

Taiwan: #MeToo accusations against one of China's leading dissidents

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DW has uncovered a growing number of claims of sexual assault and harassment against Tiananmen student leader Wang Dan. The prominent activist is facing a criminal investigation in Taiwan.

There is hardly a face more closely associated with the Chinese democracy movement than that of [Tiananmen student leader Wang Dan](#). In the aftermath of the violent crackdown on June 4, 1989, where countless Beijing residents, workers, and students were killed, Wang — then just a slender, bespectacled 20-year-old — topped the government's most-wanted list.

He was swiftly arrested and spent most of the next nine years in a Chinese prison cell. Freed by the Clinton administration in 1998, Wang has since continued his advocacy for human rights and democracy in [China](#), preserving the memory of Tiananmen from exile.

Yet for Taiwanese Lee Yuan-chun, the anniversary of June 4, 1989, recalls not just the atrocities of Tiananmen, but also a deeply personal trauma. "Every June 4, the day when Wang Dan has to speak out publicly, I feel extremely disgusted and uneasy. I am afraid of this man, afraid of hearing his voice and seeing his face," Lee wrote on his [Facebook page](#), on the very day Wang inaugurated [the new "June 4 Memorial Museum" in New York](#).

Emboldened by the [recent surge of Taiwan's #MeToo movement](#), Lee decided it was time to break his silence. In his public Facebook post, he alleged that, on the evening of June 6, 2014, Wang tried to rape the then 19-year-old in a hotel room in Flushing, New York, just two days after the 25th anniversary of the massacre.

Lee says that Wang kissed him forcefully from behind, pushed him onto the bed, and began undressing himself. Overwhelmed by fear and unsure how to respond, Lee subsequently managed to deflect Wang's advances by fabricating a story about his health. After Wang failed to respond to his call for a public apology, Lee is now pressing criminal charges against the 54-year-old.

Wang rejects accusation

Lee's accusations have sent shockwaves through the Chinese diaspora and Taiwanese society. Revered as a symbol of the democracy movement and respected as a university professor and public commentator in Taiwan, Wang's reputation has come under serious scrutiny.

He issued a statement on June 2, staunchly denying Lee's accusations and suggesting that the decision to publicize his story right before June 4 might be politically motivated. In a subsequent post on Facebook, Wang said he welcomed the criminal complaint and hoped the judiciary would "uncover the truth."

Meanwhile, Taiwan's National Tsing Hua University (NTHU), where Wang taught several years, has

launched its own investigation and contacted his students from the past 13 years. A [special faculty meeting](#) of the school's Institute of Sociology decided to cancel Wang's lectures for the upcoming fall semester out of concern for their students.

K's story

As part of a month-long investigation, DW unearthed new testimonies and previously unknown accusers, suggesting that Lee Yuan-chun's experience might not be an isolated incident. At least one of the newly surfaced accusers has reported his case to NTHU's Committee on Gender Equality. The now 34-year-old "K" told DW in an exclusive interview that he decided to speak out to protect others. "I don't want there to be more victims," he said.

K was 23 when Wang first contacted him via Facebook. Back then, Wang Dan was a frequent guest on Taiwanese political talk shows, a public figure that any student interested in social justice issues would be familiar with.

K says he was surprised that Wang contacted him, but gladly accepted his friend request. Wang, however, quickly let him know that he wasn't interested in discussing politics, instead veering the conversation towards more intimate matters. "Facebook Messenger is a place to relax, let's talk about something more private," he wrote in a message reviewed by DW.

Their exchanges remained sporadic until February 2014, when Wang's messages became more assertive. "He kept pestering me to come to his apartment, deliberately setting the time at 9 p.m., implying I should stay overnight," K recalled.

At the time, K was enrolled in a graduate program at one of Taiwan's most prestigious universities. Despite Wang's relentless invitations, K was reluctant, attempting to shift the conversation to a different topic. When K inquired whether Wang's ex-partner was a student as well, Wang Dan dismissed his concerns, writing, "You're not my student, so there's no ethical issue here."

When questioned by DW on why he eventually accepted Wang's invitation, K explained his decision with his curiosity to meet a historical figure. "I even asked him 'If I visit your home, will I be able to see some classified documents or recordings related to Tiananmen?'" K recalls.

Yet, K saw none of what he had anticipated. "I don't remember much after I got there, just that he kept pouring me drinks, both beer and red wine." After getting drunk and losing consciousness, the next thing he remembers is waking up to Wang Dan furiously cleaning the apartment.

"He berated me for getting drunk and vomiting all over his bed... he was very angry," K recalls. After that, he alleges that Wang sexually assaulted him. K maintains that he was heavily intoxicated during the incident and his memory of the details is hazy. He doesn't remember how he got home the next day but recalls feeling "afraid" of the enraged Wang Dan, and "the sight of him on top of me, putting on a condom."

Recognizing sexual violence

For a long time, K had tried to rationalize his experience as a "bad hookup." But when he eventually spoke about his experience, he was met with mockery rather than support, even from his then-partner.

In an interview with DW, Sean Du, Secretary General of the Taiwan Tongzhi (LGBTQ+) Hotline Association, Taiwan's premier LGBTQ rights organization, noted a significant cognitive dissonance in the recognition of sexual violence among gay men.

“At an event we hosted, when we polled the attendees about whether they had experienced sexual assault, no one raised their hand,” Du recounts. However, when the questions turned to specifics — had someone forced themselves upon them or pressured them into unwanted sexual activity — responses were markedly different.

“Many perceive victims of sexual assault as predominantly female. They might grasp the concept on an intellectual level, but they don’t associate it with gay men.”

The limited awareness about sexual violence within Taiwan’s [LGBTQ community](#) is merely one of many obstacles that gay survivors of sexual assault face. Despite being the [first Asian country to legalize gay marriage](#), many Taiwanese gay men remain firmly in the closet.

In fact, three of the accusers DW talked to for this story, including Lee Yuan-chun and “K,” have not come out to their families. In an emotional Facebook post, Lee noted the irony of his own circumstances, never envisioning that he would find himself coming out to his parents in a press conference.

Wang’s position of power

In the case of Wang Dan, another factor for victims is the concern that coming forward with allegations of sexual misconduct might hurt the efforts of the Chinese democracy movement.

DW spoke with Rath, a long-term acquaintance of Wang and his personal assistant, who witnessed Wang harassing two of his friends on several trips to Japan and explained the difficulties of making public accusations against Wang.

“They respect Wang, hence their reluctance to resist. But if you were to ask them, they’re not comfortable with his advances. Both of my friends expressed their discomfort as well. If given a choice, they would prefer not being subjected to such behavior,” Rath explained.

In 2014, Wang and his assistant, surnamed Hsieh, traveled to Osaka where Rath was living at the time. Hsieh arranged for “Z,” a recent university graduate, to share a hotel room with Wang. Rath recalled how Z, unfamiliar with Wang, had been surprised by the arrangement and later disclosed to Rath that Wang had attempted to sexually harass him.

“While Wang didn’t physically force himself upon Z, Z was sufficiently uncomfortable to request a room change the next day,” Rath told DW. In a chat record reviewed by DW, Hsieh promptly apologized to Z. “Hsieh was keenly aware of the sexual harassment but let it slide, since it hadn’t escalated to rape,” Rath recalled.

According to Rath, Wang Dan often invited young men as companions on overseas trips, with his assistant arranging for shared accommodation. His fondness for being accompanied by young men at social gatherings, and subsequent inappropriate physical advances, mirror the accounts of Z, Lee Yuan-chun and NTHU student Hsu Hao-chien, who had come out in support of Lee, calling Wang a “habitual offender” in a Facebook post.

New interpretations for past behaviors

Multiple independent sources told DW that Wang Dan is exceptionally generous with his students, willingly footing the bill for leisurely outings, meals, drinks, and overnight stays. However, some of his actions have raised eyebrows with his students over the years.

Fang Hao (name changed), a former student of Wang, noted, “We would all sit together, and Wang

would reserve a 'special seat' for his preferred male student. I couldn't ascertain if it was due to his affection for a student, special care for a particular student, or possibly because of romantic interest? I didn't draw such inferences then, but such things indeed happened."

Fang observed that many students looked up to Wang as a democracy movement veteran and mentor. "The people he targeted usually share similar traits. They are young enough, and their social experience is indeed not that ample... their self-exploration, how they like or love, and their emotions haven't reached a mature state," he told DW. Fang even suggested that Wang's "China Salon," a long-term project of Wang's, might have served as a recruitment ground for young men.

Wang has long been organizing a "China Salon" at various prestigious universities across Taiwan. These gatherings have provided a platform for students from both sides of the Taiwan Strait to engage in open political discussions and have been quite popular.

Fang Hao, a frequent participant in the "China Salon" at NTHU, remarked that through such events and other lectures, Wang was able to get into contact with a large number of young students. "Some of these students idolize Wang, and then he begins to slowly weave his network," he disclosed.

Rath also suggested that Wang has been abusing his prominent position within the Chinese democracy movement to sexually harass young men for some time. "He seems to have cultivated a sinister habit, believing his behavior is acceptable when it is not," he said. Still, Rath emphasized that the Chinese democracy movement is far more than a single individual: "The fight against the Chinese Communist Party doesn't hinge on Wang Dan alone."

When reached for comment on the latest allegations, Wang Dan opted not to respond, instead pointing to the ongoing legal proceedings against him.

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