

The Losheng Sanatorium Struggle

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The Losheng Sanatorium Struggle was the struggle to preserve the Losheng Sanatorium (樂生療養院), a hospital for lepers dating from the Japanese colonial period originally built in 1929 in the Xinzhuang (新莊) district of New Taipei City (新北市). Residents of the Losheng Sanatorium were often quite elderly, including individuals well over 70 years old, and in this way sometimes had lived through multiple colonial regimes in Taiwan including the Japanese colonial period and when the KMT came to Taiwan, Losheng patients having been in many cases individuals who had come over from China with the KMT or even served in the ROC military.



Demonstrations in Taipei on April 15, 2007. Photo credit: [John Ke/Flickr/CC](#)

Given what attitude towards individuals with Hansen's Disease was in the early 20th century and up into the postwar period, with the view that individuals with Hansen's disease needed to be confined away from society, thousands of Losheng residents had experienced great suffering at the hands of successive governments in Taiwan. Although Losheng victims were allowed to leave the sanatorium from 1954 onwards, many residents had remained there since because of continued social discrimination and

because they had grown used to their surroundings after decades of living there. Likewise, many deceased patients were buried on the mountain above the sanatorium, including suicide victims who had killed themselves, and the sanatorium had many memories, both painful and pleasant, for patients.

Nevertheless, Losheng became the site of a struggle to preserve the sanatorium when it emerged that the local and city government intended to evict the residents of the sanatorium in order to build an MRT station, as part of the Xinzhuang line (新莊線). Plans for the MRT line were formulated starting in 1994, with Losheng residents excluded from this planning and criticisms from former Losheng director Chen Ching-Chuan (陳京川), but resistance by young to this kicked off in 2005. Losheng residents were promised new housing, although this would mark an end to hospital care for them. However, it was later found that the new “housing units” constructed for Losheng residents were in fact a new hospital. But the hospital was intended to be run as a business and for short-term patients, meaning that this was unsuitable to Losheng patients.



Cosplay protest at demonstrations on April 15, 2007. Photo credit: [Formosa Wandering/Flickr/CC](#)

Demonstrations against the plan to evict Losheng residents cited the suffering which Losheng patients would endure, the historic nature of Losheng Sanatorium, including calls to preserve Losheng as a World Heritage Site, the waste of money from MRT and hospital construction, safety concerns with the new construction, and the environmental damage would be caused by the demolition and construction of the sanatorium. This

saw the participation of celebrity figures such as authors Chi Ta-wei (紀大偉), Chu Tianwen (朱天文), Chu Tianxin (朱天心), and the artist Munch. The participation of artists saw the building of art installations on-site, such as a giant Gundam, and the use of creative forms of protest. The earliest organizing at Losheng dated to 2005.

Demonstrations included a sit-in outside the house of DPP premier Su Tseng-Chang (蘇貞昌) on March 11th, 2007. On March 16th, 2007, scuffles broke out between demonstrators and police, when demonstrators attempted to prevent officials from placing the official notice of demolition on the Losheng Sanatorium, with four arrests. On April 15, 2007, 5,000 marched in Taipei (台北) to call for the preservation of the sanatorium, with the participation of over 100 civic groups, demonstrations having grown from an initial participation of 400. In the face of resistance, the Executive Yuan finally ruled that 39 buildings of the Losheng Sanatorium were to be preserved, with 10 reconstructed or rebuilt, and only six demolished. 165 Losheng residents currently live in the new hospital building and 52 in the old building.



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The Losheng Sanatorium struggle can be seen alongside other youth-led movements to struggle for the preservation of historic architecture inhabited by the elderly, disprivileged individuals who had lived through decades of suffering through the turmoil of 20th century Taiwanese history. Losheng was a precursor of the Sunflower Movement and other local struggles which preceded the Sunflower Movement, particularly regarding urban evictions, insofar as it began the strategy of appealing to the central government and public writ large to intercede against the actions of a local government.

The Losheng Sanatorium, too, marked the early use of art by young people in social protest, with documentary film directors as Chen Chieh-Jen (陳界仁), electronic musicians, and other artists participating in the struggle. Participants of the Losheng Struggle later numbered among members of the Untouchables' Liberation Area, and other elements of the Sunflower Movement. The Losheng Youth Alliance (樂生青年聯盟) was also one of the groups which participated in the Sunflower Movement.



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Losheng would not be the only similar case in recent years, however, the lesser publicized demolition of Zaixing Neighborhood (再興社區) being similar insofar as this involved AIDS victims relegated to the area facing the demolition of their homes. An oral history project compiling the personal narratives of Losheng patients began in 2006 and was released in 2011 by participants in the struggle to preserve Losheng.

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Demonstration to preserve Losheng on March 16, 2013. Photo credit: [ddio/Flickr/CC](#)