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*Edited by*  
**M. Parvizi Amineh**

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## **State, Society and International Relations in Asia**



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# **State, Society and International Relations in Asia**

## Reality and Challenges

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

*Christian Schafferer*

### **Defining populism**

What is populism? In 1981, one of the most comprehensive books on populism was published. Margaret Canovan, the author, notes in the introduction to her book that the 'term is exceptionally vague and refers in different contexts to a bewildering variety of phenomena' (Canovan 1981: 3). Notwithstanding, I should like to briefly explore the original meaning of the term populism and explain its current usage, which should enable the reader to obtain a clear and distinct understanding of what definition is used in this study.

The existence of populism as a political ideology can be traced back to the early 1870s, when members of various agrarian organisations engaged in a social analysis of contemporary American society and wanted to reform the societal structure. Lawrence Goodwyn (1991: 854) writes, 'Populist reformers felt that business domination of the political process – through massive campaign contributions to friendly officeholders and persistently effective lobbying in the national Congress and the state legislatures – had proceeded to the point that the practice had begun to undermine the democratic idea itself.' Populists at that time held that elite circles in society oppressed the common people, and they made it their mission to grasp the power from these self-serving elite circles, to use it for the benefit and advancement of the oppressed masses. At its early stages, populism was believed to be an ideology capable of solving the various societal problems that existed in late nineteenth-century America. Goodwyn notes that it was, however, soon blurred with primitive and demagogic elements, and finally developed into a mere political instrument to instigate the masses. It regressed into a vehicle for racism, anti-Semitism or other similar repugnant concepts. The demeaned form of populism is 'a behavioural manifestation of deep-seated prejudices and "status anxieties," not a sensible product aimed at correcting unbalanced or generally exploitative economic practices pervading American society' (Goodwyn 1991: 855).

The modern usage of the word populism mainly reflects Goodwyn's description. The Collins English Dictionary, for example, defines populism as 'a political strategy based on a calculated appeal to the interests

or prejudices of ordinary people.’ According to this definition, a populist is someone, especially a politician, who appeals to the interests or prejudices of ordinary people to obtain his or her (political) objectives.

### **The global discourse on populism**

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

Regarding the first area of research on populism, there have mainly been four different sub-groups of scholars. The first, such as Goodwyn (1991), Benett (1969), Lowndes (2005), and Ware (2002), have looked at the origins of populist leaders and movements in American political history and tried to establish the reasons for their success and eventual downfall. The literature related to the second sub-group enriches the body of knowledge on the phenomenon of growing right-wing populism in late twentieth-century Europe. Scholars such as Betz (1994, 2002), Biorcio (1991/92), Surel (2002) and Tarchi (2002) may be mentioned here. The third sub-group has published extensively on the causes of what is usually termed populist authoritarianism, and the re-birth of populism in South American countries. Among this group we find scholars such as Knight (1998), Conniff (1999), and Di Tella (1965). The fourth sub-group has worked on establishing non-country specific causes behind the evolution of populism in modern democracy.

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

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

and has since then been the basis of further theoretical analysis of typologies of populism.

### Populism in Taiwan

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

### Research questions and methodology

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

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

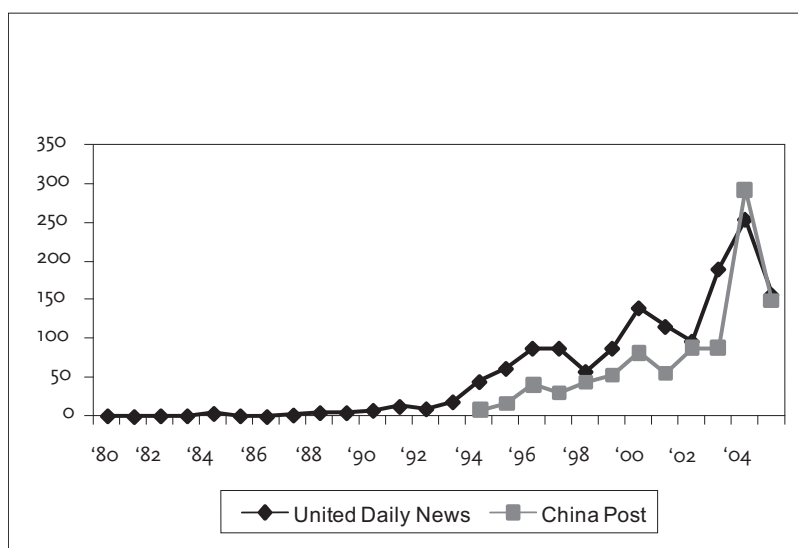
As an answer to these questions, I have searched for articles about populism in back issues of local academic journals, and browsed the databases of leading newspapers for news stories and commentaries containing the term *mincui*, which is the Chinese equivalent of populism. Newspaper archives have been particularly helpful in my attempt to trace the changing attitude towards populism over half a century. This

is especially true for commentaries in the morning editions of island-state's leading newspapers, where Taiwanese scholars in the fields of social and economic sciences tend to author newspaper commentaries about recent political, legal and economic issues. Such commentaries may either be summaries of research results or simply outline the author's own 'professional' opinion. (A number of leading local scholars hardly have any other publications besides these newspaper commentaries.) The United Daily News (*lianhebao*, UDN) and the China Post (*zhongguo shibao*, CP) are Taiwan's largest print media groups, and have the most influential commentaries in their morning editions.

### Research findings

The electronic database of the United Daily News covers editions back to the early 1950s, whereas the China Post electronic archive only allows browsing back to 1994. In total, I have found 1462 articles and commentaries in the UDN and 958 in the CP (see Figure 7.1). The very first article appeared in 1952, and in the following three decades, only few more instances can be counted. It was not before the 1990s that the term populism frequently appeared in the newspapers reviewed. A

**Figure 7.1** *Number of News Articles Containing the Term Mincui, 1980-2005*



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



considerable proportion of observed cases appeared in that decade, roughly one-third and one-fifth respectively. The majority of news items containing the term *mincui* have, however, been in evidence in recent years: about 65 per cent of all observed articles in the UDN, and approximately 80 per cent in the CP (see Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1** *Articles Containing the Term Mincui in Leading Newspapers, 1950-2005*

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

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

#### *Early debates on populism*

Between the early 1950s and the late 1970s, only nine articles published in the UDN contained the word *mincui*, all of which were written by local scholars. In their contributions, the authors wrote about Communism rather than elaborating on the concept of populism. The term *mincui* was mentioned in a historical context, mostly with reference to the Russian populist movement of the nineteenth century, the *narodnichestvo*.

#### *Destructive populism*

In 1980, the concept of *mincui* appeared for the first time in Taiwan's mass media, in connection with domestic social and political developments. During the electoral campaign period of the 1980 national election, the UDN printed in two editions the research findings of Huang Ji, a graduate student at National Zhengzhi University. (Although martial law was in effect until 1987, local elections and, to some limited extent, national elections were held regularly throughout the island.) The conclusions made in Huang's articles were drawn from his master thesis. Huang's work dealt with the growing electoral competition between the authoritarian GMD and the rising opposition. Up to the present, his commentaries have remained among the very few publications that use the concept of populism in the analysis of Taiwan's opposition in the late 1970s. He pointed out that the opposition movement at that time believed in the mobilisation of the masses to bring about political changes. Huang felt that the opposition misused the rising social pro-

blems to gain political power. In his writings, populism was portrayed as an enemy of the state. Huang posited that an opposition has to oppose, not obstruct, the government. He argued that populism is obstructive, because it disregards the opinion of experts and solely relies on the mobilisation of ordinary people who lack the ability to formulate reasonable economic, social and political policies (UDN 30 November 1980: 2; UDN 1 December 1980: 2).

### *Populist Jiang Jing-guo*

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

Zhou Yang-shan, another scholar, came to similar conclusions in his commentary published after the death of President Jiang Jing-guo in 1988. One of the most hotly discussed issues at the time was Jiang's leadership succession and the formation of a new cabinet. Zhou expressed his hope for a leader who would preserve Jiang's populist spirit (*mincui jingshen*) and a cabinet that was close to the people (*qinmin neige*). He described Jiang Jing-guo as an authoritarian leader who listened to the hearts of the ordinary people, the *laobaixing*, and drafted his policies according to these wishes (UDN 26 July 1988: 2). The 1988 commentary was Zhou's first to deal with the concept of populism, and it remained one of the only with an overtly positive connotation. Over the following years, he would turn into one of the most outspoken critics of populism. He later authored a dozens of commentaries in the United Daily News and the China Post on democratic rule and the evil of populism.

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

Taiwan. Moreover, he saw in CCK a populist whose policies and achievements should serve as a role model for the People's Republic of China. Cline's book summary was the last news item describing CCK as a populist.

### *Radical populism*

At the end of the 1980s, the concept of *mincui* also came up during discussions around the idea by key GMD bureaucrats to introduce party primaries. Party reformists, such as Guan Zhong, vigorously advocated for party primaries, whereas other intellectuals, such as Lin Shui-bo, professor of political science at National Taiwan University, argued in a commentary in the United Daily News that party primaries represented 'radical populism' (*jiduan mincui zhuyi*), which he thought would provide greater political participation, but circumvent organisational rules and circumscribe the power of the party leadership. Without being specific, Lin saw in party primaries a contradiction to Chinese cultural traditions, and believed that they would, all in all, have overtly negative effects on inter-party stability (UDN 4 June 1989: 10).

The discussion about populism intensified with the rising confrontation between the mainstream and the non-mainstream faction of the GMD over whether Taiwan's future presidents should be directly elected by universal suffrage or indirectly by the National Assembly. The mainstream faction, led by President Li Deng-hui (Lee Teng-hui), supported constitutional amendments stipulating direct presidential elections, while members of the non-mainstream faction voiced opposition to such plans and insisted on the continuation of the current electoral procedures, or indirect elections. Zhou Yang-shan, for example, authored a series of commentaries in the United Daily News opposing direct elections, on the grounds that they would imperil democratic order and stability. He referred to Russia and Poland as examples of countries where direct elections had caused political observers to question the stability of these new democracies. In his writings, Zhou drew a distinction between representative democracy (indirect elections) and populist democracy (direct elections), and outlined several differences. First, representative democracy centres upon political parties and parliaments. Populism mistrusts these two institutions and relies on charismatic and powerful leaders to rule the country. Second, established representative democracies are mostly parliamentary systems, and their leaders (prime ministers) are indirectly elected. In several democracies, such as Austria, Iceland and Ireland, presidents are directly elected, but they only represent their countries in international affairs and do not play any role in determining national affairs. Zhou argued that direct presidential elections in new democracies, such as South Korea, the

Philippines and Poland, only caused severe political and social problems. Third, representative democracy is based on constitutionalism and places importance on rationality and cooperation between different political, social and economic entities. According to Zhou, populism lacks those characteristics and uses racial and emotional appeals instead (UDN 5 August, 1991: 4; UDN 10 April, 1991: 4).

#### *Populist authoritarianism*

The discussion about the populist character of direct presidential elections continued until major constitutional reforms in 1994 paved the way for Taiwan's first direct presidential election of March 1996. The amendments meant a victory for incumbent President Li Deng-hui. However, his rising appeal to people of various social strata and political orientations soon became the target of mainstream academia. Several scholars anticipated the formation of a new authoritarian state led by Li Deng-hui. Wang Zhen-huan and Qian Yong-xiang were among the first scholars to discuss in public the rise of Li Deng-hui and the dangers he posed to Taiwan's young democracy. Wang and Qian wrote in a commentary in the UDN about the drastic shift from Chinese to Taiwanese nationalism in Li's speeches. Wang and Qian asserted that, in the past, the GMD had represented China and that the people of Taiwan had been taught they were ethnic Chinese, and that Taiwan was part of China, whereas GMD Chairman Li Deng-hui increasingly tended to echo the voices of the opposition and frequently challenged the one-China concept so as to gain popular support. The two scholars warned about the emergence of an era of populist authoritarianism (UDN 21 January 1995: 11; see also Wang and Qian 1995).

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

justice (UDN 11 October 1995). The discussion about Huang's book intensified in 1996, the year the first direct presidential election was held.

### *Populist fascism*

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

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

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

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

Nan's theory of state seclusionism and populist fascism was shared by a considerable part of Taiwan's intelligentsia and soon became a key concept in the mainstream academic world. Huang Guang-guo included the new concept in the revised 2003 edition of his legendary work, *About Populism and the End of Taiwan*.

A year later, the people of Taiwan elected their president for the third time. Chen Shui-bian won his re-election bid by a very small margin, the day after a failed assassination attempt. The GMD and its supporters claimed that the election was rigged and the assassination attempt staged. In addition, two referenda held on election day were claimed to be illegal and considered to be yet another of Chen's populist election gimmicks.

As shown in Figure 7.1, the number of news items containing the term *mincui* reached an all-out high in 2004. The presidential election and the subsequent dispute were the prime reason for all the enthusiasm for talking about populist fascist Chen Shui-bian. Even months after the dispute, Taiwan's intelligentsia continued to lash out at Chen, not only in newspaper commentaries by Taiwan's leading newspapers, but also in political talk shows and a variety of mainstream academic and non-academic journals. One key mainstream intellectual of the time was political activist and writer Huang Zhi-xian, who authored a number of books and articles in influential periodicals. Her writings indeed reflected the thinking of supporters of what the Chinese media termed the new democracy movement. On various occasions, she ascertained that Chen's re-election was the result of populist manipulation, and that his policies had brought the country on the brink of collapse;

economic development came to a standstill and democracy decayed. Under Chen, she believed, Taiwan transformed into a fascist one-party dictatorship. Furthermore, she claimed that Chen had brought about the death of the Republic of China, which not only meant the end of a nation but also the end of the Republican Chinese value system. According to her, the Republic of China was Asia's first republic and a nation that had been striving for ethnic harmony and peace. Under the GMD leadership, the Republic of China had moved from authoritarian developmentism (*weiquan jinzhan*) to democracy, whereas under Chen, the Republic had turned into an isolated and marginalised piece of land. She further stated in her works that Chen's fascist populism had led to four regrettable phenomena (Huang, 2004a: 53-64):

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

The academic discourse on Chen Shui-bian's fascist populism entered a new stage with the founding of the Democratic Action Alliance (*minzhuxingdong lianmeng*) in April 2004. Huang Guang-guo (National Taiwan University), Li Ming-hui (Academia Sinica), Xie Da-ning (Zhongzheng University), and Guo Zhong-yi (Soochow University) were among the founding members of the Alliance. The aim of the alliance was to 'relinquish fascist populism in Taiwan' (Tong 2004: 54). Lao Si-guang, the spiritual father of the Alliance and a leading scholar at the Academia Sinica, said in an interview with the influential Hong Kong weekly *Yazhou Zhoukan* (YZZK) that Taiwan's political landscape had been plagued by two phenomena, the commodification (*shangyehua*) and utilisation (*gongjuhua*) of politics. Society, he believes, does not bother to separate right from wrong, but pursues selfish goals. Democracy in Taiwan came overnight. Although all of its formal institutions exist, people lack an understanding about its role and nature in a modern society. Politicians and big business work together in an effort to enlarge their power and profits. Under such a system, elections no longer serve their original purpose. They have become a 'tool' for greedy politicians and corporations. Lao states that Jiang Jing-guo applied the same strategy. While emphasising the importance of elections in the democratic process, he used them as a tool to preserve his political power without attempting to nurture a democratic culture. Lao asserts that scrupulous

politicians work hand in hand with gangsters and dubious local faction leaders to maintain the electoral machine. He believes that because of this, society lacks a self-regulatory mechanism that would ensure deepening respect for the rule of law. Lao Si-guang views Singapore and Hong Kong as models for Chinese societies, with a profound respect for the rule of law and a common value system, even though he agrees that the laws and regulations themselves are flawed and anti-democratic. Lao claims that the people in Taiwan lack that sort of common understanding and shared value system. Instead, society merely focuses on the binary question whether something is beneficial to them or not (*youli vs. wuli*). The basic intention of all members of society is to turn each other into tools which may ultimately be used to obtain individual goals. Lao believes that this process of *gongjuhua* leads to a society without human values, a society in which voters are proud to elect gangsters into office in exchange for a few cents and promises. Moreover, Lao thinks Chen Shui-bian uses the concept of *gongjuhua* to control the masses and to turn democracy into fascist populism (Tong 2004: 54-6; see also Lao 2004).

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

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

Moreover, Taiwan's mainstream intelligentsia began to draw comparisons between Chen Shui-bian's lavish private life and those of former dictators. In June, Chen's son married and a glamorous wedding took



place. Unfortunately, heavy rainfalls around the island caused severe damage and the death of twenty people, and thus overshadowed the ceremony. The wedding was soon spotted as a further sign of Chen's repugnant populist rule. For example, highly respected political commentator Nan Fang-shuo (2005) lamented Chen's extravagant lifestyle in an article entitled *The Last Stage of Populism*, and dramatised the people's suffering caused by the floods. Nan depicted Chen as a man of evil character who did not care about the ordinary people. In the article, he painstakingly described every detail of the 'wedding of the century.' Nan questioned how Chen and his family could possibly enjoy a glittering wedding when people were dying in the heavy floods. Populism, he ascertained, neither requires ability, knowledge nor a feeling of appropriateness. On the contrary, one only had to know how to use the weakness and blind spots of others to get unlimited control. Nan regarded Chen's wedding as an extreme form of populism. In his view, Taiwan's financial situation deteriorated daily just because Chen's government had lavishly spent money. He compared Chen with the wife of the former Filipino dictator Marcos, who like Chen came from a low social stratum and worked her way up to the top. Once in that position, she abused her power and became a spendthrift. While most people in her country were poor, she enjoyed dressing up. Nan elucidated that she had possessed more than three thousand pairs of shoes, all of which were brand names. Photos juxtaposing Chen's wedding with flood victims and their demolished homes were added to Nan Fang-shuo's analysis of the last stage of Taiwanese populism.

## Conclusion

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

In the late 1970s, local intellectuals used the term populism for the first time in connection with the rising opposition movement (see Table 7.2). Several years later, the term appeared more frequently in academic writings and in the mass media. Scholars and journalists made use of the term *mincui* whenever they would describe the leadership style of President Jiang Jing-guo. At that time, there was a positive connotation attached to the meaning of populism and phrases like *mincui jingshen* (populist spirit) and *qinmin neige* (government close to the people) were commonplace.

The lifting of martial law in 1987 paved the way for democratic reforms and further increased the interest of the local academic commu-

**Table 7.2** *Discourse on Populism in Post-war Taiwan*

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

*Source:* Author's own research

nity in discussing the concept of populism. Some of the Taiwanese intelligentsia regarded the growing demand for direct presidential elections and party reforms as calls for radical populism (see Table 7.2). During the fourth period (1995-1997) of the Taiwanese discourse on populism, mainstream intellectuals warned about the possible occurrence of a further dictatorship. They were concerned about the growing popularity of President Li Deng-hui and his utilisation of Taiwan's quest for identity. In their eyes, Li was nothing but a populist authoritarian ruler who tried to circumscribe democratic institutions by directly appealing to the people. The last period of the discourse began in 1998, when a group of local scholars foresaw the end of a democratic Taiwan and the emergence of a populist fascist dictator. Former human rights lawyer and democracy activist Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party became the frequent target of the mainstream intelligentsia, who described Chen as promoting populist fascism by attacking the mainland Chinese ethnic minority and calling for the establishment of a Taiwanese nation. The Taiwanese discourse on populism has several severe shortcomings.

Firstly, there appears to be no clear concept about populism. Taiwan's mainstream intellectuals have differently interpreted the meaning and impact of populism on the island's political and social landscape over the last few decades. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, populism was seen as something harmful to the political process. Scholars, such as Huang Ji, accused the growing opposition movement of using social problems to stir up the masses to gain electoral support. A few years later, populism had a positive connotation and was exclusively used to de-

scribe the leadership style of President Jiang Jing-guo. At the end of the decade, the negative connotation returned. It appears to me that that the definition of populism and its role in the political process has merely depended on the political affiliation of the observed politician, which has caused several paradoxes to arise. Although Jiang Jing-guo was an authoritarian leader, mainstream intellectuals never used the term authoritarian populism to describe Jiang's leadership. He was simply referred to as a populist. When President Li Teng-hui succeeded Jiang Jing-guo and voiced his support for groundbreaking democratic reforms, such as direct presidential elections, local scholars began to worry about the emergence of a new form of authoritarian rule, namely populist authoritarianism. The election of former democracy activist and human rights lawyer Chen Shui-bian as head of state in March 2000 intensified the discussion about the evil character of populism. Chen's disputed re-election in 2004 triggered off a new wave of attacks on Chen and his populist authoritarianism. The so-called new democracy movement emerged with the sole aim of putting an end to what the movement termed 'fascist populism.'

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

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

The future discourse on Taiwan's populism should at least include the following four periods:

- 1977-1980: Growing opposition movement, such as the Meilidao group, and leading politicians, such as Taoyuan county magistrate Xu Xin-liang.
- Late 1980s: Local and national politicians, such as Wang Yi-xiong, supporting the labour and environmental movements.
- 1998-2005: New, powerful and more radical populist leaders, such as former Provincial Governor Song Chu-yu and former Vice-President Lian Zhan.
- 2005-2006: Former democracy activists who, after being politically marginalised, turned against former comrades, such as Xu Xin-liang and Shi Ming-de.

