

## The place of Su Beng in the fight for freedom

Written by Lee Min-yung 李敏勇  
Friday, 26 February 2016 10:41

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Long-time Taiwan independence advocate Su Beng (蘇炳), 97, is affectionately known by the epithet Uncle Su Beng. Su's monumental memoirs — which reach an impressive length of more than 1,000 pages and are to be published by Avanguard Press on May 20, the same day that president-elect Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) is to be sworn in as president — are of both political and cultural significance.

In the mid-1990s, when former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) was still in office, Su — a unique presence within Taiwan's pro-independence community — returned to Taiwan after about 40 years in exile, disregarding the risk of imprisonment. Apart from his advocacy of socialist ideals, Su has also set the tone for Taiwanese nationalism, and he is synonymous with the Taiwan Independence Association (TIA).

After returning to Taiwan, being imprisoned and then released, Su turned the TIA, which he leads, into a leading light among Taiwan's civic movements, that gradually became known throughout Taiwanese society. The young people who participated in the Sunflower movement are highly respectful of Su, and students from various universities published a book based on Su's oral history.

In the eyes of young people, Su and democracy movement pioneer Deng Nan-jung (鄧南仲) are important role models.

Su, who was born in 1918, sees himself as a lifelong revolutionary who fights for his ideals without ever looking back.

Deng, who was born in 1947 and insisted on full and unrestricted freedom of expression, burned himself to death in 1989. The two have both helped set an example for Taiwanese politics in the post-World War II period, and Deng even published Su's monumental work Taiwan's 400-Year History (台灣四百年史) in Taiwan while Su was still in exile.

Su's memoirs give a detailed account of his life and his career. His revolutionary dreams and his exile unfold in Taiwan, China and Japan, and they also extend to the US, Canada and Europe. He has the mind of an artist, but is also capable of dialectical thought. He engaged

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with “Red” China and then moved on, as he was attracted to Marxism yet critical of the myths surrounding the Chinese Communist Party and the former Soviet Union.

After World War II, Su held a unique position in the Taiwanese independence movement during the time when the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) monopolized power in the Republic of China (ROC). He both worked together and competed with other pro-independence groups, and his memoirs contain both confessions and criticism. In the 21st century, Su has maintained contacts with such people as Lee, former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and Tsai.

When Tsai was thanking supporters during her post-election gathering on Jan. 16, she made special mention of Su, who was sitting just below the stage. It is difficult to put words to the meeting between a revolutionary who has stood outside the establishment and a reformer who is part of the establishment, but together, the two have shone a light on a path leading to a more democratic and a more independent future for Taiwan.

*Lee Min-yung is a poet.*

Translated by Perry Svensson

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2016/02/26](#)