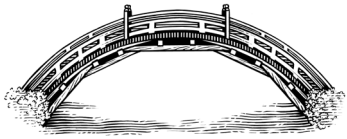
ASIA POLICY, VOLUME 19, NUMBER 2 (APRIL 2024), 77–135
HTTP://ASIAPOLICY.ORG

ROUNDTABLE

Social and Political Identity in Taiwan: Implications for Taiwan's Security



Nai-Yu Chen

Brian Hioe

Christina Lai

Lev Nachman

Hsin-I Cheng

Michael Mazza

Rong Chen

Introduction

Nai-Yu Chen

Who are the Taiwanese people? This seemingly simple question has been steadily taking on new complexity as an increasing number of Taiwan's citizens identify solely as Taiwanese rather than as Chinese or a combination of the two. The latest survey results from the National Chengchi University's Election Study Center reveal a steady shift—61.7% of respondents now see themselves as uniquely Taiwanese, a substantial increase from just 17.1% in 1992 when the survey began. This shift in identity is reshaping various aspects of Taiwanese life, including domestic politics and its relationships with global powers like China and the United States.

At the crux of this transformation lies a fundamental question: How will Taiwan's redefined and evolving identity impact its future security and trajectory as a nation? This *Asia Policy* roundtable of essays takes a multifaceted look at the drivers behind Taiwan's changing identity and how it is shaping the island's trajectory on issues that are central to its security and future.

Set against the outcome of the 2024 Taiwanese presidential and legislative elections, the first essay by Brian Hioe offers a comprehensive analysis of the role and strength of the two traditional political identities in Taiwan: the pan-blue camp, centered around the Kuomintang (KMT), and the pan-green camp, centered around the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Emphasizing the interplay between domestic concerns, cross-strait relations, and the emergence of third parties such as the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), he observes that dissatisfaction with the DPP's handling of economic issues, coupled with the appeal of the TPP, underscores the structural demand for an alternative to two-party dominance, despite the China factor's continued significance.

Christina Lai next delves into the evolution of Taiwanese identity and its impact on the country's policies toward China and the United States. She explores the nuanced factors shaping Taiwanese identity, including generational differences, perceptions of major powers, and the influence of multiculturalism. Lai contends that the rise of a civic identity based

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on democratic values poses significant implications for traditional party stances toward China and U.S.-Taiwan relations, necessitating a nuanced approach from the United States.

Shifting the focus away from the DPP and KMT, Lev Nachman in his essay examines the role of small parties, particularly spotlighting the emergence of the TPP and the decline of the once-promising New Power Party (NPP). In the 2024 election the TPP received a 22% share of the party vote and gained eight legislative seats, which not only reflects genuine discontent with the established parties but also makes it a potential kingmaker. Nachman prompts analysts to reassess Taiwan's evolving multi-party dynamics and their ramifications for domestic policies and cross-strait relations amid diminishing DPP-KMT dominance.

Challenging simplistic dichotomies, Hsin-I Cheng's essay investigates the intricate interplay of cultural and political identities in Taiwan. She argues that the cultural and political realms of the Taiwanese sense of self are intimately interconnected, shaped by historical experiences, geopolitics, and the quest for self-determination. She also sheds light on how marginalized groups such as Indigenous peoples and new immigrants have contributed to Taiwan's complex identity development.

Michael Mazza's essay next examines the profound demographic shifts occurring in Taiwan, specifically the rapid aging and eventual shrinkage of its population. His essay elucidates the societal, economic, and national security challenges posed by these demographic changes, such as strains on the workforce, healthcare system, and military readiness. It highlights the need for Taiwan to adopt technological solutions, welcome immigration, and deepen international security partnerships to mitigate these challenges. While Taiwan's demographic predicament presents significant hurdles, it may also catalyze a leaner and more resilient society, capable of deterring external threats through innovative approaches.

Using polling data and a public opinion survey, Rong Chen analyzes how Taiwan's evolving identities shape perceptions of U.S.-Taiwan relations. Results show that a strong Taiwanese civic identity is associated with greater support for independence, rejection of cultural similarity with China, and favorable views of the United States. She contends that the changing Taiwanese identity could influence perceptions of long-standing U.S. policies toward Taiwan, notably the "one-China" principle and the preservation of the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. She concludes by arguing that wise diplomacy and steering clear of zero-sum thinking are crucial in preserving peace.

Collectively, these essays illuminate the complex interplay of domestic dynamics, identity formation, demographic changes, and international relations shaping contemporary Taiwanese society and politics. While each essay offers unique insights, common themes emerge, such as the growing demand for political alternatives, the evolving nature of Taiwanese identity, and the importance of adaptive responses to demographic challenges and shifting geopolitical landscapes. As Taiwan navigates these multifaceted challenges, thoughtful analysis and strategic foresight will be essential in charting its course toward a secure future. ◈

Trends in Political Identity: Where Does Taiwan Go from Here?

Brian Hioe

Taiwan's 2024 presidential election resulted in a win for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), awarding power to the party for an unprecedented third consecutive term under Lai Ching-te. His win can largely be attributed to the public's perception of more stable governance under the DPP as well as its preference for the DPP's cross-strait stance to that of the other major party in Taiwan politics, the Kuomintang (KMT).

Yet the results were mixed for the DPP. Lai did not win by the same margins as his predecessor, President Tsai Ing-wen, reflecting popular discontent toward the party for failing to resolve economic woes that have long plagued Taiwan. As a result of failing to win a majority, the DPP lost control of the legislature. On the one hand, this in some ways reflects a reversion to the status quo—the only time that a non-KMT political party controlled the Taiwanese legislature has been during the eight years of the Tsai administration. On the other hand, given that the DPP and KMT performed nearly evenly in the legislature results, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), a recently established third party, may hold the decisive balance of power going forward. The DPP is a center-left party that historically has leaned in the direction of Taiwanese independence. It is denoted by the color green and leads a coalition of smaller progressive parties (pan-green). The party emerged from Taiwan's democracy movement and has since aimed to moderate its pro-independence origins. The KMT is the former ruling party from the authoritarian era. Following Taiwan's democratization, it has continued into the present as a right-leaning party that favors closer relations with China. It is marked by the color blue and leads a coalition of smaller conservative parties (pan-blue). The TPP, as a newer entrant, is pan-blue-leaning and politically closer to the KMT on cross-strait relations, while its stance between liberalism and conservatism on domestic social issues is as yet undefined.

What, then, are we to make of the election outcome? Poll after poll shows that Taiwanese identity continues to be on the rise, with declines in Chinese identity and mutual identity (identifying both as

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Taiwanese and Chinese).[1] Such trends are particularly visible among young people, who overwhelmingly identify as Taiwanese and not Chinese.

However, it is not the case that rising identity trends will entail the DPP's certain victory in future election cycles. The KMT continues to be a viable political force. To this extent, the biggest puzzle from the 2024 election may be the rise of the TPP. Despite its pan-blue leanings, the party seems to be supported by a large number of young people.

This essay assesses the role and strength of the two main traditional political identities in Taiwan, the KMT and the DPP, and looks at how factors such as the role of third parties, voter demographics, domestic economic and social policies, and the cross-strait issue played into the 2024 presidential and legislative election outcomes. It argues that the DPP maintained the presidency more as a result of pan-blue weaknesses and public preference for its stance on the cross-strait status quo than on the basis of a strong popular mandate.

The KMT and Pan-Blue Identity

Splits within the pan-blue coalition. Had the KMT and TPP been able to unite behind a joint presidential ticket, it would have likely resulted in a defeat for the DPP. Recognizing that this was the case, the two parties undertook a convoluted series of negotiations in October 2023. However, their joint ticket dissolved spectacularly in November during a televised press conference when the TPP and KMT candidates rowed publicly on national television.[2]

The pan-blue camp faced challenges cementing a joint ticket from the onset. Before the dissolution of the KMT-TPP ticket, business magnate and Foxconn founder Terry Gou also sought to run as an independent. But the reason why no combination of Gou, Ko Wen-je, or Hou Yu-ih was able to unite this camp was that each aimed to be the presidential candidate and refused to be part of a joint ticket if they were to instead serve as the vice presidential candidate. Thus, the splits in the pan-blue camp attest to a lack of unity—party politicians contending for the presidential nomination have by and large refused to back out in favor of greater political and ideological unity.

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1 Christine Huang and Kelsey Jo Starr, "Most People in Taiwan See Themselves as Primarily Taiwanese; Few Say They're Primarily Chinese," Pew Research Center, January 16, 2024 ~ https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/01/16/most-people-in-taiwan-see-themselves-as-primarily-taiwanese-few-say-theyre-primarily-chinese.

2 Brian Hioe, "How the Taiwan Opposition Alliance Talks Fell Apart," *Diplomat*, November 28, 2023 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/how-the-taiwan-opposition-alliance-talks-fell-apart.

To begin, Gou's run as an independent only took place because he was passed over for the KMT's nomination in a manner that led to bruised feelings. The nomination took place through a closed process by the KMT's central leadership rather than through an open primary that would have consolidated political legitimacy behind a single candidate.[3] Indeed, it is probable that the lack of an open primary also undercut Hou's legitimacy as the KMT's candidate. It is generally thought that the KMT held a closed primary because chair Eric Chu hoped to become the party's presidential candidate. As polls showed that Hou was likely to become the candidate if the nomination was open, Chu pushed for a switch to a closed-door nomination process, though he was shunted aside after Gou declared his interest in seeking the KMT nomination.[4]

To accomplish this selection method, Chu aligned with members of the KMT who were suspicious of Hou's background as *benshengren*—the approximately 88% of the population descended from waves of migration to Taiwan from China in the hundreds of years preceding the KMT's retreat to Taiwan after its defeat in the Chinese Civil War. The party's leadership has historically been among the *waishengren*—a term referring to the 10% of the population descended from those who came to Taiwan with the KMT in 1945–49. Hou, too, was viewed with suspicion because of his historically moderate stances on cross-strait policy and because he had been close with the DPP in the past. As a result, part of the reason behind the divides within the KMT is the party's failure to localize and become accustomed to benshengren politicians. The party has long feared that another Lee Teng-hui—Taiwan's first democratically elected president who was benshengren but also a KMT politician—could rise to the top of the party and unexpectedly turn on it at the helm.

The youth vote and structural weakness in the pan-blue camp. Apart from internal splits, the KMT has also struggled to make inroads among the young Taiwanese in the past decade. This proved another contributing factor to its defeat in 2024. Yet it is not out of the question that young people would vote for a pan-blue political party.

The KMT has largely floundered in youth outreach since the 2014 Sunflower Movement. This youth-led protest movement, which was among

3 Teng Pei-ju, "Could a Prospective Opposition Joint Ticket Block Lai's Path to the Presidency?" Focus Taiwan, November 4, 2023 ~ https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202311040002.

4 Brian Hioe, "Internal Divisions Regardless of the Outcome: The KMT's Troubled Candidate Decision-Making Process," Taiwan Insight, May 12, 2023 ~ https://taiwaninsight.org/2023/05/12/internal-divisions-regardless-of-the-outcome-the-kmts-troubled-candidate-decision-making-process.

the largest social uprisings in Taiwanese history, involved the occupation of the legislature for 23 days in protest of a trade agreement that the KMT hoped to sign with China.[5] The trade agreement, known as the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement, would have allowed for Chinese investment in Taiwan's service sector, leading to concerns about the possible impact on political freedoms in Taiwan.[6]

Since then, the KMT has mostly been unsuccessful in winning elections at the national level, though it is stronger at the local level. The KMT's base at the local political level is largely built on clientelist networks that have existed for decades, going back to the authoritarian period. In 2020, by its own admission, the KMT had fewer than 9,000 members under 40.[7] A year later, the KMT reported that membership of those under 40 was up by 40%.[8] Nevertheless, the party struggles with outreach to young people.

By contrast, Ko's TPP has come to be viewed as the party with the support of Taiwanese youth, despite its recent negotiation with the KMT over a joint ticket. It is the weakness of the KMT, as well as its inability to improve its image after the Sunflower Movement, that has opened the path for the rise of the TPP. The TPP has positioned itself as a light blue party that is more moderate on cross-strait issues than the KMT. Yet the fundamental difference between the TPP and KMT may be mostly a matter of branding. For example, the TPP supports policies such as reviving the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement and even constructing a bridge between Taiwan's outlying island of Kinmen and Xiamen in China—a plan that critics have warned would make Chinese military attacks on Kinmen easier.[9] Nevertheless, the party has still attracted the support of many young people.

The TPP may also benefit from the hard-to-pin-down stances of party chair and presidential candidate Ko Wen-je. Ko was originally elected as Taipei mayor in 2014 with the endorsement of the DPP, positioning himself

5 For an overview of the movement, see "What Is the Daybreak Project?" Daybreak Project ~ https://daybreak.newbloommag.net.

6 Brian Hioe, "What Was the CSSTA?" Daybreak Project, July 20, 2017 ~ https://daybreak.newbloommag.net/2017/07/20/what-was-the-cssta.

7 Erin Hale, "Why Is Taiwan's Kuomintang on the Ropes?" Al Jazeera, November 12, 2020 ~ https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/11/12/why-are-taiwans-new-generation-a-test-for-the-kmt.

8 Sherry Hsiao, "New KMT Members Under the Age of 40 Up about 40%," *Taipei Times*, January 21, 2021 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2021/01/21/2003750969.

9 Jason Pan, "Ko Wen-je Criticized over Call to Restart CSSTA Talks," *Taipei Times*, June 22, 2023 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/06/22/2003801986; and Chen Yu-fu and Jason Pan, "Kinmen Bridge Plan Slammed over Security Fears," *Taipei Times*, August 24, 2023 https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/08/24/2003805214.

as a pan-green candidate and political progressive who reflected the values of the Sunflower Movement. In the years since, however, Ko has drifted toward the pan-blue camp.[10] His ties with the DPP soured after controversial cross-strait exchanges took place between Taipei and Shanghai as sister cities, during which Ko repeatedly referred to Taiwan and China as "one family sharing a common destiny."[11] The final straw proved to be an incident when student demonstrators against the exchanges were attacked by gangsters with links to pro-unification groups.[12]

Ko has since shed his image as a progressive, given numerous incidents of public misogyny and statements that can be interpreted as homophobic.[13] That Ko is supported by younger members of the population proves hard to mesh with the fact that polls show that the youth voters largely support legalizing gay marriage and addressing a wave of recent #MeToo cases that call on politicians guilty of sexual harassment or assault to answer for past actions.[14] Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands demonstrated against the KMT during the Sunflower Movement and the DPP swept to power in its aftermath, it is thought that members of Generation Z who were too young to directly experience the movement may be among Ko's supporters.[15] Ko benefits from the TPP's social media savvy, conducting outreach on TikTok and other platforms used by Generation Z in a way that both the DPP and KMT have not. His gaffes may add to, rather than diminish, his appeal in that he is seen as an alternative to the slick and polished mainstream politicians.

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10 Brian Hioe and Lev Nachman, "From Green to Blue: The Political History of Ko Wen-je," *Diplomat*, November 28, 2023 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/from-green-to-blue-the-political-history-of-ko-wen-je.

11 Kharis Templeman, "Taiwan's January 2020 Elections: Prospects and Implications for China and the United States," Brookings Institution, December 2018, 7 ~ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FP_20191231_taiwan_election_templeman-1.pdf.

12 "Suspects in 'Sing! China' Festival Clashes Sentenced," *Taipei Times*, July 31, 2018 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/07/31/2003697716.

13 Tessa Wong, "Ko Wen-je: The Dark Horse Who Has Shaken Up Taiwan's Politics," BBC, January 13, 2024 ~ https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67966731.

14 "A TV Drama about Taiwanese Politics Has Sparked a Social Reckoning," *Economist*, June 22, 2023 ~ https://www.economist.com/culture/2023/06/22/a-tv-drama-about-taiwanese-politics-has-sparked-a-social-reckoning.

15 Simina Mistreanu and Johnson Lai, "A Non-traditional Candidate Resonates with Taiwan's Youth Ahead of Saturday's Presidential Election," Associated Press, January 11, 2024 ~ https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-youth-ko-lai-hou-de6685d9addf7815703250e7245ec9e5.

The DPP: Facing Backlash as the Incumbent but Still the Preference on Cross-Strait Politics

The DPP's struggle to maintain a strong grasp on power in the election results from dissatisfaction with it as the incumbent, mostly over its failure to address long-standing economic woes. The Tsai administration was unable to resolve the pressing domestic issues facing Taiwanese society. Increases in wages have not kept pace with those of costs and inflation, and economic challenges have been compounded by the shocks of the Covid-19 pandemic and other events.[16] Young people face low salaries, despite the administration raising the minimum wage and Lai promising to increase it further.[17] Moreover, housing is unaffordable, with the cost of home ownership equaling fifteen years of income in Taipei before accounting for living expenses.[18] Taiwan also faces looming demographic challenges from both the declining birthrate (because of the inability of young people to afford to have children) and being on the precipice of becoming a super-aged society (when over 20% of the population will be age 65 or above, estimated to occur around 2025–26).[19]

Having been in power for nearly a decade may have led to backlash against the DPP. At the same time, the primary political difference between the major parties in Taiwan does not arise from domestic issues—the DPP, KMT, and TPP alike recognize that these are major challenges facing Taiwan. Each party, of course, has various proposals to address these problems, but they do not fundamentally differ from each other. Rather, the main difference between the parties is still their cross-strait policies.

First, it is important to note that a vote for the KMT does not mean a vote for unification. The KMT's public stance is to maintain the cross-strait status quo, even if the party is still seen as having a long-term goal of unification with China. And although the DPP is historically a pro-independence party, its stance is also to maintain the cross-strait status quo. The differences are in political approach and degrees of nuance. Had the KMT won, it would not have necessarily meant that the Taiwanese

16 Roy Ngerng, "Taiwan's Low and Inadequate Wages Have Exacerbated Its Social Problems," News Lens, December 22, 2023 ~ https://international.thenewslens.com/article/186729.

17 Teng Pei-ju, "DPP's Lai Promises to Level Up Salaries in Taiwan," Focus Taiwan, December 14, 2023 ~ https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202312140006.

18 Joanna Lee, "Housing Affordability Crisis," Euroview, October 15, 2021 ~ https://euroview.ecct.com.tw/category-inside.php?id=800.

19 James C.T. Hsueh, "Taiwan Heading into Its Super-Aged Era," East Asia Forum, March 4, 2023 ~ https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/03/04/taiwan-heading-into-its-super-aged-era.

public was suddenly in favor of unification with China either.[20] But the KMT promised to return to policies of economic engagement with China that had led to concerns about impact on Taiwan's political freedoms during the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou. By contrast, the DPP promised to continue current policies, which has encouraged relations with Western countries and other regional powers wary of Beijing while attempting to avoid economic or political overreliance on China. The Taiwanese public ultimately preferred sticking with the DPP's approach, perhaps because the KMT's cross-strait stances did not sufficiently account for the large tectonic shifts in world politics that have occurred since the party last held power.

Indeed, an interview by Ma, in which he urged "faith in Xi Jinping" and claimed that the majority of Taiwanese are in favor of unification with China, likely did not help matters.[21] Since the end of his presidency, Ma has continued to play a highly active role in the KMT. The interview with German broadcaster Deutsche Welle, which was released two weeks before election day, may have been read by the public as a mask-off moment for the KMT. While the party sought to distance itself from the comments, with Ma not being invited to its final election rallies, the damage may have already been done.[22]

The Structural Demand for an Alternative to Two-Party Dominance

If the DPP's win was primarily a result of greater faith in its cross-strait policy, its victory may reflect how much work the party has to do if it hopes to maintain power. The rise of the TPP—and its ability to attract the crucial votes of young people—is thought to be due to its anti-establishment appeal as a newly emergent third party seen as different from the DPP and KMT.

Many election observers have spoken of the 2024 election as one in which domestic issues were more important than ever. Indeed, the political trends of the past decade also show this. The rise of the New Power Party (NPP) in 2015, as a significant third party to emerge from the Sunflower Movement, similarly reflected the desire of the general public

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20 Pei-ju Teng, "DPP, KMT Candidates Reject Independence, Pro-China Labels at Debate," Focus Taiwan, March 30, 2023 ~ https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202312300014.

21 Ma Ying-jeou, interview by Richard Walker, "Taiwan's Ex-President Ma: 'You Can Never Win' War with China," Deutsche Welle, January 12, 2024 ~ https://www.dw.com/en/taiwans-ex-president-ma-you-can-never-win-war-with-china/video-67962324.

22 Shelley Shan, "Ma Not Invited to KMT Rally Following Remarks," *Taipei Times*, January 12, 2024 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2024/01/12/2003811980.

for alternatives. Despite the fact that the DPP supported the Sunflower Movement, and that the movement was one largely about the threat that Taiwan faces from China, the NPP, like the TPP, framed itself as an attempt to move beyond two-party politics as well as an effort to provide for discussion of domestic policy without such issues being overshadowed by cross-strait relations.[23] This may explain the appeal of the TPP, despite its shifting stance on cross-strait relations that might otherwise be alienating to the public. In this light, while cross-strait relations continue to be the most important issue in Taiwanese politics, domestic issues are clearly of growing importance to voters, as reflected in the 2024 election.

Compared to previous election cycles, the 2024 election also lacked any overarching issue that would allow for the reframing of long-standing anxieties over the threat from China. In the 2020 election the 2019 protests in Hong Kong were influential, while in the 2022 election cycle the Russian invasion of Ukraine provided a new lens for a cross-strait scenario. When a Chinese satellite launch over Taiwan triggered a nationwide alert and concerns about a possible missile attack—an incident that the KMT accused the DPP of orchestrating as part of electioneering—the public response was mild.[24]

Conclusion: Are Electoral Politics in Taiwan Still Shaped by the China Factor?

The 2024 presidential election reflects the changing dynamics for the island at present. For one, the election occurred at a time of greater international focus on Taiwan than ever before. Beyond growing awareness of the role that Taiwan plays in global semiconductor supply chains (and their importance, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic), Chinese military threats against Taiwan are increasingly discussed internationally. Nancy Pelosi's historic visit to Taiwan in August 2022, as the first U.S. Speaker of the House to visit Taiwan in a quarter century, gave impetus to this, as did Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Yet the dynamic was different in Taiwan itself. Despite that relatively close outcome compared with other races, many described the election as less concerning to the Taiwanese public. Certainly, there was nothing

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23 Brian Hioe, "Third Force Politics in Taiwan," Euroview, August 21, 2020 ~ https://euroview.ecct.com.tw/category-inside.php?id=332.

24 Brian Hioe, "KMT Leans into Allegations That Missile Alert Was Orchestrated by the DPP," *New Bloom Magazine*, January 2023 ~ https://newbloommag.net/2024/01/10/kmt-missile-alert.

resembling the sense of "national doom" that many described in the lead-up to the 2020 election.[25]

Some analysts have termed the "boring" 2024 election cycle as representing the firm foundations of Taiwan's democracy at present.[26] This may be the case. However, the China factor still casts a large shadow over the dynamics of Taiwanese politics, domestic or otherwise. To this extent, the domestic issues are themselves shaped by cross-strait ones. ◈

[25] Brian Hioe and Wen Liu, "What Is 'National Doom'? In Taiwan, It Depends on Whom You Ask," *Nation*, January 9, 2020 ~ https://www.thenation.com/article/world/taiwan-election-national-doom.

[26] Chang Hsin-yu and Matthew Mazzetta, "Taiwan's 'Boring' Election a Sign of Its Maturity as a Democracy: Scholar," Focus Taiwan, January 14, 2024 ~ https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202401140009.

Unpacking Taiwan's Identities: Substance, Contexts, and Party Stances toward China

Christina Lai

Taiwan's peaceful transition from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy in the 1990s has led not only to rapid economic growth but also to the building of a vibrant civil society. This democratic transition and the growth of civil society promoted Taiwan nationalism, given that the island's political institutions were different from those of authoritarian China.[1] As Taiwan's identity has consolidated around its own institutions and systems, how does this identity shape Taiwan's policy toward China and the United States? What does Taiwan's own, local identity mean for party politics?

This essay investigates the factors contributing to Taiwan's evolving sense of identity and explores how identity might shape the U.S.-China-Taiwan triangle. It also analyzes how Taiwanese identity affects major party stances toward China, including those of the Kuomintang (KMT), the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). The essay, first, offers an overview of the substance of Taiwan's identities and highlights variations within its consolidated national identity. Second, it addresses how political parties in Taiwan differ from each other in their policies toward China. Finally, the essay concludes with a discussion of implications for the future of Taiwan's foreign policy and U.S.-Taiwan relations.

Substance and Variation: Taiwanese Identity from the 1990s to 2023

Taiwan is a beacon of democracy, as it is the only place where a Sinophone majority of people enjoy diverse cultural heritages and liberal democracy. Multiple elements have gone into constructing this unified Taiwan identity over the last few decades, including the formation of the

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[1] Margaret K. Lewis, "What Does Taiwan Want? It Wants to be Taiwan," *Global Asia* 16, no. 1 (2021): 34–38; and Qi Dongtao, "Globalization, Social Justice Issues, Political and Economic Nationalism in Taiwan: An Explanation of the Limited Resurgence of the DPP during 2008–2012," *China Quarterly*, no. 216 (2013): 1018–44.

identity of the self vis-à-vis the other (i.e., Taiwan vis-à-vis China and the United States), generational differences, and renewed connections with Southeast Asian countries, including immigration to Taiwan. These elements have helped forge distinct and yet diverse identities for Taiwanese, separate from those that are more culturally Chinese.

Perceptions of the United States and China. Ever since President Xi Jinping assumed power in 2013, politics in China have taken an authoritarian turn, in which freedom of speech and individual rights have been increasingly suppressed. China's deteriorating human rights environment has not only led to a heightened negative image of the country among Taiwanese people but also encouraged a strengthening of bilateral ties between the United States and Taiwan based on the promotion of liberal democracy and universal human rights.[2] For example, the past two presidents, Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT and Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP, despite their different party affiliations, both took pride in Taiwan's democratic achievements and sought to strengthen security ties and diplomatic exchanges with the United States.

In terms of China-Taiwan relations, the political debate over moving toward unification, declaring *de jure* or formal independence, or maintaining the status quo is certainly related to Taiwan's political future and identity formation. However, a more complex picture emerges when the Taiwanese people are asked to demonstrate their resolve for de jure independence immediately. The Election Study Center at National Chengchi University has conducted surveys on citizen preferences since the mid-1990s using a survey design that helps differentiate moderate nationalists from unyielding ones through the use of hypothetical scenarios.[3] The results have been consistent over the last few decades—most Taiwanese citizens prefer to maintain the status quo in the current China-Taiwan relationship, which entails upholding Taiwan as a de facto independent state but not pressing for de jure independence.[4] This is one of the most important features to emerge from Taiwanese politics, regardless of whether someone identifies

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2 Frédéric Krumbein, "The Human Rights Gap in the Taiwan Strait: How China Pushes Taiwan towards the U.S.," *Pacific Review* 35, no. 3 (2022): 383–414.

3 For the long-term trends on Taiwan's identity and political choices over independence or unification, see the survey results conducted by Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Taiwanese/Chinese Identity (1992/06~2023/06)" ~ https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961; and Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland (1994/12~2023/06)" ~ https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963.

4 Yi-huah Jiang, "Taiwan's National Identity and Cross-Strait Relations," in *Taiwan and China: Fitful Embrace*, ed. Lowell Dittmer (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2017), 19–41.

as Taiwanese, Chinese, or both. Only a small number of respondents would rather see Taiwan pursue formal independence in the face of China's ongoing threat. That is to say, most Taiwanese citizens are willing to de-link their identities from their political future.

Even if Taiwan's identity itself is not a pressing issue that will determine the island's political future, how the Chinese government will respond to the Taiwanese mainstream's preference for the status quo remains uncertain. Since the early 2000s, Beijing has gradually escalated tension by putting pressure on both Presidents Chen Shui-bian and Tsai Ing-wen during their tenures. This increased tension has taken the form of harsh language, military drills and exercises in close proximity to Taiwan, and the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan's legal status. On a deeper level, these strategies reflect Beijing's anxiety about understanding the evolution of Taiwan's internal dynamics since the 2000s.[5]

The preferences over the political future of Taiwan (de jure independence vs. unification with China) do not totally align with how individuals in Taiwan identify themselves (i.e., exclusively Taiwanese, Chinese, or both). Beijing and Washington should take note of this nuance and the complexities of global and local thinking on identity within Taiwan. When the actors in Taiwan's civil society, such as NGOs, humanitarian aid networks, and cultural exchange programs, become embedded in the international community, identity begins to shift beyond legal and formal independence from China to how Taiwan can be recognized and respected by citizens around the world. This shift points to the opportunities for Taiwan's liberal and democratic identity to gain greater support and resonance in the international community.

Generational differences. Taiwan has gone through significant changes in terms of governing regimes since around the turn of the century. It was under Japanese colonial rule from 1895 to 1945, then authoritarian rule under the KMT from 1945 through the 1980s and early 1990s, and a democratic government since 1996. The differences in life experience and collective memory of the population have given rise to distinct, broad identities.[6] Specifically, members of the older generation, who lived under the KMT authoritarian rule and maintained close ties with their mainland families, tend to hold more positive views about China. Members of the

5 Kathrin Hille, "Beijing's Simplistic Narrative on Taiwan Is Fuelling Tensions," *Financial Times*, October 12, 2019 ~ https://www.ft.com/content/57ea6df4-eb39-11e9-a240-3b065ef5fc55.

6 Shelley Rigger, *Taiwan's Rising Rationalism: Generations, Politics, and "Taiwanese Nationalism"* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2006).

younger generation, who grew up during the 1990s, often hold a strong belief in democracy and identify themselves as Taiwanese. Younger people in Taiwan are less likely to embrace closer relations with China than their older counterparts.[7]

In addition, many Taiwanese people, especially college students and young professionals, witnessed the protests taking place in Hong Kong in the last decade and were largely sympathetic to the protestors' demands for greater autonomy and rule of law.[8] In 2019–20, protests in Hong Kong against the extradition bill collectively formed one of the most significant social movements of the time, and the violent crackdown and police brutality toward the protestors received significant global media attention. Occurring about five years after the 2014 Sunflower Movement in Taiwan and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, Taiwanese saw connections between their two causes, and the mutual support between student organizations and civil society points to a convergence of political discourse on democracy and freedom. It was also during this time that coalescence around local identities in Taiwan and Hong Kong reached new highs and negative public views of the Chinese government peaked in both locations.[9]

Beyond a Han-centric perspective. Aside from Taiwan's civic identity, scholars and activists have started to reconsider the notions of statehood, national identity, and political contestation, given Taiwan's unique historical context.[10] Specifically, as a multifaceted movement, the term "Taiwan independence" is not necessarily equal to an expression of nationalistic discourse.[11] Even though independence in Taiwanese politics often refers to the defense of sovereignty in light of China's territorial claims, there is new thinking among the younger generations that conceptualizes the term "independence" as anti-imperial and anti-colonial practices. For example, in 2014, college students, social activists, and NGOs organized a large-scale protest against President Ma Ying-jeou's Cross-Strait Service

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7 Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, "In Taiwan, Views of Mainland China Mostly Negative," Pew Research Center, May 12, 2020 ~ https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/05/12/in-taiwan-views-of-mainland-china-mostly-negative.

8 Christina Lai, "A Case Study of Recent Social Movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan: Convergence of Counter-Identities amid China's Rise," Global Taiwan Institute, August 2020.

9 Chih-Jou Jay Chen and Victor Zheng, "Changing Attitudes toward China in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the Xi Jinping Era," *Journal of Contemporary China* 31, no. 134 (2022): 250–66.

10 Syaru Shirley Lin, "It's Not Just China: Population, Power Generation, Political Polarization, and Parochialism Are Also Long-Term Threats to Taiwan's Success and Survival," *China Leadership Monitor*, Summer 2021 ~ https://www.prcleader.org/post/population-power-generation-political-polarization-and-parochialism-are-also-threats-to-taiwan.

11 Wen Liu, "From Independence to Interdependence: Taiwan Independence as Critique, Strategy, and Method toward Decoloniality," *American Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2021): 371–77.

Trade Agreement with China. This and related protests came to be known as the Sunflower Movement. Since then, local NGOs, sociologists, and activists have developed the idea of indigeneity in Taiwan's public discourse, moving away from previous debates over Chinese nationalism based on a ethnocentric Han perspective.

Furthermore, in the 1990s, Taiwan's mainstream media often conveyed negative images of immigrants from Southeast Asia and their children from transnational marriages.[12] Specifically, this "new second generation" has mostly been depicted as a socially marginalized group, suffering from a language barrier, low academic performance, and difficult financial conditions. However, such negative images began to change into positive ones in the 2010s, as members of this generation became involved in public affairs and began promoting a more inclusive attitude in Taiwan's society. A survey conducted by the Taiwanese government in 2020 showed that there was a total of 305,000 children of new residents and transnational families at all levels in school, accounting for 7.3% of the total number of students.[13] More importantly, the number of new second-generation students enrolled in colleges and universities increased by 65,000 during 2020, and these young adults are important assets for Taiwan's soft power in promoting greater educational and diplomatic exchanges.

Nowadays, young adults who grew up after Taiwan's democratic transition are more likely to hold inclusive identities and to embrace a more ethnically and culturally diverse society. As a young and vibrant democracy, Taiwan is undergoing the process of identity formation and contestation—be it cultural, civic, or nationalistic—and it might take time for the Taiwanese public to forge a whole-of-society consensus on how to both address China's challenges and embrace the island's multiethnic reality.

Political Parties and Their Policies toward China

Even though Beijing's assertive sovereignty claims over Taiwan have increased public concerns, China's threat of forced unification presents an opportunity to think about what it means to be Taiwanese. Tensions in China-Taiwan relations have been on the rise since 2016, as

12 Lee Mei-hsien and Chueh Ho-chia, "Taiwan 'dongnanya xin er dai' de xingxiang jiangou" [The Image of the 'New Second Generation' in Taiwan's Mainstream Newspapers], *Communication, Culture and Politics* 7 (2018): 133–74.

13 Ministry of Education (Taiwan), "109 Xue niandu ge ji xuexiao xin zhumin zinü jiuxue gaikuang" [An Overview of the Number of the New Second Generation at All Levels of School in 2020], November 2021.

Tsai refused to accept Beijing's "one China" principle or "one country, two systems" rule. As a result, China's aggressive military drills, economic sanctions, diplomatic campaigns, and misinformation operations have attempted to limit Taiwan's international presence and prevent closer ties with the United States.

However, none of the major political parties in Taiwan has advocated for legal independence. To be clear, although Tsai has repeatedly urged China to recognize the sovereignty of Taiwan, she has been careful not to pursue de jure independence. Specifically, Tsai and other DPP members have deliberately framed their political stance in terms of protecting liberal democracy and civil society from annexation by Beijing—a de facto independence agenda.[14] An example of this nuanced approach is Tsai's careful choice of words that describe Taiwan as an independent state under the name Republic of China (Taiwan), not as the Republic of Taiwan or other provocative terms.

The DPP. The DPP is one of the earliest Taiwanese political parties that has consistently advocated for a Taiwan-centered policy. From the 1990s to the present, the essence of Taiwan's nationalism for the DPP has been about being a civic nation that encompasses all of the island's peoples rather than an ethnic coalition that sets itself apart from a culturally Chinese one.[15] For example, though a member of the DPP, President Chen Shui-bian explicitly promised not to declare formal independence in his inauguration speech in 2000, and he stressed the cultural affinity between Taiwan and the greater Chinese-speaking community worldwide.[16] Furthermore, he liberalized bilateral trade with China and promoted increased engagement between China and Taiwan.

Starting in 2008, however, Chen's efforts in pushing for curriculum reforms in Taiwan's education system became seen as a "de-Sinicization" campaign executed by the DPP.[17] This included efforts by the Ministry of Education to standardize a series of textbooks on Taiwan's history, maritime development, geography, and state-society relations called *Getting*

14 Lev Nachman and Brian Hioe, "No, Taiwan's President Isn't Pro-Independence," *Diplomat*, April 23, 2020.

15 Wu Rwei-Ren, "Peripheral Nationalisms of Taiwan and Hong Kong under China's Influence," in *China's Influence and the Center-Periphery Tug of War in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Indo-Pacific*, ed. Brian C.H. Fong, Jieh-min Wu, and Andrew J. Nathan (London: Routledge, 2020), chap. 4.

16 Maria Cheng, "Constructing a New Political Spectacle: Tactics of Chen Shui-bian's 2000 and 2004 Inaugural Speeches," *Discourse and Society* 17, no. 5 (2006): 583–608.

17 Mathieu Duchâtel, "An Active Policy of 'Desinicisation,'" *China Perspectives* 70, no. 2 (2007): 92–95.

to Know Taiwan.[18] From the Chinese perspective, this series might reduce Chinese identity among the younger generations and even lead to greater support for Taiwan independence in the future.

In the 2010s, the debate over greater economic dependence on China and maintaining autonomy was an urgent question among the Taiwanese public. The DPP adopted a civic-identity-based argument in securitizing Taiwan's economic policy, and it stressed that overreliance on China for trade might undermine Taiwan's liberal democracy and political sovereignty.[19] The trade diversification policy implemented by Tsai in 2016 has proved to be a viable way of preserving Taiwan's core value of civic liberty and its democratic institutions while hedging against China's economic sanctions.

In addition, Tsai implemented new measures within the education guidelines to foster an open and transparent process of curriculum reforms.[20] Scholars of Chinese and Taiwanese history, teachers, parents, and students were invited to form a review committee in devising history textbooks that reflect Taiwan's place in Asia and beyond. In Beijing's view, Tsai's approach, albeit more subtle, was still a gradual process toward "cultural independence" that reduced the China-centered perspective of school textbooks.[21] It is true that the post-reform textbooks draw a clear line between the history of Taiwan and China, but such distinctions provide an opportunity for students to understand Taiwan's relations with Southeast Asia, the Asia-Pacific, and European countries such as Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands during the colonial era.[22] China-Taiwan relations were reconfigured on an equal footing in these textbooks and extended beyond the center-periphery perspective.

More importantly, promoting a more nuanced view of Taiwan's history does not necessarily eliminate Chinese identities, such as religious or Confucian beliefs in everyday life in Taiwan, just as schools in China must address cultural and ethnic diversity in local provinces there as well.

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18 Vladimir Stolojan, "Curriculum Reform and the Teaching of History in High Schools during the Ma Ying-jeou Presidency," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 46, no. 1 (2017): 101–30.

19 Christina Lai, "Dancing with the Wolf: Securitizing China-Taiwan Trade in the ECFA Debate and Beyond," *Asian Security* 15, no. 2 (2019): 140–58.

20 Gerrit van der Wees, "Taiwan's History Textbook Protests: One Year Later," *Diplomat*, August 1, 2016 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/taiwans-history-textbook-protests-one-year-later.

21 Wei-chin Lee, "The Turn of Fortune: Realignment in Taiwan's Domestic Politics and Diplomacy," in *Taiwan's Political Re-alignment and Diplomatic Challenges*, ed. Wei-chin Lee (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 1–30.

22 Christopher R. Hughes, "Negotiating National Identity in Taiwan: Between Nativisation and De-Sinicisation," in *Taiwan's Democracy: Economic and Political Challenges*, ed. Robert Ash, John W. Garver, and Penelope Prime (London: Routledge, 2011), 51.

The emergence of Taiwanese identities does not necessarily exclude a Chinese one. Rather, it is mainly about maintaining freedom and a liberal democracy that is inclusive of all kinds of political views (pro-Taiwan, pro-China, pro–United States, etc.) and ethnic origins.[23] The pluralistic nature of Taiwanese identities helps shape Taiwan's security interests and foreign policy objectives.[24] In this sense, these identities are less about the official name of the country and more about preserving the values inherent in its vibrant society.[25] The DPP and the recently formed New Power Party, for example, promote other progressive values as well, such as gender equality, LGBT rights, and sustainable development.

The KMT. The other major political party in Taiwan, the KMT, does not support Taiwan's formal independence but nevertheless also rejects Beijing's proposal of one country, two systems. As the KMT has suffered several defeats in recent elections, it has begun to reconsider whether to adjust its long-standing calls for closer ties with China and advocate a "localization campaign" to better connect with Taiwanese voters.[26] Even though the party remains open to the possibility of unification talks with China in the future, its political platform is still state-centric in preserving Taiwan as a de jure state for now. For example, in 2010 former president Ma Ying-jeou explicitly stated, "We have been an independent sovereign state ever since 1912…. So there is no reason for this country to declare independence again."[27] His statement represented the mainstream KMT view in competition with the DPP over the future of China-Taiwan relations.

As a representative of this party and its viewpoint, the 2024 KMT presidential candidate, Hou Yu-ih, advocated for closer engagement with China and the United States amid their power struggle in Asia and beyond. He explicitly endorsed the 1992 Consensus, a tacit understanding that both the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party agree on a "one China" framework, even though they have different interpretations of what this means—an initiative that has been a central part of the

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23 John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau, eds., *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

24 Martin Boyle, "Huadu: A Realist Constructivist Account of Taiwan's Anomalous Status," in *Social Construction of State Power*, ed. J. Samuel Barkin (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), 73–100.

25 Kevin Fan Hsu, "Beijing Can't Understand Taiwan Democracy," *Foreign Policy*, December 17, 2015 ~ https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/15/beijing-cant-understand-taiwans-democracy.

26 Lindsay Maizland, "Why China-Taiwan Relations Are So Tense," Council on Foreign Relations, Backgrounder, April 18, 2023 ~ https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-taiwan-relations-tension-us-policy-biden.

27 "President Ma Ying-jeou's Interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour," Office of the President of the Republic of China (Taiwan), April 30, 2010 ~ https://english.president.gov.tw/news/3313.

KMT platform. Hou also pledged to maintain positive relations with the United States and to both uphold Taiwan's democratic rule and strengthen its defense capabilities.[28] Specifically, the KMT proposed a "dialogue and defense" strategy in upholding Taiwan's security and suggested that it would maintain communications with both the United States and China.[29]

As more people have embraced a Taiwanese identity based on civil nationalism rather than on being ethnically Chinese, the KMT platform has also undergone some important changes.[30] A domestic consensus on preserving democracy and autonomy has led the KMT to become more cautious toward China than in previous years.

The TPP. In 2019 former mayor of Taipei Ko Wen-je formed the TPP as an alternative to the DPP and the KMT. During the 2024 campaign, the TPP's policy stance toward China emphasized pragmatic engagement and cultural exchanges. However, it seems unclear to the public what the TPP's middle-of-the-road approach actually looks like. For example, Ko called for a new framework for China-Taiwan interactions but did not explicitly put forward such a vision for both governments.[31]

In 2022, Ko's proposal for building a bridge between Kinmen and Xiamen stoked considerable controversy, given that the former is an outlying island of Taiwan and the latter is China's closest city to Taiwan.[32] The proposed bridge would provide economic benefits for locals, as Kinmen could receive more power and water supplies from China. However, Ko's public statement did not consider the security concerns of such an infrastructure project.[33] Namely, the gray-zone tactics adopted by China in the East and the South China Seas are disrupting stability in the Indo-Pacific region, and a possible blockade scenario by the Chinese navy might undermine the well-being and security of people in Kinmen and Taiwan.

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28 Hou Yu-ih, "Taiwan's Path between Extremes," *Foreign Affairs*, September 18, 2023 ~ https://www.foreignaffairs.com/taiwan/taiwans-path-between-extremes.

29 Shih Hsiao-kuang and Jonathan Chin, "KMT to Forgo Primary for Presidential Pick," *Taipei Times*, March 23, 2023 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/03/23/2003796589.

30 Dennis Lu Chung Weng, "From Dove to Hawk: KMT Transformation and the Quest for New Guardrails in Cross-Strait Relations," Brookings Institution, October 12, 2023 ~ https://www.brookings.edu/articles/from-dove-to-hawk-kmts-transformation-and-the-quest-for-new-guardrails-in-cross-strait-relations.

31 Yimou Lee, "Ko Wen-je Asks China for New Framework for Talks," *Taipei Times*, October 23, 2023 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/10/25/2003808196.

32 Cheng Ming-hsiang, Chen Yu-fu, and Liu Tzu-hsuan, "Critics Blast Ko over Kinmen-Xiamen Bridge," *Taipei Times*, June 21, 2022 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2022/06/21/2003780241.

33 Brian Hioe, "With Kinmen Comments, Ko Wen-je Dives into Cross-Strait Debate," *Diplomat*, July 1, 2022 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/with-kinmen-comments-ko-wen-je-dives-into-cross-strait-debate.

More importantly, Ko's anti-establishment stance has gained support from young people, as he presents himself as a more sincere and less formal figure who differs from traditional politicians.[34] He has also built a significant presence on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, and survey data shows that Ko was preferred to the other two major candidates by voters under 40.[35] This younger generation of voters often holds negative assessments of both the KMT and the DPP. Its members believe these two parties cannot effectively address important domestic issues, such as pension reforms, low wages, and rising housing prices, leading them in part to prefer an unconventional figure.[36] Whether the TPP becomes a strong third party in Taiwan remains to be seen. This new party will need to propose a clear political platform and depend less on Ko's charisma for its long-term development. The ascendance of the TPP also provides insight into the mentality of young adults in Taiwan: while some of them might be upset or cynical about politics, they are strongly attached to democracy and party turnover in local and national elections.

In sum, as more people in Taiwan increasingly identify primarily as Taiwanese, there may be significant implications for traditional political party stances toward China. To maintain peace and stability in China-Taiwan relations, leaders of the DPP, the KMT, and the TPP face a challenge when dealing with a stronger neighbor.[37] All parties face pressure to uphold democratic identities, a liberal lifestyle, and the rule of law in Taiwan while avoiding antagonizing China. The political vision put forward by Lai Ching-te, the newly elected president from the DPP, will have a great impact on Taiwan's democratic governance as well as U.S.-Taiwan relations.

Implications for U.S.-Taiwan Relations

Taiwan's geostrategic location plays a pivotal role in the U.S.-China competition in the Indo-Pacific, and, at the same time, Taiwan's foreign policy and regional initiatives are informed by its own identity and

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34 Brian Hioe and Lev Nachman, "From Green to Blue: The Political History of Ko Wen-je," *Diplomat*, November 28, 2023 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/from-green-to-blue-the-political-history-of-ko-wen-je.

35 "Formosa Poll: 2024 General Election Tracking Poll Wave 50," Formosa Institute, October 6, 2023 ~ http://www.my-formosa.com/DOC_199666.htm.

36 Ching-hsin Yu, "What Are the Key Issues in Taiwan's 2024 Presidential Election?" Brookings Institution, December 20, 2023 ~ https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-are-the-key-issues-in-taiwans-2024-presidential-election.

37 June Teufel Dreyer, "What's at Stake in Upcoming Taiwan Election," Foreign Policy Research Institute, December 8, 2023 ~ https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/12/whats-at-stake-in-upcoming-taiwan-election.

party politics. As China remains assertive over the Taiwan issue, the risks of a miscalculation leading to a major conflict between China and the United States in the Taiwan Strait cannot be ignored. For this reason, the Biden administration would prefer to work with the Taiwanese government to avoid political provocation of China and help maintain the island's liberal and democratic rule.

Given that more people in Taiwan now view themselves as Taiwanese, the security posture and foreign policy adopted by the Taiwanese government will reflect the essential features of Taiwanese identities—ones that are defined by highly liberal values, belief in democracy, and support for basic human rights. The U.S. government and U.S. diplomats will need to recognize the complex nature of identity in Taiwan and the potential it has for building stronger relations. ◈

Small but Mighty: Third Parties in Taiwan's 2024 Election

Lev Nachman

When we think about political parties in Taiwan, we traditionally only consider the two big-tent parties: the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Kuomintang (KMT, or Chinese Nationalist Party). But thanks to a unique electoral system, other small parties have played a critical role in Taiwan's electoral politics ever since democratization. Despite having never won the presidency, small parties have won important seats from mayorships to elected members of the Legislative Yuan. Due to their independence from the two big parties, small parties are able to advocate for or push through narrower or more radical policy issues. One example was the proposal of the New Power Party (NPP) to remove the name "Republic of China" from Taiwan's passport cover to only include the word "Taiwan."[1] Although such a radical policy was never going to pass, it pushed the DPP to at least change the passport cover to increase the size of the name "Taiwan" and make the "Republic of China" smaller. While it was not a radical change, this case shows the potential of small parties to pull the two big parties in directions they otherwise would not go.

No discourse on small parties in Taiwan could begin without acknowledging the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). This small party played a disproportionally large role in the 2024 election in a way that no small party has since perhaps the NPP in 2016. Additionally, no small party has ever seen as much success in a major election as the TPP in 2024. The party now plays the role of kingmaker in the Legislative Yuan despite holding only eight seats. We can no longer ignore the role of third parties in Taiwan, especially considering just how much potential they have for influence in the next four years.

This essay will begin by explaining how small parties are able to compete against big parties in Taiwan's unique electoral system. Next, it will examine how the TPP formed, grew, and became a *tour de force* in

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[1] Brian Hioe, "Proposals by Pan-Green Parties to Redesign Passport and Rebrand China Airlines Advance," *New Bloom Magazine*, May 6, 2020 ~ https://newbloommag.net/2020/05/06/china-airlines-passport-design.

Taiwan's political arena. The essay will then discuss other small parties that have been competitive in the last three major elections, particularly the NPP, and assess their status after the 2024 election. Finally, the essay will conclude with an assessment of what to look for from small parties in the next four years and what small parties represent in Taiwan's growing democratic system.

Taiwan's Electoral System: Designed with Small Parties in Mind

Contrary to what the disproportionate coverage of the DPP and KMT conveys, Taiwan's electoral system was intentionally created to allow small parties to meaningfully compete with larger parties. This is due to Taiwan's unique mixed electoral system. Electoral reform in 2008 provided Taiwanese voters with multiple ways to elect politicians from different parties. Taiwan uses a mixture of first-past-the-post and proportional representation systems in national elections. In the 2024 election, the presidency and 73 of 113 of the Legislative Yuan seats were decided through first past the post, in which members are elected based on who receives the most votes.[2] According to Duverger's Law, this system of voting almost always leads to a two-party political system, which is the structural reason why the DPP and KMT have grown into two fairly moderate political parties just left and right of center within Taiwan's political spectrum.[3] This system is familiar to Americans as it is the same way the U.S. president and members of Congress are elected.

What makes the election of the Legislative Yuan different, however, is that 34 seats are reserved for a proportional representation vote. This additional vote is important because it gives voters the freedom to support any political party they want, even if that party is different from that of the person they picked for president or the Legislative Yuan. For example, if a voter selects the DPP for president and local representative, he or she can additionally vote for another party in the party list. If that party receives 5% of the total party votes cast across Taiwan in this proportional representation system, then it is guaranteed at least two members in the Legislative Yuan. The higher the percentage of the total vote the party obtains, the more representatives it receives. Although 34 seats may not seem like a lot, these

2 Six seats are reserved for Indigenous Taiwanese and are elected through single nontransferable vote. For a full analysis, see Kharis Templeman, "When Do Electoral Quotas Advance Indigenous Representation? Evidence from the Taiwanese Legislature," *Ethnopolitics* 17, no. 5 (2018): 461–84.

3 For a full summary of Taiwan's electoral system and its implications, see Christopher H. Achen and T.Y. Wang, eds., *The Taiwan Voter* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017) ∼ https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvndv9z7.

seats have the potential to be incredibly meaningful, as seen in the outcome of the 2024 election.

How do parties decide who will receive one of these seats? Before the election, they propose a party list with a series of names decided internally by the party. The people ranked one to five on the list are guaranteed to be admitted into the Legislative Yuan if the party receives at least 5% of the vote. This means that many parties will put either politicians that struggle to win in district races at the top of the list, or they will negotiate with certain party members that want guaranteed admission to the Legislative Yuan. Often parties will put more famous candidates that they know their support bases want in the legislature lower on the party list as a way to incentivize their bases to vote for them in the proportional representation vote.

The Rise of Ko and the TPP

Ko Wen-je and the TPP cemented themselves as the biggest little winner in 2024. While Ko may be new to outside observers, he has been a household name in Taiwanese politics since the 2014 Sunflower Movement. The Sunflower Movement was deeply anti-KMT, opposed closer ties with China, and leaned largely toward independence. Supporters quickly flocked to Ko because of his empathy toward and history in the movement.[4] When Ko ran for mayor of Taipei in 2014, it was mainly this pan-green-leaning base of support that mobilized and campaigned for him.[5] The DPP backed his candidacy in 2014 and did not run a candidate against him. Ko even campaigned for Tsai Ing-wen, the DPP candidate, in 2014 and endorsed many other DPP and NPP candidates. He stood on stage with outspoken pro-independence politicians, including Freddy Lim. For most analysts and observers, Ko was considered at the very least pan-green.

Once elected as mayor, however, Ko quickly became a different kind of politician from what those who elected him had imagined. He was responsible for hosting the 2017 Summer Universiade Games, which involved hosting student athletes from China. His rhetoric "*liang an, yi*

[4] Brian Hioe and Lev Nachman, "From Green to Blue: The Political History of Ko Wen-je," *Diplomat*, November 28, 2023 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/from-green-to-blue-the-political-history-of-ko-wen-je.

[5] In Taiwan, the two ends of the political spectrum are defined by the colors blue and green. Blue infers pro-unification or pro-China leanings, while green infers pro-independence or pro-Taiwan leanings. For a full explanation, see Jonathan Sullivan and Lev Nachman, *Taiwan: A Contested Democracy Under Threat* (Newcastle: Agenda Publishing, 2024). See also Lev Nachman, "Misalignment between Social Movements and Political Parties in Taiwan's 2016 Election: Not All Grass Roots Are Green," *Asian Survey* 58, no. 5 (2018): 874–97.

jia qin" (two sides of the strait, one family) prompted doubts and discomfort among his pan-green base.[6] He also endeavored to create a new relationship with Shanghai's city government, strengthening city-to-city relations.

By 2018, the DPP no longer endorsed Ko and ran an opposition candidate for mayor. In the end, he won re-election by less than 1%.[7] After this election, his relationship with both the DPP and pan-green legislators began to drastically change, becoming increasingly antagonistic. Even Ko's old allies in the NPP began to question their ability to work with him, leading to deep divides within the pan-green camp.

In 2019, Ko founded the TPP and recruited pan-blue politicians who were looking for new political vehicles. Many former KMT members flocked to his party, and he made Huang Shan-shan, a former pro-unification New Party member, his number-two person.[8] Ko also worked closely with Terry Gou, the former CEO of Foxconn and long-time KMT heavyweight (who also ran for president in 2024), throughout 2019 and 2020 and recruited a number of politicians connected to Gou, including current Hsinchu mayor Ann Kao. Given the influx of KMT capital and recruitment into the TPP, Ko became viewed as more pan-blue than pan-green. In the 2024 election, his party won five seats in the legislature through the proportional representation vote by receiving 11% of the total party vote.

Ko does not describe himself as pan-blue or pan-green. His appeal is that he claims to be above blue-green politics.[9] His popularity, especially in the 2024 election, was built off of trying to rise above Taiwan's structural question of its contested territory and relationship with China. Instead, Ko wanted to create a third-party option for those who were frustrated with the two big parties. He is also known for his quirky, blunt language, which appeals to young voters.

Despite Ko's best efforts to rise above blue-green politics, it is impossible for Taiwan politicians not to hold a stance on cross-strait relations. Unsurprisingly, in the 2024 presidential election cycle, Ko and the TPP came out as adamantly pro–status quo. Unlike the DPP's approach, however, Ko's stance is more similar to that of the KMT, which favors creating stronger

6 "Chinese Official Says Both Sides of Taiwan Strait Are 'One Family,'" Focus Taiwan, July 5, 2019 ~ https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/201907050022.

7 Richard C. Bush, "Taiwan's Local Election, Explained," Brookings, Commentary, December 5, 2018 ~ https://www.brookings.edu/articles/taiwans-local-elections-explained.

8 Hioe, "Proposals by Pan-Green Parties to Redesign Passport and Rebrand China Airlines Advance."

9 Thompson Chau, "Ko Wen-je, the Maverick Seeking to Break Taiwan's Two-Party Dominance," *Nikkei Asia*, January 6, 2024 ~ https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Taiwan-elections/Ko-Wen-je-the-maverick-seeking-to-break-Taiwan-s-two-party-dominance.

relations with China to maintain the status quo. For example, Ko has proposed reviving the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement, which he originally protested in 2014 as part of the Sunflower Movement, as a way to create ties with China. He has also suggested building a bridge between Kinmen and China.[10]

Ko began the recent election cycle in a strong position because of how popular he and his off-brand politics had become, especially with young voters. Although for most of the election cycle he never polled in first place, at his peak he was in a close running for second place with the KMT. For the first time since 2000, a third-party candidate was making a meaningful splash in a national election. Talk of cooperation between Ko and Hou Yu-ih, the KMT presidential candidate, rocked media headlines around the world. If such cooperation had occurred, it would have been incredibly difficult for the DPP to overcome. Although a TPP and KMT alliance would not have been a sure thing, there were ways for their campaigns to capture both the dissatisfied median voter and the pan-blue base of support that would have overwhelmed the DPP's support base.

For months, Taiwan watched in anticipation as Ko, Hou, and Terry Gou, a former KMT member who turned independent, danced back and forth over a unified pan-blue opposition ticket against Lai Ching-te (also known as William Lai) and the DPP. Former president Ma Ying-jeou—a politician Ko once protested against—even tried to broker a deal between Ko and Hou. The drama was palpable until it reached a climactic end in late November 2023.[11] Ko, Hou, Gou, Ma, and Eric Chu, the KMT party chair, held a press conference where the pan-blue opposition alliance dissolved on live television. Ko and Hou struck an antagonistic tone toward each other, and Ma and Chu seemed exhausted at the idea of further coordination. Although Gou was all but ready to drop out, in the end collaboration between the KMT and TPP failed, leading the TPP to run independently from the KMT. For the rest of the race, Ko focused on capturing as much of the median vote as possible.

In the election, Ko outperformed expectations. He received 26% of the vote, and the TPP received 22% of the party vote. This demonstrates that the majority of Ko voters also voted for the TPP, with only a small percentage not voting for both the candidate and the party. Although Ko came in third

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10 Jason Pan, "Ko Wen-je Criticized over Call to Restart CSSTA Talks," *Taipei Times*, June 22, 2023 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/06/22/2003801986.

11 Vincent Cheng and Li Hsun Tsai, "Taiwan's Failed Opposition Alliance in Presidential Election," *CommonWealth*, November 11, 2023 ~ https://english.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=3571.

after Hou and Lai, this was still a huge victory as a third-party candidate. Based off previous political science research showing that the DPP and KMT each have about 30%–35% of the public's support, most of his votes likely came from median, undecided, and unaffiliated voters. The result means that Ko was largely successful at capturing the votes of anti-establishment citizens and those tired of the two big parties. It also demonstrates that the DPP and KMT failed to appeal to voters outside of their core support. Lai only appealed to core DPP backers and was largely unable to win over the median voter base that Tsai did in 2020.

More important, however, than Ko's strong third-place finish is the 22% of the party vote the TPP received, doubling its share in 2020. Although this only increased the party's number of representatives in the Legislative Yuan by three, it still drastically alters the makeup of the legislature. The DPP lost its majority, but the KMT also failed to gain a majority of the seats. Thus, the eight seats that the TPP controls have the potential to be deciding, "kingmaking" votes that ultimately pass policies. Despite being a small party, the TPP has successfully created a meaningful political voice for itself in Taiwan's politics.

The ultimate question, however, is who will the TPP side with? One of the biggest frustrations for analysts is the TPP's lack of clear policy proposals and political stances. It is ultimately unclear under which conditions the TPP will cooperate with the KMT versus the DPP. The eight politicians elected from the TPP also vary widely in their own individual politics, and it is not guaranteed that the TPP will always vote in a unified bloc. Instead, we may see some TPP politicians vote with one party, while others vote for another. Although the TPP spent most of the presidential campaign fiercely criticizing the DPP and flirting with the KMT, it is possible that now that the election is over there will be changes in heart among all sides.

A second big question is what will happen to Ko? The TPP may try to find him a meaningful position, but without an elected post, Ko's ability to exert his influence in politics will be minimized. Instead, he will rely on the eight TPP legislators to advocate for him. But in the same way that these eight have their own different politics, their loyalty to Ko also varies. Whether all eight TPP legislators will consistently defer to his decisions or act independently is a critical sign to look for, not just for electoral politics but also for understanding the health of the TPP as an organization. Whether the TPP can grow beyond Ko as its leader will be a critical challenge for the small party to overcome over the next four years. And what Ko does with

his party's newfound position will drastically change its ability to grow and evolve before the next local elections in 2026.

The New Power Party: In with the Old, Out with the New

Before the TPP, the NPP was Taiwan's small party that had captured the world's attention. The NPP started during the Sunflower Movement in 2014. A group of activists sought to take advantage of the momentum built up by dissatisfaction with the DPP and fears of Beijing's influence in Taiwan to create their own progressive, pro-independence party—the NPP.[12] Unlike the TPP, which formed by recruiting established politicians, the NPP was truly new. No one in the party had ever run for office or been involved in formal politics before. Yet less than a year after its founding, it ran in the 2016 election, won three district council races, and received 7% of the party vote, giving the party two extra seats. The NPP's five seats from 2016–20 made it Taiwan's third-largest party.

From 2020 to 2024, however, the NPP struggled to maintain its momentum in politics, and the party has verged on collapse.[13] The story of how the NPP went from having one of the strongest electoral starts of any movement party in Taiwan to struggling to survive is complex, involving institutional design, factional infighting, and a complicated relationship with the DPP and Ko Wen-je. Ultimately, it is important to note that the majority of politicians in the NPP have all left the party. Most of them flocked to the DPP, and many ran for election under its mantle in 2024. One, Huang Kuo-chang, turned instead to Ko and has since joined the TPP and re-entered the Legislative Yuan through the TPP's party vote.

Although in the 2020 election the NPP had been able to secure three seats through the party vote, it was not set up for a strong third-party national run in 2023–24. The party fielded two district-level candidates, both in Hsinchu. Both candidates ran in races that were also contested by the DPP, KMT, and TPP, making these four-way races with a small number of votes. In both elections, the NPP came in last. In the party vote, it only received 2.5%—one-third of what it had received in the 2020 election. The NPP will thus no longer have a presence in the Legislative Yuan and receive government funding as a political organization.

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12 Thomas Gold and Sebastian Veg, eds., *Sunflowers and Umbrellas: Social Movements, Expressive Practices, and Political Culture in Taiwan and Hong Kong*, China Research Monograph 76 (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 2020).

13 Lev Nachman, "Routine Problems: Movement Party Institutionalization and the Case of Taiwan's New Power Party," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 58 (2023): 537–56.

The NPP is not likely to disappear, however. Just because a small party loses a major election does not mean that it will collapse or fold. On the contrary, small parties in Taiwan have a long history of existing in abatement. For example, the Taiwan Green Party has not had a successful election in over a decade, yet it still has a small but loyal support base and continues to run in every local and national election. The People First Party, despite not having major electoral success since 2016, has run in both 2020 and 2024, although it has not won any seats. Even the Taiwan Statebuilding Party, which was forecast in 2020 to be the next major third party but lost in both the 2022 and 2024 elections, continues to campaign and rally for its supporters.

The Future of Small Parties in Taiwan

The TPP's major success in 2024 cements its role as a small but meaningful third party in Taiwan politics. Unlike the other small parties that also made it onto the 2024 ballot, the TPP will have a disproportionate voice for the next four years. Despite carrying on, other third parties, such as the NPP, Taiwan Statebuilding Party, and the People First Party, will play only a minor role in setting policy, if one at all.

What do Taiwan's small parties imply about the quality of the island's democracy? Although many see Ko's approach to politics as populist and perhaps unhealthy for Taiwan's democracy, third parties are in theory a net positive. Small parties allow for meaningful political competition and participation from party organizations other than just the DPP or KMT. Even though small parties typically remain small, the TPP is proving that having a third option is not just appealing to voters but also something that may change the shape of the electoral landscape in Taiwan's future. Although a strong showing for a small party was not new with the most recent election cycle, the way in which voters have unified around one small party shows genuine discontent with the current establishment parties. If parties other than the DPP and KMT continue to grow and play a prominent role, analysts will need to rethink how to theorize and predict Taiwan's domestic and international politics. Despite their seemingly niche appeal, small parties in Taiwan are here to stay, and it will be critical to watch over the next four years how the TPP's kingmaker role plays out. ◈

"Cultural Taiwanese" and "Political Taiwanese": Two Sides of the Coin

Hsin-I Cheng

At the Asia-Pacific Forward Forum held in Taipei on September 11, 2023, former Singaporean foreign minister George Yong-boon Yeo proposed his (in)famous "Chinese commonwealth." In response to a young Taiwanese who claimed to be "Taiwanese, not Chinese," Yeo interpreted this person's statement as mistakenly mixing a "political feeling" with cultural connection.[1] Presuming that the political and cultural aspects of identity can be cleanly separated from each other erases the complex processes of identity development and expression. On the contrary, the political and cultural realms of identification are intimately interconnected, layered with history, and accomplished through communication. Constructing the current and future identity of Taiwan is an ongoing journey of reconciling with the past, a process uniquely and unevenly felt by the diverse peoples who arrived there at various points in history. To separate cultural identity from political identity disregards the complex process of identity development among the Taiwanese and oversimplifies their long quest for the right to self-determination. This essay argues that cultural matters are political matters: Taiwanese identity has always been and will continue to be a multicultural one, imbued with local, regional, and global geopolitical power dynamics.

Cultural Infusion through Trade

Situated between the maritime routes of Europe, Asia, and Africa, Formosa/Taiwan has experienced vibrant trade as befits its strategic and cosmopolitan location since as early as the 1500s, with Chinese traders

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NOTE: Parts of this essay draw on the author's book *Cultivating Membership in Taiwan and Beyond: Relational Citizenship* (Lanham: Lexington, 2021).

[1] William Stanton, "A Chinese Commonwealth: A Proposal Singapore Itself Should Best Pursue," *Taiwan News*, October 5, 2023 ~ https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/5014339.

and fishers adeptly mixing Aboriginal languages and Chinese in trading activities. Because Taiwan was an unclaimed island at the intersection of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, it became a sought-after prize among the European powers. Historically, Taiwan has been partially, and at times fully, occupied by both Eastern and Western powers. It was not until the 1990s that the Taiwanese were able to select their own leadership. People on Taiwan have long adapted to different political regimes while hybridizing their distinctive identity.

From the Dutch, Spanish, Ming loyalists, and Japanese to the Chinese nationalists (Kuomintang, or KMT) who left China after the civil war, each foreign power left a cultural legacy on Taiwan's land and peoples. After the Dutch East India Company arrived in the early 1600s, it encouraged Chinese emigration to Taiwan to settle the land, which belonged to Aboriginal peoples. This strategy enabled the company to cultivate the land, maximize revenue through heavy taxes, and suppress the Taiwanese Aborigines, who resisted the company's exploitation.[2] Tension arose between the Han settlers and the Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, primarily hunters whose living standards quickly deteriorated when Taiwan became a Han Chinese colony.[3] Following the 1663 arrival of the formidable Chinese pirate and Ming loyalist Iquan (Zheng Zhilong) and his son Zheng Chenggong (also known as Koxinga), the Zheng family began building a strong navy and encouraged more Chinese immigration to Taiwan.[4]

Both the Dutch and Zheng regimes made concerted efforts to influence Taiwanese culture. Dutch missionaries accompanied the military-established schools to educate local men and women.[5] They introduced the Bible to the Aborigines and created Xin Gang Wen, a hybrid language between Dutch and the local patois. Zheng Chenggong brought Sino-centered education and the "Chinese elite culture of Confucian values" to Taiwan,[6] building schools that focused on "male cultural and

2 Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); and Shelley Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters: Small Island, Global Powerhouse* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011).

3 Denny Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

4 Ja Ian Chong, "Rediscovering an Old Relationship: Taiwan and Southeast Asia's Long, Shared History," National Bureau of Asian Research, Brief, January 11, 2018 ⇝ https://www.nbr.org/publication/rediscovering-an-old-relationship-taiwan-and-southeast-asias-long-shared-history.

5 X.M. You, "Nü zi jiao yu yu nüxing jue se duo yuan hua" [Women's Education and Diversification of Women's Roles], *Newsletter of Taiwan Studies* 94 (2016): 4–7.

6 Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters*, 16.

political leadership."[7] Concerned about foreign powers, the Qing court gained more control over Taiwan and implemented the examination system and literary Chinese learning with a limited number of Taiwanese.[8] This small literate elite population seeded Taiwanese consciousness later as an independent nation.[9] Starting in the mid-1800s, English Presbyterian missionaries, American merchants, and Spanish priests became active among the Taiwanese local population.[10] Missionaries also set up schools and print shops, which influenced the local cultural practices.

During this time, Taiwan remained culturally and politically distinct from China. After the Sino-Japan war in 1894–95, Taiwan was ceded to Japan for half a century. Communities of Taiwanese *sekimin* (Taiwanese who registered as Japanese citizens and engaged in commercial activities) became sizable in southern China and parts of Southeast Asia. The volume of interactions between Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and Japan increased as a result of colonial administrators' efforts to keep Taiwanese sekimin culturally close to Taiwan in order to help circulate information on Southeast Asia in Taiwanese news publications.[11] With this policy, Taiwan's cultural identity became further integrated with that of its neighbors.

Developing Taiwan's Consciousness through Political and Cultural Activities

With a long tradition of hunting, fishing, and trading as islanders, Taiwan's transnational characteristics, mixed with Eastern and Western cultural expressions, continued to develop under Japanese colonization. Although the Japanese colonial government launched various assimilation efforts,[12] the Taiwanese gentry and learned elites overseas spearheaded resistance against the oppressive and discriminatory colonial policies.

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7 John E. Wills Jr., "The Seventeenth-Century Transformation: Taiwan under the Dutch and the Cheng Regime," in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 99.

8 Harry J. Lamley, "Taiwan under Japanese Rule, 1895–1945: The Vicissitudes of Colonialism," in Rubinstein, *Taiwan: A New History*, 201–60.

9 Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History*; and Fujii Shozo, "The Formation of Taiwanese Identity and the Cultural Policy of Various Outside Regimes," in *Taiwan under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1895–1945*, ed. Ping-hui Liao and David Der-wei Wang (New York: Columbia University Press. 2006), 62–77.

10 Peng Ming-min, *A Taste of Freedom: Memoirs of a Taiwanese Independence Leader* (Manchester: Camphor Press, 2017).

11 Chung Shu-Min, "Taiwan zong du fu de 'nan ji nan yang' zheng ce–yi shi ye fu zhu wei zhong xin" [Japan's Taiwan Governor's Policy toward "Southeast Asia and Southern China" Was Centered around Supporting Industries], *Historical Inquiry* 34 (2004): 149–94.

12 Leo Ching, *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

They began to think of Formosa as culturally distinct from Japan as well as politically autonomous from China.[13] Political and social movements persistently expressed these struggles for self-rule and equal treatment. To oppose the island's cession to Japan, Taiwanese elites declared Taiwan's independence as "Island Republic" in May of 1895 and sought international support, although they failed to prevent Japan's colonization.[14] From 1912 to 1915, members of the Taiwanese "collaborationist gentry" (*goyo shinshi*) leveraged their influence and initiated the movement to establish the Taichung Middle School, intending it to be on par with middle schools in Japan.[15] On October 27, 1930, an anti-colonial uprising organized by the Seediq Aborigines in Musha led to indiscriminate killings by the colonial government, nearly wiping out the tribe.[16] These events are representative of the island dwellers' long-standing praxis to protect their way of life and cultivation of a collective nationalistic consciousness. Throughout the occupation, Formosans resisted the colonial regime by staging uprisings and seeking democratic reforms. Japan's colonialization of Taiwan was motivated by self-interest and accompanied by significant atrocities. At the same time, however, it introduced cultural practices emphasizing adherence to law and order, modern health concepts, civic education, and democratic organizations.[17]

After World War II, the Allies decided to reinstate Taiwan to the Republic of China led by Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Party, the KMT. The nationalist mainlanders viewed themselves in the superior position of freeing Taiwan from Japanese colonial imperialism.[18] Formosans, despite their resentment of discriminatory treatment and exclusionary laws under the colonial government, recognized that they had a more prosperous economy, advanced lifestyle, and higher education than the mainland soldiers, most of whom came from rural Chinese villages. These two peoples

13 Edward I-Te Chen, "Formosan Political Movements under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1914–1937," *Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1972): 477–97.

14 Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History.*

15 Wakabayashi Masahiro, "A Perspective on Studies of Taiwanese Political History: Reconsidering the Postwar Japanese Historiography of Japanese Colonial Rule in Taiwan," in Liao and Wang, *Taiwan under Japanese Colonial Rule*.

16 Michael Berry, *The Musha Incident: A Reader on the Indigenous Uprising in Colonial Taiwan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022).

17 Anne Booth and Kent Deng, "Japanese Colonialism in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of World History* 28, no. 1 (2017): 61–98; and Yun-han Chu and Jih-wen Lin, "Political Development in 20th-Century Taiwan: State-Building, Regime Transformation and the Construction of National Identity," *China Quarterly*, no. 165 (2001): 102–29.

18 John J. Metzler, *Taiwan's Transformation: 1895 to Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

had had very different historical experiences, and the social, political, and cultural gaps between them were substantial.[19]

Formosans expected to be treated equally by Chiang's Nationalist Party but instead were discriminated against in employment opportunities, salary, and political representation. They watched as the KMT extracted the island's wealth to supply its struggling forces on the mainland. General resentment toward the mainlanders was reflected in the popular expression that "the vicious dogs might have been chased away, but slovenly pigs had replaced them."[20] On February 27, 1947, a widow named Lin Chiang-mai, who was selling cigarettes on the black market to make a living, was brutally injured by agents from the Monopoly Bureau. The next day approximately two thousand demonstrators walked to the Monopoly Bureau to demand accountability, only to find that the entrance was closed. The guards at the Governor General's office later fired on the protestors, and conflict erupted, resulting in many Taiwanese deaths. In turn, mainlanders' inability to speak Japanese was a marker for the protesters to resist against mainlanders.[21] Both elite and non-elite Taiwanese participated in this event, later known as the "February 28th incident" or "228 incident." A committee of prominent Taiwanese organized to ask for an appropriate settlement, which included demands for an autonomous Taiwan, inclusion of Taiwanese representatives in government and industry ownership, economic reform, and reduced police powers. Chiang considered these actions "treason" and sent mainland troops and police forces to Taiwan. Shootings, robberies, and rapes of civilians persisted until the end of March.

The 228 massacre ignited pro-independence movements such as the 1948 Formosan League for Reemancipation. Based in Hong Kong, but with close connections to the United States and China, the Formosan League for Reemancipation asked the United Nations to assume control of the island and remove the KMT from power in Taiwan until a later resolution. Meanwhile, after the retreat of the Chinese nationalist leadership to Taiwan in 1949, the KMT ushered in a 38-year period of martial law on the island known as the White Terror. Hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese and Aboriginal intellectuals were executed and imprisoned in the name of rooting out "Communist insurgents." Many fled and later organized from overseas for the cause of Taiwanese independence.

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19 Chu and Lin, "Political Development in 20th-Century Taiwan."

20 Gary Davison, *A Short History of Taiwan: The Case for Independence* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 77.

21 Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History*.

Under the KMT, Indigenous Taiwanese culture, including languages, was suppressed, while Mandarin and traditional Chinese knowledge (i.e., Confucianism) were emphasized to construct a Han-centered national identity.[22] Sinification, as a form of cultural imperialism, was promoted in the mass media and educational systems.[23] Thus, Taiwanese peoples experienced a grave sense of historical amnesia that delayed and further complicated the development of any cultural and national identity. All the while, stronger demands for democracy and support for *dangwai* (outside the KMT party) political activities began to take hold. In 1964, Pen Ming-min, Hsieh Tsung-min, and Wei Ting-chao authored the "Declaration of Formosan Self-Salvation," advocating for Taiwan's independence and the creation of a constitution protecting human rights, bridging ethnic divisions, and practicing true democracy.[24] When the declaration was printed, they were arrested.

Knowledge-sharing mediums such as print media were a key battleground between the champions of democracy and the authoritarian KMT. In 1979, a rally in Kaohsiung, supported by the activist-ran magazine *Meilidao* (Formosa), led to a violent conflict between demonstrators and the police. The slogan "democracy, self-determination, save Taiwan" (*minzhu*, *zijue*, *jiu Taiwan*), which had been circulating throughout the 1970s, took root with the founding of the Democratic Progressive Party in the 1980s. The groundswell of support for democratization culminated in 1996 when Lee Teng-hui, a native, Hokkien-speaking Taiwanese, who had been educated in Japan and the United States, became the first democratically elected Taiwanese president.

Under Lee's presidency, the idea of self-determination for which so many had fought since the 1970s finally transformed into reality with the "Taiwanization of Taiwan" (*Taiwan de bentuhua*).[25] *Bentuhua* (Taiwanization) describes Taiwan's postcolonial subjectivity that integrates multiple global cultural influences.[26] The new secondary school textbook series, *Getting to Know Taiwan* (*Renshi Taiwan*), represented a major shift

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22 Allen Chun, "Democracy as Hegemony, Globalization as Indigenization, or the 'Culture' in Taiwanese National Politics," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 35, no. 1 (2000): 7–27.

23 Shozo, "The Formation of Taiwanese Identity."

24 Peng, *A Taste of Freedom*.

25 J. Bruce Jacobs, "'Taiwanization' in Taiwan's Politics," in *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua*, ed. John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 17.

26 Yoshihisa Amae and Jens Damm, "'Whither Taiwanization?' State, Society and Cultural Production in the New Era," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40, no. 1 (2011): 3–17.

in how Taiwanese youth understood themselves, with Taiwan taking center stage in their identities and relationships to the world rather than being relegated to the periphery. As Allen Chun opined, "democratization in Taiwan appears to be less a series of institutional changes per se than the end result of a contestation at the level of cultural meaning."[27] In 2000, Taiwan native Chen Shui-bian was elected as the first president from the Democratic Progressive Party. His efforts included educational reforms such as devoting resources to teaching Hokkien, Hakka, and Austronesian (Taiwanese Aboriginal) languages. Under Chen's administration, the word "Taiwan" was added to the passport in 2003. This self-naming act communicated to the Taiwanese and the countries they visited that they are people who come from Taiwan. The Taiwanese identity is political, social, and cultural, interwoven within a complex web of history and geopolitics.

Further Cementing Transnational Cultural Identity

The wave of Taiwan's democratization from the 1970s through the 1990s was infused with transnational influences. Taiwanese expatriates, many of whom had been oppressed or prosecuted by the KMT, played a crucial role in actualizing Taiwan's democracy by publicizing the government's authoritarian brutality to the international community.[28] Meanwhile, many Taiwanese abroad, as well as Taiwan's political leaders at home, were influenced and inspired by struggles such as the U.S. civil rights movement and global Indigenous rights activism. This period also brought demographic transformation to the island nation. These transnational influences cultivated a multicultural identity among the Taiwanese through political means. This is particularly pronounced in the localized activism that connected Taiwan to a global audience. This intersecting and fluid transcultural identity is evident in the sense of belonging among recent immigrants and in the Indigenous self-identification movements.

Since the 1980s, many Taiwanese men have found wives overseas, leading to a significant influx of women immigrating to Taiwan to join the families of

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27 Chun, "Democracy as Hegemony," 21.

28 Chang Ling, "Tai wan xin yi min zai Mei guo de wen hua ren tong" [Taiwanese Immigrants' Cultural Identification in the United States], in *Tai wan de xian dai hua he wen hua ren tong* [Modernity and Cultural Identity in Taiwan], ed. Lu Hanchao (River Edge: Ba Fang Wen Hua, 2001), 208–37.

their husbands.[29] While these newcomers hail from various nations, including Cambodia, China, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam, in public discourse they are often referred to as one "ethnic" group called "new immigrants." As of 2018, Taiwan had welcomed more than 650,000 new citizens (3% of the total population), who arrived through marriage or as skilled employees. This led to the new immigrant population (*xin zhu min*) surpassing the Indigenous population in Taiwan.[30] However, this population has not attracted any significant attention from politicians or concrete policies to improve their lives.[31]

Upon their arrival, many newcomers have faced legal and cultural discrimination in their private and public lives. Negative media representations further deepened societal prejudices against them.[32] Political demands, made in collaboration with local civil and advocate groups, have brought increased rights and openness. For example, the term for a marital newcomer was changed from "foreign bride" (*wai ji xin niang*) to "foreign spouse" (*wai ji pei ou*) to "new immigrant" (*xin zhu min*). Additional advocacy efforts have aimed at enhancing the rights of new immigrants, giving them greater equity, inclusion, and connectivity in Taiwan.[33] These movements have incorporated transnational elements and experiences into their development and implementation.[34]

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29 Department of Statistics, Ministry of the Interior (Taiwan), "Marriage Registration Report Categorized by Nationality, Age, and Educational Level," 2018 ~ https://www.moi.gov.tw/stat/node.as px?sn=6826&Page=1.

30 Ibid.

31 Kuo Wu-ku, "Chu le Lin Yue-zhen 'Cheng nuo tui dong xin er dai mu yu jiao yu,' 2024 zong tong da xuan ge dang can xuan ren hai you na xie xin zhu min zheng ce?" [Besides Lin Yue-zhen's "Promise to Promote Mother Tongue Education for the Second-Generation Immigrants," What Policies for New Immigrants Were Proposed by the Major 2024 Presidential Candidates?], News Lens, September 19, 2023 ~ https://www.thenewslens.com/article/191929; and Ko Jui-rey, Tseng Chih-hsin, and Tsai Cheng-chieh, "Wo guo xin zhu min zheng zhi can yu ji qi dui zheng zhi ying xiang zhi yan jiu" [A Research on the Political Participation and Its Substantial Influences of New Immigrants in Taiwan], *Journal of Homeland Security and Border Management* 35 (2021): 29–103.

32 Hsin-I Cheng, "On Migrant Workers' Social Status in Taiwan: A Critical Analysis of Mainstream News Discourse," *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 2509–28; Tzu-Ting Huang, "Media Representation of Taiwan's New Female Immigrants in Documentaries," *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations* 1, no. 2 (2015): 333–50; and Yi-Han Wang, "From 'Farming Daughters' to 'Virgin Brides': Representation of Vietnamese Immigrant Wives in Taiwan," *Gender, Technology and Development* 14, no. 2 (2010): 217–39.

33 "Zai di guo ji hua xin zhu min wen hua zheng ce de zai si kao" [Glocalization: Rethink Cultural Policies on New Immigrants], New Society for Taiwan, April 18, 2016 ~ http://www.taiwansig.tw/index.php/%E6%94%BF%E7%AD%96%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E5%AE%89%E5%85%A8/7085-%E5%9C%A8%E5%9C%B0%E5%9C%8B%E9%9A%9B%E5%8C%96%EF%BC%8C%E6%96%B0%E4%BD%8F%E6%B0%91%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96%E6%94%BF%E7%AD%96%E7%9A%84%E5%86%8D%E6%80%9D%E8%80%83.

34 Hsin-I Cheng, *Cultivating Membership in Taiwan and Beyond: Relational Citizenship* (Lanham: Lexington, 2021).

As Taiwan matures further into a transcultural space, its citizens continue to unpack their various intersecting identities. Marginalized groups collaborate with other communities in seeking recognition and equal treatment, including land rights. Yang Yao-song, who has served the Atayal peoples with the Zhi-Shan Foundation for more than two decades, expressed the profound impacts that the 2014 Sunflower Movement had on the rural Indigenous youth who "recognize dominance, oppression and inequality when they see it."[35] While these young people are in the initial stage of learning about their Indigenous cultural heritage, they are becoming more politically active, working on revitalizing the cultural ways of living in their villages. Indeed, mixed (*yuan han hun xie*) and urban Indigenous activist Lai Wei-li, also known as Kai Limadjakan, became interested in the struggles over the well-being of Indigenous peoples after participating in advocacy for the environment, migrant workers, and LGBTQ rights.[36] Youth in Taiwan, Indigenous or not, recognize that the decolonization process involves both cultural and political contestation.

Indigenous peoples in Taiwan have endured long struggles for basic human rights, such as self-identification and land justice. The Plains Indigenous (Pingpu peoples) rectification movement, involving complicated negotiations for resources and power, started in the 1990s.[37] Working within the international human rights framework, Indigenous activists have made strides in obtaining increasing acknowledgment of Taiwanese Indigenous cultural and political rights on the island. For example, starting in 2013, the Pingpu Siraya tribe mobilized to revive their culture while fighting to be recognized as one of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples. Almost a decade later, in 2022, the Siraya people were recognized as Indigenous. This rectification signifies that the Siraya people's identity ascribed to them is finally aligned with their avowed identity. This is yet another example illustrating that cultural and political identification processes are mutually informative in the development of self-identification.

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35 Author's interview with Yang Yao-song via phone, October 6, 2023.

36 Chou Chia-yao, "Hui bu luo? Wo shi shei? Wei shen me yao rong ru? 'Yuan zhu min' shi yi zhong shen fen hai shi ren tong?" [Return to the Village? Who Am I? Why Should I Assimilate? Is the Name "Indigenous People" an Identity or Identification?], Right Plus, February 10, 2023 ~ https://rightplus.org/2023/02/10/identity.

37 Jolan Hsieh, *Collective Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Identity-Based Movement of Plains Indigenous in Taiwan* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Shih Cheng-feng, "Tai wan zhuan xing zheng yi suo mian dui de ke ti" [Challenges Faced in Taiwan's Transitional Justice Work], *Taiwan International Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (2014): 31–62; and Xie Ruo-lan, "Tai wan yuan zhu min quan li fa zhan yu xian kuang" [The Current State of Taiwanese Indigenous People's Empowerment], Ministry of Education (Taiwan), Human Rights and Transitional Justice Education Resources Center, February 27, 2019 ~ https://hre.pro.edu.tw/article/3863.

Continuous Negotiation with Both Cultural and Political Understandings

The land of Formosa has nurtured diverse peoples and ways of life. Its current identity is a manifestation of the enduring remnants of policies and values from each foreign conquest. Paelabang Danapan, the former minister of the Council of Indigenous Peoples, pointed out the benefits of emulating the Indigenous point of view and examining Taiwan's experiences from a cultural, rather than a political, perspective as an island nation.[38] The cultural worldview of Taiwan's Indigenous people centers on an intimate relationship with nature, with the mountains and oceans marking their cultural and political ancestry.[39] Taiwanese people, including the Indigenous tribes, have endured the oppression of multiple foreign powers and lost many aspects of their cultural heritage.[40]

Today, it is no longer enough for the Taiwanese to dis-identify with China. Rather, engaging in collective cultural healing and memory reconstruction is the only way to articulate the meaning of living in Taiwan—an outcome of being situated in a unique political position laden with past and ongoing traumas, trials, and triumphs. In the process of (re)creating their layered hybridized identities, the Taiwanese sense of their cultural and political selves is inseparable. To maintain authenticity, the ways Taiwanese self-identify (avowed identity) and the ways they wish to be identified (ascribed identity) must be given space to align. This process cannot be separated into "political feeling" versus "cultural feeling," as former Singaporean foreign minister Yeo suggested. On the contrary, this messy process can only be understood and more clearly charted when both the cultural and political realms of lived experiences are considered as part of Taiwanese people living out their identities in a plural and crystallizing manner. ◈

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38 Chen Chen-I, "Zhuan ti yan jiang: Sun Ta-chuan—Tai wan ji shi jie de li wu: Yi ge yuan zhu min de guan dian" [Special Talk: Sun Ta-chuan—Taiwan's Gift to the World: From a Taiwanese Indigenous Person's Perspective], National Taiwan University, Graduate Institute of Taiwan Literature, March 12, 2021 ~ https://gitl.ntu.edu.tw/%E3%80%90%E5%B0%88%E9%A1%8C%E6%BC%94%E8%AC%9B%EF%BC%9A%E5%AD%AB%E5%A4%A7%E5%B7%9D__%E5%8F%B0%E7%81%A3%E7%B5%A6%E4%B8%96%E7%95%8C%E7%9A%84%E7%A6%AE%E7%89%A9%EF%BC%9A%E4%B8%80%E5%80%8B%E5%8E%9F%E4%BD%8F.

39 Author's interview with Yang Yao-song via phone, October 6, 2023.

40 Chen, "Zhuan ti yan jiang: Sun Ta-chuan."

Demographic Demise? Taiwan's Aging and Shrinking Population

Michael Mazza

Asia's most vibrant democracy is rapidly aging. The youthful energy that powered a democracy movement in the 1980s and 1990s and asserted Taiwanese identity in the 2010s is dissipating. Taiwan has always been a small country—but it is soon to be a shrinking one, with its population projected to peak in 2030. The implications for Taiwan's future vitality, and indeed for its survival, are profound.

This essay first elucidates ongoing demographic shifts in Taiwan, emphasizing changes in population size (it is shrinking) and population structure (it is aging). It then explores how those shifts are bringing about societal changes and imposing economic and national security challenges for which there are no easy answers. The essay concludes with a discussion of the ways in which Taiwan might address these impending adversities that highlights the opportunities for international collaboration and domestic cooperation, which, counterintuitively, demographic disadvantages may create.

Taiwan's Demographic Shifts

Demographic changes have come quickly. The median age in 2000 was 30.7, whereas in 2020 it was 40.8. It is projected to reach 46.2 in 2030. Between 2000 and 2020, the population growth rate dropped from an already meager 0.61% to an even more paltry 0.17%.[1] In 2000 the working-age population—those ranging in age from 15 to 64 years old—accounted for 70.3% of Taiwan's total population. In 2020 this age bracket grew to 72.0% of the population, but that growth was entirely among people aged 50 and older. Those aged 65 and over made up just 8.4% of the population in 2000, but by 2020 that share had nearly doubled to 16.0%.[2]

The dependency ratio—which measures the ratio of the population aged 14 and below and 65 and over to the working-age population as a

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1 "World Population Prospects 2022," UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2022 ~ https://population.un.org/wpp.

2 Ibid.

percentage—actually shrank over the past two decades, but that is because the under-15 population share contracted. Going forward, however, the dependency ratio is projected to rocket upward, rising from 38.9% in 2020 to 53.0% in 2030. It is projected to exceed 100% in the 2060s, meaning there will be more than two dependents—mostly expensive-to-care-for over-65s—for every working-age individual in Taiwan.[3]

These shifts in population structure are due to increasing life expectancy, which has steadily climbed since 1950 (when UN records begin), and especially due to a cratering fertility rate, which has been below the replacement level for more than four decades. In short, Taiwanese are living longer and having fewer babies.[4] This, along with other factors, including decreasing marriage rates, has led to changes in family structure and household living arrangements. Large nuclear families are now a thing of the distant past, and no-child and single-child families are the norm. Citing household registration records, Chen Yu-Hua notes that "the average household size has fallen from 6.09 persons per household in 1946 to 2.67 in 2020," a result of both increasing homeownership and decreasing fertility rates. Given the latter, Chen writes, "only a small share of households includes children." In addition, "the number of multigenerational and extended households has decreased significantly. More than 80 percent of Taiwanese are living in a one- or two-generational households [sic]."[5]

Societal and Workforce Changes and Challenges

Many traditional notions of family responsibilities endure. Married couples often live close to at least one spouse's parents, and it remains common for people to financially support retired elders. But attitudes regarding these responsibilities and customs are changing. Without siblings, two generations of single children bear greater burdens in supporting parents and grandparents, given lengthening life expectancies, than did previous generations. And bearing those burdens is becoming more difficult. As Roy Ngerng points out, housing prices across Taiwan are among the world's highest, even as household income remains "one of

3 "World Population Prospects 2022."

4 Ibid.

5 Yu-Hua Chen, "The Growing Complexity and Diversity of Taiwanese Families," Taiwan Insight, September 9, 2020 ~ https://taiwaninsight.org/2020/09/09/the-growing-complexity-and-diversity-of-taiwanese-families.

the lowest among the advanced countries."[6] Importantly, with the fertility rate having dropped below 1.0, future retirees will not have children or grandchildren—or even nieces and nephews—on which they can depend in their old age. A central element of the Taiwanese social contract is becoming defunct, a development that will require new arrangements with economic implications. Shrinking nuclear families may likewise affect social cohesion in ways that are difficult to predict.

The advent of a contracting population also raises a human capital liability. As the population declines, beginning sometime in the next ten years, one result will be tight labor markets, with more jobs available than job seekers. A labor shortage may lead to a devaluation of post-secondary education for both hirers and potential hires—why go to university when attractive, well-paying jobs are available right out of high school? This would arguably be a good outcome for workers, families, and employers, but there is a potential societal downside: a shrinking pool of Taiwanese with post-secondary degrees will mean a shrinking pool from which economic, civic, intellectual, and political leaders will emerge. The implications of such a shift are unpredictable— and may indeed be minor—but there is a risk that as Taiwan grapples with both internal and external challenges heading into midcentury, its best and brightest may be less well-equipped than those of earlier generations.

That being said, Taiwan has had to address labor shortages in some sectors of the economy since the early 1990s. As Taiwan's economy developed in the latter half of the twentieth century, growing demand for skilled labor sparked a shortage in less-skilled labor. Taiwan addressed this problem by welcoming migrant workers on contract, mostly from Southeast Asia. There are now nearly 730,000 migrant laborers in Taiwan, which accounts for 3.1% of its population. Of these, 221,000 are social welfare workers, mostly in-home caregivers, while the rest work in various industries. These workers are permitted to stay for six years, after which they must return to their home countries and reapply to work in Taiwan.[7]

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6 Roy Ngerng, "Taiwan's Housing Crisis (Part 1): Taiwan's Housing Prices Are Among the Highest Globally but Wages Are One of the Lowest among Advanced Countries," News Lens, March 22, 2023 ~ https://international.thenewslens.com/article/182910.

7 Rick Charette, "Inclusivity Leading to Win-Win Positivity: Turning Foreign Labor into a Talent Resource," *CommonWealth Magazine*, January 2, 2024 ~ https://english.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=3397; and Ji-Ping Lin, "Tradition and Progress: Taiwan's Evolving Migration Reality," Migration Policy Institute, January 24, 2012 ~ https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/tradition-and-progress-taiwans-evolving-migration-reality.

In 2022, Taiwan took action to address what it called "a growing shortage in mid-level skilled labor."[8] Rather than require migrant laborers classified as "intermediate skilled manpower" to depart Taiwan after six years, the Tsai Ing-wen administration ended the limit on work years in the country. It also opened a pathway for some of these workers to apply for permanent residency. According to the Executive Yuan, "the policy aims to keep outstanding and experienced foreign skilled talent in Taiwan, supplementing the workforce needed in the shortest time possible while at the same time demonstrating Taiwan's friendliness and goodwill to the outside world."[9] Key questions for Taiwan going forward are whether it will adopt a more open immigration system to address demographic-induced labor shortages and whether it will strive to integrate immigrant populations into the broader society. Doing so will require a willingness and ability to welcome shifts in what broadly speaking has been a culturally homogenous society.

Absent a truly robust effort to welcome and substantially increase inward migration, Taiwan's aging and shrinking population will place strains on the country's economic growth prospects. Healthy growth will remain necessary due to the costs of long-term eldercare and to the capital-intensive approaches Taiwan will need to adapt to a shrinking labor force.

Because Taiwan's changing family structures mean that retirees will be increasingly unable to rely on younger cohorts for financial and material support, saving rates will need to increase, perhaps along with payments into Taiwan's government-run social insurance system. That will put downward pressure on non-healthcare consumer spending, with implications for economic growth: in June 2023 private consumption accounted for 49.3% of Taiwan's GDP (with healthcare spending accounting for 6.6%).[10]

Moreover, it may not be the case that Taiwan will be able to take advantage of a higher savings rate to offset decreasing consumption by increasing capital investment, which will be sorely needed in the decades to come. While it is true that a higher savings rate typically frees up more money for investment, a rate increase during a time of population decline

8 "Long-Term Retention of Migrant Workers," Executive Yuan (Taiwan), April 3, 2023 ~ https://english.ey.gov.tw/News3/9E5540D592A5FECD/144d9ad7-4a42-4732-9ddd-1e8f8f6d501a.

9 Ibid.

10 "Taiwan Private Consumption: % of GDP," CEIC ~ https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/taiwan/private-consumption--of-nominal-gdp; and Sean Lin, "Taiwan Should Increase Healthcare Spending to 8% of GDP: TPP's Ko," Focus Taiwan, September 6, 2023 ~ https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202309060019.

may not lead to growing savings in the aggregate. This will present a challenge: as Taiwan becomes a super-aged society (when the share of individuals 65 and older exceeds 20% of the population) in the late 2020s and its labor supply tightens, capital investment will be needed both to increase labor productivity and, in some places, to replace labor entirely.

Taiwan is already a high-tech society, but it will need to rely even more heavily on technological solutions in the coming years. Increasingly, technology will complement and replace humans on factory floors, in agriculture, and even in the services sector. Robotics, automation, and artificial intelligence are all likely to play crucial roles in keeping the Taiwanese economy humming as the workforce dwindles. Insufficient availability of investment funds, especially if Taiwan also fails to adopt a far more liberal immigration framework, could hobble its ability to sustain healthy economic growth into the future.

Security and Defense Changes and Challenges

Taiwan's national security may also suffer from a dearth of capital investment. Just as will be the case in the private sector, Taiwan's armed forces will need to increasingly rely on technological solutions to address labor shortages. But downward pressure on tax revenues (due to a shrinking population) and greater demands on government outlays (due to an aging population) may inhibit government capital investment. The government in Taiwan already substantially subsidizes long-term care. According to the U.S. International Trade Administration, "for the period 2017 to 2021, [Taiwan's] reported government expenses for long-term care increased by 519%."[11] The government's Long-Term Care Development Fund reached $1.8 billion in 2022, up from $542 million at its establishment in 2017.[12]

A Taiwan military that suffers from a dearth of both manpower and the technology needed to augment and replace individuals, such as unmanned or autonomous systems, will be in dire straits indeed. This in part explains the growing emphasis on the importance of Taiwan's reserve system and civil defense capabilities in recent years. The Tsai Ing-wen administration's decision to increase mandatory military service for males from four months to one year is a reflection of the seriousness of the problem: reservists must

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[11] "Taiwan Elderly Care Services," U.S. International Trade Administration, September 27, 2022 ~ https://www.trade.gov/market-intelligence/taiwan-elderly-care-services.

[12] "Taiwan Elderly Care Services"; and Yang Cheng-yu and Jason Pan, "In Focus: Budgets for Care Plans for 65 and Up Rising, Officials Say," *Taipei Times*, October 30, 2023 ~ https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/10/30/2003808438.

be well-trained and have substantive experience because it will become harder to maintain a mostly volunteer active-duty force as the population shrinks and competition for talent intensifies. Since beginning its transition to a (nearly) all-volunteer force in 2013, Taiwan has faced challenges with recruitment. Those challenges will only grow in the years to come.

That is one reason Taiwan is undergoing a significant shift in its defense strategy. In its 2021 National Defense Report, the Ministry of National Defense succinctly summed up the key challenges in mounting an effective defense and the central aspects of its response:

> Enemy threats, allocation of defense resources, supply and demand of the labor market, acquisition of new weapons and equipment, military modernization, and low birthrate are also factored into the considerations as the Armed Forces seek to flatten C2 [command and control] structure, replace manpower with technologies, replace troops with firepower, and integrate regular and reserve forces, combine reserve forces and mobilized resources, and promote interagency cooperation.[13]

When President Tsai announced the force realignment plan in 2022, she described the volunteer active-duty force as "the first element."[14] But in fact it will be the reserve system that serves as the foundation on which Taiwan's capacity for self-defense will be built. In the event of a conflict, it will be Taiwan's ability to recall millions of well-trained reservists that will enable it to effectively defend itself and thus to deter conflict in the first place. Maintaining that reserve force should, in turn, become a priority—one that may come at the expense of traditional priorities for the active-duty force. It will ultimately require a change in Taiwan's military culture and a willingness on the part of army leaders in particular to dedicate resources—personnel, equipment, space, and finance—to the reserve component. Taiwan's embrace of innovative and asymmetric approaches to self-defense, despite internal and external pressure, has proceeded in fits and starts and is still not widely accepted within the defense establishment. It remains to be seen whether the active-duty force will be able to accept that while it will be "on the frontline of our defense," as Tsai put it, holding that line will depend on an ability to train, maintain, and integrate reservists for whom military service is only a part-time job.[15]

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13 Ministry of National Defense (Taiwan), *ROC National Defense Report 2021* (Taipei, November 2021), 66 ~ https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tdnswp/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Taiwan-National-Defense-Report-2021.pdf.

14 Tsai Ing-wen, "President Tsai Announces Military Force Realignment Plan," Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), December 27, 2022 ~ https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6417.

15 Ibid.

It is possible that rather than emphasize investments in human resources and advanced technological solutions to national security, the government could revive its past attempts to develop nuclear weapons. Taiwan, which has operated nuclear power plants since 1978, has the technological expertise to do so. Faced with an existential threat from China and the growing challenge of mounting a conventional defense, pursuit of the ultimate deterrent might seem an attractive option. A robust, survivable nuclear arsenal, along with credible threats of employment, could meaningfully change China's calculus regarding the use of force. Indeed, in recent years a smattering of American commentators have already called for a nuclear deterrent on Taiwan, and it would not be surprising to see discussion of the idea enter the political mainstream, just as it has in South Korea.[16]

Even if the nuclear option attracts more consideration in Taiwan in the years to come, it will likely remain farfetched. Taiwan has been faithful to its nonproliferation commitments, is phasing out nuclear power generation, and has no indigenous reprocessing or enrichment capability.[17] A secret program would be exceedingly difficult to hide—from China, the United States, or the International Atomic Energy Agency—and its revelation would cause a crisis in U.S.-Taiwan relations and possibly invite Chinese military action.

Finding a Common Cause?

For Taiwan, an effort to deepen overseas security partnerships is a more likely course of action than the pursuit of the nuclear option, which could be both self-isolating and self-defeating. Jennifer Sciubba argues that alliances "can help states compensate for declining manpower."[18] And while a country with a shrinking and aging population might not seem to be an attractive partner, there are others in Taiwan's neighborhood in similar demographic straits, most notably Japan and South Korea. "As part

[16] See, for example, Michael Rubin, "Why Taiwan Needs Nuclear Weapons," *National Interest*, May 31, 2020 ~ https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-taiwan-needs-nuclear-weapons-159261; and Angelo M. Codevilla, "Put Nukes on Taiwan," Hoover Institution, Strategika, June 30, 2021 ~ https://www.hoover.org/research/put-nukes-taiwan.

[17] Taiwan has a trilateral agreement with the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency and a 123 Agreement for peaceful nuclear cooperation with the United States. "Taiwan Overview," Nuclear Threat Initiative, September 6, 2023 ~ https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/taiwan-overview.

[18] Jennifer Dabbs Sciubba, *The Future Faces of War: Population and National Security* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 47.

of strong alliances," Sciubba writes, "states have strength in numbers, even if they are individually weakened by aging."[19]

Beyond the similarity of their demographic profiles, the national security outlooks of Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea have converged in recent years. All have grown more deeply concerned about the nature of China's rise, despite their extensive economic ties with the People's Republic. Importantly, all three countries have advanced technology sectors, all have indigenous defense industries (South Korea's is particularly robust), and all share the United States as their primary security partner. There are ample opportunities for cooperation.

Admittedly, Tokyo and Seoul, to varying extents, have been hesitant in the past to engage directly (or at least openly) with Taipei or to involve themselves in the cross-strait dispute. But demographic changes in all three countries could serve as a forcing mechanism. Sciubba notes that pursuing "military efficiency" is another way in which "states can compensate for population aging."[20] Pooling military assets, coordinating research and development investments, and capitalizing on comparative advantages—all done within some form of a collective security arrangement—would allow for optimized spending of defense dollars and offer more bang for each defense buck. Such an approach would have the added benefit of meaningfully contributing to the political facets of deterring China.

Finding new and innovative ways to deter China will be crucial in the decades to come. Beijing well understands Taiwan's demographic predicament, recognizing that it threatens to undermine the country's economic health, societal cohesion, and capacity for self-defense. China may even see Taiwan's shrinking, aging population as one day making the island democracy easier to subdue and occupy.

But that population shift may also contribute to a natural resolution of potent political issues in Taiwan, such as youth dissatisfaction with the labor market and expensive housing. Demographics-induced challenges will be difficult and expensive to solve, but those same trends may focus political, technocratic, and societal energies in productive ways. Taiwan is undoubtedly growing older and smaller. But that does not preclude it from also growing leaner and meaner. ◈

19 Sciubba, *The Future Faces of War*, 47.

20 Ibid., 50.

The Ramifications of Changing Identities in Taiwan for U.S.-Taiwan Relations

Rong Chen

This essay investigates the implications of Taiwan's evolving social and political identities for its international relations, particularly with the United States and mainland China. Specifically, it addresses two questions: (1) what do changing political and social identities in Taiwan mean for U.S.-Taiwan relations, and (2) what are the key takeaways or implications for the United States?

The victory of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the 2024 presidential election is significant not only in the context of regional security but more importantly as a reflection of the intricate identity developments that have occurred in Taiwan. Notably, the outcome of this election has exposed the deep alienation of many Taiwanese and showed that the people of Taiwan are not as easily intimidated as Beijing might like to believe and as many in the United States seem to fear.[1]

Recent Polling on Taiwan Identity

The Election Study Center at National Chengchi University in Taiwan has been conducting annual surveys on identity in Taiwan since 1992 and is widely considered a reputable source for data on this topic. Their latest survey of self-identification among the Taiwanese, published in July 2023, indicates that 62.8% of those surveyed identified as Taiwanese (a steady increase from 17.6% in 1992), while 30.5% identified as both Taiwanese and Chinese (a steady decline from 46.4% in 1992), and only 2.5% identified

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[1] Markus Garlauskas, "Taiwan's People Are Not as Easily Intimidated as Many Feared," in "Experts React: Taiwan Just Elected Lai Ching-te as President despite China's Opposition. What's Next?" Atlantic Council, New Atlanticist, January 13, 2024 ~ https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react-taiwan-just-elected-lai-ching-te-as-president-despite-chinas-opposition-whats-next.

as Chinese (a steady decline from 25.5% in 1992).[2] Meanwhile, those who endorsed the status quo in the Taiwan–mainland China relationship composed 60.7%, while 21.4% supported independence, and 6% backed reunification.[3] Additionally, a recent poll conducted by *United Daily* concerning Taiwan-U.S. relations vis-à-vis China found that 15% surveyed believed that independence is the defining variable in cross-strait relations.[4] Intriguingly, the public's view on the U.S. role in a cross-strait conflict was rather skeptical, with 40% believing that the United States would not intervene militarily. In sum, recent public surveys, taken together, show that the majority (around 66%) of the Taiwan public desires peace and balanced relations with key international players, most notably the United States and mainland China.

Survey and Analysis of How Taiwanese Identity Shapes U.S.-Taiwan Relations

How does Taiwanese identity predict perceptions of U.S.-Taiwan relations? To determine this, the author obtained and analyzed data from the Sinophone Borderlands Indo-Pacific Survey, which investigated various global issues, including views of international relations, through a series of large-scale representative surveys of public opinion across Europe, Asia, America, Africa, and Oceania.[5]

Participants and measures. As part of the Sinophone Borderlands Indo-Pacific Survey, a nationally representative sample of 1,350 Taiwanese adults in terms of age, gender, and region was recruited through national online panels by market research firm Cint between May and June 2022. Of the participants, 47.8% identified as female and participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 (mean age = 39.62, standard deviation = 12.42).

2 Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Tai wan min zhong tai wan ren/zhong guo ren ren tong qu shì fen bu (1992 nian 06 yue–2023 nian 06 yue)" [Distribution of Taiwanese/Chinese Identification Trends among Taiwanese People (June 1992–June 2023], July 12, 2023 ~ https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7804&id=6960.

3 Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, "Tai wan min zhong tong du li chang qu shi fen bu (1994 nian 12 yue–2023 nian 06 yue)" [Changes in the Unification-Independence Stances of Taiwanese as Tracked in Surveys by Election Study Center, NCCU (December 1994–June 2023)], July 12, 2023 ~ https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7805&id=6962.

4 "2023 liang an guan xì nian du da diao cha: Tai du shi liang an zui da bian shu" [2023 Annual Survey on Cross-Strait Relations: Taiwan Independence as the Defining Variable], *United Daily*, October 2, 2023 ~ https://udn.com/news/story/8625/7477181?from=udn_ch2_menu_v2_main_index.

5 Richard Turcsányi et al., "Sinophone Borderlands Indo-Pacific Survey," Sinafon and Palacky University Olomouc, April–September 2022 ~ https://sinofon.cz/surveys.

Participants were questioned about several measures pertaining to their self-identification. **Table 1** presents sample characteristics.

- *National identification*. National identification was measured along a scale for three statements: "I feel a bond with Taiwanese people," "I am glad to be Taiwanese," and "The fact that I am Taiwanese is an important part of my identity." Participants responded on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher Taiwanese identification.[6]
- *Stance on independence versus reunification*. To provide a more nuanced understanding of their opinions, participants' stances on independence versus reunification were measured with how they felt about the issue in two situations: "in the current political reality of cross-strait relations" and "if you could choose freely without any repercussions." Participants responded on a scale from 1 (strong reunification) to 7 (strong independence), with higher scores indicating stronger support for Taiwan independence.

TABLE 1

Sample Characteristics (N = 1,350)

Variable	Category	N (%)
Gender	Male	696 (51.6)
	Female	645 (47.8)
	Other	9 (0.6)
Education level	Primary school	2 (0.1)
	Junior high school	25 (1.9)
	High school/vocational	218 (16.1)
	Technical college	163 (12.1)
	University	723 (53.6)
	Postgraduate	219 (16.2)
Socioeconomic status	Lower	95 (7.0)
	Lower-middle	309 (22.9)
	Middle	694 (51.4)
	Upper-middle	215 (15.9)
	Upper	37 (2.7)

6 Li Li Huang, "M xing zheng dang vs. zhong xing yi shi: tai wan guo zu ren tong zhi yi shi xing tai ji qi xin li ji chu" [M Shape vs. Bell Shape: The Ideology of National Identity and Its Psychological Basis in Taiwan], *Chinese Journal of Psychology* 49, no. 4 (2007): 451–70 ~ https://doi.org/10.6129/cjp.2007.4904.08.

- *Party affiliation.* Participants were asked to report their political party affiliation on a scale from 1 (deep green) to 7 (deep blue).[7]
- *Perception of country.* Participants were asked to report their perceptions of 23 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, China, and South Korea, by answering the question, "How positively or negatively do you feel about the following countries/entities on the scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?" To minimize group effect, participants were randomly presented 10 out of 23 countries.
- *Perception of people.* Participants were asked to report their perceptions of twelve groups of people, including Americans, mainland Chinese, Japanese, and Indians, among others, by answering the question, "How positively or negatively do you feel about the following groups of people on the scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?" To minimize group effect, participants were randomly presented five out of twelve groups of people.
- *Perceived foreign influence.* Participants reported the perceived influence of four foreign entities—China, the European Union, Japan, and the United States—by responding to the question, "How much influence do these foreign actors have on your country?" on a scale from 1 (no influence at all) to 7 (a lot of influence), with higher scores indicating the perception of a stronger influence on Taiwan.
- *Perceived nature of foreign influence.* Participants reported the perceived nature of influence of four foreign actors—China, the European Union, Japan, and the United States—by responding to the question, "How positive or negative do you find the influence of these foreign actors on your country?" on a scale from 1 (very negative) to 7 (very positive), with higher scores indicating the perception of a greater positive influence on Taiwan.
- *Perception of cross-strait conflict.* One question in the survey was used to measure the perception of potential cross-strait military conflict: "In your opinion, how likely is a Chinese invasion of Taiwan in the next 10 years?" Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely), with higher scores indicating a higher perception of a military conflict across the strait.

[7] Political parties in Taiwan tend to be associated with a color spectrum ranging from deep green (more pro-independence/progressive) to deep blue (more pro-reunification/conservative). The Democratic Progressive Party is associated with green and the Kuomintang with blue, with smaller parties also arrayed on the green-blue spectrum.

- *Nationalism.* Nationalism was measured with responses to three statements:[8] "Taiwan should follow its own interests, even if this leads to conflicts with other nations," "Generally speaking, Taiwan is a better country than most other countries," and "People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong." Participants responded on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating a higher nationalistic tendency.
- *Perception of cultural similarity with China.* One question was used to measure the perception of cultural similarity between Taiwan and China: "How similar are Taiwan and China in regard to cultural values?" Participants responded on a scale from 0 (not similar at all) to 10 (very similar), with higher scores indicating a higher perception of a cultural similarity across the strait.
- *Demographics.* Demographic information, including age, gender, education, and socioeconomic status, was also collected.

Procedure, results, and correlation analysis. The survey was administered online in traditional Chinese. Each participant provided written consent before participation. All questions were randomized to minimize order effect. Only a subset of the data related to the goals of the current essay is reported here. All statistical analyses were conducted in SPSS Statistics 22. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of all variables are reported in **Table 2.**

Pearson correlation coefficients are also reported in Table 2. As shown, significant positive correlations were found between national identification and (1) nationalism, (2) stance on independence versus reunification, (3) perception of the United States and the American people, (4) the perceived influence of the United States on Taiwan, and (5) the perceived nature of U.S. influence. By contrast, significant negative correlations were found between national identification and (1) political party affiliation, (2) perceived cultural similarity with mainland China, (3) the perception of mainland China and mainland Chinese people, and (4) the perceived nature of Chinese influence on Taiwan. No significant correlation was found between Taiwanese national identification and the perception of potential cross-strait conflict. Overall, there was a high perception of potential military conflict across the Taiwan Strait arising in the next decade (mean = 4.53, standard deviation = 1.72).

[8] Rick Kosterman and Seymour Feshbach, "Toward a Measure of Patriotic and Nationalistic Attitudes," *Political Psychology* 10, no. 2 (1989): 257–74 ~ http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3791647.

TABLE 2

Means, Standard Deviations (SD), and Intercorrelations of Main Variables

	Descriptives		Correlations (r_s)									
Variable	**Mean**	**SD**	**1.**	**2.†**	**3.**	**4.**	**5.**	**6.**	**7.**	**8.**	**9.**	**10.**
1. National identification	5.24	1.24	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. Stance on independence†	4.85	1.69	0.30**	0.72**	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	5.25	1.86	0.34**		–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
3. Party affiliation	4.06	1.39	-0.18**	-0.29**	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
				-0.32**		–	–	–	–	–	–	–
4. Perception of the United States	63.62	24.87	0.27**	0.37**	-0.12**	1.00	–	–	–	–	–	–
				0.37**			–	–	–	–	–	–
5. Perception of Americans	64.01	23.45	0.27**	0.36**	-0.09**	0.67**	1.00	–	–	–	–	–
				0.33**				–	–	–	–	–
6. Perceived U.S. influence	5.65	1.36	0.30**	0.18**	-0.07**	0.25**	0.32**	1.00	–	–	–	–
				0.22**					–	–	–	–
7. Perceived nature of U.S. influence	4.76	1.43	0.36**	0.37**	-0.22**	0.58**	0.51**	0.29**	1.00	–	–	–
				0.39**						–	–	–
8. Perception of cross-strait conflict	4.53	1.72	-0.05	0.05	0.16**	0.08**	0.07*	0.07**	0.03	1.00	–	–
				0.08**							–	–
9. Nationalism	4.18	0.99	0.45**	0.32**	-0.15**	0.31**	0.28**	0.15**	0.41**	-0.04	1.00	–
				0.29**								–
10. Perception of cultural similarity with China	4.57	2.88	-0.12**	-0.32**	0.36**	-0.18**	-0.09**	0.02	-0.20**	0.12**	-0.09**	1.00
				-0.35**								

Note: Dagger indicates two sets of values are associated with this variable—the upper row indicates "in the current political reality," and the lower row indicates "without repercussions." Single asterisk indicates $p < 0.05$ (*), double asterisk indicates $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

Francis Fukuyama has argued that demand for recognition of one's identity is a master concept that unifies much of what is taking place in world politics today.[9] The development of Taiwanese identity is the result of concerted long-term efforts since the early 1990s (for example, fostering a unique Taiwanese identity through educational reform). As shown, this is associated with stronger support for independence; that is, the more participants identified as Taiwanese, the stronger their support was for Taiwan independence. Further regression analysis also indicates that identity significantly predicted respondents' stance on independence ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$, with repercussions; $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$, without repercussions), explaining a significant proportion of variance in stance on independence ($R^2 = 0.12$, $F(2, 1347) = 91.49$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, there seems to be only a degree of difference in terms of support for independence in contemporary Taiwan (i.e., the average Taiwanese citizen does not aspire for reunification with mainland China), corroborating previous findings.[10] As far as U.S.-Taiwan relations are concerned, unless the United States could play a role in shaping this identity, assertion of Taiwan independence might be an inevitable trend.

The results suggest that a tenet of a separate Taiwanese identity might be the perception of cultural difference between Taiwan and mainland China. The more strongly participants identified as Taiwanese, the less they perceived cultural similarity with China. This is perhaps not surprising given Taiwan's democratization over the past three decades. In essence, this perception of difference is likely rooted in a rejection of China's political system. Scholars have attributed an ideological divide across the strait as the main source for a distinctive Taiwanese identity and argued that civic and political values are more important than ethnicity and material interests in creating a common Chinese identity.[11]

Is conflict across the Taiwan Strait a self-fulfilling prophecy? The results indicate a high perception of potential military conflict between Taiwan and the mainland in the next decade, regardless of participants'

9 Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

10 Peter Hays Gries and Jenny Su, "Taiwanese Views of China and the World: Party Identification, Ethnicity, and Cross-Strait Relations," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14, no. 1 (2013): 73–96 ~ https://doi. org/10.1017/S1468109912000357.

11 Syaru Shirley Lin, "Analyzing the Relationship between Identity and Democratization in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the Shadow of China," in *Democratization, National Identity and Foreign Policy in Asia*, ed. Gilbert Rozman (New York: Routledge, 2021), chap. 8.

level of Taiwanese identification. While much discussion about cross-strait conflict has focused on the effect of Chinese nationalism (for example, the dominant narrative among Chinese nationalists is that China would lose face by giving up on Taiwan), findings from this research shed light on the role of nationalism in Taiwan. As shown, the more strongly participants identified as Taiwanese, the stronger their nationalistic tendency. Furthermore, a higher level of nationalism was associated with greater support for independence. Additional regression analysis also suggests that identity was the strongest predictor of nationalism ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$), explaining a significant proportion of variance in nationalistic tendency ($R^2 = 0.20$, $F(1, 1348) = 342.54$, $p < 0.001$). Intriguingly, nationalists also tended to perceive the United States more favorably vis-à-vis China. Altogether, nationalism might be a double-edged sword on both sides of the strait.

The findings reveal that participants overall held favorable perceptions of the United States as well as the American people. Moreover, they understood the force and nature of U.S. influence on Taiwan, which was generally perceived to be positive. Notably, the more strongly participants identified as Taiwanese, the stronger their favorable views of the United States. Further regression analysis also indicates that Taiwanese national identification significantly predicted perceptions of the United States ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$) and American people ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$), as well as perceived U.S. influence ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) and the perceived nature of U.S. influence ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$). Concerning U.S.-Taiwan relations vis-à-vis China, some experts have argued that Beijing cannot be reassured because it is not really seeking reassurance.[12] While a narrative of U.S. skepticism may seem to be prevailing in Taiwan, as reflected in recent public polls, substantive and credible U.S. reassurance to the Taiwanese people might prove more helpful than harmful.

Key Takeaways and Implications

- Taiwan's international relations revolve around its relations with mainland China. As such, U.S.-Taiwan relations are embedded in cross-strait relations. Given that U.S. strategic interests are linked to

[12] "U.S.-Taiwan Relations in a New Era," Council on Foreign Relations, Independent Task Force Report, no. 81, 2023 ~ https://live-tfr-cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/TFR81_U.S.-TaiwanRelationsNewEra_SinglePages_2023-06-05_Online.pdf.

Taiwan's fate, there seems to be an inherent "fateful triangle" among these parties.

- Changing identities in Taiwan might have ramifications for perceptions of the one-China principle and cross-strait status quo, two pillars of the U.S. policy on Taiwan, particularly since there is (intentional) ambiguity concerning both.

- One thorny issue in U.S.-Taiwan relations is the definition of status quo, which is dynamic and evolving. The challenge here is not what to maintain but rather how to maintain it. While U.S. policy to date has helped avert a cross-strait conflict and by this measure is a success,[13] it is unclear whether what has worked so far in preserving the delicate balance in the Taiwan Strait will continue to do so.

- Much attention has focused on the military capability of Taiwan vis-à-vis mainland China in the context of regional security; nonetheless, given the power imbalance, the importance of psychological warfare should not be underestimated.

- Cross-strait conflict is perceived as an existential threat on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Notwithstanding this, Taiwan will never be as important to the United States as it is to China strategically and psychologically.

- U.S. policy on Taiwan requires "wise diplomacy," since the crux of the cross-strait issue is a political dilemma rather than a military problem and should not be viewed as a zero-sum game. To accomplish this will demand concerted diplomatic efforts to avoid military conflict as well as wisdom on all sides to preserve peace.[14] ◈

[13] Raymond Kuo, Michael A. Hunzeker, and Mark A. Christopher, "Scared Strait: How Should America Deter China from Attacking Taiwan?" *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2024 ~ https://www.foreignaffairs.com/scared-strait.

[14] "U.S.-Taiwan Relations in a New Era."