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The Fukushima effect: explaining the resurgence of the anti-nuclear movement in Taiwan

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Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement has a chequered history over the past three decades; its revival after the 2011 Fukushima incident was unanticipated. Analysing the political outcomes triggered by a major international disaster, I argue that Japan's nuclear catastrophe did not directly stimulate Taiwanese activism, but its effect was relayed through a host of domestic factors. The persistent efforts of anti-nuclear activists after their 2001 defeat were eventually rewarded with the local audience becoming more receptive to their message. The resurgence of social movements after 2008 also provided a more supportive environment. Finally, because the Democratic Progressive Party, which in earlier years had been closely associated with the anti-nuclear movement, was forced into taking a back seat, anti-nuclear sentiment could cross the partisan divide.

Keywords: Fukushima incident; anti-nuclear movement; environmentalism; referendum

Introduction

On the eve of the second anniversary of the 11 March 2011 Fukushima incident, the issue of nuclear power suddenly emerged as Taiwan's most salient political topic. In February 2013, Jiang Yi-huah, the newly installed Premier, announced that his government had decided to initiate a referendum to determine the fate of the controversial Fourth Nuclear Power Plant (FNPP), which was at the time awaiting parliamentary approval of its additional budget of 56.3 billion New Taiwan Dollars (6.2 billion US Dollars). Jiang's statement came rather unexpectedly because his party, the Kuomintang (KMT), had traditionally been sceptical of the use of the referendum, which was more often championed by the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The existing law required more than 50% voter turnout for the referendum to be valid; the six previous referendums had all failed to reach the threshold. With this in mind, Jiang's unorthodox move was seen as a political strategy to ambush the rising anti-nuclear tide as well as the DPP.

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The KMT's referendum proposal provocation received a powerful rejoinder when an unprecedented anti-nuclear demonstration took place on 9 March. It was estimated that more than 200,000 participants took to the streets in Taipei, Kaohsiung, Taichung, and Taitung. Ever since the anti-nuclear demonstration first came on stage in 1989 and became a ritualised protest repertoire in the subsequent years, Taiwan had not witnessed such a large-scale mobilisation. At the same time, three opinion polls (conducted by the DPP as well as other pro-KMT agencies) showed that the opponents of FNPP (58%–69%) exceeded its supporters (18%–25%) by a wide margin.¹

The resurgence of the anti-nuclear movement and its political ramifications in Taiwan were clearly an aftermath of the Fukushima incident, in which a combined earthquake and tsunami resulted in a triple fuel meltdown, which gave rise to hydrogen explosions and the leaking of radioactive materials. In immediate response, on 20 March, an anti-nuclear demonstration was staged in Taipei, terminating a decade of dormancy in which no major protest had been launched. As usual, Taiwan's government officials repeatedly sought to reassure the terrified public that all the existing reactors were in safe hands. However, such promises sounded increasingly hollow as the Taiwanese witnessed how a technologically advanced nation such as Japan could be incapacitated during a nuclear crisis. The weakness of the official guarantee was further exposed when the World Nuclear Association listed Taiwan's existing three nuclear power plants among the world's most dangerous due to their proximity to geological faults (Chan and Chen 2011, p. 404). The following two years saw an ascending curve of mobilisation, as more and more artists, popular stars, and even some KMT politicians began to voice nuclear scepticism.

How can we explain the phenomenal rebirth of anti-nuclear activism? What were the characteristics that made Taiwanese people particularly anxious about a domestic Fukushima-style incident?

A major catastrophe functioned as a 'suddenly imposed grievance' that generated immediate protests (Walsh 1981). Globally, the nuclear disaster generated uneven results (Ramana 2013). In Germany, the conservative government led by Angela Merkel decidedly embraced an *energiewende* by scrapping its proposed postponement of the closure of existing nuclear power stations, which had been scheduled by the previous government, and by immediately closing the seven oldest reactors (Jahn and Korolczuk 2012). In Japan, by contrast, incoming Prime Minister Abe Shinzo advocated the reactivation of the shutdown reactors, despite the visible rise of anti-nuclear public opinion and organised protests (Kingston 2012, p. 3). According to Aldrich (2013, p. 255–260), Japan's recent anti-nuclear protests represented an unusually intense and frequent pattern of mobilisation in the entire postwar era, outnumbered only by the struggle against the security treaty with the United States in the 1960s. The anti-nuclear camp in South Korea was stimulated by the incident. Nevertheless, it remained unable to challenge the governmental goal of becoming 'a nuclear powerhouse', seeking to promote the overseas sale of reactors (Hong 2011). In China, where the

stability-minded communist leadership seldom countenanced social movements, a rare protest against a uranium-processing facility in Guangdong Province emerged and successfully won concessions from local officials who seemed to understand the popular fear excited by Fukushima.² In spite of the fact that the whole of humanity had increasingly become ‘a civilizational community of fate’ (Beck 2006, p. 7), there was thus a wide variation in national responses.

Observing the advent of East Asian anti-nuclear movements, scholars identified a ‘Chernobyl effect’ in spurring protest in South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in the mid-1980s (Hsiao *et al.* 1998, p. 252). But why was there not an analogous ‘Fukushima effect’, given the fact the latter incident took place right at the heart of this region? This puzzle of unevenness appears more intriguing if one expects that local responses should become increasingly similar as globalisation intensifies cross-border exchanges. While the details of the Chernobyl tragedy were shrouded in Soviet-era secrecy, satellite communication brought the televised image of Fukushima simultaneously into living rooms globally. Indeed, the theory of ‘world environmental regime’ posits the existence of a global force that levels regional differences. Individual nation states are more and more willing to adopt cognitive frames (norms, scientific knowledge, and treaties) that are internationally legitimated. Deeper integration is said to bring about more isomorphic practices all over the world (Meyer *et al.* 1997). This theory has successfully demonstrated the existence of global isomorphism in terms of governments’ environmental regulation (Frank *et al.* 2000), the progress of environment protection (Schofer and Hironaka 2005), and the rise of environmental associations (Longhofer and Schofer 2010, 2011). The discovery of global diffusion led this school to deny the conventional view of ‘national environmental policies as arising mainly in response to domestic factors’ (Frank *et al.* 2000, p. 111).

True, world environment regime theory has so far not dealt with responses to international disasters, whose contingent characteristics are arguably less likely to be institutionalised in the international arena. Here, I depart from such expectations of global isomorphism by focusing on the persistence and variety of local contexts. An analysis of Taiwan’s response to a global disaster helps to shed light on how a local society is constantly engaging with a ‘lively and evolving dialogue with the global concepts’, as identified by Weller (2006, p. 8) in his fascinating account of environmental globalisation in Chinese societies.

The research data for this study come from my interviews with anti-nuclear activists, journalistic reports, and governmental sources. I analyse the social configuration that helped to amplify the domestic effect in Taiwan of the Fukushima incident. I shall argue that the persistence of anti-nuclear activists in the ‘lost decade’ (2001–2011), the resurgence of social movements under the Ma Ying-jeou government, and the reduced partisanship associated with the nuclear controversy are the main facilitating factors for the resurgence in

anti-nuclear activity. Before going into detail, I first delineate the historical background of Taiwan's nuclear politics.

The development of nuclear energy in Taiwan

Taiwan's nuclear energy has been a state-initiated program for economic, military, and scientific purposes. In 1955, the government set up an Atomic Energy Council (AEC) to domesticate this cutting-edge technology. With US support, in the 1970s, the state-owned Taiwan Power Company (Taipower) began to build nuclear power plants. Then nuclear energy was not only seen as a panacea for energy security during the oil crisis, but was also included in the so-called 'Ten Major Development Projects' – a much propagandised governmental program for industrial upgrading. In 1978–1985, three nuclear power plants, each with two reactors, all owned by Taipower (see [Figure 1](#)), came into operation. In 1990, nuclear energy accounted for 36% of installed capacity of electricity generation; the ratio dropped to 17% two decades later as nuclear expansion was stalled due to popular resistance.³

Generating electricity in Taiwan was a government monopoly until the mid-1990s, when liberalisation allowed independent power providers (IPPs) and cogeneration plants to sell electricity to the Taipower. Nevertheless, nuclear energy remained a government-operated industry – a legacy of the KMT's ideological commitment to nation building through modern science, as well as its attempt to develop nuclear weapons, which came to an abrupt halt due to US intervention in the late 1980s. Hence, AEC and Taipower officials, together with state-sponsored nuclear researchers, have been Taiwan's nuclear energy proponents, who insisted on its indispensability as a cheap and steady source of electricity and, more recently, a necessary means to reduce carbon emissions, quite similar to the powerful 'nuclear village' (*genshi ryoku mura*) in Japan. Anti-nuclear activists countered these claims by pointing out the underestimated cost of nuclear energy, as well as the difficulty of finding a final storage for nuclear waste. Moreover, nuclear opponents claimed Taiwan was the only country to place nuclear power plants in the vicinity of the nation's capital; the first nuclear power plant was located 28 kilometres from downtown Taipei, while the second was even closer (22 kilometres). Were the fourth power plant to be allowed to operate, the greater Taipei metropolitan area with six million residents (nearly a quarter of Taiwan's population) would face the hazard of six nuclear reactors in unusually close proximity (see [map 1](#)).

Initially, business leaders tended to stand behind the government's nuclear programs due to their reliance on the provision of stable energy. Thus, the KMT government mobilised major business leaders for a pro-nuclear 'petition' in 1994, when the FNPP budget was reviewed in the legislature.⁴

Gradually power liberalisation brought an unexpected consequence. In 2006, there were 11 private power plants (mostly burning coal or natural gas) and 94 cogeneration plants, producing 34% of the nation's electricity (Bureau of Energy

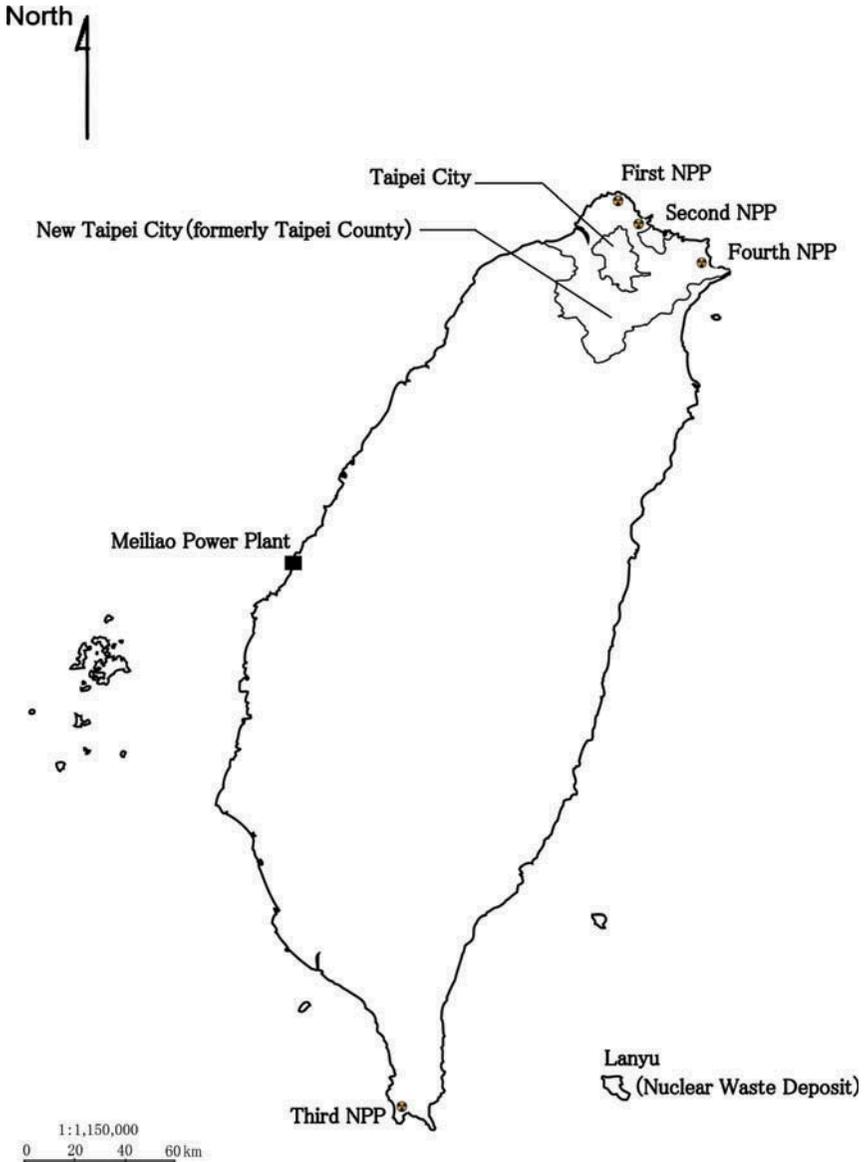


Figure 1. Nuclear facilities in Taiwan.

2011, p. 86). Independent power provision in Taiwan was a lucrative business because it enjoyed guaranteed long-term purchase by Taipower. The shift from energy consumption to energy production not only reduced private corporations' dependence on the state sector, but also changed their attitude towards nuclear

energy. Previously, the controversial FNPP seemed indispensable for energy-hungry business. Now, a mega-project like this – 2700 MW in capacity or 37% of the private electricity in 2006 – appeared likely to crowd out Taipower's purchases of privately produced electricity. As early as 1999, the Formosa Plastic Group, whose Meiliao power plant was Taiwan's largest IPP, openly suggested that the government should abandon the FNPP.⁵ After the Fukushima incident, more and more business leaders, such as the Fubon Financial Group (see below) and Eva Air, came out to voice their opposition to the FNPP.⁶ The pro-nuclear KMT government found it increasingly difficult to mobilise business support – a favourable economic circumstance that helped the anti-nuclear camp.

Taiwan's 'nuclear village' witnessed a fissure in the wake of the Fukushima incident. Previously, the AEC was criticised for its loose oversight of Taipower's nuclear projects; now it demonstrated a more assertive regulatory role. The contention was mainly about the delayed FNPP. Unlike its three predecessors, the FNPP was not a turnkey construction, and Taipower's alteration of the original design and shoddy quality of assembly raised concerns among AEC experts. An AEC vice-chairperson resigned over his outspoken disapproval concerning the FNPP's safety in August 2011. Another AEC expert, Lin Tsung-yao, who headed an official commission to evaluate the FNPP, also resigned in protest two years later because his expressed concerns were not accepted by the government. This defection from the previously cohesive 'nuclear village' lent legitimacy to the anti-nuclear movement.

Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement

Fukushima was not the first international disaster that stimulated domestic opposition to nuclear energy. The Three Mile Island incident of 1979 played a significant role by galvanising some American-trained scientists to question the government's nuclear program. By translating and introducing the global anti-nuclear discourse to Taiwan, these dissident scientists gradually aroused public attention and initiated a debate with government officials even though Taiwan was still under martial law,⁷ which imposed considerable constraints on freedom of speech.

The growing anti-nuclear voices became more persuasive because of a series of micro-incidents in the early 1980s, and the construction of the third nuclear power plant ended up costing more than double the originally approved budget. Amid rising distrust of Taipower, 55 KMT and six opposition legislators proposed to suspend the FNPP project in 1985, and the Executive Yuan later complied with this demand, marking the initial victory of the anti-nuclear activists.

The explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in April 1986 gave further impetus to Taiwan's nascent anti-nuclear movement. By that time, the aforementioned debate had won the endorsement of opposition politicians. Consequently, when they founded the DPP in September 1986, an anti-nuclear

clause was adopted in the party's charter. With the DPP converted to the anti-nuclear camp, Taiwan's nuclear issue assumed a highly visible partisanship, and the anti-nuclear movement began to embrace a 'politics-centered approach' (Chen 2011). The early fateful marriage with the opposition party bequeathed an everlasting legacy. As noted by scholars, anti-nuclear movements in both Taiwan and South Korea emerged during political liberalisation of the mid-1980s by challenging the authoritarian regime's decision to develop nuclear power for economic growth (Hsiao *et al.* 1998, p. 260). Yet Taiwan's variant was able to mount a 'conflictual engagement' against the state with the opposition's support, while the Korean activists adopted a more non-partisan and moderate strategy (Kim 2000). Prior to the alliance with the DPP, Taiwan's anti-nuclear scholars had avoided disclosing their partisan identity; now, they were more willing to take a political stand. Lin Jun-yi, an American-trained biologist, was widely believed to be the first scientist in Taiwan to write personal opposition to nuclear energy in 1979. Ten years later, he obtained DPP membership and stood as a candidate in an election. In spite of his not so successful career in campaigning, Lin was appointed the first director of the Environmental Protection Administration when the DPP took power at national level in 2000.

The continuing growth of the DPP helped to cement a political alliance with the anti-nuclear movement. In 1990, the DPP secured the position of Taipei County magistrate (now New Taipei City mayor) and maintained its dominance there until 2005. That Taipei County was not only the most populous local governing unit but also included Kongliao Township (the FNPP construction site) facilitated movement activists in their challenge to the KMT's pro-nuclear policy. The DPP's expanding local power came as a crucial resource for movement activists when they were still treated as political outcasts by the KMT government. From 1994 to 1998, four 'referendums' on the FNPP were held in Kongliao Township, Taipei County, Taipei City, and Ilan County, all under the sponsorship of DPP incumbents. Back then, the referendum was still not codified as a valid decision-making procedure. Hence, the possibility of securing DPP leaders' cooperation in defiance of the KMT government's warning helped to raise the public salience of the nuclear issue. From 1993 onwards, the DPP was able to control more than one-third of the seats in the Legislative Yuan – a critical leverage for nuclear opponents because the KMT government had relaunched the shelved FNPP project in 1991 and needed the legislators' approval for its budget. In a surprise offensive, the DPP deleted the FNPP budget in 1996, but the KMT government used the constitutional procedure of reconsideration to have it restored.

Just as the post-Chernobyl evolution of Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement appeared more partisan, it also became radicalised with the involvement of grassroots activists. With the termination of martial law in July 1987, street protest emerged as a popular avenue for expressing all kinds of social discontent. It was in this period that the previously silent victims of nuclear energy mobilised to have their voices heard. In December 1987, the indigenous people of Lanyu

protested Taipower's policy of dumping nuclear waste on their offshore island. In March 1988, Kongliao residents rose to oppose the FNPP. These victims' collective action lent credibility to the scholars' anti-nuclear discourse; the former revealed how the state's nuclear program simply violated the land rights of indigenous people without regard to environmental justice (Chi 2001, Fan 2006), while the latter testified to the fact that government officials and Taipower personnel were willing to use mass deception to have a nuclear power plant built. The escalating confrontation resulted in an unfortunate incident in October 1990, when the police tried forcefully to remove the barricade that Kongliao locals had built on the FNPP site. A policeman was accidentally killed in the ensuing mêlée, and many protestors were arrested, including one participant who was sentenced to life in prison. The temporary setback did not frustrate the anti-nuclear movement for long. In the 1990s, anti-nuclear demonstrations in Taipei City became the established protest repertoire, which reached its peak in terms of size in 1994, when journalistic sources gave estimations of more than 20,000 participants.

After the mid-1990s, Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement lost public salience, since there was no longer any parliamentary procedure to stop the construction of the FNPP. In the meantime, the DPP began to identify itself as a would-be ruling party and hence sought to moderate its hitherto pro-movement orientation. Even though the anti-nuclear clause was still enshrined in its charter, DPP elites were less and less willing to consider opposition to nuclear energy a top priority. It was in this context that some activists organised the Taiwan Green Party in 1996 as an attempt to reassert the movement's autonomy vis-à-vis the DPP. However, with its poor electoral performances, the Green Party was not able to persuade voters that it, rather than the increasingly mainstream DPP, was the authentic anti-nuclear party (Ho 2003).

Prior to the historic transfer of power in 2000, Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement had assumed a pro-DPP course because of the simultaneous emergence of opposition party and anti-nuclear activism in the mid-1980s. With the pro-nuclear KMT government as the common foe, there was considerable interpenetration of the two social forces. Taiwan's nuclear politics took an abrupt turn when Chen Shui-bian led the DPP to victory in the presidential election in 2000. After an initial period of equivocation, DPP leaders announced the termination of the FNPP in October 2000. The decision was certainly welcomed by anti-nuclear activists who saw their dream finally being realised. However, it produced an unexpected political backlash by solidifying the KMT-led opposition that was determined to use its parliamentary majority to boycott the government. Four months into his presidency, Chen Shui-bian already faced pressure from the opposition for a recall. To avoid further political entanglement, the DPP decided to backtrack and sought rapprochement with the opposition. In February 2001, the government resumed the halted construction of the FNPP, thus shattering the euphoria of nuclear opponents.

As the DPP was preparing for the consequential about-turn, it made several concessions and promises to the frustrated anti-nuclear activists. First, the DPP

claimed to obtain from the KMT the endorsement of a 'nuclear-free homeland as the eventual goal', which was later written into the Basic Environment Act promulgated in 2002. Second, the DPP decided to establish a cabinet-level Nuclear-Free Homeland Communication Committee, inviting NGO leaders to participate. This marked the first time that the central government's resources were devoted to raising public awareness of nuclear risk (Ho 2005, p. 347). Finally, the DPP assured that a national referendum would be forthcoming to decide on the FNPP's future.

What appeared as temporary political expediency in 2001 turned out to have long-lasting consequences. With sluggish economic performance, the DPP re-oriented its attention to promoting growth by suspending its environmental and anti-nuclear commitments. Even though the referendum was finally legalised as a valid decision-making procedure in 2003, the DPP did not honour its promise to let the people decide the fate of the FNPP. In the 2004 presidential election, the referendum Chen initiated was about national defence and cross-strait relations, and was perceived as a campaign tactic to boost his re-election bid. With the opposition attempt to boycott Chen's referendum, anti-nuclear activists' voices were sidelined amid heightened partisan rivalry.

By the time Chen Shui-bian had won his second term, the FNPP dispute looked like a faded memory. The DPP incumbents seemed resolute about finishing FNPP's construction so as to not repeat their past mistake. In 2004 and 2006, the DPP government twice approved the supplementary budget for the FNPP, which the opposition-controlled parliament supported as expected, without arousing any protest mobilisations by the weakened nuclear opponents. Shortly before the end of Chen's tenure in 2008, former president of Academia Sinica and pro-DPP intellectual leader, Lee Yuan Tseh, made public his changed attitude concerning nuclear energy. Lee had previously been sympathetic towards the anti-nuclear movement, but with the looming challenge of climate change and disappointing progress of renewable energy, he insisted on the necessity of 'choosing the lesser evil'. Although Lee was careful to characterise his comment as a scientific observation, its political connotations seemed apparent. After eight years of leading the national government, the DPP appeared to have become reconciled to reality by shedding its former anti-nuclear radicalism.

How activists survived the defeat

The DPP's decision to revive the FNPP in 2001 represented a defeat, as well as a dilemma for the anti-nuclear movement (Arrigo and Puleston 2006). With the unexpected defection of their former ally and the opposition parties firmly entrenched in their pro-nuclear beliefs, activists found it difficult to forge a political alliance. Yet, the DPP government opened new policy channels, such as the Nuclear-Free Homeland Communication Committee, which provided certain possibilities to work within the government. On the issue of how to deal with the DPP government, Taiwan's environmentalists were divided in their

strategic considerations. The established wing, exemplified by the Taiwan Environmental Protection Union (TEPU), decided to utilise existing channels to pressure DPP leaders, rather than severing relations (Lin 2008, p. 158). From its founding in 1987, TEPU had always been Taiwan's most important environmental organisation. Since it was co-founded by anti-nuclear professors and DPP activists, it had persistently adopted a pro-DPP identity. Although highly critical of the DPP's about-turn in 2001, TEPU leaders refrained from open confrontation with the DPP, and sought by lobbying government officials to promote renewable energy as an alternative to nuclear power.

By contrast, the Green Citizens' Action Alliance (GCAA) represented the younger wing of Taiwan's environmentalism. The GCAA began as TEPU's Taipei Branch in 1992, but its growing antagonism with the national federation led to its secession in 2000. While TEPU was mainly led by college professors, the GCAA participants were junior and usually had a background of student movement activism. One of the key generational differences consisted in their attitude towards the DPP. Many of the TEPU professors personally experienced the KMT's martial law era repression, and so were more willing to collaborate with the DPP even with their understanding of the latter's unreliability. In comparison, the GCAA activists tended to be less tolerant of the DPP's deviation from its environmental promise. It was symptomatic that the conflict between two generations of activists first broke out over how Chen Shui-bian dealt with nuclear issue when he was Taipei City mayor in 1996. As requested by the anti-nuclear movement, Chen staged a nuclear disaster drill for the first time, but the scale was much less than activists had expected. Younger activists suspected Chen's insincerity and launched an open protest, which provoked a heated debate within TEPU.⁸

After the 2001 setback, the GCAA was more openly critical of the DPP's 'betrayal'. Moreover, the sense of alienation among GCAA activists was further intensified because their less-established social status prevented them from joining the government's decision-making channels. Thus, while both TEPU and GCAA continued to propagate the anti-nuclear message, the lack of official avenues compelled GCAA to rebuild the shattered movement in more novel ways.

First, they worked with Kongliao residents, who bore the full brunt of the 2001 reversal and were left discouraged so that their organisation had been rendered inactive for a certain period of time. The local leaders claimed that they had learnt how to survive the KMT's cheating for years, but were totally at a loss when it came from the DPP.⁹ GCAA activists performed a kind of 'psychotherapy' to heal the collective trauma and encourage the residents to resume their activism.¹⁰ GCAA activists also introduced the practice of 'integrated community building', which had come into fashion around the mid-1990s, to revitalise the local leadership. They were able to obtain a government subsidy to promote Kongliao's fishing village culture, hence bringing new resources to the demoralised community.

Then, in 2004, Cu Suxin, a GCAA activist, produced an acclaimed documentary *How Are You, Kongliao [kongliao nihao]?* The film brought to the big screen a

decade of Kongliao activists' actual experience, which was hitherto largely unknown to the general public. The film made a clear moral accusation, highlighting the glaring contrast between the disillusioned senior Kongliao leaders who gradually succumbed to infirmity and death without being able to protect their hometown from the FNPP threat and the increasingly comfortable DPP politicians who had successfully buried the nuclear controversy in the past. Because the film was screened often in Taiwan, it succeeded in arousing widespread sympathy for Kongliao's seemingly unjustified victimhood. The power of images helped to bring the anti-nuclear message to a broader circle that might originally have viewed the FNPP dispute from a narrow partisan perspective (Lupke 2012).

Finally, rock and roll music also became a medium for making the anti-nuclear movement more widely accessible. In 2000, the Taipei County government began to sponsor an annual international music festival on Kongliao beach. It was intended to be Taiwan's Woodstock; yet, the performing stage was ironically set up with the FNPP construction site as its backdrop. GCAA activists secured the permission of local officials to set up a booth in the central passage so that concert-goers could receive their anti-nuclear pamphlet, trinket, and bracelet. It turned out to be a successful way of repackaging the idea of environmental protection to the younger generation. In 2004, without prior arrangement, rock musicians on stage began expressing their personal opposition to the FNPP, thus paving the way for increased involvement of artists in the anti-nuclear movement in years to come.¹¹ From 2009, GCAA also held their own annual 'No Nuke' rock concert in Kongliao in an innovative mixture of live music, beach activities, art exhibitions, and movement activism (Coulson 2011). These cultural activities presented the anti-nuclear movement in a 'trendy' fashion. Since the FNPP issue had been overloaded with partisanship and grievances, a softer image made it easier for movement activists to address those who were previously unconcerned.

As a lesson of defeat, the GCAA had to experiment with unconventional methods to maintain the movement's momentum. In so doing, these young activists played an instrumental role in communicating the anti-nuclear message to the new constituencies. Thus, after Fukushima, there emerged a division of labour among anti-nuclear activists. While TEPU continued to pressure DPP leaders to take a firmer stand, GCAA was able to address a more broadly based public, even to persuade those who were politically apathetic or even KMT-leaning to join the anti-nuclear camp.¹²

A contentious civil society

The Fukushima incident happened in a historical conjuncture that facilitated the revival of the anti-nuclear movement. Social protest was riding an ascending wave ever since President Ma Ying-jeou had taken office in 2008. As more and more people took to the streets to express their discontent, anti-nuclear activists found it easier to recruit sympathisers.

Table 1. Protests in Taiwan (2008–2011).

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011
Assemblies and Parades ¹	3,636	6,305	9,267	5,298
Protest Events ²	382	438	517	564

Note: 1. 'Assemblies and Parades' is based on police statistics. See the National Police Agency, <http://www.npa.gov.tw/NPAGip/wSite/lp?ctNode = 12593&CtUnit = 2374&BaseDSD = 7&mp = 1>, accessed March 20 2013.

2. 'Protest Events' comes from my analysis of the journalistic reports in the *Lianhe bao* [United Daily News] electronic database <http://udndata.com/>. I aimed to count the *contentious gatherings* reported in the media. Operationally, I searched the electronic database, using 25 keywords that are often used to describe protest events: 'petition' (*chenqing, qingyuan*), 'protest' (*kangyi*), 'contention' (*kangz-heng*), 'sit-in' (*jingzuo*), 'demonstration' (*youxing, shiwei*), 'lobbying' (*youshui*), 'advocacy' (*changyi*), 'gathering' (*jihui*), 'collecting signatures' (*lianshu*), 'strike' (*bagong*), 'slow-down' (*daigong*), 'taking leave collectively' (*jiti qingjia*), 'hunger strike' (*jueshi*), 'barricade' (*weidu, weichang*), 'filing a lawsuit' (*susong*), 'press conference' (*jizhahui*), 'protest drama' (*xingdongju*), 'occupying' (*zhanling*), and so on. Irrelevancies and redundancies were removed. The police data on 'assemblies and parades' might have appeared more 'narrow' than my definition of 'protest events', but actually it is the opposite because the official category includes more non-contentious gatherings, such as religious processions and electoral campaigns, than contentious gatherings.

Table 1 shows the dynamic of social protests from 2008 to 2011, from two sources. The police records and journalistic reports are consistent in showing that Taiwan's civil society became more and more contentious and protest-prone after the second transfer of power in 2008. There is the observation that Taiwan's social movements have 're-started' in recent years (Hsiao and Ku 2010). There are several reasons for this. First, there has been a long antagonistic relationship between the KMT and Taiwan's social movements ever since the latter's advent in the 1980s. Ideologically, the KMT's position on human rights, gender equality, ecological conservation, and labour protection is often at loggerheads with the demands of social movements. While the KMT struggled to accommodate the growing Taiwanese identity during the DPP era, its deep-seated social conservatism remained little modified. Therefore, the KMT's comeback brought a visible threat to social movement activists as they came to face a more unfriendly incumbent. Many institutionalised channels of access to official decision-making process are no longer accessible, and the Nuclear-Free Homeland Communication Committee was abolished as soon as Ma Ying-jeou became President. As a result of the estranged state-civil society relationship, protest increasingly becomes the only weapon that movement activists can use to influence the policymaking authority.

Moreover, the growth in mobile communications technology and social media had greatly facilitated the decentralised, low-cost spread of information. Taiwan was not immune to the communication revolution that facilitated a wave of protest including the Arab Spring and the global Occupy movement.

Since students were more tech-savvy and heavy internet users, their activism often proceeded through online media, especially Facebook, which launched a

traditional Chinese language platform for Taiwanese users in 2008. In March 2012, a student protest demonstrated the power of digital networks. In opposition to an urban renewal project in Taipei, a Facebook call for mobilisation attracted to the site overnight more than 300 students, who sought to prevent the forced demolition of private houses, until they were dragged away by reinforced policemen the next morning. Although the students failed to save the houses, their protest did force the city government to revise the regulations for urban renewal.

Social movements often produce unintended consequences, including the so-called ‘spillover effect’, in which a preceding movement generates new opportunity for a later one (Meyer and Whittier 1994). Thus, the Fukushima incident was for Taiwan less an out of the blue wake-up call from mass hibernation than a timely accelerator of the already activated civil society.

The prominent role of Taiwan’s artistic community in the recent wave of anti-nuclear movement activity serves as a clear example of how the spillover effect worked. Previously Taiwan’s artistic community was largely apolitical, if not conservative – a legacy of the KMT’s control over cultural production during the martial law era. However, in recent environmental disputes, their participation became a noticeable trend. In 2010, to oppose a large-scale land reclamation for heavy industry (the Guoguang Petrochemical Project), a group of poets, writers, theatre directors, and photographers initiated a signature campaign to petition the government. In the following year, more than 80 literary heavyweights visited the endangered wetland to demonstrate their solidarity. After the government was forced to abandon the Guoguang project, another group of pop singers, directors, and talk-show hosts joined a campaign to protest the development of a tourist resort (the Beautiful Bay Resort) that privatised and encroached on a beach of the local indigenous people. Clearly, with the precedents of the anti-Guoguang and anti-Beautiful Bay protests, Taiwan’s art workers had broken loose from their self-imposed censorship and were more willing to take a stand on public issues. Taiwan’s post-Fukushima anti-nuclear movement undoubtedly reaped the benefits of this infusion of new blood.

The DPP’s eclipsed leadership

As we have seen, Taiwan’s anti-nuclear movement developed in the 1990s in close collaboration with the DPP. DPP politicians often mobilised their constituencies in busloads to participate in the annual demonstrations, and the salience of party flags gave the misleading impression that they were DPP-sponsored events. However, after Fukushima, the earlier stereotypical impression of partisanship had greatly declined, partly because the DPP had ended up supporting the FNPP during its tenure of office, and partly because its excessive *realpolitik* had incurred the resentment of anti-nuclear activists so that it was prevented from playing the leading role as it used to.

In contemporary Taiwan, the KMT-DPP rivalry has produced a polarising effect so that for a social movement to become really ‘national-popular’, as in the

Gramscian sense of ‘hegemonic’, it has to carefully avoid being labelled and perceived as partisan; otherwise, it is easily dismissed as a political ploy. In addition, once a movement comes to rely extensively on supporters from one political camp, it runs the risk of discouraging others from across the partisan divide. The prevalence of the notion ‘citizens’ movement’ (*gongmin yundong*) reflected not only the advent of a more assertive civil society in present-day Taiwan, but also a concerted effort among activists to present a non-partisan image.

How to tread over the sensitive cleavage of partisan identity was a challenge for Taiwan’s post-Fukushima activism from early on. The task became even thornier as the DPP reverted to its previously anti-nuclear stance after the Japanese disaster. Individual DPP politicians had the incentive to emphasise their anti-nuclear pledges in order to obtain personal visibility. The demonstration on 20 March 2011 coincided with the DPP’s primary; consequently, many candidates mobilised their supporters for that event. With their campaign vehicles and banners, the DPP appeared to steal the thunder of the movement activists, some of whom were so infuriated at this thinly disguised instrumentalism that they shouted ‘the KMT and the DPP were equally responsible for the FNPP’ (*heshi shi lanlü gongye*), which almost provoked a nasty brawl with the DPP crowd.

In her 2012 presidential campaign, Tsai Ing-wen proposed to finish the FNPP’s remaining construction work without putting it into operation. She also opposed the attempt to delay decommissioning of existing reactors. According to Tsai’s plan, Taiwan could become a nuclear-free nation as early as 2025. Tsai’s proposal reflected a degree of compromise. On the one hand, she did not endorse the immediate abolition of the FNPP, as anti-nuclear activists demanded, evidently for fear of repeating the DPP’s 2001 error; on the other hand, the DPP chose not to emphasise its difference from the still pro-nuclear KMT throughout the campaign in order to avoid being accused of inconsistency. Consequently, the 2012 presidential election was primarily focused on cross-strait relations, economic development, and personal integrity, with the FNPP barely emerging as an issue.

After President Ma Ying-jeou won a second term, there were signs that the DPP was even less able to set the agenda of the nuclear debate under its new chairperson, Su Tseng-chang. In January 2013, after mobilising a successful anti-Ma political protest, the DPP set its eyes on the anti-nuclear movement. Su launched a signature campaign for a referendum on the FNPP, which was scheduled to be held during the national election at the end of 2014. Given the fact that the existing law stipulated an unusually high threshold of voter turnout, a referendum held simultaneously with a general election had more chance of being valid. However, the DPP leadership made two tactical errors. First, there had been no prior consultation with anti-nuclear activists, who were surprised and infuriated at the DPP’s attempt to wrest the movement leadership from them. Second, according to the estimate in early 2013, the FNPP would already have started operating by the end of 2014. Therefore, a referendum by that time seemed unnecessary and meaningless. Aside from these miscalculations, the

ill-conceived proposal deepened the public impression that the DPP was not bona fide anti-nuclear, but rather sought only to reap political advantage for its own ends. In other words, the projected referendum would not have any effect on the FNPP, but primarily served to increase the DPP's votes. Facing overwhelming criticisms both within and without the party, Su Tseng-chang quickly withdrew the plan.¹³

The DPP's failed leadership was further demonstrated in its confused inaction facing the government's unexpected announcement of the FNPP referendum in February. Originally, Jiang Yi-huah planned to hold the referendum in the summer without any accompanying general election. Understanding that the KMT had deliberately set a political trap to lure the DPP into an almost unwinnable battle, the opposition was initially at a loss about whether or not to mobilise its supporters for the summer referendum. There was a dilemma: should the DPP take up the gauntlet, the voter turnout requirement would easily ensure its political defeat; if the DPP dodged the challenge, it would stand to lose political credibility because of its own previous proposal of a FNPP referendum.

Afterwards, the DPP finally decided to engage the KMT's referendum by mobilising its grassroots supporters and attempting to revise the referendum law at the same time. By that time, the DPP was forced to take a back seat in the anti-nuclear movement. In the 9 March demonstration, the DPP even ordered its elected officials and workers not to carry the party flag. The invisibility of the DPP in the largest anti-nuclear event was highly symbolic of its political predicament. A series of blunders compelled the opposition party to play a rather insignificant role in a social movement that it had helped to initiate more than 20 years earlier.¹⁴

There is evidence that the DPP's reduced involvement facilitated the anti-nuclear sentiment to cross the pre-existing partisan divide. The escalating nuclear scepticism reached a climax when even the traditionally pro-nuclear KMT witnessed an internal split. In November 2012, the New Taipei City Mayor, Chu Liluan, expressed his concern regarding the existing reactors in his jurisdiction. He publicly stated that the FNPP should not be put into operation if its safety remained in doubt. After the March demonstration, the Taipei City Mayor Hau Lung-bin suggested the FNPP could be terminated immediately without a referendum, as if acting to out-rival Chu. Chu and Hau were among the competing aspirants widely expected to succeed Ma Ying-jeou to the presidency in 2016. By hastily jumping onto the anti-nuclear bandwagon, the cohort of future KMT leaders had already deserted the more and more isolated central government led by Ma. Therefore, in a quite unanticipated fashion, the Fukushima incident ignited the succession strife within the ruling KMT, and inflicted collateral damage on its traditional pro-nuclear orientation.

Conclusion

Two years after the Fukushima incident, a revolutionary shift in Taiwan's public mentality was taking place. Before that, it was nearly impossible to foresee a

solid anti-nuclear majority in opinion polls, to foresee the aging movement rejuvenated, more colourful, mainstream, and non-partisan, and to foresee a schizophrenic KMT that was deeply divided over the FNPP. What had totally disappeared was the KMT's traditional pro-nuclear enthusiasm. Before the Fukushima incident, in April 2010, the government had actually vowed to expedite the construction of the FNPP, in the attempt to present it as a 'ceremonial gift on the 100th anniversary of the Republic of China'.¹⁵

Here, I have attempted to analyse the extraordinary resurgence of Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement. During the Fukushima incident, the Taiwanese witnessed horrific images of a reactor explosion and were in a panic over potential contamination from radioactive fallout. However, these facts do not explain why Taiwan ended up generating arguably the strongest anti-nuclear sentiment in East Asia. The international disaster gave rise to diversified national responses because the particular combination of domestic circumstances functioned as a prism that refracted the incoming light in different trajectories.

The above analysis has identified three facilitating conditions for the re-emergence of Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement. First, the outreach campaigns of activists after the consequential setback in 2001 helped to tide over the lost decade. Second, the surge in social movement activity after 2008 generated a spillover effect for post-Fukushima nuclear activism. Lastly, the DPP's inability to lead the movement unintentionally carved out the political space for a more broadly based participation.

Understanding responses to major disasters, such as Katrina and the Gulf oil spill, has emerged in the recent research agenda of environmental studies. A key question is: 'are these event-driven policy changes of sufficient magnitude to represent large-scale and effective ecological modernization?' (Rudel *et al.* 2011, p. 233). I argue that the effect varies with national contexts. In the three-decade history of Taiwan's anti-nuclear movement, never before has it come so close to the proclaimed goal of 'the nuclear-free homeland'. It remains to be observed whether this possibility will be translated into reality.

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Notes

1. *Ziyou shibao* [Liberty Times], 12 March 2013, p. A4.
2. Economist, 20 July 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21582016-rare-protest-prompts-government-scrap-plans-build-uranium-processing-plant> (accessed 15 February 2014).
3. Author's calculation of the data in Bureau of Energy (2011, p. 81).
4. *Xinxiwen* [New Journalists], 26 June 1994, p. 33.

5. *Lianhe wanbao* [United Evening Post], 20 April 1999.
6. *Ziyou shibao* [Liberty Times], 20 March 2013, <http://iservice.libertytimes.com.tw/liveNews/news.php?no = 780806&type => (accessed June 20, 2013).
7. Taiwan was under martial-law rule from May 1949 to July 1987 because of the 'communist insurgency'. The KMT government deprived Taiwanese of a number of political rights of speech, association, and demonstration, justified by its claim of wartime emergency. Therefore, its overdue termination set forth a great wave of popular protests and awakening of civil society, including anti-nuclear activism (Hsiao and Ho 2010, p. 49–53).
8. Interview with Lai Weijie, general secretary of Taipei County Taiwan Environmental Protection Union, Taipei, 4 April 1999.
9. Interview with Lai Weijie, general secretary of Green Citizens' Action Alliance, Taipei, 12 July 2001.
10. Interview with Kang Shihao, president of Green Citizens' Action Alliance, Taipei, 23 December 2009.
11. *Lianhe wanbao* [United Evening Post], 9 March 2013, <http://udn.com/NEWS/NATIONAL/NATS2/7747510.shtml> (accessed 19 March 2013).
12. The Mothers' Alliance for Monitoring Nuclear Power Plants, established in March 2013, was a clear example. Its main founder was Chen Ailing, who led the charity foundation of the Fubon Financial Group, for which her husband served as chairperson. Fubon maintained close ties with Ma Ying-jeou, who had granted its acquisition of the government-owned Taipei Bank in 2005 during his tenure as Taipei City mayor. Before Chen launched her rather unexpected activism, she met Cu Suxin of the GCAA in order to make sure that the movement was in no way related to 'the KMT-DPP partisan rivalry' (Wu 2013).
13. http://news.rti.org.tw/index_newsContent.aspx?nid=402799 (accessed 26 March 2013).
14. Unable to lead the rising anti-nuclear mobilisation, the DPP used the national legislature to boycott the FNPP referendum initiated by the KMT, with the support of anti-nuclear NGOs. In September 2013, the KMT withdrew the referendum proposal largely due to the dogged resistance of the opposition party. In spite of the about-turn, the KMT incumbents could continue their pro-nuclear policy with or without a referendum.
15. *Ziyou shibao*, 15 April 2010, <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2010/new/apr/15/today-p9.htm> (accessed 27 March 2013).

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