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Contending Identities: Taiwan and
China's Cross-Strait Relationship

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Abstract

Taiwan's strategic geopolitical position—along with domestic political developments—have put the country in turmoil ever since the post-Chinese civil war. In particular, its antagonistic, cross-strait relationship with China has led to various negative consequences and cast a spotlight on the country on the international diplomatic front for close to over six decades. After the end of the Cold War, the democratization of Taiwan altered her political identity and released a nation-building process that was seemingly irreversible. Taiwan's nation-building efforts have moved the nation further away from reunification with China. With that, the people's sentiments (especially those of the younger generation) of China have deteriorated and see it as a prime economic and democratic political threat, giving rise to the Sunflower student movement. Due to this increased resentment towards and tension with China, Taiwan has compromised its pre-existing vulnerable geopolitical position and the help it receives from the outside world. While that may be the case, this study suggests that the strong Taiwanese identity amongst young Taiwanese is due to contextual influences and that their attitudes toward China is fluid and can be shaped by their environment.

Keywords:

Taiwan, China, national identity, young, cross-strait relationship, economy, political influence

Introduction

Taiwan's history has been fraught with a series of identity challenges that pit its strategic geopolitical location against its democratization and nation-building process. Forty years after the Chinese Civil War, Taiwan's position as a fault line in the Cold war along with Kuomintang's ambition to reunify with China has stunted Taiwan's political growth and building of its nation. In the 1980s, Taiwan's dual process of democratization and nation building was then prioritized, presenting it with new geo-strategic obstacles for both Taiwan and China and the rest of the world.

Political leaders in Taiwan often have to deal with an extremely precarious and compromised geo-strategic situation that impacts all facets of Taiwan's political environment, giving Taiwan's external backers (especially the United States of America) an enduring and keen interest in the domestic affairs of Taiwan. Taiwan's steady deterioration of global recognition, where an increasing number of countries refuse to recognize its sovereignty, meant that it is even more reliant on its few existing backers like the USA, resulting in further restrictions on its political developments within the country. Taiwan's continually struggles to balance its pursuit of an independent political identity that is aligned with its people's views with the external restrictions that are increasing because of various countries' interest in and relationship with the new global superpower—China.

As such, Taiwan's history is aligned with international strategic shifts and China's powerful position in these shifts. In the 1940s to 1980s, Taiwan ability to successfully strengthen its financial markets was a deterrent against the spread of Communism in East Asia. During the Cold War era, Taiwan was able to gain strong external supporters and independence as an autonomous state due to its

anti-Communist stance recognized by the rest of the world. After the 1980s, Taiwan progressively democratized its nation with competitive elections and large political parties, further enhancing the government's legitimacy¹. Yet, because of its special geo-strategic position, not many countries have heard about its efficient and smooth democratization process as well as its quest for a strong national identity. Hence, Taiwan's pursuit of independence remains uncertain.

This project seeks to examine the historical events that have occurred and relate them to survey data in order to examine Taiwanese residents' fluid national identity and to seek out possible alternatives to the cross-straits conflicts. This research examines the historical events that took place in Taiwan and their impact on the cross-strait relationship, with an emphasis on how it has influenced and altered national identity in Taiwan.

Literature Review

Previous research about the cross-strait relationship between China and Taiwan has sought to examine the economic and political impact on both countries.²

However, the existing literature has yet to sufficiently analyze how the national identity of the people in Taiwan has been shaped by this antagonistic relationship. Taiwan's national identity is difficult to measure. Even though researchers have tried to explicate Taiwanese' voting behavior using their national identity, it seems like there is noticeable fluidity in self-identity.³ Besides surveys, primary research materials, demography, analysis of content, analysis of discourses

¹ Wachman, Alan. 1994. *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization*. Amok: M.E. Sharpe

² Ibid.

³ Kuo, Alexander and Margalit, Yotam. 2012. Measuring Individual Identity. *Comparative Politics*, 44(4): 459-479

are some of the approaches that is utilized in existing research to measure national identity.⁴

In this essay, which examines national identity, it is important to note that research often utilizes two approaches—the constructivism and the primordialism approach.

Constructivism examines the intimate relationship between a nation and a nation state. A nation is a social construct and may even be seen as an imagined community⁵ that sets the foundation for the rise of the nation-state. Nationalism is a political precept in which national and political units need to be in line with one another.

However, the primordialist approach views the actual social presence of groups that create a subjective consciousness as well as reciprocal emotional connections. Such social presence include features like customs, language, beliefs, shared experiences and ethnicity⁶. As such, national identity is one that is deeply rooted in an individual. Even though it may be fluid, it should stabilize over time⁷.

Even so, scholars also recognize that there may be instances in which one will have an affiliation to more than just one national identity. Smith (1986) argues that there is a “dual attachment” – loyalty to the political administration, which is seen in terms of obligations and rights of the citizens, and loyalty to the ethnic community.

⁴ Brady, H. E., and Kaplan, C. 2009. *Conceptualizing and measuring ethnic identity*. In R. Abdelal, Y. Herrera, A. Johnston and R. McDermott (eds), *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 33-71.

⁵ Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. New York: Verso.

⁶ Verkuyten, Maykel. 2005. *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity*. New York: Psychology Press.

⁷ Huntington, Samuel P. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remarking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kuo and Margalit (2012) also explicate the idea of “situationalism” whereby people alter their identity in response to what is happening around them. This is seen in their research on Georgia where the strength of the situation influenced how much it alters national identity. Therefore, a change in context and environment may cause an alteration in an individual’s affiliation to a particular nation or nation-state. This approach is useful in my research in order to find out whether Taiwanese people’s identity is something that is fixed, or it is fluid that changes according to the environment.

Historical Background

To better understand Taiwan’s current situation in global politics, it is important to understand how they got into this situation in the first place. According to Ai Dun’s *Shattering the Myths: Taiwanese Identity and the Legacy of KMT Colonialism*, Taiwan’s geo-strategic position was a result of Kuomintang’s loss in the Chinese civil war and its flight to Taiwan. At that time, it built up an authoritarian government and constructed a Sinic social identity. Even though it was only in control of an extremely small territory, Taiwan and Kuomintang were seen as China’s official representatives. Besides being one of the founding members of the United Nations, Taiwan also secured a treaty with the United States defending itself against foreign threats (i.e. the Chinese in this case). Doing so secured Taiwan’s position as the official representative of the non-communist Chinese people. The treaty that they had with the United States of America came in useful during the first Taiwan-China Straits crisis when Matsu and Kinmen islands were bombed by China.⁸

⁸ Ai Dun. 2004. *Shattering the Myths: Taiwanese Identity and the Legacy of KMT Colonialism*. Taipei: Yushan Chushanbe.

However, global support for Taiwan declined after the Soviet-Sino split and the halt in the Cold War. In 1971, votes from the council of the United Nations poured in to recognize the People's Republic of China, transferring the administrative power from Taiwan (Republic of China) to the People's Republic of China. Even though the United States of America was initially in support of an independent Taiwanese state, Nixon's 1972's visit to China caused the tables to be overturned, supporting instead the One China principle.⁹

Internally, Kuomintang's pursuit of reunification further fortified Taiwan's cultural and political identification with China. The Kuomintang argued that it has brought many Chinese treasures to Taiwan and wanted to bring Taiwan back to China¹⁰. A significant example was the party's endeavor to compel its people to use Mandarin as the official language, replacing the local dialect of Minnan and further strengthening the political power of the Mainlander Chinese minority. As such, ambivalence in Taiwan remains as some people see themselves as both Chinese and Taiwanese while others long for a separate state.

Currently, China's anti-secession law on Taiwan is a reflection of Beijing's deep-seated concerns with the domestic developments in Taiwan and is an indication of its willingness to look towards forcing a reunification even though it may be fraught with extremely high costs. The increasing influence of the people's voice regarding Chinese foreign policy is making the cross-strait relations even more complex.

⁹ Wachman, Alan. 1994. *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization*. Amok: M.E. Sharpe

¹⁰ Ai Dun. 2004. *Shattering the Myths: Taiwanese Identity and the Legacy of KMT Colonialism*. Taipei: Yushan Chushanbe.

Today, Taiwan is a society that is still in evolution, moving quickly away from the international views of what Taiwan is and how Taiwan perceives its relationship with China. As with the ambitious endeavor by the Kuomintang, modern Taiwan systematically alters its domestic affairs and does not rely on the influence by a foreign authoritarian rule. Such autonomy that Taiwan displays may suggest that this evolution is irreversible. Alan Wachman states in *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization* that in 1988, after the death of Chiang Kai-shek's son – Chiang Ching-kuo, Kuomintang appointed Lee Teng-hui as the President of Taiwan, as well as the head of the party. This was a move to introduce a native Taiwanese into the party in order to alter the Kuomintang's strong identity towards Mainland China. As such, Lee was the first-ever native Taiwanese president. His leadership caused the Kuomintang to steer away from its goal of reunification with China, allowing instead for Taiwan to democratize. In the early 1990s, Lee oversaw a pragmatic diplomacy foreign policy to challenge the policies regarding the reunification of China. He saw the need for Taiwan to be seen as a separate and distinct state from the control of China. Some of his moves included participating in the United Nations. The Kuomintang government permitted elections for the National Assembly and the Legislative Yuan in 1991. In that year, they also released all-new guidelines for the unification of the nation.¹¹

These guidelines were crucial in defining the way Taiwan saw unification with China. Reunification of Taiwan with China was perceived as a long-standing political issue that is reliant on the democratic political reforms in China and the acceptance of the Taiwanese people. There wasn't any form of planning and time frame for

¹¹ Wachman, Alan. 1994. *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization*. Amonk: M.E. Sharpe

reunification and the situation placed the responsibility on China to ensure the conditions were optimal for a smooth and voluntary reunification. The 1994 Taiwanese White Paper even went on to predict that China's continuous absence of political reform and its antagonism towards political development in Taiwan would increasingly lead to stronger support for Taiwan's independence.¹²

In 1996, Lee then began publicly promoting Taiwan's shift away from the goal of reunification. As a result, China responded by cancelling the track-two talks with Taiwan. During Taiwan's presidential campaign, China also test fired missiles in the areas surrounding Taiwan in an attempt to get citizens to not vote for Lee. This sparked the beginning of the complicated cross-straits relations. The 2000 China's White Paper even went to the extreme of relegating Lee to one who sabotaged the peace and stability of the cross-strait relationship, and as an obstacle to China's relationship with the United States of America. As a matter of fact, even Lee's political rise was a hyperbolic reflection of Taiwan's identity changes.¹³

Chen Shui-bian, who was part of the Democratic Progressive Party, then took over the political leadership of Taiwan in 2000, further advancing its political goals towards an autonomous state. He wanted to extend the Taiwan First approach to continue what his predecessors started. Winning the election came as a surprise as the democratic progressive party came from illegal opposition movements in the past. During his administration, the cross-strait relations were tense. For instance, China, for the seventh time, obstructed Taiwan's effort to be part of the World Health Organization (WHO) during the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic.

¹² Ai Dun. 2004. *Shattering the Myths: Taiwanese Identity and the Legacy of KMT Colonialism*. Taipei: Yushan Chushanbe.

¹³ White Paper. 2000. *The One China Principle and the Taiwan Issue*. Retrieved from: www.chinaconsulate.se/Content/Taiwan/whitepaper1.htm.

Because of that, Chen blamed China for the massive spread of SARS and further started a referendum for Taiwan to join the WHO.¹⁴ Chen also managed to hold a second term in his presidency. According to Tim Culpan's *Taiwan Alters Arms Referendum Language*, during the election for presidency, he held two contentious referenda as a defense mechanism against China¹⁵. Furthermore, Chen's government amended the curriculum in schools by seeing China as a separate and foreign state. These small-scale policies were extremely pertinent in shaping the Taiwanese identity.

With these changes in the political and educational landscape, the Taiwanese began to question their identity and the attitudes they had toward China and Taiwan, as well as the relationship between both countries. Therefore, both Lee and Chen played pertinent roles in encouraging residents to question their identity and creating an all-new Taiwanese political and social identity that is far from that of China.

However, in 2008, Ma Ying-jeou of Kuomintang won the presidential seat, bringing back to power the party that seeks to reunify China. Even though Ma continued to advance Taiwan's independence (stating that it was not his party's goal), he ensured that the cross-straits relationship was well-maintained. Ma's strategy was to put forth Taiwan as an autonomous state but also to encourage Taiwan to establish a common market and direct transportation lines with Mainland China.

Finally, the recent incumbent president Tsai Ing-wen who is part of the DPP, took things the other way as she criticized Ma's stance on allowing Taiwan to become

¹⁴ World Journal. 2003. Bian: there will be no referendum if Taiwan acquires WHO membership. World Journal. August 19. Retrieved from: <http://www.chineseworld.com>.

¹⁵ Culpan, Tim and Pan, Philip P. 2004. *Taiwan alters arms referendum language*. Washington Post, January 17. Retrieved from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A23616-2004 Jan16.html>

a sovereign state. She is now in her second term and her position toward the cross-strait relation does not depart far from that of her party to see Taiwan as an independent state. Even though she sees the need to maintain good trade and economic networks with China, she also recognizes the need to diversify so that Taiwan will not be overly reliant on China. She is also more liberal in her policies in the way she view minority groups in society such as the LGBT groups.¹⁶

The back and forth diplomatically with regards to China then further caused citizens to question their identity. Could they possibly be politically Taiwanese but culturally Chinese? Could they be both Chinese and Taiwanese at the same time? An additional complication has arisen here as different generations, due to their experience of different political administrations, perceive themselves differently from each other. The older generation thinks that they are Chinese, but many of the younger generation strongly believes that Taiwan is a separate state and must profess its independence to avoid being taken advantage of by the big power of rising China.

This conflict then gave rise to the Sunflower Movement in 2014, which was an all-time largest anti-China protest. In *Who Supports the Sunflower Movement? An Examination of Nationalist Sentiments*, Chen and Yen write that in protest against the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement with China, Taiwan's university students stormed the national legislature and unexpectedly gave rise to a 24-day occupation of parliament, and a subsequent political crisis. It was arguably the largest and longest episode of collective contention in Taiwan. In the end, the Sunflower Movement was peacefully concluded, with the dispute free-trade agreement halted in the legislative

¹⁶ Hsieh, Y., & Skelton, T. (2017). Sunflowers, youthful protestors and political achievements: lessons from Taiwan. *Children's Geographies*, 16(1), 105-113. doi: 10.1080/14733285.2017.1391977

process. The young wanted to protect their identity as Taiwanese and block approval of the KMT's proposed Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) with China without a detailed analysis and review of the deal. Even so, the young opinions were split. At first glance, the Sunflower Movement may have seemed like an "anti-China" movement, but it is part of a larger post-democratization trend. Many marginalized young students have joined in protests, highlighting the class and generational elements of the movement.¹⁷

With that, what exactly is the resident's affiliation and further, what is Taiwan's national identity as a result of the cross-strait relations?

Contradictions in China and Taiwan's Economic Relationship and Ties

In the post-Mao era, economic ties between China and Taiwan were strengthened with the goal of reunification. China and Taiwan's economy were both similar to one another, and the economies were complementary. Majority of the Taiwanese then, see themselves as Chinese. Even up till today, more than 66 per cent of Taiwan's outgoing foreign investment goes to China and it is Taiwan's main trading partner.¹⁸

With greater cross-strait economic inter-reliance and Taiwan's greater push for democratization, the meaning of Taiwanese self-identification is increasingly perplexing Taiwanese residents. Some individuals in Taiwan think that giving support to the liberalization of the economy with China is a method used to encourage

¹⁷ Chen, F., & Yen, W. 2016. Who Supports the Sunflower Movement? An Examination of Nationalist Sentiments. *Journal Of Asian And African Studies*, 52(8), 1193-1212. doi: 10.1177/0021909616645372

¹⁸ Yabuki, S., & Harner, S. 2018. *China's New Political Economy*. Boulder: Routledge.

unification and backing economic constraints with China is the same as maintaining a distinct, autonomous Taiwan.

On China's part, the incumbent President Xi is furthering the administration's goals of the founding of the One People's Republic of China. As China sees Taiwan as part of it, it wants to be responsible for all political and military concerns of Taiwan. Beijing, itself, is extremely antagonistic to any form of policies or actions that seem to represent any form of a permanent split of Taiwan from China. Because the signs of this are already appearing, it is increasingly aggressive in proposing revisions to the educational curriculum, in a bid to "salvage" the new generation and reframe the historical events that occur in Taiwan. China also wishes to halt the cultivation of a Taiwan national identity, especially amongst the young, that is vastly different from that of China. Chinese and Taiwanese identity differs in terms of the rule of law, democracy, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. To entice Taiwan to accept unification, China has granted them more economic advantages. However, that still remains unsuccessful. Beijing is extremely anxious that the new generation will be brought up in a way that has no affinity and relationship with Mainland China.¹⁹

As such, Beijing has already started to put pressure on Tsai through a number of measures: lowering the number of Chinese tourists and students in Taiwan; limiting the space available for Taiwan's participating in the multilateral trade; increasing the strength of military operations on every side of the Taiwanese island and showcasing its military might to prevent any form of conflict that Taiwan seeks; trying to attract

¹⁹ Ibid.

Taiwanese graduates to find jobs in China by offering high salaries and affordable housing; and finally, seeking to poach Taiwan's diplomatic allies.²⁰

While China seems to be impatient and eager to reunify both states, Taiwan has taken a patient approach to cross-strait relations. Since most Taiwanese have been conditioned to live with the cross-strait tensions and are in favor of maintaining the status quo of being seen as a separate state, the political focus of Taiwan is to increase its competitiveness economically, allowing Taiwan to be less reliant on China and diversifying its economic partners. This can be seen through the New Southbound Policy. Since the current ruling DDP is not China's preferred political party, they choose to not embark in any actions to force China to deal with them in an appropriate manner.²¹

The Taiwanese government also seeks to augment the quality of life of its people, through greater partnerships with major world powers like the United States of America, India, Japan, Australia, as well as the European Union, even though Taiwan may not have formal and legitimate diplomatic relationships with them.

Methodology: Situationalism as a Mode to Examine National Identity

Looking at the political changes and historical events that have occurred in Taiwan, this research posits that situationalism is the most effective framework in order to examine the shifts in self and national identity of Taiwanese because of how the Taiwanese people's mindset has changed over the years, reacting to changes in their situation. To better understand the identities that Taiwanese residents subscribe

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Hsieh, Y., & Skelton, T. (2017). Sunflowers, youthful protestors and political achievements: lessons from Taiwan. *Children's Geographies*, 16(1), 105-113. doi: 10.1080/14733285.2017.1391977

to, a recent survey done in 2016 that sought to gain a better understanding how Taiwanese viewed their national identity is analyzed. The comprehensive survey was part of a paper, *Explaining National Identity Shift in Taiwan*, by Yang Zhong.

Taiwanese national identity is a conflicting affiliation between Chinese and Taiwanese identities. In this case, will an individual “switch” affiliations due to the external context such as the economy, habits of the two cultures, et cetera? This is the main question that the survey attempts to answer.

Viewing China as an opportunity could lead Taiwanese residents to have a stronger affiliation to being Chinese but if China is seen as a threat, they may then try to distance themselves away from being a Chinese, and instead desire for an autonomous Taiwanese identity. For example, China’s military might is often perceived as a threat to Taiwan because of the many missiles that can be pointed to Taiwan. On the other hand, should Taiwanese work with China, it can be an amazing opportunity given China’s huge markets and links with various countries. It will then lead to improve cross-strait relations and peace and stability within the region.

Yang Zhong’s survey was conducted using systematic sampling to select respondents. Given the ongoing view of China as either a direct threat or country of opportunity, respondents were primed using a piece of news that discusses greater economic cooperation with China either as a threat or an opportunity. Survey respondents were then allocated to four groups randomly, ensuring a diverse spread of age groups, gender demographics, varied levels of education and areas of residence.²²

Every group was given the same survey questionnaire but the approach differed in terms of the primer. Group 1 was not given any sort of primer before the

²² Zhong, Y. 2016. Explaining National Identity Shift in Taiwan. *Journal Of Contemporary China*, 25(99), 336-352. doi: 10.1080/10670564.2015.1104866

questionnaire, Group 2 was given news that puts China in a good light, Group 3 was given news that puts China in a negative light, and Group 4 was given both pieces of news. The primer was used as a way to find out if attitudes and affiliation of respondents alter when a piece of information is given to them. Even though the primer is only but information provided, it is a method used to check if the identities of respondents will be swayed. Should identities be something that is fixed, whether or not there is a primer would no longer matter. Therefore, Group 1 is used as a control group to ensure consistency in the research.

Group 4 differed from Group 1 as they were given both pieces of information. This was to also done to ensure all variations are taken into account.

Group 2's prime: China as an opportunity

As the second largest economy around the globe, countries all over are trying their best to further their ties with China to improve their own economies. China's huge market grants great opportunities for intentional corporations. Corporations can either make use of the low prices of production in China, or prosper by the large number of consumers in the Chinese market. China is now known as the globe's largest factory and globe's largest market. Taiwan should seize this opportunity

To bolster the impact of the prime, respondents were given questions to think about and answer:

- a. Do you associate with the fact that China is the globe's second largest economy?

- b. Do you associate with the fact that China grants plentiful opportunities for businesses and is known as the globe's largest factory and largest market?
- c. Do you think Taiwan should take the opportunity to gain entrance to the Chinese market to avoid being left out?

Group 3's prime: China as a threat

Recently, Hillary Clinton articulates her opinion on the cross-strait economic exchange. Clinton asserts that Taiwan needs to prudently weigh its options and the extent to which it is opening its economy to China. She argues that if Taiwan does not manage to gain economic independence, it will also adversely affect its political independence. Becoming too dependent on China will cause Taiwan to become susceptible in the long run as China will certainly make increasing demands on Taiwan.²³

To bolster the impact of the prime, respondents were given questions to think about and answer:

- a. Will Taiwan's economy become progressively dependent on the Chinese market?
- b. Will Taiwan gradually lose its ability to gain independence?
- c. Will Taiwan become susceptible to threats and demands made by China?

Doing so enables one to analyse and figure out whether the primers in Group 1 (no primer), Group 2 (China as an opportunity), Group 3 (China as a threat), Group 4

²³ Yabuki, S., & Harner, S. (2018). *China's New Political Economy*. Boulder: Routledge.

(China can both be an opportunity or a threat) will shape identity of individuals and subsequently on national identity.

To examine the respondent's stance on national identity, questions relating to whether they see Taiwan and China as distinct states, if both countries should be reunified, and what should be the name of Taiwan (i.e. Taiwan versus Republic of China).

Further, Inglehart's generation replacement theory²⁴ (1997) argues that different environments would lead to the development of a different value system. Socialization takes place when one is young and once these values are internalized, it is challenging for it to alter. Taiwanese below the age of 30 grew up in an environment where China rose up to become a superpower; they may then become more sensitive to China as a nation.

The hypotheses for this research is that:

1. Providing the primer of China as an opportunity would lead to a consequential increase in the affiliation with China.
2. Providing the primer of China as a threat would lead to a consequential increase in the disdain for China.
3. Providing both primers would lead to no drastic effect on identity
4. The young are more susceptible to the primer of China as an opportunity or a threat.

Findings

²⁴ Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization : Culture , Economic, and Political Change in 43 Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

The research gave rise to several pertinent findings. Firstly, majority of the survey respondents view Taiwan and China as separate states, while a minority view them as one single state. Furthermore, Group 1 and Group 4's findings were consistent in which there are little drastic changes to their responses. Yet, even though majority of the respondents see Taiwan and China as separate states, they were divided on their country's name (Taiwan versus Republic of China).

Next, when comparing Groups 2, 3, and 4 with Group 1 (control), the primer that purports the view that China is a threat increases an individual's affiliation with Taiwan and increases their disdain to even call themselves a member of the Republic of China. In comparison, the primer that supports China as a land of opportunity decreases their affiliation with Taiwan and instead respondents are more likely to report Republic of China as the name of their country. Therefore, this result confirms my research hypotheses that the identity that an individual associates is influenced and or determined by environmental factors. Self-identity and subsequently national identity is not fixed and rather, it is fluid.

Besides that, in the questionnaire, when asked about the imagined relationship with China (father-son, siblings, couples, friends, acquaintances, or enemies), respondents that identified themselves as Taiwanese did not see China as a helpful sibling that helped in solving the challenging difficulty of Taiwan's status in the international arena, yet they were undecided as to whether China was seen as an enemy often picked the option on the fence (acquaintances). For respondents who long for reunification, they then see China as a sibling that they would like to rekindle

their relationship with. In comparison, those who think that China will take advantage of Taiwan have attitudes of China as an enemy.²⁵

Even though that is the case, it seems that the primer that purports China's vast amount of opportunities effects are much stronger than that of the one that primes respondents for China's threats. This was an interesting finding.

Variation among Different Generations

Survey results show that the respondents below the age of 30 have a much stronger affiliation to Taiwan and identity as Taiwanese, and none of them see Taiwan as being part of China. The impact of the primer is also much higher amongst this age group. This confirms the fourth hypothesis that the young are more susceptible to the primer of China as an opportunity.

Besides the survey results, historical data can also be used to cross-reference and to further explain their behavior. This group of individuals is also those who possibly took part in the Sunflower movement demonstrations. While they were growing up, they have lived through multiple changes in power in their political administration. Furthermore, Taiwanese youth grew up in a relatively affluent and peaceful society. The young then are increasingly likely to support freedom, independence, and democracy over the authoritarian rule of China. The spread of information in today's increasingly technological age also grants them a basis of comparison.²⁶

²⁵ Zhong, Y. 2016. "Explaining National Identity Shift in Taiwan." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 25(99), 336-352. doi: 10.1080/10670564.2015.1104866

²⁶ Zhong, Y. 2016. "Explaining National Identity Shift in Taiwan." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 25(99), 336-352. doi: 10.1080/10670564.2015.1104866

As seen in China's firm stance on Hong Kong's occupy central movement, they are now able to better appreciate Taiwan's democracy and yearn for it. The state that Hong Kong is in right now, where China is compelling Hong Kong to create legislation against subversion and seditious acts is something that the young Taiwanese wish to steer far away from. Other than that, China's ban on Chinese tourists heading to South Korea is taking a toll on the South Korean tourism industry, which is one example of how powerful China can be. Many of the Taiwanese young individuals do not wish such an occurrence to happen to them in future and would rather the Taiwanese government be a distinct state that does not have to be overly reliant on the Chinese economy, as they are extremely afraid that Taiwan may be taken over by the larger and more powerful Chinese government.²⁷

Despite the close proximity of the two nations, many young Taiwanese still choose not to visit Mainland China. Many of them resent that their island is not being recognized as a nation in the UN due to Beijing's strong pressure and clout. It is not permissible for Taiwan to display its national flag or utilize its name as Taiwan (not even the Republic of China) in official international events like the Olympics. This could be a further explanation for the young Taiwanese's distaste for China.

In recent years, because of increasingly attractive salaries and job opportunities that China is offering, many young Taiwanese are more willing to move to China. This differs from in the past when Taiwanese do not even wish to visit China, having the impression of China being unsafe, dirty, and filled with unfriendly citizens. Even if they were willing to live in China, due to economic considerations, these young individuals still prefer to see themselves as Taiwanese rather than

²⁷ Ibid.

Chinese. “Many graduate students are heading to China to find work, but they come back complaining about the widespread corruption in China,” argued one respondent. This shows that China’s strategy of attracting youth to their country has not fully achieved its intended goals of building stronger affiliations to China. China’s pouring of economic resources in attracting the young in Taiwan is unprecedented, but it continually choose to neglect the voices of the Taiwanese government under the DDP and still tries to force Taiwan to adhere to the One China principle. That is something that is creating lots of dissent amongst the young people in Taiwan.²⁸

In comparison, respondents between the ages of 30 to 49 may not necessarily see themselves as one China, but identifies their country as the Republic of China. When they were offered the primer that China is a great opportunity, respondents were more likely to see both nations, as one of the same while the opposite was true when China is posed as a threat. Historical events show that this was the period where Taiwan was commonly known as the Republic of China. According to Inglehart’s argument, they are then also less likely to alter their identities and hence identifying themselves as part of the Republic of China even though they may not see themselves as being Chinese. Even so, during their growing years, they were part of the batch that underwent an education curriculum that sees Taiwan as distinct from China and hence their stance on their affiliation with China. Also, this was the period of time where China shot to fame in the global arena, gaining superpower status economically. During the initial years, Taiwan enjoyed some of the privileges of China’s strategy to open up its markets. In comparison, the younger generation has a totally different impression, as they no longer gain many advantages.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Respondents that are above 50 did not seem to be affected by the primers. This can be further explained that the older generation are often retired and may not see the importance of being part of China or even not being part of China. Financial incentives are less important in this age group and many of the respondents in this age group may even be part of the descendants of the generation that fled to Taiwan during the Chinese Civil War.

Contending Identities

As such, even though the research shows that situational environments influence identities, it is insufficient to address what exactly are the on-the-ground sentiments of the residents.

Even during the presidential elections, the flipping and flopping of KMT and DDP seems to suggest that the entire population are still quite divided as to what their affiliation is. There is definitely a huge gap in terms of the affiliation between age groups and it will take a few more generations for these identities to be realigned. Furthermore, the affiliations are conditional and depend on the future actions and future economic landscape. Some of the areas in which the two nations differ include how Taiwan is a democratic state and celebrates political freedom while China maintains itself as an authoritarian state. In March 2018, China's Communist Party eradicated constitutional limits that are placed on the terms of presidency. This enabled Xi Jin Ping to be the ruler of China for an indefinite period of time.

Those who are in support for reunification continue to support their stance even though doing so could have a high cost. The rest remains as swing voters that will chart their course according to the climate. With such uncertainties, it definitely

poses a challenge in the Taiwanese administration given that it chose to adopt a people-centric democracy. The conflicting political identities are a long-standing problem but it seems that most Taiwanese share the same sentiments in terms of their cultural identities as being distinct from China.

Conclusion

Overall, this research demonstrates how national identity in Taiwan is fluid, and is situational. Even though majority still declare that Taiwan and China are distinct states, if the rise of China can be seen as a great opportunity for Taiwan, then some respondents may be inclined to think otherwise. In contrast, if China is perceived as a threat, Taiwanese want to steer away from its association with China.

Much of this identity ambivalence is linked to how China's rise has a complicated impact on cross-strait relations. China's overbearing and urgent goal of reunification is starting to show, causing much tension. Aside from that, Taiwan's multiple shifts in power between different political parties with differing goals and agendas has created an environment where its residents are perplexed by what it truly means to be a Taiwanese. Though majority of the older generation, like the young, sees themselves as distinct from China, they associate their nation with the name of Republic of China. Furthermore, the older generation has experienced the advantages of the opening of the Chinese markets to Taiwan and, thus, has a more positive perception of China. Some of them may even be native Chinese who fled to Taiwan during the Chinese Civil War. The younger generation, however, due to the lack of freedom and democracy that China pursues, is hesitant to become part of China and are afraid of being taken advantage of. The rise in technology has led to greater

knowledge of the world around them and many would not want to fall prey to the power of China as seen in Hong Kong and South Korea's case. Even though they do not want to be on bad terms with China, they also do not wish to be seen as part of China. Exacerbated by the fact that the Taiwan is still not recognized as a nation-state, then how will national identity be constructed and developed?

That being said, it is not impossible for the Taiwanese identity to revert back to one that is more Chinese. The extent to which this could happen is reliant on the strategy that Beijing deploys. As seen in the research, should residents view China more positively, there is a swing towards a more Chinese identity. Should China continue to impose diplomatic and economic sanctions on Taiwan, it will only cause even more dissent from the Taiwanese residents—a similar reaction to when China imposed several restrictions in Hong Kong. Otherwise, China could decide to minimize the gap and differences between the two nations by embarking on a democratization process and enabling the rise of a civil society. Then that would help to make China a more inviting society for the Taiwanese. However, at the moment, this seems to be something that will happen. China wants to maintain the status quo of its authoritarian state, yet still seeks to reclaim Taiwan back to its shores. Its attractive promises of economic trade, financial help and resources do not seem inviting to the Taiwanese. Instead, many individuals in Taiwan are still wary of the intentions of China and feel that they will be taken advantage of.

Because China is such a powerful nation, Taiwan is also facing increasing pressure as it starts to lose many of its trusted allies to China. The economy of Taiwan has not been that strong and the country is actually losing a lot of its people, jobs, and investment opportunities to China. Taiwanese-Chinese marriages are

becoming more prevalent and Taiwanese are becoming more willing to visit and even stay in China. Despite that, many Taiwanese, especially those under 30 years old, still see themselves as a true-blue Taiwanese and their attitudes tend toward wanting Taiwan to become a distinct and sovereign state, and veer away from any situation that puts Taiwan under the control of China.

Globalization in the modern world has allowed for greater movement of professionals and talented individuals. While Taiwan continues to be supportive of cross-strait exchanges and cooperation, they still wish to see their collaboration and endeavors to be reciprocated. As of now, public sentiments in Taiwan still express fear of being “eaten” by China. Without the necessary legislation and regulations, it is difficult for Taiwan to cooperate. Taiwan’s government has managed to take their own stance to propagate policies to improve their industries, better their competitiveness in the international front, and secure the safety of Taiwan’s human rights and economic freedom. That is a world that many of the Taiwanese residents would like to see, and an identity that is tied to greater political, economic, and social freedom.

Looking at these unique circumstances surrounding Taiwan, we see the ways in which identity is a fluid concept and is dependent on one’s surroundings. Also, we can argue that Taiwan is an imagined community that has not fully achieved independence and recognition by the United Nations. This further intensifies the already antagonistic cross-strait relations Taiwan with China.

Then again, China has risen up so much that now, anyone who seems to be of Chinese heritage, including Singaporeans, Malaysians, and definitely Taiwanese are perceived to be a part of China. When then will China stop? If it were to consume

Taiwan into its One China Principle, what are the dangerous and long-term consequences?

Taiwanese national identity continues to be contested even today. As Taiwan and China maintains closer economic ties, it doesn't seem like they will one day be friends, or even families in the near future. At the end of the day, the closer ties that China proposes are fraught with hidden agendas while Taiwan accepts the ties in their bid for economic survival. In turn, this has caused a deep-seated identity confusion amongst Taiwanese people, with divisions based on age and generation, and a collective national identity that is always in flux.

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