

Sunflowers shine light of leadership

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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A year ago yesterday, scores of university students and others, unarmed yet loaded with indignation over their futures being increasingly dictated by China and with a yearning for change, stormed into the Legislative Yuan's main chamber in Taipei and started a 24-day occupation that has since been termed the Sunflower movement.

Just as sunflowers turn to follow the sun — symbolizing positivity, openness and brightness — the pursuit of social justice and an acute sense of awareness about the challenges they and the nation face have been the light leading the many young faces to take bold steps in voicing their anger about arbitrary policymaking spearheaded by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government.

They cannot accept KMT legislators attempting to ram through bills that matter to the nation's future in a mere 30 seconds, nor can they accept President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration attempting to pass the controversial cross-strait service trade agreement without legislative reviews or public scrutiny.

The protesters and their supporters were also indignant at the growing income disparity in the nation, which leads many to see little hope for a bright future.

A year has passed since the Sunflower movement erupted, and despite attempts by the Ma administration and some media outlets to portray the student-led protesters as rioters, the radiance of the sunflowers' bright petals continues to foster strong civic engagement among the public. The movement and its effects have altered the nation's political map.

For example, the KMT was bruised and battered in the nine-in-one elections in November last year. Also, a third political force has emerged, since many young people have — on their own initiative — formed new social activist groups, such as Taiwan March (台灣前進), Democracy Kuroshio (民主黑潮) and Democracy Tautin (民主挺).

Indeed, negative perceptions of young Taiwanese have been substantially changed in the wake of the Sunflower movement.

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In the past, younger people — often said to display an apathetic attitude toward their surroundings — had been criticized as being spoiled and selfish people who enjoy the fruits of democracy without thinking of how they might contribute to or consolidate the nation's democratic achievements.

Through the Sunflower movement, the youth have showed a remarkable level of resilience and maturity, as well as a depth of understanding about the nation's democratization.

The movement has forced the KMT, as well as China, to readjust attitudes toward cross-strait affairs, just as the younger generations must pay attention to social issues as they learn to scrutinize government actions and keep it in check.

Most importantly, young people have shown an adamant and uncompromising attitude toward upholding democratic values and social justice.

A floral symbol of adoration and embracing new opportunities as well as a reminder of all that is good in life, sunflowers certainly have been a great symbol to represent the student-led protesters' massive demonstrations in March last year against the government's opaque handling of the service trade agreement.

With their tall stalks and bright petals stretched toward the sun, sunflowers evoke feelings of vibrance and radiant warmth. As such, society looks forward to the sunflowers' luminescence continuing to uplift the social and political awareness of young people, leading them toward the continued pursuit of critically important national issues and increased civic engagement.

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