

Sunflowers melt the hearts of elders

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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After occupying the legislative chamber for 24 days in protest against the government's handling of the cross-strait service trade agreement, student-led protesters last night peacefully withdrew from the Legislative Yuan with a heart-warming rally in which participants shared their thoughts on the action and expressed gratitude for all the support they had received.

While the protest at the legislature might have ended — although more challenges are likely to be made to the President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) administration's work on the controversial pact — one thing is certain: The Sunflower movement has won the hearts and respect of many older Taiwanese.

Until not so long ago, people born in Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s were commonly mocked as belonging to the “strawberry generation,” in reference to a perception that they were work-shy, soft and unable to deal with pressure. Some adults, disappointed by a seemingly apathetic attitude in young people, have even come to call them the “ice-cube generation,” implying that they will melt without any dramatic change in the environment.

However, the negative perception of young Taiwanese has substantially changed with the Sunflower movement — to the extent that some people have jokingly said that they feel like yielding their seat on the MRT when a young person boards as a show of respect.

The large number of college and graduate students who are part of the Sunflower movement have done many people proud, demonstrating a remarkable level of resilience, maturity and organizational skills, and most importantly, an acute sense of awareness about the various challenges they and the country face, as well as displaying a depth of understanding for the country's democratization.

One aspect of the movement that has touched many people is that the protesters joined it out of a genuine belief in democracy and a sense of duty. They wanted to do their part for the protest without desiring the media limelight as politicians often do.

Consider the case of Ku Liu (柯鈞), a 19-year-old freshman at Pingtung's Meiho University, who during the occupation of the legislative chamber was assigned to guard the No. 6 door. For the

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past 21 days, he dutifully attended the entrance without seeking media attention by standing quietly next to student leaders Lin Fei-fan (林飛帆) and Chen Wei-ting (陳偉霆), upon whom the media have largely fixed their attention.

In the past, youngsters have been criticized for enjoying the fruits of democracy, which was hard-won by their pioneering elders, without thinking of how they might contribute to or solidify these achievements.

However, through the Sunflower movement, they have showed this criticism to be unfounded.

Student protester Chiang Chi-chi (蔣智奇) said that after the withdrawal from the Legislative Yuan, he wants to pursue a master's degree in economics "and become an economist who is not manipulated by politics," while 22-year-old Keng Hsiang-hsuan (鄧暘暘), a member of the Black Island Nation Youth — the group responsible for spearheading the siege of the Legislative Yuan — said that "the Taiwan in my mind is a free and democratic nation. Our parents have failed to safeguard Taiwan's democracy for us, but we would rather die than let our children grow up in a land without democracy."

It is encouraging and comforting to hear words of maturity and wisdom from young people, and Ma's government officials should listen well rather than occupying themselves with attempts to portray them as rioters.

While the Sunflower movement last night expressed its gratitude to the public for their support, Taiwanese in return ought to thank the protesters for drawing attention to issues of critical importance and increasing awareness and civic engagement.

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