



Democracy on Fire: Breaking the Chains of Martial Law in 1977

民主星火：1977 衝破戒嚴的枷鎖

Author: Chen-Yu Chang, Noax Tao and Lee-Hang Chen **Illustrator:** Xuan Lee **Publisher:** Avanguard

Date: 1/2022

Right's contacts: bft.children.comics@moc.gov.tw

128 pages | 17 x 23 cm

Volume: 1

BFT2.0 Translator: Michael Kearney

In 1977, Ah Wen had been on the other side of history: recruited as a spy. His assignment was to infiltrate the campaign headquarters of an independent candidate.

As a spy, he met a promising young man named Ah Yu. The two young men engaged in intense debates about Taiwan's future. While working together to monitor the elections, they also met Elena, a participant in the democracy movement. Together they put up campaign posters, faced attacks from thugs, and attended inspiring rallies for independent candidates.

Growing up, Ah Wen had never questioned the KMT, the ruling party that had imposed martial law in Taiwan. His father, a KMT member, had taught him to view those opposed to their party as "communist spies." But during this time, Ah Wen's perspective began to change.

On election day, tensions between the police and civilians escalated. Amidst the chaos, Ah Wen saw a sniper on the police station roof aiming at the crowd—with his friend Ah Yu in the line of fire.

This historical backdrop resonates with recent issues in Taiwan, among them the Chinese Communist Party's interference in its democratic process.



Producer **Chen-Yu Chang**

Chen-Yu Chang currently serves as the Global Director of World Softest Productions. He is dedicated to developing works that possess Taiwanese and humanist qualities to popularize history. His works include television series, animation, manga, board games and designs for social purposes. He is promoting Talking about Taiwan, a manga series about Taiwanese history, and Social Affairs, a multimedia series of social satire.



Screenwriter **Noax Tao**

Noax Tao graduated from National Taiwan University with a degree in economics. She started her career in the media industry, initially focusing on finance and politics, and later participated in the startup of online media ventures. After eight years in institutional roles, she transitioned to become a freelance writer dedicated to creative endeavors. She has authored novels such as *Seductive Hostess*, literary journalism including *Trading Youth for Tomorrow: A Guide to the Adult Entertainment Industry – Portraits of Survival in a Sea of Desire*, and has ghostwritten numerous books.



Illustrator **Xuan Lee**

Xuan Lee is a creator of animated cartoons and comics who believes in the existence of mysterious phenomena and enjoys crafting unusual stories. Xuan Lee has contributed to several hand-drawn animation productions and served as a 3D animator contracted by Taipei Veterans General Hospital's Neurosurgery Department. Xuan Lee received the Comico Original Manga Award for Potential and subsequently serialized a manga on the platform. The artist's short comics have been nominated for the MedibangXAdonit NoWords Manga Competition and honored with a special selection in the Action Comics category of the 5th Short Manga Awards. In 2019, Xuan Lee participated in the Taiwan Comic Base residency program, creating 360-degree comics.



Researcher **Lee-Hang Chen**

Lee-Hang Chen holds a master's degree from the Institute of Taiwan History at National Chengchi University. An independent researcher, he has authored academic publications, as well as several pieces of popular history and non-fiction articles.

Democracy on Fire: Breaking the Chains of Martial Law in 1977

Written by Chen-Yu Chang

Translated by Michelle Kuo

Democracy on Fire: Breaking the Chains of Martial Law in 1977 depicts a pivotal moment in Taiwan's democracy movement when ordinary people rose up against electoral fraud.

From the 1950s until the 1980s, Taiwan held "elections" for citizens to vote for representatives and administrators at the county and city levels. But these were essentially meaningless, as the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party manipulated or purchased votes.

By the late 1970s, the legitimacy of the KMT began to unravel due to international diplomatic isolation and an economic downturn. As the party's

This book depicts a pivotal moment in Taiwan's democracy movement when ordinary people rose up against electoral fraud.

Idealistic young volunteers emerged. They were dedicated to monitoring the elections and working for the independent candidates. Hope and protest became integral to the electoral process.

On the fateful election day of November 19, 1977, the staffers at a polling station at Zhongli Elementary School in Taoyuan tampered with the votes of an elderly couple. Instead of investigating the suspected fraudster,

grip weakened, the number of independent candidates participating in elections increased. These candidates spoke passionately about democracy and reform, openly criticizing the KMT's corrupt practices.

the police arrested the witness and the elderly couple. Meanwhile, the suspected fraudster was allowed to remain at the polling station and continue his official duties. This mishandling sparked public outrage, as many believed that the police had protected electoral fraud. Thousands of people gathered at the police station to demand justice, and tensions between the police and the public escalated. Ultimately, the crowd surrounded and set fire to the Zhongli police station, leading to the deaths of two citizens.

The Zhongli Incident, as it is called, was a watershed moment when the Taiwanese people openly challenged authoritarianism. It signaled that the dangwai (outside the party) movement had garnered enough popular support to influence society. As government control

and intimidation weakened, more people took to the streets to voice their demands. Subsequent large-scale protests such as the Qiaotou Incident and the Kaohsiung Incident became a key force in the battle for democracy in Taiwan. The Zhongli Incident showed it was possible to break free from the shackles of martial law, opening a new chapter in Taiwan's journey toward becoming a free society.

This essay is edited from the afterword.



HSIAO
HSUAN,
ARE YOU
GOING
OUT?



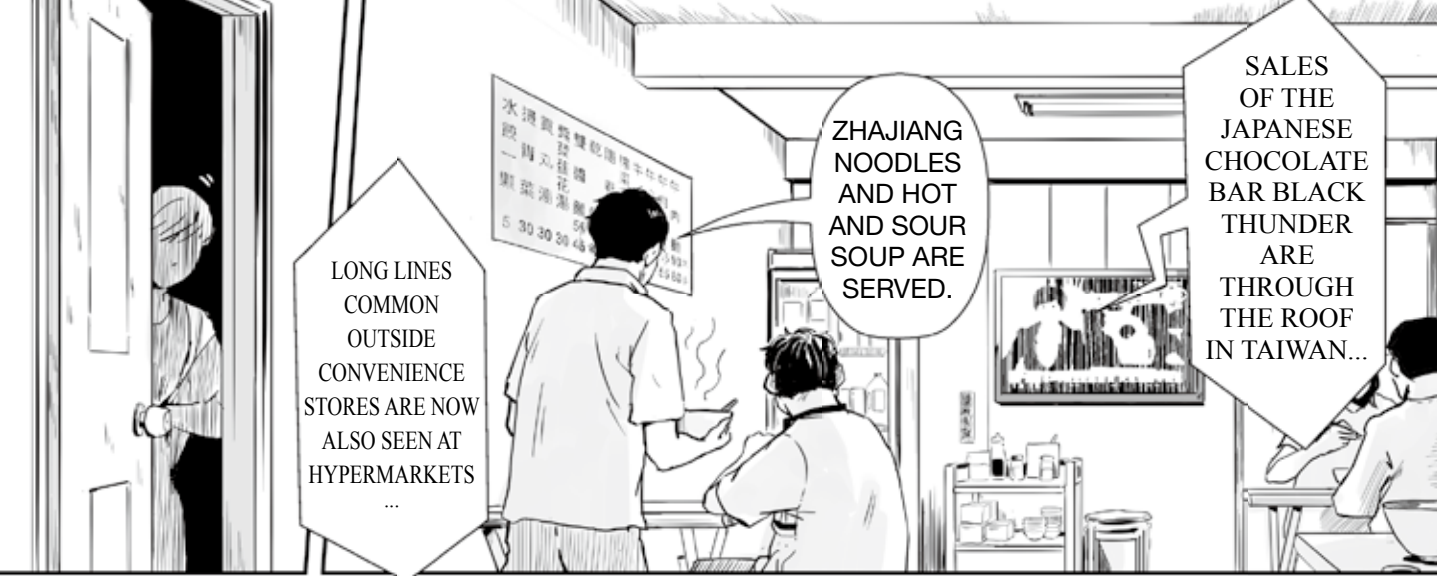
WHAT A
STUPID
DAUGHTER!

AH!



SHH!

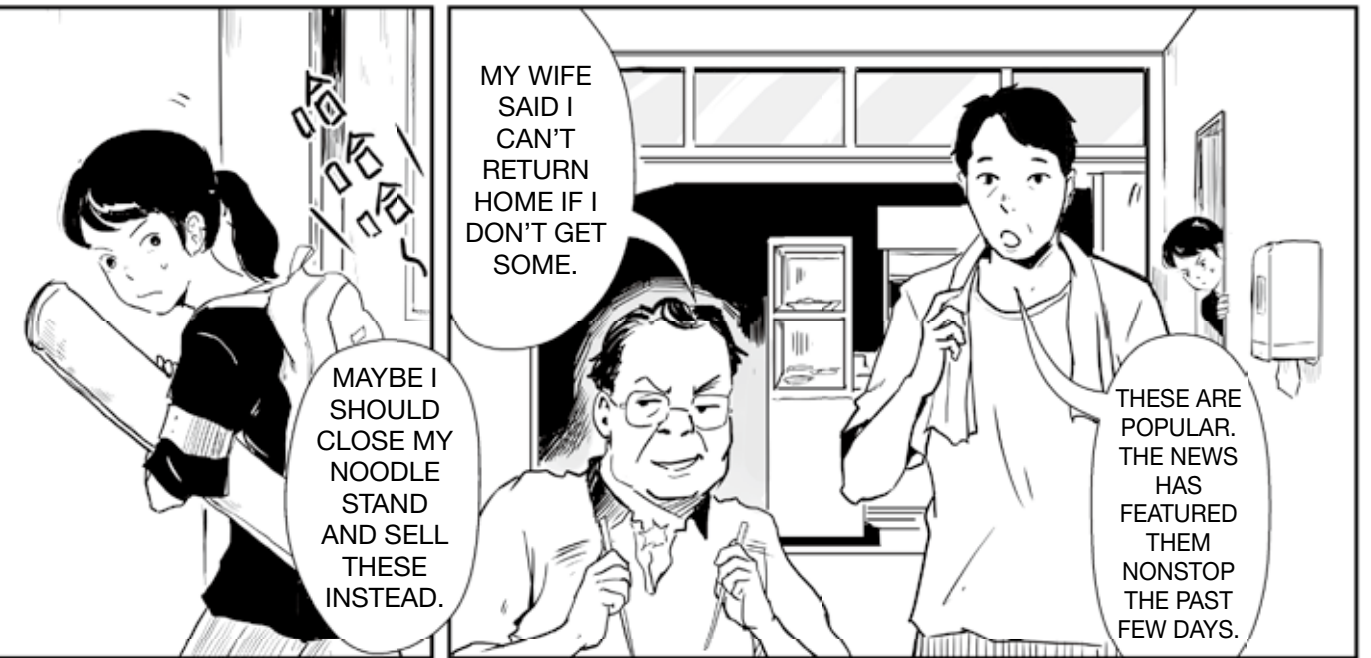
反服貿



LONG LINES
COMMON
OUTSIDE
CONVENIENCE
STORES ARE NOW
ALSO SEEN AT
HYPERMARKETS
...

ZHAJIANG
NOODLES
AND HOT
AND SOUR
SOUP ARE
SERVED.

SALES
OF THE
JAPANESE
CHOCOLATE
BAR BLACK
THUNDER
ARE
THROUGH
THE ROOF
IN TAIWAN...



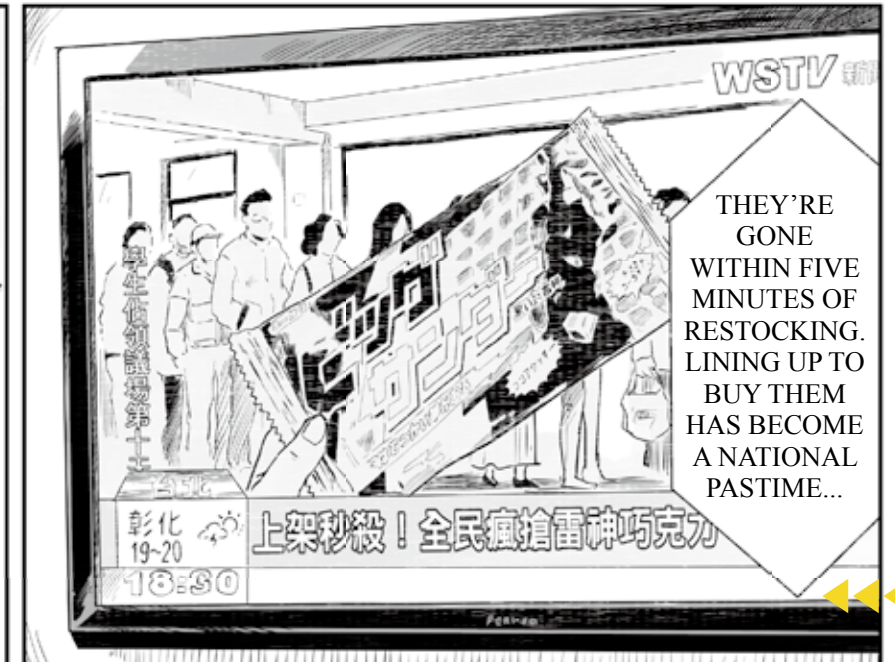
MY WIFE
SAID I
CAN'T
RETURN
HOME IF I
DON'T GET
SOME.

MAYBE I
SHOULD
CLOSE MY
NOODLE
STAND
AND SELL
THESE
INSTEAD.

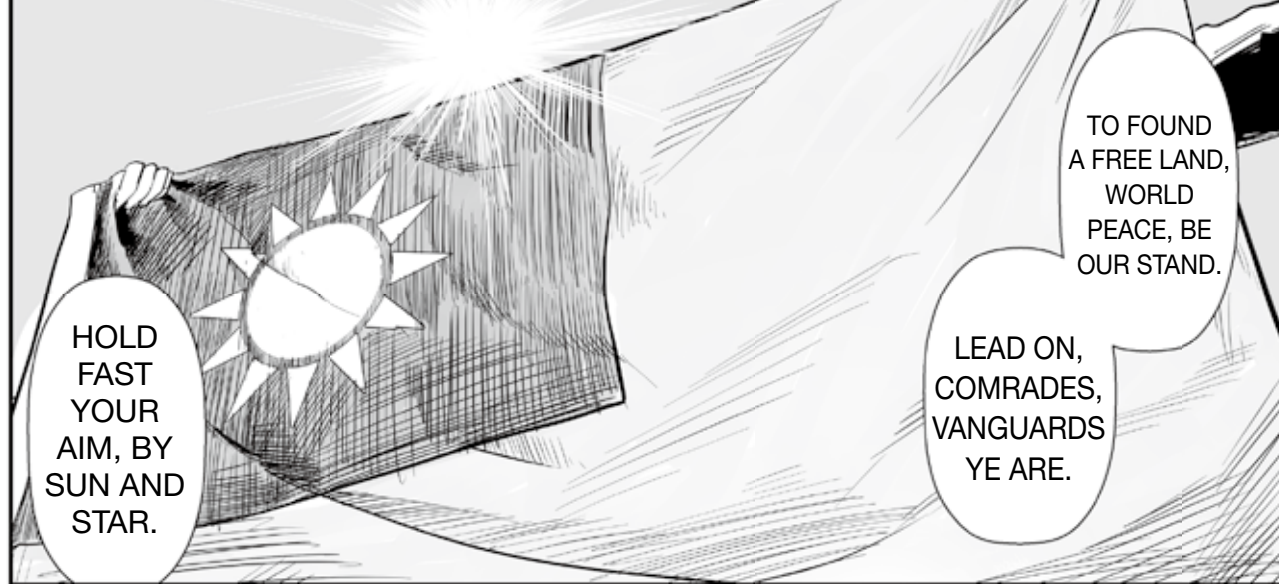
THESE ARE
POPULAR.
THE NEWS
HAS
FEATURED
THEM
NONSTOP
THE PAST
FEW DAYS.

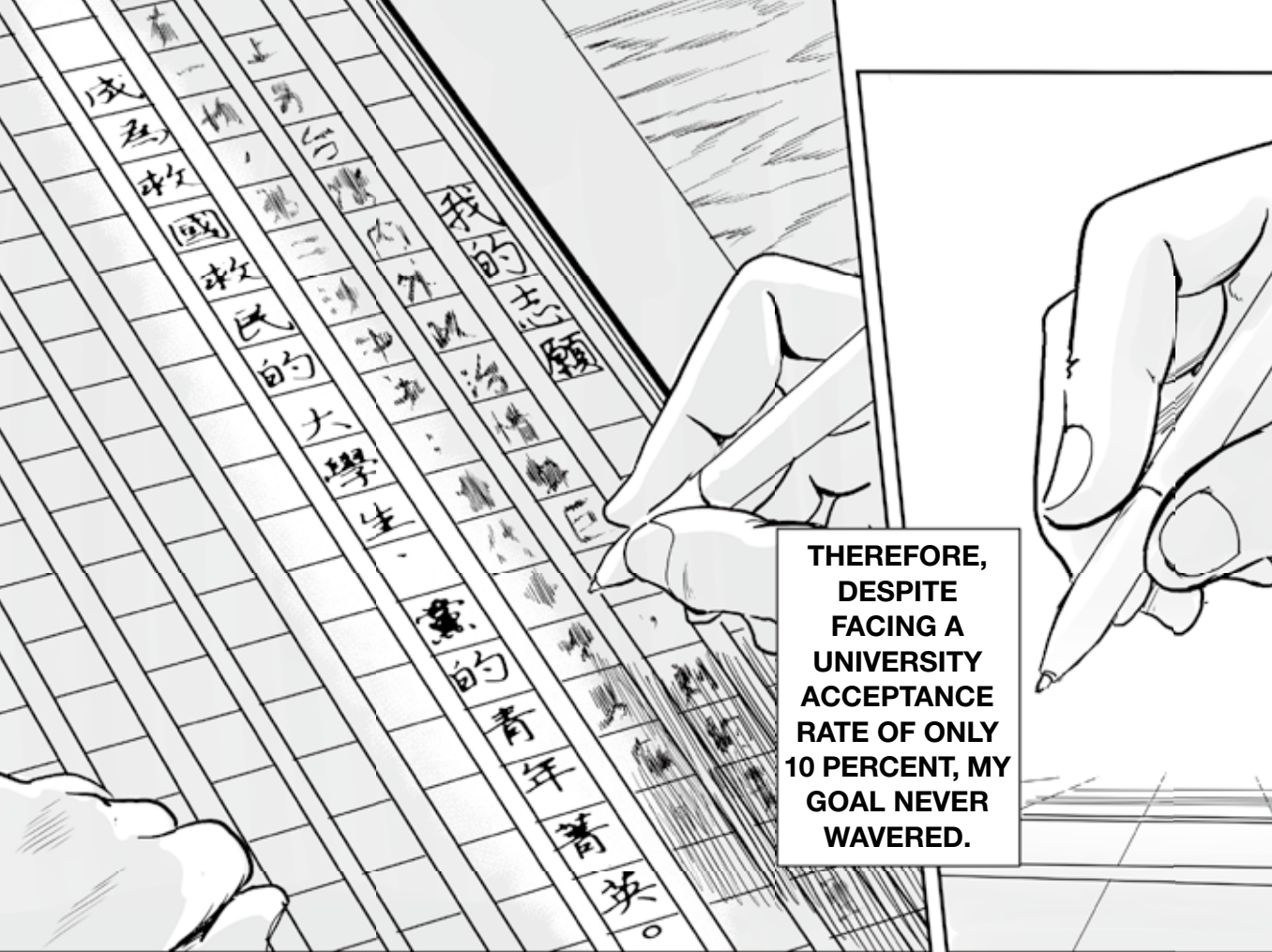
KMT LEGISLATORS ARE URGING
THE SPEAKER TO EXERCISE
PARLIAMENTARY POLICE POWERS.

TODAY IS THE 10TH DAY THAT
STUDENTS HAVE OCCUPIED
THE LEGISLATIVE YUAN.



THEY'RE
GONE
WITHIN FIVE
MINUTES OF
RESTOCKING.
LINING UP TO
BUY THEM
HAS BECOME
A NATIONAL
PASTIME...





THEREFORE, DESPITE FACING A UNIVERSITY ACCEPTANCE RATE OF ONLY 10 PERCENT, MY GOAL NEVER WAVERED.



RESULTS OF THE UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAM



WITHOUT THE PARTY, THERE WOULD BE NO COUNTRY. WITHOUT THE COUNTRY, THERE WOULD BE NO HOME.

HIS FAVORITE MOTTO IS...

UBIQUITOUS SLOGANS REMIND US OF WHAT WE MUST DO TO IMPROVE THE COUNTRY.

UNFORTUNATELY, MANY SPIES STILL LURK AMONG US. THEY ENDEAVOR TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PARTY.

I DON'T SPEAK DIALECTS