

**2019 Taiwan Fellowship Research Report**

**Project Title: Oppositional Politics in Recent Taiwan**

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It is my greatest honor and privilege to be a Taiwan Fellowship recipient. I have conducted research in Taiwan from January to December, 2019, and I have benefitted tremendously by the academic exchange and collaboration during this research trip. I am truly grateful for the support and hospitality from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China.

My research project is centered on "opposition" with a principal concern in mind: the global democratic crisis. The incapacity of democratic systems around the world to alleviate recent waves of ethnic, social, religious, or ideological opposition has left many societies engulfed in vehement conflict or mired in endless and unproductive squabbles. These have been familiar scenarios in Taiwan as well. If we are able to clarify the concepts and trajectories of Taiwan's socio-political opposition, they will certainly help us understand the predicaments of other democratic societies.

I was extremely fortunate to be able to conduct my research as a visiting scholar at the College of Communication of National Chengchi University (NCCU). The College Library possesses the finest collection of research material in the fields of communication and journalism in Taiwan. The most precious resource of the College, however, is its faculty members from a wide range of disciplines such as journalism, political communication, social media, and discourse analysis, to name just a few fields that are most relevant to my research. During my visit I was able to attend and participate in more than a dozen conferences and workshops, and the exchange with Taiwan's top scholars has significantly broadened my perspective and provoked innovative research ideas as well.

The first subject of my project is a new theory of "radicalization" of opposition. The research started with a close examination of physical conflict between protestors and the police in Taiwan before and after the Sunflower Movement of 2014. Yet since June

2019 the "Anti-Extradition Bill Movement" in Hong Kong, while shocking the world with its enduring resistance and growingly intensified violence, has also shed new light on this issue. I was fortunate to have exchanged views with Hong Kong scholars including Lee Ching Kwan, Edmund Cheng, Francis Lee, Wai Hei Yuen, and Gary Tang, who are also keen to explain the radicalization of the most violent protests in Hong Kong history from various angles.

My study, however, portrays a picture quite different from theirs by illustrating the mutual imitation between protests in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The practice of protests consists of several established conventions that limit both the disruption of social routines by the protestors on the one hand, and the use of coercive force in law enforcement on the other. New conventions, however, were transferred from Taiwan's Sunflower Movement to Hong Kong's Occupy Central and later to the Anti-Extradition Bill protests, leading to a more antagonistic confrontation between the society

and the authority. Months of subsequent violent conflict further erased earlier conventions of Hong Kong protests and gradually changed the society's conceptual tolerance of violence. This research was first presented in a seminar at the College of Communication of NCCU on November 19, 2019. The full article, "What Have Protests Accomplished to Change? Rethinking the Radicalization of Street Movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong," will be submitted for review.

The second article of the project, which deals with a different dimension of oppositional politics, "From Political Symbolism to a Symbolic Opposition in Taiwanese Politics," is also ready for review. The "normalization" of statehood for the Republic of China has been a perennial concern for the whole country and its citizens. Yet the reality of international politics has made it virtually impossible. Some of the efforts, therefore, choose to challenge the political symbology of the republic, including the national flag, passport cover logo, bronze statues of Chiang Kaishek and so on.

My research attempts to demonstrate that these challenges represent a form of opposition, continuing to remind the society of the socio-political "schisms" resulting from the Chinese civil war and thence the KMT's rule in Taiwan. However, because normalization is still unattainable for Taiwan, the recurrent propositions and actions to replace, deface, or demolish those national symbols thus become symbolic and ritualistic protests themselves.

The third topic of the project is closely related to the most prominent issue of 2019: the global overflow and devastating effects of fake news and misinformation. While the current political and academic interests prioritize the detection, fact-checking, and containment of misinformation, my focus is on the interpretative and argumentative dimensions of public debate which, I believe, are more essential in framing social discourse and public opinion. My research approach was particularly inspired by the works of Professors Hu Yuan-hui and Lo Shih-hung of National

Chung Cheng University, and I will continue to collaborate with them on this subject.

I want to thank the College of Communication of NCCU for their generous support, and I am especially grateful to Professors Su Heng and Trisha Lin for their friendship and guidance. I am also very gratified to have worked with some of the leading new media, such as the Initium Media and the News Lens, on the possibilities of developing new social platforms and the positive influence that they can bring about. I would also like to express my gratitude to the friendliest staff of the Center for Chinese Studies and the librarians of the National Central Library. My research could not be so successful without their thoughtful and heartwarming help.

Last but not least, I truly appreciate the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that brought me to be in touch with the exuberant vitalities and limitless possibilities of Taiwan. The whole world is severely threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic now, but I have

full confidence in Taiwan's ability to overcome the disease and maintain the prosperity of the country. I will continue to collaborate with the academic communities of Taiwan on exciting new projects, and I hope that I can visit Taiwan soon in the near future.