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## RESPONSE: PUBLIC OPINION AS AN INFLUENTIAL FACTOR IN SUNFLOWER MOVEMENT SUCCESS

I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to Ming-sho Ho's commentary on my recent article. Ho is a leading expert on social movements, and my piece addresses his analysis of the Sunflower Movement in particular (Ho 2015). I will respond to his comments in order.

I wrote this piece to challenge the widespread notion, a misperception in my opinion, that the disunity between Ma Ying-jeou and Wang Jin-pyng (also known as Ma–Wang rivalry) was the key reason for the success of the Sunflower Movement. I agree with Ho that numerous factors were at work for the Sunflower Movement to succeed, but it is my understanding that he puts most weight on the elite disunity. As he argues: “the disunity within the ruling party offered a favorable opportunity for Sunflower activists to ... claim success when they ended their occupation” (Ho 2015, 92). While Ho considers that the disunity motivated Wang to help the activists achieve their goal, I contend that public opinion was the key reason behind Wang's decision-making throughout the movement.

Ho speculates that my “mind-reading” of Wang Jin-pyng is critical to my claims. In fact, I support my arguments and analyses of Wang's decision-making process with interviews with legislators, their aides, staff members of various parties, and participants of the Sunflower Movement. All my interviewees were, to some extent, involved in Wang's decision-making process throughout the development of the movement, and their knowledge of the norms, rules, and networks within the legislature made them the most appropriate interlocutors to weigh in on his decisions. My interviewees unanimously thought that public opinion was influential, and the consensus convinces me of the importance of the role of public opinion in the evolution of the movement.

For example, with respect to Wang's decision not to evict protestors, the record shows that Wang agreed with Premier Jiang that the police had to be used to remove protestors from the Legislative Yuan when the movement began, but it was a decision that Wang neither publicly announced nor stuck to as the movement developed. Wang's first public interview took place on the third day after the movement began. At around nine a.m., Wang appeared and announced that he would not use police force to evict activists. Before his appearance, a leader in the movement revealed to me in an interview, “we (movement participants) had been calling for Wang to come out to take care of the situation, but he was nowhere to be found” (anonymous interview). In another interview, a legislative aide confided to me that in the gap of around 46 hours between the inception of the movement and Wang's first public announcement, Wang used the time to gauge public sentiment and support for the movement. Once it was clear that

the movement was widely supported, Wang changed his stance dramatically to discontinue police action (anonymous interview). In the article, I invite readers to consider a counterfactual: would Wang still make the same decision if the movement was unpopular? I contend that it would be unlikely.

Although my article focuses on the influence of public opinion, I do not argue that public opinion was the sole variable that mattered. My main argument, as stated above, is that public opinion served as an influential cue for political elites like Wang in making critical decisions that shaped the outcome of the movement. In this regard, I agree with Ho that public opinion, along with other political variables, constituted the environment in which the Sunflower Movement operated.

It should also be noted that public opinion did not prove an unmitigated good for the movement. Support for the movement dropped considerably after the nationwide march on March 30, which should have sounded the death knell for the movement. The responsibility to put an end to the movement, as a result of the occupation, fell largely on Wang's shoulders as the leader of the legislature. However, Wang did not have many viable choices—inter- and intra-party negotiations mostly failed, and public dissatisfaction for a stalled legislature continued to mount. A clear public voice to end the movement propelled Wang to find a feasible solution. Fortunately, the decision that Wang made was acceptable to the multiple parties involved, although it was perceived unfavorably by many members within his party. In short, public opinion interacted with political variables to provide the outcome of the movement.

Theoretically, I hope that my work might serve as a springboard to bring the influence of public opinion back to studies of social movements. Social movement studies focusing on political variables often neglect public opinion as an explanatory factor. As I have demonstrated in my work, this neglect could lead us to draw erroneous conclusions that a political factor such as elite rivalry was the sole reason for the success of the Sunflower Movement. Suffice to say, public opinion is a factor that should not be taken lightly, and its inclusion, along with the factors noted in Ho's work, provide a more complete picture of the movement.

#### REFERENCE

- Ho, Ming-sho. 2015. "Occupy Congress in Taiwan: Political Opportunity, Threat, and the Sunflower Movement." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 15 (1): 69–97.