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Inst 421

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Taiwanese Attitudes toward Mainland China

Research Question and Introduction

How do Taiwanese regard Mainland China? What factors explain Taiwanese attitudes toward Mainland China?

While standing beneath the overhang of a quaint corner coffee shop in Taiwan, a dilapidated taxicab pulled over in front of me, prepared to take me to the nearest train station. With a smoldering cigarette hanging from his lip, the driver met me warmly with “Have you eaten?”, a typical Chinese greeting. After setting off to the train station, passing the fenced off industrial district, he asked me something interesting. “Have you been to the mainland? (你去過大陸嗎?)” he said in a thick Taiwanese accent. In English, one may not immediately notice the discrepancy in terminology used here. Between local people in Taiwan, China is almost always colloquially referred to as “*dalu*”, or in English, “mainland.” Since my ability to speak Chinese was not at a high enough level to start a discussion about cross-strait politics, I answered him with a simple “yes” and continued asking if he had also been.

Although, at face value, this is a rather trivial language discrepancy between Taiwan and Mainland China, it sparked a question within me early on. By referring to Mainland China simply as the “mainland,” it is implied that Taiwan is separated from Greater China. It begs the question of whether this simple language difference is trivial at all. Undoubtedly, Taiwan is geographically separated from the mainland as well as in terms of Taiwan’s domestic affairs. However, a greater question arises when we consider how the people of Taiwan view themselves in relation to Mainland China.

Especially since the eruption of the Hong Kong protests in 2019, the Taiwan issue has been thrown into the international spotlight. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) stance towards Taiwan has progressively become more aggressive compared to previous years. From People’s Liberation Army (PLA) fighter jets intruding on Taiwan airspace, to economic pressures regarding their recent application to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Trade (CPTPP), the CCP still clearly maintains the view that Taiwan is a part of Greater China, not an independent state.

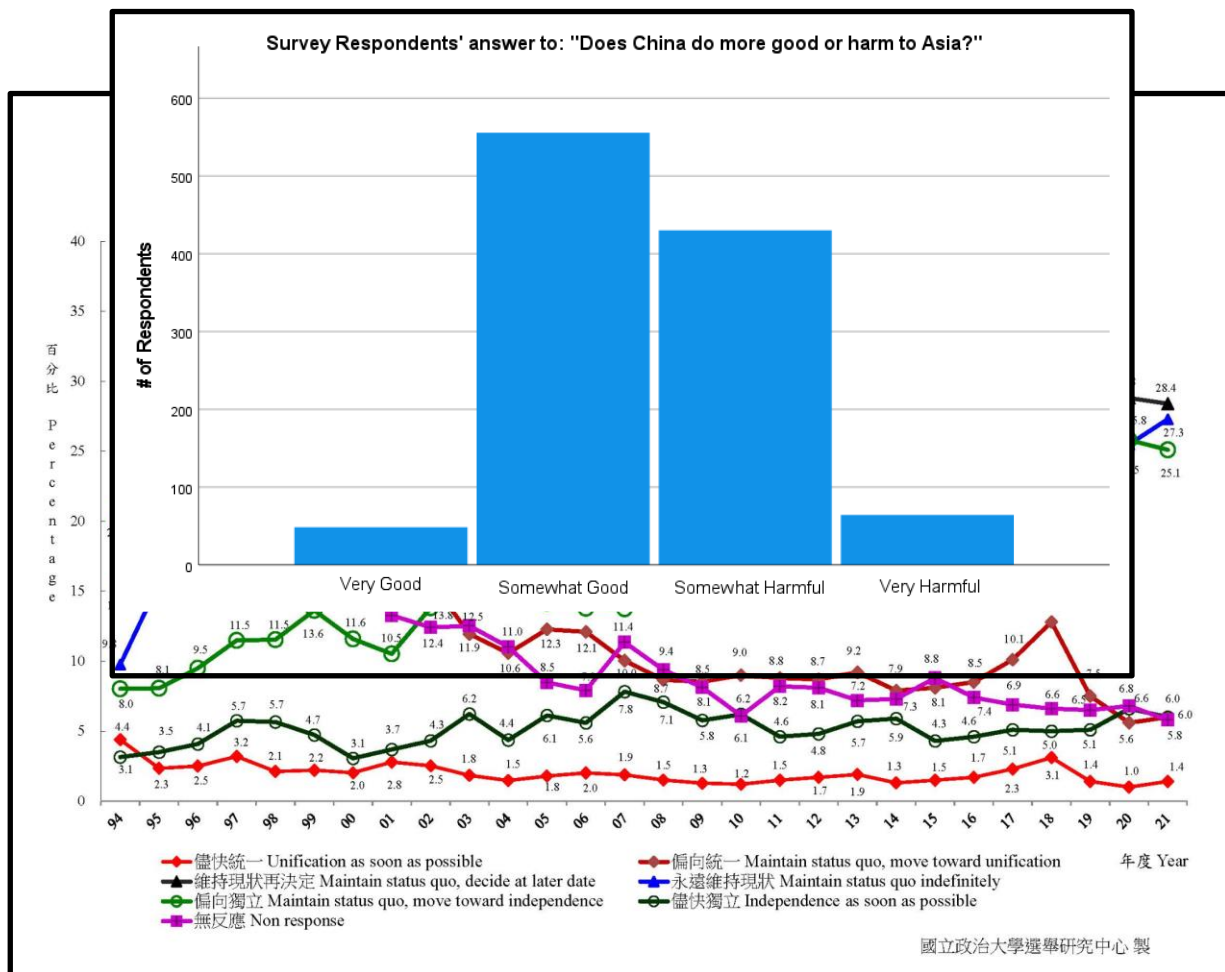
In the realm of international trade, Taiwan’s future also possesses great importance. As the home of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC), one of the world’s leading producers of microchips, increasingly more countries are beginning to recognize their dependence on Taiwan’s industries. Especially as the threat of invasion by the mainland grows, the world’s largest economies are starting to see Taiwan as “a choke point in the global supply chain that’s giving new urgency” to maintaining good relations with the mainland (Crawford 2021).

Considering Taiwan's significance to current issues in international relations regarding the People's Republic of China (PRC), one must remember to take the sentiments of the Taiwanese people into consideration as well. It is also important to consider why they hold the attitudes they have.

Within the Taiwan population there is a broad variation of attitudes people have towards Mainland China. While some people vehemently oppose the mainland in all aspects, there are others that profoundly express their approval of the mainland and cross-straits unification. For example, prior to the 2022 Winter Olympics held in Beijing, several popular Taiwanese musicians collaborated with a Mainland Chinese media company to make a music video. Although, on the surface, the video seems to want to provoke nostalgic familial feelings felt by many ethnic Chinese before the lunar new year, there are several lyrical references that subtly imply China and Taiwan are "one family" (Chen 2022). As a result of their participation in the video, these celebrities faced criticism from those who believe they are merely the CCP's puppet being used to spread pro-unification propaganda among Taiwanese youth. Undeniably, these

celebrities and their critics represent two extremes on the spectrum of Taiwanese attitudes toward the mainland.

Despite these two extremes, they do not represent the majority of Taiwanese popular sentiment. As shown by data in the above graph, when asked about their opinions towards unification or independence, the majority of Taiwanese tend to be neutral, or at least think the status quo should be maintained for now (Election Study Center, National Chengchi University). A similar trend can be found in the Asian Barometer dataset. When presented with the question: "Does China do more harm or good to Asia?", the public's views congregated closer to neutrality rather than either extreme. This data raises another question about what distinguishes more neutral people from those who lean closer towards the extremes.



Hypotheses

I hypothesize that Taiwanese attitudes toward Mainland China are affected by national identity, belief in democracy, and attitudes toward the United States. Furthermore, I hypothesize that Taiwanese people who identify with “Green” leaning parties, such as presidential incumbent Tsai Ying-wen’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), tend to have more negative views of Mainland China. On the other hand, people who identify with “Blue” leaning parties, such as the pro-unification Kuomintang (KMT), generally have more positive views of Mainland China. Additionally, I also hypothesize that Taiwan’s middle age population will tend to have more positive attitudes toward the mainland, while the younger and older generations express more negative sentiments.

National Identity.

Belief in Democracy.

Party Identification.

Attitudes toward the US.

Generational Attitudes.

Data and Methodology

Currently, I have considered only one possible methodological framework to conduct the analysis. In the 2021 study “Changing Attitude toward China in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the Xi Jinping Era,” Chen and Zheng implement a framework that analyzes macro-level events and micro-level attributes to examine public attitudes

toward China in Taiwan and Hong Kong. To start, they provide a brief historical analysis (macro-level) of PRC-Taiwan relations in recent years. Then, using survey data taken between 2017 and 2020 in Taiwan and Hong Kong simultaneously, they examine how Taiwanese people and Hongkongers view Mainland China's future development. In this study two questions were used to measure people's attitudes toward China: 1) Do you have confidence in the future development of Mainland China? (請問您對中國大陸 未來的發展有沒有信心?) 2) If you had the opportunity, would you be willing to encourage your family to go to Mainland China for development, including investment and work? (請問, 如果有機會, 您願不願意鼓勵您的家人去中國大陸發展, 包括投資和工作?) Chen and Zheng then use five independent variables to help describe the difference between people's attitudes toward Mainland China: social positions, socio-economic status, party identification, national identity, and belief in democracy.

For my own research project, I plan to employ a methodology like that of Chen and Zheng where I first examine the macro-level, then bring it down to the micro-level. At the macro-level I would like to take time to provide context. Starting with the Republic of China's (ROC) exile to Taiwan, I will review historical events and policymaking that are formative to the China-Taiwan relationship such as the ROC's expulsion from the United Nations and its practically synchronous accession with the PRC to the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the

micro-level, I plan to utilize data from the Wave 5 Asian Barometer Survey conducted in Taiwan from July 2018 to January 2019 to conduct a regression analysis. I will use two questions from the survey to measure people's attitudes toward China: 1) Does China do more harm or good to Asia? and 2) Is the influence of China on world affairs today positive or negative? For my independent variables I plan to use national identity, party identification, belief in democracy, attitudes towards the United States, and age.

Although the topics of the above article and this thesis are very similar, allow me to clarify some methodological differences. This thesis will use a different data set from Chen and Zheng. This thesis will also examine two different independent variables from the above mentioned paper: age and attitudes toward the United States.

As far as the current literature is concerned, there does not seem to be any up-to-date analysis done of the above research questions using data from the Wave 5 Asian Barometer Survey data. Therefore, one contribution of this thesis is to examine how current theory holds up when using the dataset.

Proposed Chapter Outline

- I.** Introduction
- II.** Hypotheses
- III.** Macro-Level
- IV.** Individual/Micro-Level:
- V.** Methodology and Data Analysis
- VI.** Conclusion

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