

adversarial interest groups. This has been the business interest which the DPP state cannot afford to ignore once it is in power. Besides, the above three social movements, such as the women, human rights, and the aborigines, have seemed to develop a better relations with the DPP state for exactly the opposite reason, there has been no obvious adversary group between them and the state.

The DPP government has been quite conscious about this challenge from certain type of social movements and has attempted to renew its progressive alliance with them by accommodating their demands without jeopardizing its political interests that lie in other sectors (especially the business) of society. The emerging political landscape in which social movements and a new democratic state interact is still in the making. Both the state and social movements need to realize the new challenges and adjust accordingly to co-manage the unprecedented situation of democratic governance. And such newly emerging political landscape could significantly affect the dynamics of social movements and their respective influence on the state as well as their relative status in the civil society. The typological analytical framework is believed to be valid and useful in understanding Taiwan's social movements though a new political factor, i.e. regime change should be brought into the picture. And that deserves further deeper and closer observation on the social movements and state relations in Taiwan since 2000.

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## "Rosy Periwinkle": The Politics of the Licensed Prostitutes Movement in Taiwan

Mau-Kuei Chang and Yufen Chang

Licensed prostitutes in Taiwan were referred to as *Gong Cang* (or public prostitutes) working in the confines of *Gong Cang Guan* (the house of *Gong Cang*, or the brothels). Before the system was banned, brothels and *Gong Cang* were licensed by the city government and overseen by local police.<sup>1</sup> By law a prostitute license was granted only to "voluntary" prostitutes hired by brothels with licenses.<sup>2</sup>

Supporters of the *Gong Cang* system argue that consensual prostitution has no victims and poses little threat to public. And, for women under a severely distressful situation, selling sexual services has been considered as something like the last resort to survive. They also believe that the licensing system can offer prostitutes better protection and working conditions through regular government inspections. The licensing system thus allows prostitutes to work with less fear and harassment.<sup>3</sup> However, citing from previous studies, others

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Portions of this paper were based on an earlier paper written by the authors in Chang and Chang (2002). This version contains an update of the movement and an expansion of its theoretical frame for understanding social movements.

<sup>1</sup> *Gong Cang's* services were plain sex--straightforward, without frills. *Gong Cang* practices were oriented toward (but not restricted to) the working-class and underclass, sometimes older or handicapped customers, and sometimes guest workers. Their customers were asked to wear condoms and were charged fixed prices set by government regulation. Before the ban on the practice, the prices were set to about 30–35 US dollars for a unit of 15 min, and 30% of which was taken by the brothels according to the rule, but in practice this amount of money may be different. The brothels were located in a run-down neighborhood in Taipei City, situated in narrow, low-lit alleys of long-designated red-light districts.

<sup>2</sup> Official reports said that there were only 128 prostitutes working at 36 brothels in Taipei City in June 1997. A much larger population of unlicensed, and hence illegal, prostitutes existed outside the *Gong Cang* system and are not part of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, the rules said that they were not allowed to solicit in the street and should have a physical examination every week administered by health officials at the city's Research Institute to Prevent Sexually Transmitted Disease.

do not share this stand. They argue that prostitutes' services are often "mortgaged" in lengthy contracts until loans advanced to them or their families are paid up. Also, *Gong Cang Guan* operates in a gray area, affiliated with organized crimes and protected by corrupted officials. The system is exploitative while prostitutes are very vulnerable because of financial or family burden despite of government's regulations. For instance, in many cases, prostitutes could first work as underage prostitutes in the brothels and then continued to work as *Gong Cang* "legally" when they reached 20 years old.

In late 1996, when the City Council proposed harsh measures to clean up the city, licensed prostitutes from Taipei City's red-light district went to petition for extension of the system. Their protests eventually erupted in public in 1997 when City Hall, under pressure from the City Council, agreed to outlaw all prostitution. The system was eventually banned in year 2002 for Taipei City and for entire Taiwan. As the paper will show, in the beginning, the protest was really about survival of several dozen unorganized and nearly despairing prostitutes who were mostly middle-aged women with little formal education. They were mostly financially stressed though not always poor. They were shy to speak in public, and had little self-esteem for having probably the least respected and the most stigmatized job. But in the following years, along with the changing of larger political context, veteran prostitutes and movement activists successfully transformed their initial protest movement into a vocal sex workers' rights movement.

The movement has attracted public attention and stirred nationalistic nerves in Taiwan. Our research question emerges from this puzzle: how could a group of no more than two hundred underclass women – originating from the dark corner of the margin of the society, hidden under the glossy urban life, appearing to be inexperienced with citizen politics, with little organizational support, with little resources, social network, or any other kind of matters that have been found to be important for social movement and movement organization – successfully become politically active and influential in Taiwan since 1997?

Reading from a variety of commentaries on this movement, we find strongly disagreeing opinions on this issue. Some attempted to categorize the prostitute's protests and sex workers' rights movement under the larger umbrella of the Taiwan's women's rights movement. But women's rights activists have been divided in their views about whether to abolish the *Gong Cang* system and about its implications for gender relations and women's status.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 contains a list of almost all important women's groups that have been active in contemporary Taiwan. They are split into two camps as will be discussed later. Also, compared to other women's groups, the pro-prostitutes' rights groups have stronger ties not with women's groups but with labor movement and human rights groups in their movement activities.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Hwang (1998) and Lin (1998) wrote about opposing prostitution, while Ka (1998) criticized women's movement that opposing prostitution.

Table 1 Women groups' positions on prostitution in Taiwan

Groups that oppose prostitution	Groups for rights to prostitutes
Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation	<i>Ri Ri Cuen</i> (Collective of sex workers and supporters)
Garden Hope Foundation	Alliance of Pink Collar Workers
P.W.R. Foundation	United Front of Women Workers
Taipei Association for the Promotion of Women's Rights (TAPWR)	Gender/Sexuality Rights Association
Taiwan Feminist Scholars Association	Center for the Study of Sexualities, National Central University
ECPAT Taiwan (Taiwan 547) (Awakening Foundation) <sup>a</sup>	

<sup>a</sup>The General Secretary of the Awakening Foundation *Wang* had once actively supported the prostitutes' protests for a period in 1997. But soon she was dismissed from the Foundation because the board of the Foundation disagreed with her.

On the one hand, to ban or not to ban the *Gong Cang* system has been very politically controversial and charged with accusations and counter-accusations. It was not just widely covered by media published for domestic readers, but also internationally known media, like the *BBC World News*, the *Guardian*, and *The New York Times*. But the lack of scholarly study of the prostitutes' movement has been also noticeable. As the paper will show, the prostitutes' movement shattered the united image among feminist advocates of different camps. The points that have been hotly debated include: "what does this mean for equal status of the sexes," "what are women's proper sexual roles," and "body autonomy," an important concept for the feminist movement. Feminist scholars found themselves in dispute with each other on this particular movement.<sup>5</sup>

## Prelude to the Protests

One of the reasons which prompted the prostitutes to go protesting in public was the decision to ban the *Gong Cang* system in September 1997. At that time the city government was led by the rising star of the Democratic People's Party (DPP), Mayor *Chen Shui-bian*.<sup>6</sup> He was in conflict with the opposing City Council dominated by the DPP's archrival Nationalist (*Kuomintang*, or the) party.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The issues and splits of the women's movement in Taiwan are discussed in Huang (1998), Lin (1998), and Fan (2003).

<sup>6</sup>DPP stands for Democratic Progressive Party, which came into existence in 1986 as a movement force opposing the authoritarianism. The DPP has had been the ruling party of the government (but a minority party in the Congress) during the years between 2000 and 2008.

<sup>7</sup>The KMT party had been the ruling party of the authoritarian regime of Taiwan from 1949 until 1999. During this time, the KMT enforced martial law until 1987, when it ended under serious challenge from the DPP.

The Council pushed the mayor to come up with a more effective plan to suppress the spread of sex-related businesses, and mentioned the *Gong Cang* system as a “shame,” or “double-standard” practice of the government actually issuing licenses to sell sex. At first Mayor *Chen* was not willing to bow to the pressure, but under the advice from his staff and the Taipei Association for the Promotion of Women’s Rights (TAPWR), a women’s rights group close to the City Hall, he modified his earlier position. On September 1st, the City announced that after serious evaluation and preparation, it would end the *Gong Cang* system by September 9. What they had never anticipated was the eruption of strong protests and the sustaining high level of sympathy for the prostitutes from the general public. Even the Council wittingly reversed its former position so that they could criticize the Mayor for his bluntness. And, perhaps by contingency, as no one could predict in advance, the prostitutes and Taiwan’s most active labor movement group, the Committee on Action for Labor Legislation (CALL hereafter) and its network, the Alliance of Pink Collar Workers (Pink Collar), and the United Front of Women Workers (United Front) began to form a movement alliance.<sup>8</sup>

What was the social-political conjuncture that induced these political reversals in positions and created movement alliances between the otherwise masculine CALL and poorest women? How did this unexpected “coalition” evolve later? Are feminists’ concerns of different camps the only foci of the movement? Could there exist other political agendas that might have helped to contribute to the burst of support for the movement?

### Proposing an Embeddedness Approach

Compared with existing social movement perspectives, such as various resource mobilization approaches, identity-based approaches, or the dominant political process model, this paper inclines toward a political process model that emphasizes the importance of political conflicts and the opportunity structure for sustaining movement actors. But the paper also proposes an “embeddedness approach” for understanding the contingency of identity making and strategy planning. Here we borrow the concept of the “embeddedness” of social actions, which has been crucial to understanding economic behavior by economic sociologists,<sup>9</sup> and the network analysis of social movement organizations and collective actions suggested by Diani.<sup>10</sup> The concept of embeddedness helps us to think of social movement, whether its cause, identity, or strategy, led by active social organization, as not emerging or acting in isolation, but as

<sup>8</sup> The CALL has been an active organization for laborers and other social-political causes in Taiwan since 1988. Further explanation will follow. More details will follow in next sessions.

<sup>9</sup> Here we refer to the influential work by Granovetter (1985).

<sup>10</sup> See Diani (1992) and Diani and McAdam (2003).

constrained by existing social-political context in an arena of conflicts, and in turn acting on contingency. Movements are embedded in a particular time and place, influenced by past structures, current events, and punctuated by existing salient social-political conflicts of the time and place. They are thus influenced by political and social movement agendas and organizations already present. Because they are enmeshed with other movements and political actions/actors, movement strategies or directions are not always planned in advance like “single-issue” movement study tends to assume. Part of the reason is that newly emerging social movement and new organization often lack the credibility or ability to draw public support and attention. It is always a “late-comer” joining the arena full of evolving, inter-connecting, conflicting civil groups, political parties, and movement competitors struggling to increase their own support. The new movement must find its own place, persuade others to give support, and become recognized as a legitimate issue in an existing pattern of social relations. Its relations to previous existing agendas and groups and issues, whether that might be associating or conflicting, allying or opposing, thus become important in its identity shaping and strategy making. The late-comer needs to orient itself and reacts to the external environment for the purpose of self-differentiation and recognition. In brief, social movement and movement organization are not made up by deliberate choice or strategic planning from the outset, but by their contingency with the larger social and context along their development.

Putting it from another angle, when responding to conflicts, events, and adversaries, the movement and organization navigate their own path in a constellation of contested actions and creates their own life course (e.g., a chronology). A social movement, from this perspective, can be defined as a cluster, or a chronology, of interrelated, conflictual actions and events embedded in the midst of other social conflicts and movement causes. It defines itself in a dialogical relationship to other existing socio-political causes and actions. The paper defines this interpretative framework an “embeddedness” approach, and uses it to examine the origins and subsequent transformations of the prostitutes’ movement in light of contingencies and contexts throughout the period 1997–2006. In the following, we will first provide a short summary of the emergence of protests, the movement scenes in the early period and in more recent years, and then provide an analytical interpretation of the transformation of movements.

### Some Protest Scenes in Late 1997

On September 1, 1997, about one hundred *Gong Cang* women, their faces hooded with large baseball caps and sunglasses in fear of revealing their identities, broke social taboos and went public. Like other “ordinary” protesting citizens, they visited the Taipei City Council and then tried to find Mayor *Chen Shui-bian* in City Hall. Demanding the respect and the right to their occupation, they appealed

for the continuation of the *Gong Cang* system of legalized prostitution, which the City had threatened to abolish in less than 2 weeks.

This protest and the following events drew extensive media coverage. Existing women's organizations were divided in response to the prostitutes' protests. Some were sympathetic to *Gong Cang* but decided to side with the city's policy, while others supported *Gong Cang* in challenging the city's decision aggressively. In less than 1 week, the *Gong Cang* grievance group and protest movement began to form.

On two other occasions, September 6 and 11, 1997, *Gong Cang* and their supporters numbering in dozens returned to Taipei City Hall and demanded to meet with Mayor *Chen Shui-bian* (again) to present their petition. When the authorities refused to meet with them, they held up cardboard signs with slogans such as, "Right to Live, Right to Work, Help the Prostitutes but no Charity." On these two occasions, the protestors clashed with police; protesters were pushed and bruised.

The prostitutes' protests surprised many people. Many got the chance to look at the prostitute for the first time in public life, though largely in media coverage, instead of only in news about police raids. Their protests revealed the harsh lives that some middle-aged prostitutes had gone through. Sympathy mounting as people watching their grievances mixed with stigmatization, discrimination, fear, anger, frustrations, and the deprivation reported. And the public were taken by further surprise by their petition goal: to be allowed to continue to work as prostitutes while turning down the government's offer of a transition relief program, which they said could do little to relieve their financial burden. Even their most important ally, the labor activists who worked closely with the prostitutes almost immediately after the protests erupted, admitted later that they had little prior knowledge about the prostitutes and what their work meant to them.<sup>11</sup>

As the events unfolded, the mayor and the city government became the primary targets of protests and were accused of "bullying the poor and ridiculing the prostitute."<sup>12</sup> One protest strategy that served to draw media and public attention, while causing much embarrassment for Mayor *Chen Shui-bian* was called "under prostitutes' shadows." This strategy was to tag along *Chen Shui-bian* like his "shadow" and to disgrace him when he made important public appearances in official ceremonies, meetings with the President, or receptions with foreign dignitaries.

Since 1998, the main organization of the movement has been the Caring and Mutual Help Association (or the *Ri Ri Cuen* for short).<sup>13</sup> *Ri Ri Cuen* literally means "spring time every day" in Chinese and is the name of a flower, in English

<sup>11</sup> See *Hsia Lin-ching's* post, "A Journey of Social Learning with Prostitutes' Protest," [http://coswas.org/archives/01coswas/6essay/post\\_6.html](http://coswas.org/archives/01coswas/6essay/post_6.html), accessed on January 15, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Pink Collar and United Front (1998).

<sup>13</sup> Its formal English title has been "Collective of Sex Workers and Supporters," or COSWAS. The name is different from its Chinese name, which has been *Ri Ri Cuen* Association. We elect to use *Ri Ri Cuen* because it is much more well-known in Taiwan.

the "rosy periwinkle." The flower was chosen to symbolize the prostitutes' toughness and determination in their struggle for survival against extreme adversity. The organization was formed jointly with veteran prostitutes as the main constituency and labor activists as the strategists during the height of protests. One of the main speakers for prostitutes was *Guan Xiu-qin*, or *Guan Jie* (elder sister *Guan*).<sup>14</sup> She had enough courage to tell the entire society in her true identity that she took pride in her job as a prostitute for her family. She took part in early protests at City Hall and in 1997. Her courage in breaking social taboo and publicly telling her life story as a prostitute with dignity inspired many others, including young students and activists, to join their cause. She led other sisters to form a *Gong Cang* self-help organization, and encouraged them to engage in public protest while she herself elected to continue to work as a prostitute despite the government ban. *Guan Jie* rejected the government's welfare offer with dignity, viewing prostitution as a self-sustaining profession. This protest strategy gained strong public support as documented in *Ri Ri Cuen's* own activity report. The prostitutes' protests created 147 major mobilizations and 326 episodes or action events during the period between September 1997 and March 1999.<sup>15</sup> These demonstrations involved intense internal training sessions, dialogue actions with women's movement groups and labor movement groups, dialogue actions with general citizens and the media, and waves of protests and petitions. In sum, the movement was devoted to a self-empowering process that featured dialogical interactions with diverse groups culminating in confrontations with the city government and with Mayor *Chen Shui-bian*.

### Movement Scenes in November 2006

By 2007, after 9 years of protest, the outlook of the movement and campaigns had become rather different.<sup>16</sup> What follows are some descriptions of a recent, major event involving *Ri Ri Cuen* in December 2006.

On November 25–27, 2006, *Ri Ri Cuen* held its fifth international conference, the International Cultural Festivals for Prostitutes and Action Forum, which was partially funded by the Taipei city government. The organizer invited domestic and foreign activists, feminist scholars and writers for sex workers' rights. The attendees came from the United States, Australia, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands. The conference drew around one hundred participants each day, not including administrative staff and voluntary helpers. A handful of domestic sex workers attended who were veteran *Gong Cang*

<sup>14</sup> A version of the story about *Guan Xiu-qin* can be found in Wikipedia: <http://zh.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%E5%AE%98%E7%A7%80%E7%90%B4&variant=zh-tw>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, [http://coswas.org/archives/01coswas/6essay/post\\_6.html](http://coswas.org/archives/01coswas/6essay/post_6.html) accessed on January 15, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> These following descriptions were largely based on a field report written by a graduate student, *Chen Shu-han*. Additional sources from the media also were included when necessary.

women. These women had engaged in a long series of protests during 1997–1999 and had worked as *Ri Ri Cuen* activists since its founding in 1998.

Other participants included the two organizations that founded *Ri Ri Cuen*, (the Pink Collar and the United Front), and Taiwan's only human rights association for sexuality and gender issues (the Gender/Sexuality Rights Association). In addition, there were church-based service groups for international migrant workers in attendance. One common characteristic of these groups is that they were either founded by or had close relations with CALL. Even the voluntary staff at the conference site were from a community college (*Ludi* Community College) managed by members of the CALL. Notably absent from the conference, however, were Taiwan women's movement representatives or academic scholars, despite *Ri Ri Cuen*'s invitations. Lack of attendance from other groups signaled the divisiveness among women's activists that still persists today.

Toward the end of the conference, a round-table session concluded with a presentation of *Ri Ri Cuen*'s draft of the "2006 Declaration of the International Conference on Sex Industry and Policy." Its contents addressed current issues in Taiwan and elsewhere in the world, such as the suppression of the sex industry and pressures to impose stricter sanctions on human trafficking in the context of the rising trend of global migration. The declaration included the following statements:<sup>17</sup>

1. Opposition to human trafficking should not be equal with opposition to sex work, nor should it be equal opposition to immigrants/guest workers.
2. All forms of the movement against human trafficking movement that also suppresses prostitutes and immigrants should be opposed.
3. All humans should have the freedom to migrate and the freedom to work.
4. Sex work is like any job. Sex workers are workers entitled to the protections of laborers' rights, social rights, and human rights.
5. Sex trade is consensual behavior between a buyer and a seller; sex workers are not victims, and no parties should be penalized.
6. Illegal entry is not human trafficking, and a marriage resulting from cross-country arrangement is not human trafficking.

The declaration advocated rights for sex workers and articulated opposition to more stringent control of international immigrants, including sex workers, as long as they were not victims of global human trafficking. The groups' concerns for immigrant women engaged in sex work followed the labor movements' interests (as represented by CALL, the Committee on Action for Labor Legislation) in aiding and organizing guest workers in Taiwan, and in joining the coalition of groups in international labor movement organizations.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Readers are cautioned that the organizer said that the wording of these statements needed to be polished at a later stage for formal release, which the authors have failed to obtain despite of attempting. And the translation provided here is based on our interpretation.

<sup>18</sup> Most of international activities are mediated through CALL's network to Taiwan International Worker's Association (TIWA).

The "carnival" part of the conference involved embracing the culture of the sex industry. Singing and "hot" dancing routines were performed by sex workers and a movement dance troupe during conference breaks. In the evening the festivities were held in *Guisui* Park, a small community park near the old red-light district. The highlight of the festivities was the street parade day on December 27.<sup>19</sup> A ceremony held before the parade commemorated the death of *Guan Jie*, the outspoken sister and movement initiator. *Guan Jie*'s body was found on August 3, 2007, by the seashore near Keelung Port in northern Taiwan. The news shook the network of movement activists. Police theorized that *Guan Jie* committed suicide out of despair about her financial situation. But activists argued that *Guan Jie* was forced to end her life due to the unbearable burden caused by increasing government and police suppression.

When activists gathered outside of the Presidential Palace in memory of *Guan Jie*'s death, they directed their protest at the former Mayor *Chen* of Taipei, who by then had become the President of Taiwan. Though President *Chen* had no direct authority over city affairs, the movement still wanted to identify him as the original and still primary target after almost 9 years. In addition, *Ri Ri Cuen* also used the occasion to press current Taipei mayor, *Ma Ying-jeou*, to fulfill his campaign promises made 8 years earlier when he defeated *Chen* in 1998. At his campaign, *Ma* had promised to revise the laws on the sex industry, to legalize consensual sex trade, and to re-zone special districts for sex related business but he never really pushed for their passings.

The 2006 conference fielded public parades with *Gong Cang* women in the lead vehicles. A large photo of *Guan Jie* was placed in front of the parade. Movement leaders including veteran *Gong Cang* sister *Li-juan*, *Ri Ri Cuen*, and over 30–40 activists and supporters, some spicily dressed to attract public attention. In addition, there were perhaps one or two hundred other participants or interested bystanders riding on motorcycles following behind. But compared to earlier parades, far fewer *Gong Cang* women participated. If they had survived the repression, they had either gone "underground," left the profession, or simply lost contact after 9 years of protests because chances to revive the *Gong Cang* seemed remote.

The theme of the 2006 conference was "honest politics: de-criminalizing sex work," and called for the following actions:

1. Relax law enforcement against the sex industry and revise article 80 of Bill to Maintain Public Order Bill (because it criminalizes prostitution and sex industries of all kinds).
2. Oppose punishment against sex clienteles of sex workers, an amendment to Bill to Maintain Public Order proposed by some women's groups.

<sup>19</sup> The first one was held during the International Cultural Festival for Sex Workers in December 2002. The parade was joined with the campaign for Council member by *Ri Ri Cuen*'s leader Wang Fang-ping.

3. Encourage sex workers to form cooperative and self-governing organizations.
4. Provide help to NGOs to set up a temporary "Relief Center for Women in a Special Kind of Business."<sup>20</sup>

As in past conferences, the sex workers' slogans, speeches, and action performances were full of satirical rhetoric, mixed with mocking and angry protests. They criticized the hypocrisy of partisan politics, social morals, and the public order. More important, the conference was scheduled deliberately when Taipei was in the midst of a mayoral campaign at the end of *Ma's* second term. Conference participants seized upon the timing as a political opportunity to advance their agenda.<sup>21</sup> A parade of conference participants stopped at three campaign offices of major candidates to present their demand for decriminalizing the sex industry.<sup>22</sup> Judging from the varying degrees of support they received, and the way each candidate treated them, there seemed to be a negative correlation between the popularity of the candidate and his or her sympathy for the movement. The strongest candidate, who eventually became Mayor in December 2006, *Hao Lung-bin*, refused to receive them and turned down their appeals almost rudely.<sup>23</sup> Police interrupted the activists at least twice on this particular visit to *Hao's* campaign office and threatened to charge them with violating the Assembly and Demonstration Act, while they received the warmest support from two candidates who scored the lowest number of votes in the election.<sup>24</sup>

The parade lasted for a few hours and folded quickly. As the streets returned to normal, the activists and *Gong Cang* members went to an old brothel house on *GuiSui* Street of the *Datung* District. Here, *Gong Cang* veterans would make a special "healthy vinegar" supposedly good for women, along with other "sex" stuff for sale to earn some income and for movement promotion. The house, known as *The Wen-Meng Lou*, used to be a popular brothel during the Japanese period and has been owned by Taiwan Bank. The prostitutes have turned the house into a protest center, with *Guan Jie's* photos on display and also an exhibition on sex.

<sup>20</sup> "Special kind of business" is a technical term employed by the government. The term defines eight kinds of sex-related businesses which require government inspections and licenses for special administrative purposes.

<sup>21</sup> For the same reason, to generate public attention for the movement cause during election time, one of the key members of *Ri Ri Cuen*, *Wang Fang-ping*, had run for electoral office twice. Once she ran in 2000 for a council member seat, and the other time in 2004 for a legislator member seat. She had received less than one thousand votes each time, a very poor showing.

<sup>22</sup> "To pay the candidate a visit" is a commonly used movement tactics. Other social protest groups have used this tactic also. This could be so because the "visits" are always good "stories" that news media will not miss, and because the visits could force politicians who were relatively vulnerable to make some kind of commitment or concessions at the moment.

<sup>23</sup> *Hao Lung-bin* is a *Kuomintang* member who won the campaign eventually and was sworn in office in December 26, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> The bottom one was Ms. *Zhou Yu-kou*, the only female candidate, and the next lowest was Mr. *Song Chu-yu* (or James Soong) of the People First Party.

The 2006 conference, protest and public parade appeared peaceful, normal, and routinized. Yet previously in late 1997, many prostitutes had felt angry, some were ready to fight, and several committed suicide out of desperation. At that time, there was a clear-cut villain, the then-Mayor *Chen Shui-bian* who had made the prostitutes unite into a self-help group to fight for their survival. The organizational goals of the prostitutes movement in 1997 was immediately close to prostitutes' daily lives, while the movement repertoire was much more confrontational. By 2006, the movement had redefined itself. The other women's groups were calling for more restrictive regulation on immigrants to prevent human trafficking and to protect women immigrants from falling into sex industry. The *Ri Ri Cuen* took an opposing view. It lobbied against the amendment of the penal code. The *Ri Ri Cuen* could be described as pro-sex workers rights, pro-immigrant rights movement organization.

### Comparing Scenes from These Two Periods

During the period between September 1997 and December 2006, several important events marked the "chronology," or life course of the movement. First, *Chen Shui-bian* lost his bid for a second term to his KMT challenger *Ma Ying-jeou* in the 1998 election. The regime of Taipei City Hall changed hands accordingly. The voting results were so close that the *Gong Cang's* criticisms of *Chen* may have made the difference. The deteriorating relationship between City Hall and the Council involving the conflicts over abolishment of the *Gong Cang* system definitely had a negative impact on *Chen's* re-election attempt. At the same time, as a candidate, *Ma* appeared to be more sensitive and reasonable on a variety of issues, including the abolishment issue. He had promised to offer *Gong Cang* a 2-year extension during his campaign and agreed to review the policies on a special zoning plan for sex-related business if elected.<sup>25</sup> And, to the surprise of many, not only did *Ma* succeed and revive the *Gong Cang* system for 2 years, but he also appointed the CALL's founder, *Cheng Chuen-chi*, to be his Commissioner of the Labor Bureau.<sup>26</sup> A subtle change of the alliance between social groups and the incoming KMT's City Hall was also happening at the juncture.

When the movement began as a grievance protest, highly mobilized, and charged with prostitutes' anger and frustration, the prostitutes' aim was simple. Their goal was to protect their daily business and to make a living while getting a minimum amount of respect. In doing so, they also had to strive for their

<sup>25</sup> None of the promises was actualized except for the two-year extension. Not only did he outlaw the licensing practices following *Chen Shui-bian's* decision, but he also pushed the Taipei municipal police to clamp down on prostitution throughout his term.

<sup>26</sup> Since the CALL has been known as the movement force behind prostitutes' protests, *Cheng's* appointment through *Ma's* victory helped substantiate the anti-Taiwanese nationalism social movement's conspiracy theory about the sacking of *Chen Shuibian* through *Gong Cang's* grievances.

dignity, admitting trauma but not admitting shame, since exposing themselves in public was essential for their cause.

After the initial extension of the licensing system under *Ma's* administration, the response of the *Ri Ri Cuen* after 2001 was to gradually become a vocal advocate for granting rights to sex workers in general, including those who cross the border using different names to make a living or work "illegally." The aim of the movement was to advocate for the rights of underclass sex workers. They proposed that the sex industry be legalized, the sex trade de-criminalized, and international women immigrants be accepted. Sex workers organizations have become "knowledge centers" for educating prospective movement activists and the general public and countering prejudice against women who sell their bodies. Finally these knowledge centers seek to recognize the system's unfairness toward women sex workers.

Another notable development in 1998 was the movement's relation to the city government. In 1997 the city government was clearly enforcing an anti-prostitute agenda, forcing prostitutes to lose their relatively safe jobs and income, and compelling them to fight back. After *Ma's* election victory and his subsequent approval of a 2-year extension, by the end of 2006 the sex workers relations with the City were congenial if not warm. On the one hand, Mayor *Ma* and his police commissioner continued to suppress the sex trade in practice in the name of law and order. This restrictive atmosphere may have contributed to the death of elder sister *Guan* indirectly. But on the other hand, the Commissioner of the Bureau for Social Affairs of the City was instructed to fund the sex workers' international conference and cultural festival.<sup>27</sup>

Just what socio-political contexts are important for these developments? How can one make sense out of the change in this movement from 1997 to 2006? We now turn to the contingencies of the movement, meaning the social, legal, and political factors that are external but related to and influencing the prostitutes, activists, movement associations, and political actors.

## Bring in Social and Political Contingencies: Prostitutes, Sex Work, and Politics in Taipei

### "Legal" versus "Illegal" Prostitutes: Dilemmas for Governance

Most of the *Gong Cang* sisters had long careers in prostitution and lacked other job skills.<sup>28</sup> Most became prostitutes when the men in their families who were

<sup>27</sup> The new Taipei Mayor, *Hao Lung-bin*, had refused rather firmly and somewhat rudely to meet with movement activists or to accept the movement's appeal during his campaign. This relationship between the City and the movement will continue to evolve.

<sup>28</sup> One of the activists described them in the following: "Their mean age was 36, 50% of them were single parent, 95% were under nine year's education, they have long experiences of prostitution, and every one of them has heavily-laden life stories" (Taipei *Ri Ri Cuen* 2000a, p. 17).

supposed to be responsible for providing income, whether they were fathers, elder brothers, or husbands, became suddenly unable to do so, plunging the entire family into a desperate economic situation. It also could happen to a woman with little education or skills who was abandoned, or who managed to escape from domestic violence, to raise very young children. Most prostitutes in Taiwan shared an ethnic *Han* background, though a small number had an aboriginal background (ethnic Austronesian).

Other kinds of sex-related work and prostitution also existed in Taiwan. By law, women who prostitute illegally are generally called as *An Cang*, or illegal/private prostitutes. Illegal prostitution is a crime penalized for violating public order, and is sanctioned with fines and possible prison terms without exception.<sup>29</sup> In reality, either as matter of cover-up or as a cluster effect, prostitutes tend to work either inside legal brothels together with *Gong Cang*, or in illegal brothels hidden near neighboring legal brothels (and sometimes even in the same buildings as the legal brothels). This "mixing problem," almost irresolvable, has contributed to the government's determination to abolish *Gong Cang* practices.

The practices of controlling prostitution in cities originated in the first half of twentieth century, when Taiwan was still a colony of Japanese Empire and Taipei was Taiwan's most upscale city. During the period of Chinese (Republic of China) rule of Taiwan beginning in 1945, prostitution was first banned for several years, and then *Gong Cang* and brothels were restored in 1956. Authorities deemed prostitution "practical" and necessary because of an imbalanced sex ratio. This demographic gender imbalance was created by an influx of soldiers and male refugees who had fled Communist China.<sup>30</sup>

Local politicians and mainstream media sought to minimize and conceal the policy matters surrounding prostitution from public scrutiny and official responsibility. The official and moral reasons to criminalize prostitution and sex related businesses included the practical concern of public health and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Religious groups and police organizations have opposed prostitution for traditional based moral and humanitarian concerns. Prostitution has been constantly regarded as a social problem, a plague that endangers the public order. It also has been viewed as inhumane and deviant because prostitutes often were portrayed as being forced into the sex industry as sex slaves, victims, or criminals, who needed to be "saved" and "corrected" by authorities, and to become "good" or "normal" women.

<sup>29</sup> But men who purchase sex services are not prosecuted for their conduct. The penalties mostly involve fines. Female frequent violators can be sent to correcting institution for moral lessons and job training courses.

<sup>30</sup> Hong Wan-chi (2001).

### *Nationalistic-Partisan Conflict Between the City Government and the City Council, with Gong Cang Caught in the Cross-Fire*

A unique characteristic of the *Gong Cang* movement is that it unexpectedly emerged in the midst of internal political conflict in Taiwan's nationalistic and partisan politics. The political context of the conflict between the city government and the city council, and the events surrounding the abolishment of the *Gong Cang* system is critical in gauging the trajectory of the prostitutes' movement.

Before the late 1980s, Taiwanese nationalism was considered a serious offense and was heavily suppressed. The ruling KMT Party considered itself the governing body of all of mainland China, not just of a separatist new nation on a small island. On the other hand, the opposing Taiwanese nationalists argued that Taiwanese and Chinese belonged to two different race/nations and struggled for democratization and Taiwan independence. After decades of political confrontations beginning from 1980s, Taiwan embarked on a process of political liberalization and democratization creating an opportunity for Taiwan's independence movement to grow. Two major political parties embraced this nationalistic independence cause, the Democratic Progress Party (DPP, founded in 1986), and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU, founded in 2001). This rising Taiwan independence tendency, as both a political force and a movement, faced strong resentment and political attacks from the KMT and its allies, such as the Chinese New Party (founded in 1993) and the People First Party (founded in 2001).<sup>31</sup>

In 1994, 8 years after Taiwan lifted martial law, the pro-Taiwanese independence DPP scored a major victory in Taipei's mayoral election, led by rising political star and former active legislator (equivalent to a congressional representative in the United States), *Chen Shui-bian*. The victory marked a significant step in Taiwan's electoral politics. This victory was important not only because Taipei City had been a strong-hold of the pro KMT bases, but also because *Chen's* opponent was a reputable, long-time political celebrity, a staunch anti-Taiwanese nationalism hero, and a Chinese nationalist supporter from the Chinese New Party, *Zhao Shao-kang*. The 1994 election was intense and charged with nationalistic fervor, with name-calling, reputation-smearing, and accusations, not only between candidates and parties, but also among ordinary citizens like taxi drivers who supported different candidates and parties. The political mobilization was so intense that one scholar stated that the city was "split" in two.<sup>32</sup> The 1994 victory of *Chen* and his party constituted a major blow to the old political liners in Taiwan. But this "victory" was only partial because the DPP party failed to win the majority of seats in Taipei City Council. The old liners still controlled the Council, holding 60% of the seats, more than enough to challenge the Mayor's administration.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> On electoral politics, democratization, nationalism in Taiwan, see Chang (2005).

<sup>32</sup> Wang Fu-chang (1998).

<sup>33</sup> There was a total number of 52 Council Members, while the Kuomintang and Chinese New Party together had 31 seats, and the Democratic Progressive Party had 20 seats.

Just what prompted mayor *Chen* to take an action against this legitimate but neglected profession of licensed prostitutes, which had existed since the Japanese period and that the general public had almost forgotten about? The emergence of the sex workers protests were directly related to furious tug-of-war between the Taipei City Government and the City Council, and between the incoming new Mayor from the pro Taiwanese Independence DPP and the firmly established KMT interests in City Council. The city government authorities did not initially target *Gong Cang* women. *Gong Cang* women were largely of Taiwanese ethnic background, were not politically active, and posed little threat to *Chen* and the DPP. In addition, the number of *Gong Cang* women was insignificant compared to that of other forms of sex workers.

But heavy pressure from KMT dominated city council compelled the mayor and the police to impose stricter regulations on the widespread sex-related businesses in Taipei. In February 1997, a few months before the official abolishment of *Gong Cang*, a well-known prosecutor made himself a public hero by "televising" his raid on the red-light district to rescue illegal underage and forced prostitutes.<sup>34</sup> Though contraversially, his actions served to expose and publicize the existence of illegal prostitution rings. Wide range media reports stirred up public outrage against forced prostitution, the sex trade, and police corruption. However, the public made no distinction between legal and illegal prostitution. The media stories all implied that some real owners of *Gong Cang* brothels (not the official, registered ones) were expanding their highly profitable businesses, running illegal brothels, and housing illegal prostitutes.

The illegal sex-related businesses and social pressures for more government actions, accompanied by a spiraling of political confrontations, led to the eventual ending for *Gong Cang*. The *Gong Cang* registered brothels were caught in the midst of this political confrontation and social atmosphere. The following is a chronology of the events that led to clashes over abolishing *Gong Cang*.

As the events unfolded in late 1996 and early 1997, the KMT caucus of the City Council criticized *Chen Shui-bian* for failing to control the spread of sex-related business in the city. *Chen* and his police chief were caught off-guard when opponents ridiculed them for issuing "state-endorsed licenses" to brothels and prostitutes. After a few rounds of political maneuvering, *Chen* decided to reverse his position and abolish the *Gong Cang* system as his next step.

*Chen* was also influenced by his Commissioner on the Bureau for Social Affairs, a long-term comrade and former dissident, *Chen Chu*.<sup>35</sup> *Chen Chu* was put in charge of providing social services to the *Gong Cang* women, with the goal of bringing them back to "normal" lives. She was working with advice from the Taipei Association for the Promotion of Women's Rights (TAPWR), whose members had aided *Chen's* campaign and were mostly DPP supporters with ties

<sup>34</sup> *United Daily*, 1997, Feb. 05, sec. 7. The televised raid was led by district prosecutor *Liu Cheng-wu*.

<sup>35</sup> She was elected as the new Mayor of Taiwan's second largest City, Kao-hsiung, in 2006.

to the early women's movement. Some at the TAPWR viewed all prostitutes as being forced sexual slaves. They held the view that the sex industry exploited women and served as a financial resource for criminal organizations. According to their argument, sex work is not normal and should never be encouraged nor tolerated as an "ordinary" career.

In March 1997, in a report and statement delivered to the City Council, *Chen* denounced the "evils" of the prostitution business and resolved to abolish *Gong Cang* system. His declaration was embraced by media and supported even by some of the opposing Council members. But some other opponents of *Chen* in the Council disagreed with the ban, went to the brothels and the red-light district, and helped *Gong Cang* form the first early organization as a "self-help" and grievance group.<sup>36</sup> In just a few weeks, sympathetic media and activists began to help mobilize the prostitutes to engage in protests.

In response to this mobilization in the beginning, *Chen* agreed to offer more welfare services and employment placement services. He staunchly rejected the Council's resolution for "reconsideration" when *Gong Cang* women appealed aggressively. At the same time, the *Gong Cang* women's self-help association quickly turned down *Chen*'s new package for social services on the grounds that it was useless and hypocritical.<sup>37</sup> In April 1998, the Council took another vote, reversing itself from its previous position by passing a new resolution calling upon the mayor to withdraw the ban entirely. The resolution mandated for the licensed prostitutes a 2-year period to transition into "new" livelihoods. Along with the prostitutes' protests and sympathy for them, the relationship between City Hall and the City Council had deteriorated by the end of 1998 over the issue of the abolishment of the *Gong Cang* system.

*Chen*'s move could be viewed as a "rule by law" action, like sticking to the possibilities provided by due process, but opponents depicted him as a self-righteous mayor with middle-class biases who deliberately forced the poorest women out of work while refusing to make any political compromises. The negative image persists today, when ever there were tragic events occur to *Gong Cang* veterans or to "illegal" prostitutes elsewhere in Taiwan. Activists remind the public of *Chen*'s policy to dismantle the *Gong Cang* system and *Chen* is regarded as being responsible for the disastrous fates of *Gong Cang* sisters.

To single out Mayor *Chen* as the primary target is undoubtedly political action. The accusation cannot be said fair since it does not consider *Chen*'s

<sup>36</sup> The first one who helped the prostitutes was Council Member Li Cheng-lung, who has no party affiliation. He won his council seat with the nickname "Hit *Bian* Hero," meaning a strongman to "hit" *Chen Shui-bian*. The other one was Council Member *Yang Zhen-xiong*, a member of the Chinese New Party. Neither participated actively after the movement started up with the help of the CALL labor organization.

<sup>37</sup> One of the arguments made by them was: "We do not need your money; we just want the extension of two years. We will turn into illegal prostitutes anyhow, regardless, because we have no other means. Why does the City choose to waste taxpayers' money? But some prostitutes took the offer (and possibly continued to be "illegal" prostitutes).

policy to ban *Gong Cang* was contingent on political pressures from the KMT caucus of the City Council. And, as one researcher indicated, the Council members, though siding with the prostitutes after self-reversal, were not concerned about the women at all; they were only opportunists interested in fighting against the mayor along partisan lines.<sup>38</sup> The Council's support for the prostitutes was only temporary, limited to offering a 2-year extension, and motivated by political gain from opposing the mayor. Their involvement with *Gong Cang* dissipated quickly after *Chen* stepped down, replaced by *Ma* in December 1998.

What made the *Gong Cang* protest and the prostitutes' rights movement sustainable throughout the years? Why, in late 1998 after *Ma* approved the extension period, did the self-help organization of *Gong Cang* cease to exist and transform into a genuine social movement? Where did the main organization *Ri Ri Cuen* come from? What networks or movement trajectories were evident during the emergence of the prostitutes' rights movement? In order to answer these questions, we must explain first why other women's groups failed to support the prostitutes in 1997. Some of these groups supported Mayor *Chen* and even advised him on the abolishment policy. Only by comprehending this larger scenario can we gauge why *Ri Ri Cuen*, from a different movement lineage and past, came into existence and to support prostitutes' rights. We thus turn to explain another contingency that shaped and constrained the prostitutes' right movement.

### The Early Women's Movement and its Opposition to Prostitution

There have been several explanations for why the women's movement did not join the prostitutes in their protests and instead sided with the DPP's Taipei city government to end prostitution. The first obvious one is "class difference."<sup>39</sup> Most members of Taiwan's women groups are from professional and urban backgrounds, including lawyers, writers, and college professors. They may be advocates for gender equality and even feel sympathetic toward the under-class prostitutes' situation, but not to the extent that they support legalized prostitution. "It is not "proper" for the younger generation to think of prostitution as a career choice" as *Chen Shui-bian* once quoted from TAPWR's position statement. But this "class" based explanation is not sufficient to explain Taiwan's women groups' opposition against the prostitutes' movement. The movement has in fact drawn sympathetic scholars from similar professional and social class backgrounds of the middle class.

<sup>38</sup> Hong Wan-chi (2001,161).

<sup>39</sup> For instance, Weng and Fell suggested that Taiwan's women movement activists have not developed strong, grassroots support because their class backgrounds led them to adopt an elitist movement strategy (2006,152).

From our framework of social movement embeddedness (refer to Table 1), we find that groups that opposed prostitution can be traced to the mid-1980s, or even earlier, as in the case of the Awakening Foundation. These organizations were "embedded" in a larger socio-political context. Social movements during this period by their very existence challenged the authoritarian regime and the KMT's one-party rule.<sup>40</sup> After the end of martial law in 1986, with the forming of the DPP and the rise of Taiwanese nationalism, women's organizations began weakening their ties to the DPP while claiming they were neutral and independent of partisan politics.<sup>41</sup>

Another important factor for women's groups to oppose prostitution related to the convergence of early phase women's movement with the DPP's political movement. The DDP had established a branch committee on women's affairs, which was elevated to the Woman's Department in 1996. The Department has been successful in working and coordinating with other women activists and NGOs in lobbying for amendments and revisions of existing laws against gender equality, and providing more welfare aid to needy women. Another event impacting mainstream women's organizations was the abduction and disappearance of the first Director of the DPP's Women's Department, *Peng Wan-ru*,<sup>42</sup> in November 1996. This tragic event shook the network of women activists and united them against violence targeted at women. The most significant issue the women's movement focused on between 1986 and 1995 concerned rescuing underage prostitutes. During these years, feminist groups and more conservative church-based women's groups worked together. They marched into red-light districts several times to protest the government corruption and for doing little to protect young girls from minority backgrounds and poor families. They targeted pimps and the brothels that forced young women into prostitution. In some cases, they helped coordinate police raids on red-light districts to "rescue" young girls. Some church-based women's groups provided young girls with half-way shelters. As the movement evolved, and as the church-based organizations

<sup>40</sup> Chang Mau-kuei (1991).

<sup>41</sup> This intricate, historical connection between the women's movement and political movements, is exemplified by works on *Lu Hsiu-lien* and *Lee Yuan-chen's* account and it also was depicted by Fan (2003). See Rubinstein (2004) and Lee (2002). *Lu Hsiu-lien* was a long-term political dissident between the late 1970's and the early 1980's. But before she became involved with the opposition movement, she helped launch the first wave of the equal rights movement for women in Taiwan in early 1970s. She has served as the Vice President of the country from 2000 till 2008. *Lee Yuan-chen* was a literature professor who started *Awakening Magazine*, and then became the President of the Awakening Foundation in 1987, a women's organization that has existed the longest in Taiwan since 19980's; and it is still one of the most influential group on gender issues.

<sup>42</sup> *Peng Wan-ru* had been an activist before heading the Department. She was last seen riding in a taxi back to her hotel from a DPP meeting that evening. Police suspected that she had been abducted, and the case is still unresolved. *Peng's* disappearance thus illustrates one of the many forms of violence committed against women. A foundation named after *Peng Wan-ru* (the P.W.R. Foundation) was created in 1997 to commemorate her life and work.

gained more recognition from the authorities and the media, the movement focused solely on rescuing the "underage" prostitutes and ignored other larger social issues such as gender inequality and adult consensual prostitution. By 1995, the mainstream women's movement was successful in lobbying for the passing of two acts to fight against under-age prostitution: the Child Welfare Act and the Child and Youth Sexual Transaction Prevention Act.

But along with issues related to rescuing underage prostitutes, a more progressive branch of the women's movement emerged. This new wave of activism tackled the basic issue of gender inequality and focused on the trafficking and commodification of women. It was not just about rescuing poor, young girls that fell into prostitution, but about ending prostitution, pornography, and sometimes even advertisements appealing to explicit sex. Its purpose was to elevate women's status from a submissive position that could be "consumed" for male entertainment or pleasure. It aimed to challenge social inequality and men's domination. In this regard, prostitution and the sex industry were manifestations of the problems of a patriarchal society, and thus voluntary prostitutes could never be as "voluntary" as they appeared to be.<sup>43</sup>

Taiwan's women organizations throughout the late 1980s were pro-human rights and pro-democratization, being part of Taiwan's liberalization movement. These organizations maintained political ties to DPP as the main opposition party against the authoritarian government. It is no surprise that some came to work closely with *Chen Shui-bian's* campaign for City mayor and continued to advise the city government after *Chen's* victory in 1994. Their previous positions in 1980s against trade in women and prostitution and approach to gender equality defined prostitution as debasing to women; this stance in late 1990s prevented them from supporting prostitutes' rights and lead them to approve the abolishing of *Gong Cang* system in 1997. As a result, when *Gong Cang* protests began to erupt, and when to people's surprise self-proclaimed "voluntary prostitutes" started to show up to demand to hold on to the profession, these anti-prostitution feminists could not just reverse their previous positions and support the prostitutes.<sup>44</sup> For this reason, pro-prostitutes' rights activists attacked them as being either middle-upper class or "self-righteous" feminists, who were perhaps too "noble" (read hypocritical) to really understand and help women in extreme adversary conditions.

If most of the existing women's groups could not play a part in the emerging prostitutes' movement because they were constrained by their political ties and their previous movement positions, where did *Ri Ri Cuen* come from? What is its relationship to the CALL labor organization? And what about the CALL could have led this organization to play a significant role in helping the prostitutes and launching the sex workers' rights movement?

<sup>43</sup> Hwang and Beford (2003, 2004)

<sup>44</sup> A public statement issued by women's rights groups opposing prostitution can be found on pages 36–38 in *Ri Ri Cuen Caring Association* (2000). In that statement, these groups want to "bar sex-related businesses, require compulsory education for men who pursue sex services, help prostitutes, and prevent sexually transmitted diseases."

## The CALL and the "New Opposition": Subverting Taiwanese Nationalism with Libertarian Feminism and Under-Class Grievances in Taiwan

At the beginning of protests in 1997, the main movement group of *Cong Cang* had been the Self-Help Organization. However, the Pink Collars and the United Front organizations played a central role in providing assistance in strategic planning and mobilization.<sup>45</sup> In December 1998, *Ma Ying-jeo* of the KMT succeeded in defeating *Chen Shui-bian*, but his 2-year extension of licensing prostitutes ended in 2001. The *Ri Ri Cuen* Association came into existence with broader movement objectives, such as pushing for legalizing the sex industry and advocating human rights for sex workers in general. The origin of the *Ri Ri Cuen* and its role can illustrate the "embeddedness" picture of social movement.

The labor organization United Front was formed in 1991 to mobilize mostly female factory workers to fight against employment discrimination and barriers. Pink Collar was formed in 1994 for similar objectives, but its main aim was to mobilize women workers in the service sector. Both groups were led by a psychology professor at *Fu-jen* Catholic University and labor activist associated with CALL, *Hsia Ling-ching*. Leaders of these two groups, *Wang Fang-ping* and *Zhou Jia-jun*, were students of *Hsia*, and had worked as factory workers as part of their training advised by *Hsia* and the CALL. The primary goal of these groups could be described as fusing gender thinkings with those of the labor movement. The organizational ties of Pink Collar to other labor movement groups were directly mediated through the CALL.<sup>46</sup> As groups, they constituted the feminist wing or network of CALL, which was otherwise led by and disproportionately represented by male workers.

Before CALL's formation in 1992, during the mobilizing process of the independent union movement era (1988–1993), there had been a series of clashes with big companies and government officials. According to the Union Law of Taiwan, as a rule of principle, unions can exist exclusively in factories and worksites, or on a one-factory-one-union basis. This means that workers in small factories with less than 30 workers are excluded automatically. Unions could exist legally but lacked the organic bonds that could link workers from different factories and sectors together. When the cracks in the authoritarian regime widened in 1986, most of the two thousand registered unions were still controlled or influenced by pro-managerial unions and pro-KMT members, and there was no effective "national" or even "regional" union that could link and represent them.

<sup>45</sup> Supposedly, the Self-help Organization would have evolved into a self-governing association of prostitutes, as the activists had hoped or planned. But its work and functions were never clearly stated.

<sup>46</sup> In addition to working together, *Hsia* and the CALL's founder *Cheng Chuen-chi* were also a married couple.

Against this background, CALL aiming to bridge different and separate unions, began to form in 1992. Most of the CALL's work was about educating union activists, recruiting young students, mobilizing workers to collectively protect their legal entitlements against biased employers, and pressuring legislators and the government to revise polices and legislatures in favor of fuller employment and social equality to working- and lower-class people. In recent years, CALL's "trademark" has been the "Autumn Struggle" (*qiudou*) – street marches and protest gatherings held in early November every year. The best way to describe the CALL's function is to think of it as the baseline group that networked with and facilitated the growth of other unions and movement groups. Throughout the years, the CALL has been one of the most influential movement associations advocating the collective interests of working people, international migrants, college students, and low-income populations in general.

In addition to the union movement, CALL was also engaged in building a "New Opposition Movement" with anti-Taiwanese Independence and Libertarian Feminism activists and intellectuals in early 1990s. The term "New Opposition" was used to differentiate the movement from other social movements that had previous group or personal ties to Taiwan's rising nationalism and DPP. The New Opposition saw the DPP and Taiwanese nationalism as a political fiasco for regime domination, stealing the common goods accumulated during the democratic movement in late 1980s and threatening progressive social causes. In general, the New Opposition belonged to the younger generation of scholars and activists who had ideas close to the Old Left,<sup>47</sup> but shied away from advocating the Old Left's intent for the outright unification with mainland China. The New Opposition also was attuned to radical theories born in the 1960s and Western Marxism, and it was more sophisticated in its post-modern critique of state power and the nation-state.

The year 1991 marked another attempt to strengthen the New Opposition discourse, this time in the magazine *Margin of the Isle* (*daoyu bianyuan*). In this magazine, the New Opposition set out to re-configure Taiwan's resistance movement or opposition strategy against the DPP and its Taiwanese Nationalism's ascent to legitimate political power. They criticized the DPP as becoming the "monopoly" of social progressive power in the name of nation-building and "love for Taiwan" (Taiwanese patriotism). Their discourse aimed to challenge mainstream politics and electoral partisanship, and to discredit

<sup>47</sup> The "Old Left" existed in the 1950s in Taiwan. It bore a birthmark of Chinese Communism and patriotism for an eventually unified China. The majority of the "Old Left" was composed of progressive writers, teachers, reporters, and intellectuals of the early days. Many of them were imprisoned and suffered a great deal during Taiwan's White Terror Era (roughly during the 1950s–1960s). Those who survived began to re-surface in the public arena after political liberalization in late 1980s. Their movement at that time was about supporting and organizing the farmers' and workers' movements, and they took part in electoral politics in the name of the *Laodong* Party (or Labor Party).

Taiwanese nationalism as capitalist-oriented, heterosexual hegemony, as ethno-Taiwanese-Chauvinism, and as a hidden attempt to revive Fascism.

Against the idea of being confined within a nationalist boundary, *Margin of the Isle* set its agenda to link with international progressive groups and to "cross all boundaries." It had claimed that it would include all possible outcasts in Taiwan, including farmers, workers, aborigines, gay and lesbians, the old veterans, sexual libertarians, the homeless, and so on. The magazine was for these outcasts who had been excluded from or ignored by other social movements, and by rising Taiwanese Nationalism and mainstream politics.

The magazine existed for only a short time (1991–1994). While its political analyses generally would be viewed as purely political rhetoric today, its satiric and radical styles were well tuned to the younger generation, which had few ties to previous social movement organizations and political movements and to the DPP in general. Within this reconfiguration of this particular political position of social-cultural critique and radicalism, the themes having the most to do with our study on prostitutes' rights concerned sexual liberation, including elements of sex-positive feminism, libertarian feminism, and lesbian rights. Their positions are complicated, but best illustrated in two major books: Josephene Ho's *Gallant Women (Haoshuang nyuren, 1994)* and *Sex Work, a Prostitute's Rights Perspective* (Center for the Study of Sexualities 1998). Their strategy and arguments for gender equality are based on sex liberation discourses that affirm sexual desire, especially for women. For instance, Ho argues that women should have the right to express and satisfy their sexual desires, including the desire for lesbian love (Ho 1994, 205, 207).

Before the *Gong Cang* protests erupted, libertarian feminists, siding with those who advocated human rights to gays and lesbians, already had been at odds with other mainstream women groups on a variety of issues. These differences basically centered on views about sex and choices. Ho and others argued that sexual repression and the patriarchal system actually complement each other. Only when the problems associated with the repression of women in relation to the repression of sex become fully recognized and tackled, can women truly enjoy equality with men. Ho was advocating sex feminism from a libertarian perspective also, meaning that individual woman could and should be empowered to pursue their own pleasure and desire, and that they should be entitled to choose not to follow moral standards, like chastity, prescribed in patriarchal societies. Other feminist groups do not agree that sex liberation (or inhibition) is *the* most fundamental issue, but regard violence and discrimination against women, as well as the commodification of women in the system, as the fundamental issues. In their view, the sex industry is the core of these problems and should not be tolerated, and women's "choices" could never be real "choices" unless true gender equality is obtained first.

## The Encounter: When Feminist Labor Activists Met Desperate Prostitutes

The stage for feminist conflict had been set before September 1997: There were nationalistic conflicts and partisan politics feuds, and hence emerging new political opportunity structures for movement activists. Some became associated with the new DPP administration, while others elected to oppose it such as the New Opposition. Differentiation and frictions emerged within the feminist camp and women's groups over issues related to sex and equality. The conditions for the fusion of the energies for the movement to develop were present except for the spark to ignite the explosion. And it indeed occurred at the first meeting between young feminist labor activists and prostitutes. That occasion has been fully recounted and repeated several times by *Ri Ri Cuen's Wang Fang-ping* and *Hsia Lin-Ching*.<sup>48</sup> For instance, *Wang Fang-ping* recalled:

It was September 3, 1997, at a "Forum on *Gong Cang's* Existence and Abolishment" organized by Awakening. Attorney *Shen Mei-zhen*<sup>49</sup> spoke to support abolishment as it was the only means to save *Gong Cang* from the "fire hole" (meaning a miserable and painful condition for women). And there was Elder Sister *Guan* who stood up in face of scholars and well-educated feminists and spoke with nervous voice and with emotion to question this position. As a *Gong Cang* representative, she "reminded" everyone of the realities that she was facing, and expressed her discontent forcefully as a member of the underclass. It was because of this anger that we, the United Front and Pink Collars, immediately decided to join them for protest.

Wang continued, on that spot where Elder Sister *Guan* was first seen and heard, as she spoke red-facedly:

Mrs. *Shen* you came from hardship also. Equally are we all women, will you consider for our women. . . ? Now you have your education diploma, your family must have supported you through becoming an attorney. My father was a coal miner, because we did not finish school so we became what we are today. It is not that we love to, but we have had no choices. If my father had left me with an inheritance, I say I could attain the same degree as you have. I wish I could sit in an air-conditioned room just like you. I wish you could support us, because within 2 days we will have nothing to feed

<sup>48</sup> In Wang's other personal account, she said she was deeply moved by that scene and by *Elder Sister Guan*. It took her almost two years before she was finally able to grasp the connection between her own past and her work on prostitutes' rights. She remembers when she was a young child when her father died, and her mother was facing similar economic stress to raise three children along, similar to the difficulties many prostitutes had to deal with. Her mother chose to get remarried to solve the crisis. And her previous experiences working with female workers made her even more susceptible to help prostitutes.

<sup>49</sup> She was a leader of the TAWPR and also an advisor to Chen Shuibian.

ourselves, and must die. I mean it, pressured by our family burdens, we really must die.<sup>50</sup>

And then she ran away from the forum crying before the dialogue ended. *Wang Fang-ping* recalled that although she did not know anything about prostitutes, this scene reminded her of a female factory worker with whom she had worked before, who had been oppressed by her family's financial burden and social class when choosing to enter sex industry. And *Wang* remembered that she was helpless to help her or to stop her.<sup>51</sup>

The CALL soon endorsed Pink Collar and the United Front's decision to work with the prostitutes. Three prostitutes were invited to attend the planning meeting for "1997s Autumn Struggle" and then to other national and regional unions allying with the CALL. In that year until the end of 1998, prostitutes and workers participated each other's protesting activities; the CALL's performance troupe and volunteers also cheered for the prostitutes' protests.<sup>52</sup> The union between the most influential labor organization and the most stigmatized women with so little resources, through the medium of feminist pro-sex pro-worker activists, and through the opposition against prostitution of mainstream women's groups, became accomplished. And the dynamics of prostitutes' protests, nationalist politics, and differences within feminist movement thus began to intertwine and unfold.

## Conclusions

It is fair to say that many western countries' women's organizations also seem to have difficulties in reaching a consensus on their positions on prostitutes and prostitution. Some are for decriminalization of prostitution, such as libertarian feminism; and some oppose prostitution either from a conservative point of view, or from anti-patriarchal society point of view. As the paper has described, in Taiwan we observed a similar divergence of debates. However, how a social movement emerges and develops in the settings of domestic politics and culture is contingent. This chapter has provided a narrative and an interpretation of Taiwan's controversial sex workers' rights movement. Looking at the movement as it is embedded in the contingencies, networks, and opportunity structures, we have argued that a movement's options are frequently shaped by external conditions, whether that might be state policies, electoral competitions, nationalistic conflicts, or activists' ties to past movement actions and networks. As we have explained, the public had tolerated licensed prostitution for some

<sup>50</sup> Before *Guan Jie* chose to end her life in 2006, she tried to commit suicide earlier in 1999 when the DPP City Council Members attempted to boycott and delay Ma's plan to issue a two-year extension to the prostitutes.

<sup>51</sup> Wang (2000, 126–27). See also Chen (1997) for background of the story.

<sup>52</sup> Their cooperation took many forms and can be found in their chronology listed in *Ri Ri Cuen* (2000, 184–222).

time. The drive for its abolishment and the defense of its existence were first situated in the context of Taiwan's nationalistic politics and partisan competition, which both emerged through a democratization process. The licensed prostitutes' movement was really an unexpected social movement that was first stimulated by the tug-of-war between political archrivals Mayor Chen and the Taipei City Council. Second, the movement was shaped by the contradictions between two larger movements at particular times: first, the women's movement to save underage prostitutes formed at the earlier political stage, as a part of larger political movement when the KMT authoritarian rule was the primary target; and second, the emergence of the New Opposition, in responding to the Taiwanese nationalism promoted by the DPP, which blended pro-sex feminism, the labor movement, and anti-Taiwanese nationalism into one movement and ridiculed and debased the rising political power of DPP. Political rivalries and movement differences thus converged. Their convergence could not be comprehended unless we looked into the contingencies in democratization period, and the organization networks that link social movement organization and political parties.

Today the controversy is still unresolved. Feminist groups and women's groups do not all share the same position on sex and sex work. Without the support from other women's groups, the difficulties for the *Ri Ri Cuen* to overcome in pressuring the government for decriminalization of sex work are thus very high for a foreseeable future. And the *Ri Ri Cuen* is not without other challenges also. It is constrained by its own relatively "successful" past, ironically.

As an action group the *Ri Ri Cuen* has shown its ability in skillful strategic planning in making movement cause understood while ridiculing political hypocrisy, especially the DPP. But its social base is relatively small, and diminishing. It could not reach other cities nor did it appeal to most women's groups. Its movement directions and resources, especially the non-tangible kind of resources, are influenced heavily by its alliance with the CALL. Its recent attempt in 2006 to combine issues on sex workers' rights with immigrants' rights illustrates how it is influenced by the CALL, which has developed concern about the well-being of international migrant workers for some time. What has constrained the CALL is expected to constrain the *Ri Ri Cuen* also. For instance, the CALL focused on organizing workers of the underclass, helping them become organized to fight exploitation and discrimination. *Ri Ri Cuen* tried the same strategy with *Gong Cang* veterans though only a handful had participated throughout the years. This primary movement strategy and workers' position really prohibited them from working with established business interests for lobbying for widening sex industry. It should, and must support sex workers, not the business. But unless the association could persuade and mobilize many more underclass sex workers, including those who entered the country without proper documentation, to participate, it would be hard for them to persist and remain influential.

Today's sex industry has become well-adapted to business and leisure needs. Young girls are not like the *Gong Cang* veterans who had worked as if prostitution were their last resort or a life-long career. Young girls have many means

and "disguises" to engage in the sex trade other than becoming the most stigmatized "illegal prostitutes." They may be in the "business," but they have no need to admit it in public or to become organized as a co-op, just to protect their dignity and maintain the option of becoming "good" women, or returning to an "ordinary" life in the future. In other words, *Ri Ri Cuen* might soon have a scenario in which the sex industry is expanding with urban and commercial growth, with more young women, including new women immigrants, become employed "flexibly," but very few of them would come forward to support the organizing drive. In the end, the organization will be more likely to remain a vocal pro-sex group aiming to help underclass sex workers, pushing for legalizing consensual sex trade, but will be far from organizing a general sex workers cooperative movement.

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