 2001 national election, however, the KMT failed to gain an absolute majority of seats in parliament, ending its dominance in the lawmaking body. The election marked the beginning of a polarized pluralist party system.

Limited pluralist authoritarian party system (1945-1986)

On 17 April 1895, the Treaty of Shimonoseki ended the Sino-Japanese War. According to the treaty, China ceded Taiwan, the Pescadores Islands and the Liaotung Peninsula in southern Manchuria to Japan.¹ Under Japanese rule, Taiwan's infrastructure was tremendously improved, its food production industrialized and an export-oriented economy created. It was at that time that the foundations of the Taiwan's economic miracle were laid. During World War II, the United States reached an agreement with Chiang Kai-shek providing that Taiwan would be returned to China after the war. The agreement was confirmed in the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945. Soon afterwards, Chiang Kai-shek appointed a committee headed by Chen Yi to take over the island's administration. The KMT's strategy was to infiltrate Taiwan's society by the means of public participation in state-controlled elections. At the early stages, the plan failed to materialize because of the widespread dissatisfaction with the new regime that culminated in the 2-28 Incident (1947), in which Mainland Chinese troops killed several thousand Taiwanese. After the incident, the regime continued its strategy of infiltrating Taiwan's society by holding state-controlled elections. There were two basic types of state-controlled local elections throughout the martial-law period: Those held at the provincial level, and those at the sub-provincial level. At provincial level, there were direct elections of members to the Provincial Assembly, and the special municipality councils of Taipei and Kaoshiung. The chief executives at provincial level were appointed, though. Sub-provincial elections can be separated into four types depending on their administrative levels:

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1. Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Story of a Nation* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1988), 152-53.

1. County level: At the county level, there were direct elections of magistrates and provincial municipality mayors, and the members of county councils and provincial municipality councils.
2. County municipality level: At this level, members of county municipality councils, rural township councils and urban township councils, and the mayors of rural and urban townships were directly elected.
3. Borough level: At the borough level, the chiefs of boroughs and villages were directly elected.
4. Neighborhood level: The neighborhood was the smallest electoral unit. At this level, wardens were indirectly elected.

Table 1: Local elections in post-war non-democratic Taiwan (1946-1987)

Administrative Level	Number of elections held	Average number of candidates per seat	Number of seats	Voter turnout	Average elected unaffiliated candidate	First direct election held
Provincial Level						
Provincial Assembly	9	1.9	57-77 ↑	73.48	20.62 ↑	1954
Taipei City Council	5	1.43	48-51 ↑	65.72	16.8 ↑	1969
Kaoshiung City Council	2	1.81	42	76.22	23.81	1981
County Level						
Council members	11	1.76	814-1,024	79.96	28.94↓	1950/51
Chief Executives	10	2.32	19-21	74.32	13.66	1950/51
County Municipality Level						
Council members	13	1.69	3,700-9,778 ↓	66.37 ^a	54.5 ^a ↓	1946
Chief Executives	10	1.95	309-360 ↓	70.67 ↑	12.25 ↓	1950/51
Borough Level						
Chief Executives	11	1.61 ^b	5,105-6,608 ↓	64.71 ↓	28.53 ^c ↓	1951

Source: Author's own calculation based on data provided by the Central Election Commission

^a data on 1946 and 1948 election not available

^b data on 1946 and 1948 elections not available

^c data on elections held before 1973 not available

Voter turnout in local elections was between 60 and 70 percent. Since the formation of new political parties was illegal at that time, opposition candidates could only register as independents. In 1950s, only one out of ten councilors at county municipality level was nominated by the KMT. In 1986, three quarters were affiliated with the party. At the county level, the situation was similar but less dramatic. At the provincial level, the KMT could not significantly increase its share of councilors. Although the average number of successful independents was the lowest in the elections of county chief executives, Taipei City councilors and provincial assembly members, there was a significant increase in the number of elected independent candidates (Table 1). Most of these independents were true opposition figures. The group of unaffiliated politicians can be divided into two categories, the first comprised of politicians who were indeed critical of the KMT government and the latter of politicians who

were supporters of the KMT regime. Most of the candidates belonging to the latter group registered as independents after having failed to obtain the party's nomination. It was not before the 1977 local elections that the former group gained momentum. The elections resulted in an unprecedented high number of non-KMT provincial assembly members, and chief executives of counties and provincial municipalities taking office. At least 14 of the 21 independent assembly members were genuine opposition figures, eight of whom were the highest vote getters in their constituencies. Moreover, four out of twenty chief executives of Taiwan's twenty counties and provincial municipalities were anti-KMT activists. The election was also different from previous ones in that it was for the first time that the opposition ran on a common platform. Moreover, in thirteen counties and provincial municipalities the number of votes cast for anti-KMT activists almost equaled those cast for the KMT votes, which took the party by surprise and encouraged opposition figures to continue their struggle for democracy within the system.² A year later, the strengthened opposition movement tried to continue its electoral success at the national level by taking part in the supplementary parliament elections scheduled to be held at the end of the year.

From local to national level

In addition to local elections, limited direct parliamentary elections were held during the martial law period. Members of the three chambers of parliament were first elected in 1947 and 1948 respectively in all provinces of China including Taiwan. Delegates to the National Assembly (NA), the constitution-drafting body, and members of the Legislative Yuan (LY), the lawmaking body, were elected by universal suffrage, whereas members of the Control Yuan (CY), the watchdog organ, were elected indirectly by local councils. According to Article 65 of the Constitution, LY members serve a three-year term and elections of new members must be completed three months prior to the expiration of each term. The term of office of CY members was restricted to six years by Article 93, whereas the term of office of NA delegates terminates on the day on which the next NA convened. Article 28 of the Constitution rules that NA elections be held every six years. Due to Communist rule over most parts of China, new parliamentary elections were, however, impossible and thus members of parliament were frozen in office. The Council of Grand Justices ruled that the then members of parliament should continue to function until nation-wide elections could be held.³ However, population growth, the ageing of parliament members, and the increasing doubt over the KMT's legitimacy to rule Taiwan made supplementary parliamentary elections necessary.

In its fourth plenary session held in March 1966, the National Assembly, thus, enlarged presidential powers by amending the Temporary Provisions affixed to the Constitution. The amendment added two important clauses, one of which accorded the President the right to make adjustments to the administrative and personnel organs of the Central Government and promulgate regulations providing for elections to fill the elective offices at the Central Government level, which had become vacant, or for which additional representation was deemed necessary due to population growth. That amendment paved the way for supplementary elections of all three parliamentary organs. In his message to the nation held during the 1969 Chinese new-year festivities, President Chiang Kai-shek announced that national elections would

2. Lin Jia-long, "Taiwan difang xuanju yu guomindang zhengquan de shichanghua" [Taiwan's local elections and the marketization of KMT's political power], in *Liang'an jiceng xuanju yu zhengzhi shehui bianqian* [Grassroots elections, political and social changes in China and Taiwan], ed. Chen Ming-Tong and Cheng Yong-nian (Taipei: Yuandan, 1998), 236.

3. Interpretation Shih Tzu No.31, Council of Great Justices.

take place later that year to fill vacancies and add new members to all of the three parliamentary bodies.⁴ In March 1969, the government promulgated the rules and regulations concerning the supplementary national elections. The first such election was finally held in December 1969. Fifteen National Assembly members, eleven Legislative Yuan members and two Control Yuan representatives were elected. There were further supplementary elections in the following years (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of elected seats supplementary parliament elections (1949-1987)

	1969	1972	1973	1975	1980	1983	1986	1987
National		53			76		84	
Assembly	15 (1.06)	(3.76)	–	–	(6.19)	–	(8.71)	–
Legislative		36		37	70	71	73	
Yuan	11 (2.30)	(7.91)	–	(8.62)	(17.24)	(19.29)	(22.53)	–
Control	2		10		22			22
Yuan	(2.82)	–	(12.82)	–	(29.73)	–	–	(31.88)
Total	28	98	10	37	168	71	157	22

Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Central Election Commission

Numbers in brackets are percentage of total members

The 1969 election was a by-election of five National Assembly members, and an election of 23 additional members of parliament due to population growth and the elevation of Taipei to a special municipality. The term of those members who represented the province of Taiwan and had been elected in 1947 did not expire before the 1972 election. Since then, all members elected to represent Taiwan had to stand for re-election, whereas all other members remained frozen in office. The number of additional seats had been increased over the years due the changes in the calculation formula of seats per district, the elevation of Kaoshiung to a special municipality in 1979, and population growth. Since 1972, seats reserved for overseas Chinese representation were appointed by the president. The number of appointed members equaled about half of the elected members in 1972. This ratio decreased significantly, but remained almost unchanged in the composition of new Control Yuan members, that is about 45 percent. Although the number of parliament members elected in Taiwan increased over the years, there had been no chance of any law being passed without the support of the senior members—those elected on the mainland in 1948—and the newly appointed parliamentarians. Even in the late 1980s, the total number of newly elected members remained far below 50 percent of the total number of parliamentarians (Table 2). Nevertheless, these elections gave the opposition the opportunity to challenge the KMT government not only in local elections but also in national ones. Although the ratio of newly elected members to the total membership was anything but impressive, these elections were de-facto national ones since they were not in any way limited to only a small part of the area under the jurisdiction of the KMT government. At that time, Taiwan had already emerged as the de-facto remnant of Sun Yat-sen's Republican China.

After the election victory in 1977, the opposition was determined to expand its success from the local to national level by taking part in national elections. The 1978 parliamentary elections were hotly contested by candidates of both the opposition and the ruling party. In order to maximize the support of opposition candidates and to co-ordinate their campaign efforts throughout the island, a special assistance committee was founded by opposition leaders such as Huang Hsin-chieh and Shih Ming-teh, and named Tangwai Campaign Assistance

4. Central Election Commission, *Zhong hua min guo xuanju shi* [Republic of China election history] (Taipei: Central Election Commission, 1986), 389.

Committee (*dangwai zhuxuan tuan*).⁵ *Tangwai* (also *dangwai*) was a term used to refer to those independent candidates who opposed the KMT and literally means “outside the party.” Since it was illegal to form political parties, collectivism among opposition candidates could only exist without official institutions. The 1978 election was expected to be a turning point in Taiwan’s political history. The opposition had high expectations since the KMT regime appeared to be less suppressive than in the past. In early December, non-KMT candidates were even allowed to make public a common platform for the elections and to introduce it to the local and foreign media, which led the opposition and foreign observers even more to consider the election crucial for Taiwan’s political future. However, US President Carter’s decision to recognize the regime in Beijing and de-recognize Taipei as the only legitimate government of China just a few days before the elections should have taken place was a shock to the KMT government, and elections were postponed indefinitely, a move most likely caused by the regime’s uncertainty about the outcome of the election. Immediately after the elections were cancelled, democracy in Taiwan once again appeared to be a myth, since US pressure seemed gone. But, as a matter of fact, US pressure on Taipei increased as a result of the Taiwan’s Relations Act, which was passed shortly afterwards by the US Congress, and restored Taipei-Washington relations.

The opposition tried to preserve some of the momentum gained during the interrupted election campaign by staging a number of indoor and outdoor meetings. At the beginning of June, the opposition established two organizations to provide organizational facilities to opposition members of parliament and the provincial assembly respectively, namely the Joint Office of Tangwai Representatives (*Taiwan dangwai minyi daibiao lianhe banshichu*) and the Joint Committee of Tangwai Parliamentary Candidates (*zhongyang minyi daibiao xianju houxiuanren lianyihui*).⁶

In August 1979, the opposition started to publish a magazine, *Meilidao*, which became the most important political publication in Taiwan at that time. The magazine aimed at forming a united front against the KMT leadership, regardless of the different ideologies and backgrounds of its supporters. Its board members comprised sixty founding members of different ideological and professional backgrounds within the opposition. Prominent people such as Shih Ming-teh, Huang Shin-chie, Lin Yi-hsiung, Yao Chia-wen, Chang Te-ming, Huang Tian-fu, Hsu Shin-liang, Chang Chun-hung and Lu Hsiu-lien, however, soon gained the upper hand. The dominant group around *Meilidao* set up several offices around the island and openly doubted the regime’s legitimacy to rule Taiwan. The group was of the opinion that the KMT could be forced into a full-fledged democratization through an escalating series of mass meetings and demonstrations.⁷ Soon, this opposition group appeared to be a serious threat to the KMT regime. The government thus decided to discredit the activists by initiating what would later be called the Kaoshiung Incident. Without doubt, the cancellation of the 1978 election brought about temporary political disorder in Taiwan and put great pressure on both the KMT regime and the opposition.

A year after the Kaoshiung Incident, the postponed 1978 election finally took place. The election was viewed as a watershed event in Taiwan’s political development, since it was the first time that the opposition agreed on a common platform and was able to openly criticize the government without facing harsh consequences. Moreover, the election was held under a new election law that was a compromise between the government and opposition figures.

5. Jürgen Domes, “Political Differentiation in Taiwan: Group Formation Within the Ruling Regime and the Opposition Circles,” *Asian Survey* XXI, no. 10 (1981): 1012; Mab Huang, “Political Ko’tung and the Rise of the Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan,” *Soochow Journal of Political Science* 5 (1996): 136.

6. Domes, *Differentiation*, 1012-13.

7. Domes, *Differentiation*, 1012-13.

Both international observers and opposition figures were surprised and some even called the election a “political holiday.”⁸ Copper and Chen claim that in spite of garnering less than ten percent of the seats in this election, the opposition could still “boast of victory” for several reasons, such as the fact that several opposition figures succeeded in gaining the highest numbers of votes. Moreover, the public in general seemed sympathetic toward the opposition and did not negatively associate it with the Kaoshiung Incident.⁹ After the election, leading figures of the opposition noted that the formation of a political party would be necessary if they wanted to gain legitimacy, channel financing, seek agreement on issues, arrange for co-operation during campaigns, and better negotiate the co-ordination of candidates.¹⁰ Thus, pressure from opposition circles on the authorities to legalize political parties increased constantly.

Finally, on 28 September 1986, 135 members of the opposition established Taiwan’s first true opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The party comprised both moderate and radical Taiwan independence activists; those who were anti-KMT but in favor of unification with mainland China also supported it, the most prominent of whom was Zhu Gao Zheng. Although it was still illegal to form political parties in Taiwan, the authorities did not crack down on the newly formed DPP. In October, President Chiang Ching-kuo made public his intention to lift the martial law decree and allow the formation of political parties. In December, the DPP took part in parliamentary elections and succeeded in gaining substantial support (10 out of 73 seats in the Legislative Yuan and 10 out of 84 seats in the National Assembly). The KMT government was taken by surprise when it learned that some of their ‘iron seats’ such as those reserved for representatives of labor unions were taken by the DPP. In the following year, the KMT regime lifted martial law. Substantial political and social changes followed and led to a pluralist party system with the KMT dominant.

Pluralist party system with one dominant party (1986-2000)

After the lifting of martial law in 1987, political parties mushroomed in Taiwan. In December 1989, the first national election after the lifting of martial law took place. Thirteen political parties participated in the election of 130 parliament members. The KMT nominated 140 candidates, the DPP 57, the two KMT satellites, the CDSP and CYP, nominated 2 and 3 respectively, and other parties 20. Although a number of different parties contested in the election, the DPP was the only opposition party that could gain substantial support and put pressure on the KMT government to reform Taiwan’s political system. One of the DPP’s key demands was the retirement of the senior parliament members—those elected on the mainland and frozen in office. Only through massive street protests did the KMT regime finally agree to pass a law requiring the “voluntary retirement” of these members.

8. John F. Copper and George P. Chen, “Taiwan’s Elections: Political Development and Democratization in the Republic of China,” *Occasional Papers/Reprint Series in Contemporary Asian Studies* 64, no. 5 (1984): 59-67.

9. Fu Hu and Yun-han Chu, “Electoral Competition and Political Democratization,” in *Political Change in Taiwan*, ed. Cheng Tun-jen and Stephan Haggard (Boulder: Rienner, 1992), 183; Copper, *Political Development*, 69.

10. This co-ordination is decisive in elections, since the SNTV-system is applied in national elections in Taiwan.

Table 3: Candidates and elected officials non-supplementary parliament elections (1947-2004)

Date	Seats	Turnout	Candidates						Elected				
			Total	KMT	DPP	NP	Other ^b	Female	KMT	DPP	NP	Other ^c	Female
Legislative Yuan													
21-23 January 1948 ^a	8	71.41	13	–	–	–	13	2	–	–	–	6	2
19 December 1992	161	72.02	403	158	78	–	167	46	96	50	–	15	17
2 December 1995	164	67.65	397	139	93	45	120	50	85	54	21	4	23
5 December 1998	225	68.09	498	161	112	51	174	86	123	70	11	21	43
1 December 2001	225	66.31	455	97	83	32	243	81	68	87	1	69	50
11 December 2004	225	59.16	492	103	129	1	259	96	79	89	1	56	47
National Assembly													
21-23 November 1947 ^a	27	73.24	78	–	–	–	78	5	–	–	–	27	4
21 December 1991	325	68.32	627	304	144	–	179	76	254	66	–	5	42
23 March 1996	334	76.21	591	263	153	83	92	103	183	99	49	6	61
Control Yuan													
10 January 1948 ^a	5	81.08	8	–	–	–	8	3	–	–	–	5	1

Table compiled by the author based on data provided by the Central Election Commission

^a Taiwan Province only

^b LY: 1948: no data on partisanship; 1992: CSDP(1), LP(1), SCP(1), WP(1), CUP(4), ACDP(1), CCP(1), RP(1), TP(1), ChSDP(25), CPWP(1), CPAP(2), independents(122); 1995: LP(2), CTDAP(1), CP(1), independents(115); 1998: CYP(1), CTDAP(1), NDNA(5), GP(1), NDP(1), TAIP(20), DU(25), NNA(12), independents(108); 2001: PFP(61), TSU(39), NDNA(1), TN1(3), WAP(1), TAIP(3), GP(1), CTDAP(1), GCBLU(1), independents(132);); 2004: PFP(65), TAIP(4), TSU(40), WAP(1), NPSU(32), WA(1), independents(116); NA: 1947: no data on partisanship; 1996: LP(2), CTDAP(1), GP(1), PP(1), CYP(1), independents(69)

^c LY: 1948: no data on partisanship; 1992: ChSDP(1); 1995: independents(4); 1998: NDNA(3), TAIP(1), DU(4), NNA(1), independents(12); 2001: PFP(46), TSU(13), TN1(1), independents(9); 2004: PFP(34), TSU(12), NPSU(6), independents(4); NA: 1947: no data on partisanship; 1991: NDNA(3), independents(2); 1996: GP(1), independents(5)

Constitutional amendments in April 1991 paved the way for elections of all members of parliament (National Assembly and Legislative Yuan).¹¹ Throughout the 1990s, Taiwan's party system remained unchanged. There were several interesting developments, though:

1. The number of political parties contesting in national elections decreased.
2. The KMT lost popular support, but no opposition party succeeded in preventing the party from obtaining an absolute majority in parliament.
3. There was a tendency towards a three party system during the first half of the 1990s, and another towards a two party one during the second half.

There was much enthusiasm in 1989 to participate in national elections.¹² Within a few years, however, most of that enthusiasm was gone and after the 1992 parliamentary election most people predicted the emergence of a two party system. When the New Party (NP), a KMT splinter, was founded in August 1993 there suddenly seemed to be optimism that the KMT would lose its majority in parliament and a three party system would emerge soon. The NP's official election campaign strategy (*san dang bu guo ban*) in the 1995 national election was to win enough popular support as to break the KMT's monopoly in the Legislative Yuan, the lawmaking body of government.¹³ The party almost succeeded: The KMT's share of seats dropped from the 60 percent the party obtained in 1992 to 52 percent in the 1995 national election. The NP captured 13 percent of the total number of seats and the DPP 33 percent, two percentage points more than the previous election. In the 1998 national election, the party nominated 51 candidates but only eleven (3 percent of total number of all elected legislators) got elected. The ruling KMT captured 55, the DPP 31, and the remaining seats were taken by minor parties and independents (see Table 3). These results seemed to have put an end to optimism about a three party system emerging in Taiwan.

The Rise and Decline of Minor Parties

During the period of pluralism in Taiwan's party system (1986-2000), there were a total of 32 political parties competing against the ruling KMT in parliamentary elections. Aside from the DPP and the NP, no opposition party succeeded in gaining significant popular support, that is 5 five percent of the total votes cast for candidates nominated by political parties. These parties are referred to as minor parties in the following.¹⁴

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11. Amendments in May 1992 stipulated that the members of the Control Yuan be nominated and, with the consent of the National Assembly, appointed by the president. Further constitutional amendments were made in April 2000. Article 1 of these amendments turned Taiwan's parliament into a semi-bicameral one. The term of all National Assembly members expired on 19 May 2000. After that day, members to the assembly will only be elected by proportional representation within three months of the expiration of a six-month period following the public announcement of a proposal by the LY to amend the constitution or alter the national territory, or within three months of a petition initiated by the LY for the impeachment of the president or the vice president. Elected members have to convene of their own accord within ten days after the confirmation of the election result and have to remain in session no longer than one month, with the term of office expiring on the last day of the convention.
 12. In this election, a total of 101 members of parliament were elected: Taiwan Province: 58; Aborigines: 4; Special Municipalities (Taipei, Kaoshiung): 20; Fukien Province: 1; functional seats (workers, farmers, business-people, industrialists, fishermen and teachers): 18
 13. New Party, *Qing xiu nei zheng ai Taiwan* [Change the political system, love Taiwan] (Taipei: New Party, 1995), 16-30.
 14. Apart from minor parties, four political alliances took part in parliamentary elections. Although these alliances are registered as political parties they are not in practice. Alliances have merely

As illustrated in Table 4, political parties competing in national elections proliferated at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. A total of fourteen minor parties (sixteen parties in total) took part in the 1991 National Assembly election—the highest number of participating political parties ever in Taiwan. Three years later, only three minor parties (six parties in total) took part in national elections. After 1995, the number of (minor) parties participating in national elections increased slightly (Table 4) but never reached the 1992 total. Between 1986 and 2000, there were only five minor political parties of political significance (the Labor Party, Workers Party, Chinese Social Democratic Party, Green Party, and the Taiwan Independence Party), and only three that obtained enough popular support to have a candidate elected. In 1991, the Chinese Social Democratic Party (CSDP) captured one seat in the Legislative Yuan. The Green Party (GP) was successful in one constituency in the 1996 National Assembly election, and the Taiwan Independence Party (TAIP) in the 1998 Legislative Yuan election. Most of the remaining minor parties nominated one or two candidates who garnered no more than a few hundred votes in constituencies where at least 30,000 votes were necessary for a victory. With the exception of the CSDP, all of the politically important minor parties were single-issue oriented and part of the various social movements that emerged at the end of the 1980s.

Table 4: Minor parties in parliament elections (1989-2004)

	Number of parties	Candidates	Elected	Total votes received	% of total votes cast
LY 1989	11	25	0	125,258	1.3
NA 1991	14	81	0	222,976	2.54
LY 1992	12	45	1	182,332	2.25
LY 1995	3	4	0	7,456	0.08
NA 1996	4	21	1	129,859	1.24
LY 1998	5	24	1	155,443	1.55
LY 2001	7	52	2	289,265	2.78
LY 2004	4	7	1	18,068	0.18

Table compiled by the author based on data provided by the Central Election Commission

Among these, the Labour Party was the first to contest in national elections. Socialist intellectuals and labor activists under the leadership of former DPP legislator Wang Yi-hsiung founded the party in November 1987. At the end of the 1980s, labor disputes were on the rise and Wang Yi-hsiung thought that a party representing the interests of Taiwan's 3.4 million industrial laborers would have a political future in democratizing Taiwan. The 1989 Legislative Yuan election was the first national election after the lifting of martial law. Wang Yi-hsiung had great expectations and his party nominated candidates in eight constituencies.¹⁵ Wang himself ran in the industrial city of Kaoshiung. The party, however, garnered only about one percent of the total votes cast, and none of the hopefuls was elected. Nevertheless, compared with the other minor parties, the results were impressive. In 1992, the party took part in elections for the last time. Hope was vested in artist Hsu Hsiao-tan, who contested in the city of Kaoshiung. The party adopted a rather unorthodox strategy in the election cam-

been formed so as to get access to free TV advertising and to be eligible for nationwide seats allocated by proportional representation. See Christian Schafferer, *The Power of The Ballot Box: Political Development and Election Campaigning in Taiwan* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2003), 72.

15. Two in Kaoshiung City (1st and 2nd electoral district); one in 12th electoral district of Taiwan Province (Kaohsiung County); one in the 14th electoral district of Taiwan Province (Taidong), one in the 7th electoral district, of Taiwan Province (Chang Hua), and three in the functional constituencies representing workers (lao gong tuan ti).

paign. The candidate, Hsu Hsiao-tan undressed publicly on various occasions and promised an *open* campaign. The party's strategy almost worked out: Hsu Hsiao-tan succeeded in getting 32,349 votes and would have needed another 108 votes to be elected. Instead of her, another, less *open*, female candidate (KMT) captured the parliamentary seat. The defeat of Hsu Hsiao-tan ended the party's existence. The Labor Party was not the only political vehicle of the labor movement at that time. In March 1989, Luo Mei-wen, together with a number of other socialist intellectuals, founded the Workers Party (*lao dong dang*). Most of its 3,000 members were workers and socialist intellectuals who belonged to branches of the Chinese Communist Party and had been former political prisoners.¹⁶ Before establishing the Workers Party, Luo Mei-wen was the vice-chair of the Labor Party. There were several differences between Luo Mei-wen and the chair of the Labor Party, Wang Yi-hsiung, which led to Luo's decision to quit the party. Firstly, Wang had no interest in grassroots activities. He only wanted to win elections and provide legal advice to workers. Luo argued that a party had to achieve more than just providing services to workers. In his view, the party had to be a symbol—a revolutionary force that struggles fiercely against capitalist exploitation. A further difference was the attitude towards unification and socialism. Wang was of the opinion that unification with the People's Republic of China would worsen the situation for the workers since a large number of mainland workers would enter Taiwan and lower wages. Wang was not interested in Marxism and saw pragmatism as a way to improve the lives of workers. Luo, however, thought that only through unification could the working class get strong enough to fight effectively against capitalist, imperialist forces. Luo was an adherent to Marxist ideology and wanted to significantly reduce the influence of the capitalists, by revolution if necessary. Apart from the ideological differences, Wang Yi-hsiung and Luo Mei Wen belonged to different social classes. Wang studied Law at National Taiwan University and pursued further studies at academic institutions in Japan, France, and the UK. Although he had been a legislator representing the industrial city of Kaoshiung in the past, he had never been directly involved in the labor movement. Luo, on the other hand, was at that time a veteran activist of a powerful trade union in Hsinchu County (*yuan dong cuan gong hui*). The Workers Party filed three candidates in the 1989 parliamentary election; none gained enough popular support to be elected. In 1991, the party concentrated its resources on the campaign of Luo Mei-wen, who ran for office in Hsinchu County, where he was quite popular due to his active role in the 1989 Hsin Pu-chen strike.¹⁷ Luo garnered 18,008 votes (10.35 percent of the votes cast), which ranked sixth in his electoral constituency. Luo Mei Wen would have needed another 5,613 votes (3.2 percent) for his victory.¹⁸ With the failure of Luo Mei-wen in Hsinchu, even members of the party began to doubt the possibility of having a powerful labor party in Taiwan. Others blamed the weak financial capabilities and the KMT-dominated media for the

16. The party's vice chairman, for instance, was 34 years and 7 months in prison.

17. In 1989, Luo Mei Wen was the leader of a trade union (*yuan dong cuan gong hui*) belonging to Far Eastern, one of Taiwan's top 50 business conglomerates (total assets). The factory was situated in Hsin Pu-chen, Hsinchu County. Employees there were dissatisfied about the working conditions and payment; Luo Mei-wen demanded improvements from Far Eastern. However, as a result of the union's activities, the union had its office ransacked by the police. That incident led to the union's final decision to stage a protest against the company. According to him several thousand workers took part in the demonstration, which eventually proved unsuccessful. Tang Shu, a leading party official, blamed the government for the failure, claiming that government officials had put pressure on the families of the participants. Family members were told that there would be no work for them in future unless they withdrew their support for the union. (Interview with Tang Shu, Secretary-General, Workers Party, August 1996, Taipei).

18. There were nine candidates running for office in the same constituency. The district magnitude was four.

poor results.¹⁹ Popular support for the party diminished over the years, and after another defeat in 1996, the party decided to refrain from filing candidates in national elections.

Apart from the Labor Party and Workers Party, there were two other important minor parties, which tried to become vehicles for Taiwan's social movements, namely the Green Party and the Taiwan Independence Party. Prof. Kao Cheng-Yan of National Taiwan University founded the Green Party in January 1996. The party filed 16 hopefuls in the 1996 National Assembly elections. In total, the Green Party obtained about 1 percent of the vote, and only one hopeful was elected with 11 percent of the votes cast in Yunlin County. In the beginning, the party had a variety of objectives, such as abolishing the National Assembly and promoting social welfare legislation, and did not primarily focus on environmental issues.²⁰ After the defeat in 1996, the party, under the leadership of Kao Cheng-yan, developed into a single-issue party. Kao ran a highly focused—though unsuccessful—campaign in 1998, and later in 2001. His objection to the construction of Taiwan's fourth nuclear power plant became the only issue raised in his campaign speeches, pamphlets and newspapers ads. The Green Party was thus not able to repeat its 1996 success at the polls and disappeared from Taiwan's political landscape after its defeat in 2001.

In March 1996, the people of Taiwan could for the first time directly elect their president. Incumbent President Lee Teng-hui of the ruling party obtained 54.0 percent of the vote, whereas independence activist and former prisoner of conscience Peng Ming-min (DPP) only garnered 21.1 percent. The result was a setback for the independence movement. Their supporters blamed the DPP leadership for the disastrous outcome of the election. Independence activists believed that the perceived weakening of the DPP's adherence to the founding principle of pursuing Taiwan's independence had disappointed many core DPP supporters who either refrained from voting or cast their votes in support of Lee Teng-hui.²¹ The Taiwan Communiqué, a major news organ of the independence movement, wrote at that time:

19. Interview with Tang Shu, Secretary-General, Workers Party, August 1996, Taipei.

20. With the president directly elected by popular vote, the Green Party as well as other opposition parties considered the National Assembly futile and tried to abolish it. Until its abolishment, the Green Party regarded it as “garbage” that should be recycled. Party candidates elected to the National Assembly were expected to use their seats to support constitutional changes allowing for the abolition of the chamber, and to use 80 percent of their salaries to financially support Taiwan's social movements. The Green Party initiated the formation of the Social Legislative Campaign Alliance (she fa lien) in September 1996. The alliance consisted of sixteen major social groups: the Taiwan Environmental Protection Union (taiwan huan jing bao hu lian meng), Animal Protection Association of the ROC (zhong hua min guo guan huai sheng ming xie hui), Alliance for the Disabled (can zhang lian meng), Taiwan Journalists' Association (taiwan xin wen zhi che xie hui), 410 Education Reform League (410 jiao yu gai cau lian meng), Social Workers' Association of the ROC (zhong hua min guo she hui gong zuo zhuan ye ren yuan xie hui), Foundation for the Encouragement of Social Welfare Institutions (li xin she hui fu li shi ye ji jin hui), Taiwan Labor Front (taiwan lao gong zhen xian), Legislative Action Committee of the Workers (gong ren xing dong li fa wei yuan hui), The Eden Social Welfare Foundation (yi dian she hui fu li ji jin hui), League for the Promotion of Welfare for the Aged (lao ren fu li tui dong lian meng), Car Accident Rescue Association of the ROC (zhong hua min guo che huo jiu yuan xie hui), Taiwan Association of University Professors (taiwan jiao shou xie hui), and the Modern Social Welfare Association (xian dai she hui fu li xie hui). The alliance's main purpose is to push welfare legislation.

21. Lee Teng-hui was very popular due to the fact that he was the first president born in Taiwan and that he was believed to be a disguised independence activist. See Ian Buruma, “Taiwan's New Nationalists: Democracy with Taiwanese Characteristics,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1996) <<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19960701faessay4214/ian-buruma/taiwan-s-new-nationalists-democracy-with-taiwanese-characteristics.html>> (1 August 2003).

The attempts by DPP leaders Shih Ming-teh and Hsu Hsin-liang to play political power games, first by co-operating with the pro-unification New Party and recently with the ruling KMT, has deeply disappointed many of the DPP's core supporters. In December 1995, then-chairman Shih Ming-teh orchestrated a "grand reconciliation" with the pro-unification New Party and aligned himself with the NP in an unsuccessful attempt to run for the presidency of the Legislative Yuan. In the spring of 1996, in a peculiar zigzag change of course, the new chairman of the DPP, Mr. Hsu Hsin-liang, offered to join the KMT in forming a coalition government.²²

In October 1996, a group of leading members of the Taiwan Association of University Professors together with over two hundred other independence activists formed the Taiwan Independence Party. The party was supposed to become a platform for those dissatisfied with the current DPP policies regarding Taiwan's status as an independent nation-state. The party exclusively focused on the independence issue. In its charter, the party declared that it was "the eternal, changeless and highest objective of the party to establish a new and independent Republic of Taiwan." Three DPP legislators joined the party shortly after its formation. The Taiwan Independence Party was thus represented in parliament prior to the 1998 Legislative Yuan election. The party leadership vested great hope in 1998 national election and filed 20 candidates; however, only one was elected. In total, the party secured 1.45 percent of the vote. The election results were disastrous, and the Taiwan Independence Party, too, was soon dissolved.

Apart from these three single-issue parties, there was one catchall party, namely the Chinese Social Democratic Party (ChSDP). Former DPP member Zhu Gao-zheng, who had become famous due to his verbal and physical attacks on KMT legislators at parliamentary meetings, founded the party. Zhu modeled his party on the German CSU (Christian Social Union), and it addressed all aspects of Taiwan's society. Zhu Gao-zheng intended the party to become a third force in Taiwan's politics.²³ The ChSDP, therefore, nominated 58 candidates in the 1991 National Assembly election—the highest number of candidates ever nominated by a minor party. However, none of the candidates was elected. The ChSDP garnered 2.12 percent of the total vote. A year later, the party took again part in a national election. However, only one out of the 25 party candidates was elected. With about 65,000 votes—18 percent of the votes cast—Zhu Gao Zheng was the second highest vote getter in Yunlin County. This time, total popular support, however, dropped to 1.5 percent. After the 1992 defeat the party dissolved and Zhu Gao Zheng joined the New Party (NP).²⁴

Why did all these political parties fail? Both common and indigenous factors led to the downfall of each of the minor opposition parties. Common factors include the limited financial capabilities of minor parties, the KMT's media monopoly, and the lack of prominent political figures.

Indigenous factors include strategic errors made in the nomination process of party candidates. Local and national elections have been held ever since—with the exception of several small constituencies—in multi-member constituencies with the application of a system known as the single non-transferable vote (SNTV). Under this system, more than one hopeful is

22. "Towards the fourth party," *Taiwan Communiqué* 72 (October 1996): 14.

23. Interview, Zhu Gao Zheng, August 1996, Legislative Yuan, Taipei. See also Chinese Social Democratic Party, *zhonghua shehui minzhu dang: jiben gangling* [Chinese Social Democratic Party: Basic Principles] (Taipei: ChSDP, 1991).

24. In an interview with the author, Zhu Gao Zheng claimed that the NP merged with his party. Interview, Zhu Gao Zheng, August 1996, Legislative Yuan, Taipei.

elected in each constituency, namely those garnering the highest votes.²⁵ Multi-seat constituencies require each political party to assess how many votes it reasonably hopes to poll in a certain constituency. If the party nominates too many candidates in the constituency, party votes may be split to the extent that rival candidates take the seats away. By nominating too few candidates, the party runs the risk of wasting votes. The former led to the disastrous defeat of the Chinese Social Democratic Party in the 1991 National Assembly election. The party nominated forty-three candidates in Taiwan province and the special municipalities of Taipei and Kaoshiung. Only the KMT and DPP had more hopefuls. Although the party garnered over two percent of the total vote, none of its candidates was elected. The expectations of the party were too high, and far too many hopefuls were nominated in as many as ten constituencies.

Apart from nominating too few or too many candidates, the overall success of the party depends also on its ability to coordinate popular support. If the party network fails to support each candidate with the same degree of enthusiasm, one of the party's candidates may take a disproportional number of votes away causing the defeat of the party colleague. As to ensure a proportional distribution of votes among the candidates contesting in the same constituency, the NP and the DPP practiced the so-called *pei piao* system (forced vote distribution). *Pei piao* is a rational system based on the fact that the chance of someone being born on Monday is the same as of someone being born on Tuesday. A party could, for instance, nominate five candidates in an electoral district, and give each of its candidates two single-digit numbers, that is zero and one to the first candidate, two and three to the second and so forth. Party supporters could then be urged to vote for the candidate whose number coincides with the last digit of their ID. If most party supporters followed the strategy, each candidate should receive an equal amount of votes. The *pei piao* system has been regarded as one of the key reasons for the success of the NP and the DPP in parliamentary elections.²⁶ The ChSDP failed to adopt such a strategy, and consequently no even distribution could be achieved in those constituencies where the party filed more than one candidate.

The WP and the LP made a similar mistake. Candidates opted to contest against each other in key constituencies instead of forming a coalition and nominating a common candidate. The split within the LP and the subsequent formation of the WP led to the downfall of both parties.

The TAIP failed because it nominated rather unknown politicians as its candidates. Prominent party leaders, such as Lin Shan-tian, refused to take part in national elections since they questioned the legitimacy of the KMT government.²⁷ The party's influence thus diminished within a few years.

25. The number of electoral districts has changed several times since 1945. In Legislative Yuan elections, for instance, provinces and special municipalities were electoral districts in the 1948 election. Eight members were elected in the province of Taiwan in that election. In the last election of legislators (2001), the province of Taiwan was divided into twenty-seven constituencies. With the exception of two thinly populated counties—Penghu and Taitung—an average of seven hopefuls were elected in each of these constituencies.

26. For the use of this system in the 1995 parliamentary election see Cheng-hao Pao, "Xin dang ping jun pei piao ce lue jiao jie zhi yan jiu: yi ba shi si nian li fa wei yuan xuan ju wei li [The Effectiveness of the New Party's Strategy of Forced Vote Distribution in the 1995 Legislative Election]," *Journal of Electoral Studies* 5, no. 1 (May 1998): 95-138.

27. Lin Shan-tian is one of Taiwan's leading criminal law experts. He became famous as the leader of a movement calling for the abolition of §100 of the Criminal Law (also known as the Sedition Law). In an interview with the author, he emphasized that the KMT government is a foreign regime without legitimacy to govern Taiwan. He, therefore, could not take part in elections of representatives of an illegitimate institution. Interview with Lin Shan-tian, National Taiwan University, March 2000.

Polarized Pluralist Party System

Taiwan's party system was about to undergo significant changes at the turn of the century. The 2000 presidential election caused a deep split within the KMT and led to the formation of the People First Party (PFP). Its founder, Song Chu-yu, quit the KMT a year earlier after the party announced that it would not nominate him as the party's presidential candidate. The national elections of December 2001 made Song's party the third strongest force in parliament (20 percent of seats). Song's move led to the end of a KMT majority in the legislative body. The KMT obtained 30 percent of the 225 seats at stake and the DPP 38 percent. The DPP thus became the largest political party represented in parliament. This constellation may suggest a three party system, but what has developed over the last few years in Taiwan instead is a polarized pluralist party system.

There have emerged four political parties of great significance since the 2001 national election: the DPP, KMT, PFP and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU). The latter is the smallest party of these four and captured about 6 percent of the 225 parliamentary seats in 2001. Former President Lee Teng-hui is the spiritual leader of the party, which was founded in July 2001 with the aim of stabilizing Taiwan's political system and of assisting the DPP to secure a majority in parliament.²⁸ Currently, Taiwan's political landscape is divided into the blue and the green camp. The terms 'blue camp' and 'green camp' derive from the main colour in the party flags of the KMT and DPP, respectively. The blue camp comprises the KMT, PFP and the NP, whereas the DPP and the TSU belong to the green camp. The blue camp favors unification with the People's Republic of China under the formula "one country, two systems," whereas the green camp is actively seeking international recognition as an independent nation-state with formal representation at the UN and other international bodies. The 2004 presidential election divided Taiwan's society along party lines and seriously endangered Taiwan's political and social development. Parliamentary elections held in December of that year helped to improve the situation and will most likely depolarize Taiwan's party system and society.

Developments leading to a polarized pluralist party system and society

When the KMT arrived in Taiwan in 1945, gentry politics dominated the island. With the introduction of local self-governance in 1950 under the 1946 constitution, powerful local factions (*difang paixi*) emerged and soon began to replace the power of the gentry. The nature of local politics in Taiwan changed with urbanization, industrialization, and liberalization. In the 1950s, the era of gentry and factional politics, Taiwan was an agrarian society. Most people lived in the countryside. In the 1960s, local politics changed in urban areas but remained dominated by gentry and local factions in rural areas. In urban areas, there was an increasing involvement of business groups in local politics. In the mid-1970, more than half of Taiwan's population resided in urban areas and only 30 percent were employed in the agricultural sector. In urban and rural areas, a new era of local politics appeared. Apart from the traditional political forces, party politics came to light: the KMT versus the *dangwai* (non-KMT). With industrialization, wealth accumulated and money politics surfaced. Vote-buying (*mai piao*) emerged at this stage.

28. It is interesting to note that it is now the TSU that speaks out in favour of a fully independent Taiwan nation-state. The DPP has become pragmatic on various issues such as cross-straits relations and the official name of the island-state. Most of the TSU legislators and senior party staff are former members of the KMT, not of the DPP.

Further significant changes occurred in the 1980s. In urban areas, money politics became an even more decisive factor in politics. More and more interest groups emerged. Social movements began to dominate the political scene. With the lifting of martial law in 1987, political parties mushroomed. It was about that time that a new phenomenon entered Taiwan's political landscape—a phenomenon that led to the polarization of Taiwan's pluralist party system and to the coup attempt of March 2004. Some analysts, such as Chao Yung-mau, spoke of an over-politicization of Taiwan's society.²⁹ However, it was perhaps more than just an over-politicization of Taiwan's society. It may have been the beginning of a new era in Taiwan's political culture—the era of populism.

Defining populism

The existence of populism as a political ideology can be traced back to the early 1870s. Its founders, members of various agrarian organizations, engaged in a social analysis of contemporary American society and wanted to reform the societal structure. Lawrence Goodwyn 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."³⁰ In other words, populists at that time held that an elite in society oppresses the common people, and they considered it their mission to grasp the power from the self-serving elite and use it for the benefit and advancement of the oppressed masses. By the late 1880s, agrarian organizations had developed into broad networks that included thousands of black and white chapters of the Farmers Alliance. In 1891, these Populists established the People's Party to contest the 1892 presidential election. The party was quite successful at the beginning, and joined with the Democratic Party to support William Jennings Bryan's unsuccessful presidential bid in 1896. Thereafter, the party lost much of its own identity and gradually dissolved after the 1904 presidential election.³¹

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. It was, however, soon blurred with primitive and demagogic elements, and finally developed into a political instrument to instigate the masses. In other words, it developed into a vehicle of racism, anti-Semitism and other similar ideologies. Goodwyn describes it as "a behavioral manifestation of deep-seated prejudices and 'status anxieties,' not a sensible product aimed at correcting unbalanced or generally exploitative economic practices pervading American society."³²

The modern usage of the word populism mainly reflects Goodwyn's description. The Collins English Dictionary 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 would then be a person, especially a politician, who appeals to the interests or prejudices of ordinary people as to reach a certain goal. It is important to note that a populist makes a "calculated appeal," rather than just an appeal to people. Populism can also descend into demagoguery and cultism. West and Langone define a cult as "a group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing and employing

29. Chao Yung-mau, *Taiwan di fang zheng zhi de bian qian yu te zhi* [Changes in Taiwan Local Politics] (Taipei: Han Lu, 1998), 248-63.

30. Lawrence Goodwyn, "Populism," in *The Reader's Companion to American History*, ed. Eric Foner and John A. Garraty (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 854.

31. Goodwin, "Populism." See also Omar H. Ali, "The Making of a black Populist: A Tribute to the Rev. Walter A. Pattillo," *Oxford Public Ledger* 121, no. 25 (28 March 2002) <<http://www.geocities.com/salika4/OxfordPublicLedgerRevWAP.html>> (1 August 2003).

32. Goodwin, "Populism," 855.

unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control [. . .] designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families, or the community."³³ Henry Louis Mencken, one of the most influential American writers of the early twentieth century, defined a demagogue as "one who preaches doctrines he knows to be untrue to men he knows to be idiots."³⁴ Populism, cultism and demagoguery can go hand in hand and are not mutually exclusive.

Populism in Taiwan

In Taiwan, populism emerged in the late 1970s and became a common political strategy a decade later amid political, social, and environmental changes. Until the end of the twentieth century, populism was a predominantly local and single-issue oriented phenomenon. It surfaced as a byproduct of competitive local and national elections. In order to win votes and attract the masses, an increasing number of politicians tried to understand the grievances of the electorate—especially those of the middle class and the various social movements that surfaced as a consequence of the worsening social and environmental conditions. There were at least eight major social movements promoting the interests of consumers, environmentalists, laborers, women, aborigines, farmers, students and teachers. Even though some of these movements emerged earlier than the 1980s, they all gained considerable political significance in that decade. The social movements of the 1980s differed not only in the degree of threat they posed to the state, but also in their capability of mobilizing internal resources. Some of the movements, such as those focusing on labor and environmental issues, did in fact pose a serious threat to the government, and caused the founding of cabinet-level agencies. Moreover, they succeeded in determining election issues and thus the political agenda of the regime. In the 1983 national election campaign, consumer protection emerged as the primary issue. Three years later, "environmental protection was the issue raised by almost every candidate."³⁵ It was this combination of powerful social movements and electoral competition that introduced populism to Taiwan's political culture and at the same time speeded up the democratization processes.

Populism in the 80s and early 90s was predominantly local and single-issue oriented. Rather than becoming full-fledged populists, politicians merely used populist rhetoric and campaign strategies. At the end of the 1990s, Taiwan's political system not only experienced a deep split within the KMT but also the birth of the nation-state's first powerful populist leader and movement—a movement that radicalized Taiwan's society and political culture. Populism was no longer local and single-issue oriented. It encompassed a large variety of issues and swept the whole island. The movement has its roots in the right wing of the KMT. After the death of President Chiang Ching-kuo, Lee Teng-hui took over the presidency. Lee was the first president who was born in Taiwan—a fact that contributed to his popularity among the population of Taiwan and caused discomfort among the more radical pro-China forces within the KMT and society. Although Lee was officially supporting unification, his real intentions were no secret. In his view, Taiwan was not only a political entity separate from China but also a nation in its own right. Inside the KMT, members of the non-

33. L. J. West and M. D. Langone, *Cultism: A conference for scholars and policy makers*. Summary of proceedings of the Wingspread conference on cultism, September 9–11 (Weston, MA: American Family Foundation, 1985).

34. Cited in Giovanni Carbone, *Populism's visits Africa: the case of Yoweri Museveni and no-party democracy in Uganda*. Paper presented at the Crisis States Research Center's Annual Workshop, Delhi, December 2004, 4.

35. Mao-gui Zhang, *She hui yun dong yu zheng zhi zhuan hua* [Social Movements and Political Change] (Taipei: Institute for National Policy Research, 1994), 57.

mainstream faction, such as Jao Shao-kong and You Mu-ming, established the New KMT Alliance (*xin guo min dang lian xian*) in May 1990. Within three years, the faction developed into a political party of its own. The New Party (NP) gained significant support at the polls and soon became a third force in Taiwan politics (Table 3). At the end of the 1990s, however, the party lost most of its appeal. A number of internal conflicts and accusations of illegal activities carried out by some of its leaders harmed the party's image as a 'clean' party.

Moreover, democratization marginalized the pro-China forces in Taiwan whereas it strengthened the position of the pro-Taiwan politicians. The people of Taiwan, being isolated from the mainland, developed their own cultural and ethnic identity, despite the efforts of the former KMT government to assimilate the Taiwanese. At the end of the 1990s, pro-China oriented political leaders could no longer win sympathy with radical views regarding ethnic identity and unification with Communist China. They, therefore, became populists and even demagogues. One of the most popular and successful populist leaders (demagogues) in Taiwan's political history is Song Chu-yu, who was born in China in 1942. Song was educated in the US and held several leading positions within the KMT apparatus. Between 1979 and 1984, for instance, he was Director of the Government Information Office and after that he was the head of the Department of Cultural Affairs, a central organ of the KMT. While holding these positions, Song became one of the key figures behind the KMT's attempt to "clean" Taiwan's society from "illegal thoughts" (any critical assessment of KMT rule), and to prohibit the use of Taiwanese as a means of communication.³⁶ In 1993, he was appointed governor of Taiwan and in the same year, he contested successfully in the first direct election of that post. At the end of the 1990s, Song was more and more marginalized by the KMT under the leadership of democracy-oriented Lee Teng-hui, especially when the KMT agreed with the DPP to streamline the Provincial Government and to suspend all provincial elections. In 1997, the constitution was amended accordingly. Song fiercely protested the amendment since it crossed his plans for serving a second term. A second term as governor would have given him the opportunity to improve his Taiwanese, which by that time had developed into the lingua franca of politics, and as to further extend his power base in southern Taiwan, which was one of the prerequisites for his ambitions to win the presidential race of March 2000. When his term as governor ended in 1998, he was still hoping to obtain the KMT's presidential nomination. Lee Teng-hui, critical of Song's understanding of democracy and questioning his passion for Taiwan, picked the less powerful bureaucrat Lien Chan as the presidential candidate. Because the KMT leadership had passed him over, Song felt he had no other option but to run as an independent. It was at that time when Taiwan's first nationwide populist movement appeared. Song's campaign strategy was to attack the political establishment, to blacken the image of the KMT and label the DPP as anarchists. His campaign messages reached out to the ordinary people. He talked much about the economy and other social concerns, and often stressed that he wanted to serve the people of Taiwan. His political platform was named accordingly: New Taiwan People Service Team (*xin taiwan ren fuwu tuandui*). Song ultimately lost the presi-

36. The Chinese nationalist (KMT) government under Chiang Kai-shek and later his son Chiang Ching-kuo promoted Han nationalism with the aim of eventual "liberalization" of the mainland. As part of this attempt, the KMT government was determined to assimilate the native population of Taiwan through social control and education. The Han-nation-building process severely affected the daily lives of the native population. Regulations forbade the use of Japanese, aboriginal and Sinitic languages other than Mandarin. Ethnic origin and the ability to speak Mandarin worked as keys to power and became instruments of social control. The KMT government purged state institutions of the local people, the Taiwanese, and within a few years the Mainlanders, the ethnic minority, held the majority of key positions in government and state-run industries. The Han nationalists justified the purges with the claim that the "primitive prostitute culture" of the "local population" lacked the ability to govern the island.

dential election by a small margin to Chen Shui-bian of the DPP. His defeat was, however, still a victory, considering the fact that he did much better in the election than his rival Lien Chan. In light of these results, populism could now be viewed as an effective political strategy. Song, therefore, attempted to extend his power by leading a populist movement based on his own political party. No other name would better describe the nature of Song's political party (movement) than People First Party, which was eventually founded on 31 March 2000. Within a short period, it resembled more a nationalist movement similar to the Austrian Freedom Party led by populist leader Jörg Haider. Party staff and legislators became an army of sycophants. Whenever they appeared in public they would wear orange vests and convey the message that they were there to serve the people of Taiwan, that they were guardian angels—those who would help the ordinary people to deal with the corrupt government, those who would defend the rights of the *laobaixing*, the common people.

Apart from the People First Party, Song founded an organization named the Friends of Song. According to its statutes, all members had to study Song's philosophy, to identify themselves with Song's beliefs, to follow him, to unquestionably support him, and never criticize any of his actions.³⁷ This all leads to the question of whether Song is a cult leader, a demagogue, or both.

The 2004 presidential election, populism, and the Lien-Song Rebellion

The March 2004 presidential election was different in many ways from the previous two direct presidential elections. Previous elections, for instance, had a number of presidential candidates representing a variety of views. This election, however, polarized society and led to violence and hatred among the population. The polarization was triggered by an attempt by senior political leaders of the blue-camp, especially Song Chu-yu and Lien Chan to stop the marginalization of their political and economic power. They had one common enemy, namely Chen Shui-bian. The PFP and the KMT were aware of the fact that only if they agreed to run under a joint presidential ticket could they defeat Chen Shui-bian.³⁸

Although Lien Chan received fewer votes in the previous presidential election than his more charismatic rival Song Chu-yu, he was nominated as the presidential candidate with Song as his vice president. The fact that Song's party received fewer votes and seats in the 2001 parliamentary election than the KMT and performed poorly in the 2002 local elections may explain this awkward situation. Still the Lien-Song ticket itself was rather incongruous. During the presidential race four years earlier, the two espoused widely divergent views and made malicious accusations against each other. Lien Chan, for instance, described Song as cruel and unscrupulous (*lang xin gou fei*). Song, on the other hand, stated that Lien Chan had proved incompetent while serving as vice president and thus questioned Lien's ability to function as the head of state. Four years later, things appeared to be completely different.

Another difference between the 2004 presidential election and the previous ones was the nature of the electoral campaign. In previous campaigns, candidates seemed to have their own platforms and ideological backgrounds. During the first part of the election campaign, the DPP dominated the campaign by announcing major policy issues, such as the drafting of a new constitution. At that time it became obvious that the opposition had no concrete agenda. The Lien-Song ticket appeared to be ideological bankrupt. The second part of the campaign

37. These rules are summarized in a pamphlet published by the organization (song you hui xu zhi shou ce)

38. Under the current law, the president and vice-president are elected on a single ticket by a plurality vote.

(about two weeks before the election) consisted entirely of personal attacks on Chen Shui-bian. No policy issues were discussed.

The first campaign issues emerged at the beginning of September, when a group of one hundred-fifty thousand people gathered in front of the presidential office urging the president to change the official name of the island-state from Republic of China to Taiwan. A month later, two hundred thousand people took to the streets of Kaoshiung, Taiwan's second largest city, in support of President Chen Shui-bian's appeal for a new constitution. Chen had repeatedly said that a new constitution would be completed by 2006 and implemented by 2008, with its contents being decided by referendum. The opposition parties opposed Chen's plans. KMT chair and presidential candidate Lien Chan repeatedly called them "silly" and "nonsense." Opinion polls conducted in early November by the China Post, Taiwan's leading daily newspaper, other media outlets, and private pollsters placed President Chen in the lead. Chen's new constitution and referendum law seemed to be more popular among the electorate than the blue camp had assumed. Consequently, the blue camp made a policy U-turn. On 15 November, Lien Chan came out with his own constitutional plans, and a few days later he even supported a referendum law. At the end of November, the blue camp—having a majority in parliament—pushed through their version of the law. Voting in the LY resembled a circus performance by blue-camp legislators. They ran around yelling and holding self-made posters saying that President Chen had once more cheated the people. Lien Chan's bowing to public opinion polls raises the question of whether Lien Chan had not changed from a bureaucrat to a populist as Song had. In the past, Lien Chan lacked charisma, leadership, and political marketing skills. The 2004 election campaign made him a clone of Song—a person he admired for his talent of inciting the masses. Lien Chan emerged as the protector of the Taiwan people, the true leader who would wipe out all evil things. Under his leadership, the KMT joined Song's populist movement.

Anyhow, the DPP was quite at a loss and had to accept that the blue camp had taken their issues away. Damage control was necessary and resulted in Chen Shui-bian's plan of holding two national referenda on national security issues coinciding with the presidential election.³⁹

Adolf Hitler and Chen Shui-bian: the climax of populist rhetoric

In February, Chen Shui-bian and former President Lee Teng-hui came up with the idea of forming a human chain from the very north of Taiwan to the very south of the island. The human chain would symbolize resistance to China's military threat and be in remembrance of the 2-28 Incident.⁴⁰ Two million people took part in the rally, which surprised the blue camp. Lien Chan and Song Chu-yu, both born in China, accused Chen Shui-bian of creating ethnic

39. Chen's referenda plan led to several discussions in local and foreign academic circles. The majority of scholars—most notable here are Flemming Christiansen of Leeds University and Huang Kuang-Kuo of the Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University—branded Chen Shui-bian a populist causing tensions between the Taiwan Straits and instigating racial unrest in Taiwan.³⁹ Chen Shui-bian may have used the referenda to boost his popularity, but the content and meaning of the referenda do not in any way constitute a contradiction to his beliefs and ultimate goals. Thus, Chen may be called a populist for applying populist methods, but he certainly is not a demagogue. Moreover, Chen's populism is by far less radical and less institutionalized than Song Chu-yu's populist movement. It is astonishing that neither local nor foreign scholars have looked into the question whether Song Chu-yu is a populist, demagogue or even a cult leader..

40. On 28 February 1947, protests against the KMT government were brutally suppressed and several thousand Taiwanese killed.

division and conflict in Taiwan.⁴¹ To counter the success of the green camp, the KMT/PFP planned to stage a rally on 13 March attracting even more participants. It was at that time that the electoral campaign entered its second stage: the personal attack on Chen Shui-bian. In the run-up to the planned rally, the blue camp started a media barrage against President Chen. More than a dozen different ads were placed in Taiwan's leading newspapers and aired by major television stations, most of which were entitled 'Change the President, Save Taiwan,' and contained the message that incumbent President Chen was the scum of the nation. The tone and language used in the opposition's campaign leaflets and ads were without doubt the worst ever found in any election campaign on the island. Newspaper ads even compared President Chen Shui-bian with Adolf Hitler and asked the electorate to end Chen's dictatorship by voting for Lien Chan and Song Chu-yu. A photo of Hitler was added to drive home the insinuation.⁴² In central Taiwan, the KMT campaign headquarters distributed posters showing terrorist Bin Laden expressing his admiration of Taiwan's 'dictator' Chen.⁴³ In another ad, an image of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was used. Apart from other claims, the ad stated that the referenda were illegal since they were to be held concurrently with the presidential election. The KMT referred to Article 17 of the referendum law, which according to the party clearly forbids the holding of referenda on the same day a national election takes place. Mysteriously, Article 17 of the law does not mention such a regulation. To put it differently, the KMT deliberately misled the public into believing that the referenda were illegal and that President Chen was acting as though he were above the law: in effect, a dictator like Saddam Hussein.⁴⁴ The 3-13 rally attracted four million people around the island, which marked a new record in Taiwan's election history. The rally itself resembled more a revolution than an electoral campaign activity, and climaxed when the Lien Chan made a dramatic gesture in Taipei prostrating himself alongside his wife and KMT Secretary-General Lin Fong-cheng, and kissing the ground in front of the Presidential Office. Shortly before Lien's surprise prostration, Song Chu-yu, leading a march in central Taiwan, also knelt on the ground with his wife and kissed the ground. Song and Lien said that the gesture was meant to demonstrate their love for Taiwan.⁴⁵

One day prior to the election, incumbent President Chen Shui-bian and Vice President Lu Hsiu-lien were both shot while campaigning in southern city of Tainan, in an apparent political assassination attempt. The injuries were not life threatening, and both Chen and Lu were released from hospital on the same day. Nevertheless, the attack provoked shock and unease among the population. Subsequently, both presidential candidates agreed to cancel all campaign activities. The election, however, had to take place as scheduled on the following day since the election law only allows for suspension of election upon the death of a candidate. Supporters of Lien Chan and Song Chu-yu doubted the authenticity of the attack and worried that it would influence the outcome of the election. In an attempt to win back sympathy votes, supporters of Lien Chan and Song Chu-yu spread malicious rumors accusing President Chen of having planned the assassination attempt. Legislator Chen Wen-chien, for instance, claimed in her live talk show broadcast on one of Taiwan's most popular TV channels that she would have proof that Chen faked the whole attack. She claimed that a nurse working at the hospital Chen and Lu were treated after the attack had called her. During their conversa-

41. Basically, the population can be divided into two groups: those people of Chinese origin who arrived in Taiwan before the end of Second World War and those afterwards. The latter group is referred to as the 'mainlanders.'

42. The ad can be viewed at http://www.eastasia.at/vol3_1/ad1.htm

43. The ad can be viewed at http://www.eastasia.at/vol3_1/binl.htm

44. The ad can be viewed at http://www.eastasia.at/vol3_1/saddam.htm

45. A photo of the event can be viewed at: <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/photo/2004/03/14/2003113135>

tion, the nurse allegedly told the legislator that Chen’s wound would not stem from a gunshot and that security police had already arrived in the morning to prepare for the arrival of Chen and Lu. Apart from making such malicious claims, she instructed viewers to boycott the ‘illegal’ referenda by yelling at polling station staff, “I refuse to take the ballots for the referenda.” During the TV show, other prominent figures, such as author Li Ao, described President Chen as a ‘slick trickster.’ The claims and insults led to an uproar, especially because of the fact that Chen Wen-chien failed to offer any evidence to substantiate her claims.

The next day, incumbent President Chen Shui-bian won the election by a slight margin of 29,518 votes. Voter turnout averaged 80.28 percent, two percentage points lower than in 2000. Compared with the previous election, Chen Shui-bian and Lu Hsiu-lien garnered ten percentage points more votes. In the counties of Nantou and Taichung, the DPP presidential hopeful increased his share of votes by fifteen percentage points. Lien Chan and his running mate Song Chu-yu lost support in every one of the twenty-four counties and cities. Even in the capital, the alliance’s stronghold, the blue camp lost five percentage points (Table 5).

The aftermath: the Lien-Song Rebellion

After the election defeat, Lien Chan and Song Chu-yu made public their intention to file lawsuits nullifying both the election result and the election itself. The first lawsuit was based on Article 104 of the presidential election law and aimed at Chen Shui-bian and his running mate Lu Hsiu-lien. Lien and Song accused Chen and Lu of having (i) staged the assassination attempt, (ii) prevented some 300,000 soldiers and police officers from exercising their rights to vote, (iii) holding the two referenda together with the presidential vote as to influence the outcome of the election. The second lawsuit was based on Article 102 of the presidential election law and accused the Central Election Commission of vote rigging and of illegally holding referenda together with a national election. The lawsuits seemed to be an appropriate way of dealing with the blue camp’s suspicions. The motives behind the lawsuits were, however, questionable. When Song Chu-yu and Lien Chan were informed about their defeat, they were also made to understand that there was no chance of changing the result within legal and moral boundaries. Song and Lien, nevertheless, decided to continue their media war against Chen Shui-bian. What started as a protest movement during the election campaign soon developed into a rebellion, or even a coup attempt. No option seemed more feasible to Lien Chan and Song Chu-yu than the highly questionable approach of discrediting the president by any possible means. The aim of the rebellion was not to win the lawsuits in court (for it was already clear that the blue camp would lose both suits) but to discredit—or even topple—the government headed by Chen Shui-bian. It would have been a *de facto* coup d’état—a silent coup from within the system against the system without tanks and soldiers on the streets.

Table 6: Legislative Yuan Election Results (2004 and 2001)

Affiliation	2001				2004				Change (%)	
	Votes	%	Seats	%	Votes	%	Seats	%	Votes	Seats
DPP	3,447,740	33.4	87	38.7	3,471,429	35.7	89	39.6	7.0	2.3
KMT	2,949,371	28.6	68	30.2	3,190,081	32.8	79	35.1	15.0	16.2
PFP	1,917,836	18.6	46	20.4	1,350,613	13.9	34	15.1	-25.2	-26.1
TSU	801,560	7.8	13	5.8	756,712	7.8	12	5.3	0.3	-7.7
others	1,211,348	11.7	11	4.9	948,524	9.8	11	4.9	-16.8	0.0
Total	10,327,855	100.0	225	100.0	9,717,359	100.0	225	100.0	-	-

Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Central Election Commission

Table 5: Vote share in presidential elections, Taiwan, 2004 and 2000^a

Administrative Area	Chen Shui-bian, Lu Hsiu-lien (DPP)				Lien Chan (KMT), Song Chu-yu (PFP)			
	2004	%	2000	%	2004	%	2000 ^b	%
Taipei City	690,379	43.47	597,465	37.64	897,870	56.53	979,102	61.69
Kaoshiung City	500,304	55.65	597,465	45.79	398,769	44.35	467,567	53.75
Keelung City	90,276	40.56	69,555	30.84	132,289	59.44	154,577	68.53
Hsinchu City	96,818	44.88	69,760	33.79	118,924	55.12	134,646	65.23
Taichung City	267,095	47.34	193,796	36.86	297,098	52.66	328,877	62.56
Chia-yi City	85,702	56.06	70,124	47.01	67,176	43.94	78,443	52.58
Tainan City	251,397	57.77	191,261	46.06	183,786	42.23	221,978	53.46
Taipei County	1,000,265	46.94	741,596	36.73	1,130,615	53.06	1,264,528	62.63
Yilan County	147,848	57.71	123,157	47.03	108,361	42.29	137,631	52.56
Taoyuan County	448,770	44.68	299,120	31.72	555,688	55.32	622,251	65.98
Hsinchu County	92,576	35.94	61,533	24.75	165,027	64.06	179,673	72.27
Miaoli County	123,427	39.25	86,707	26.81	191,059	60.75	232,331	71.84
Taichung County	440,479	51.79	305,219	36.51	410,082	48.21	525,331	62.84
Changhua County	383,296	52.26	298,571	40.05	350,128	47.74	442,995	59.42
Nantou County	146,415	48.75	106,440	34.49	153,913	51.25	200,888	65.09
Yunlin County	243,129	60.32	193,715	46.99	159,906	39.68	216,365	52.48
Chia-yi County	199,466	62.79	157,512	49.49	118,189	37.21	159,299	50.04
Tainan County	421,927	64.79	347,210	53.78	229,284	35.21	295,660	45.80
Kaoshiung County	425,265	58.40	342,553	47.14	302,937	41.60	380,637	52.38
Pingtung County	299,321	58.11	238,572	46.28	215,796	41.89	274,305	53.21
Taitung County	40,203	34.48	28,102	23.2	76,382	65.52	92,572	76.44
Hualien County	53,501	29.80	40,044	21.42	126,041	70.2	146,005	78.09
Penghu County	22,162	49.47	16,487	36.79	22,639	50.53	28,141	62.80
Kinmen County	1,701	6.05	759	3.11	26,433	93.95	23,534	96.31
Lienchiang County	248	5.76	58	1.8	4,060	94.24	3,149	97.74
Total	6,471,970	50.11	5,176,781	39.30	6,442,452	49.89	7,590,485	59.94

^a Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Central Election Commission, Ministry of Interior, Taipei^b Combined votes of both candidates

5.1 The 2004 Legislative Yuan election: signs of change

On 11 December 2004, voters in Taiwan again went to the polls to elect 225 members of the Legislative Yuan. The election result was a victory for the KMT, and a defeat for Song's PFP and the green camp. Compared with 2001, the KMT succeeded in increasing its share of votes and seats by about 15 percent (see Table 6). The DPP and the TSU could not get a majority in parliament. This result was predictable for two major reasons. Firstly, both parties were too optimistic and nominated far too many candidates. To make things worse, there was no effective cooperation between the two parties. Votes were thus not shared among the hopefuls of the two parties contesting in the same electoral constituency. Secondly, President Chen Shui-bian ran a highly focused campaign predominately addressing national identity issues, which was criticized by the pro-China media and the opposition parties. Stories about a possible war with China if Chen Shui-bian obtained a parliamentary majority were common and seemed to work in favor of the People's Republic of China and the pro-China forces in Taiwan.

Song Chu-yu and his PFP, however, were the biggest losers. The party lost one quarter of the popular support and parliamentary seats it obtained in 2001. Song's populist rhetoric and the violent post-election protests instigated by his party colleagues seemed to have seriously hurt the image of the party.⁴⁶ Although the KMT leadership was part of the rebellion against Chen Shui-bian, Lien Chan and other senior party members and legislators were rarely involved in the violent protests following the disputed March election, thus giving the electorate the impression of the KMT as a more reasonable party. Song's defeat was predictable when the KMT first agreed to, but later postponed until after the election, a merger between the KMT and the PFP. The election results, however, were too impressive and the KMT decided to cancel the planned merger. After this disgracing experience, Song Chu-yu sought a new partner. At the end of December 2004, there were several indications of possible cooperation between the DPP and PFP.⁴⁷ Will this cooperation lead to a depolarization of Taiwan's current polarized party system?

46. The Advocates, a local think tank, released an opinion poll in mid-June revealing that 67.8 percent of the electorate strongly opposed the protests of the blue camp. Polls taken in March showed that about 52.9 percent opposed the protests. <<http://www.advocates.org.tw/article.asp?Class=%A5%C1%B7N%BD%D5%ACd>> (18 June 2004).

47. Kao Tian-sheng, "Song chu yu ke wang chong hui 'zhu liu pai'?" [Song Chu-yu back to the mainstream again?] *New Taiwan Weekly*, 15-21 January 2005, 11-16.

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