

# The Awakening of Taiwanese Consciousness: The Sorrows of Being Born a Taiwanese 💢 Lauren Chung I Department of Political Science I Boston University



#### Abstract

The Republic of China (ROC), also known as Taiwan, has been the haven of the Kuomintang (KMT) since its defeat at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949. Taiwan has long been the subject of control by foreign powers, which has created a unique history for the autonomous region. Historical circumstances have created a space for a distinct Taiwanese culture that has diverged from that of the mainland. This paper examines the role of this newfound culture on civic engagement, specifically regarding the sentiment for separatism or lessened ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC). I examine the history of the island by first discussing the evolution of Taiwanese culture over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. I take a closer look following Taiwan's democratization, which developed a deeper cultural cleavage that is politically salient. Cultural cleavages have only increased the nationalist sentiment of the Taiwanese people in pushing for greater separation – if not full-fledged independence – from the PRC. The results of my historical analysis argue the relevance of culture theory on the growing divide between Taiwan and China. In addition, this paper provides a perspective the effects of identity politics in Taiwan and its effect on cross-strait relations.

### Methods

#### **Research Questions:**

What circumstances have afforded the Taiwanese the ability to fully express their political culture? How has a distinct Taiwanese identity translated into any particular cross-strait policy?

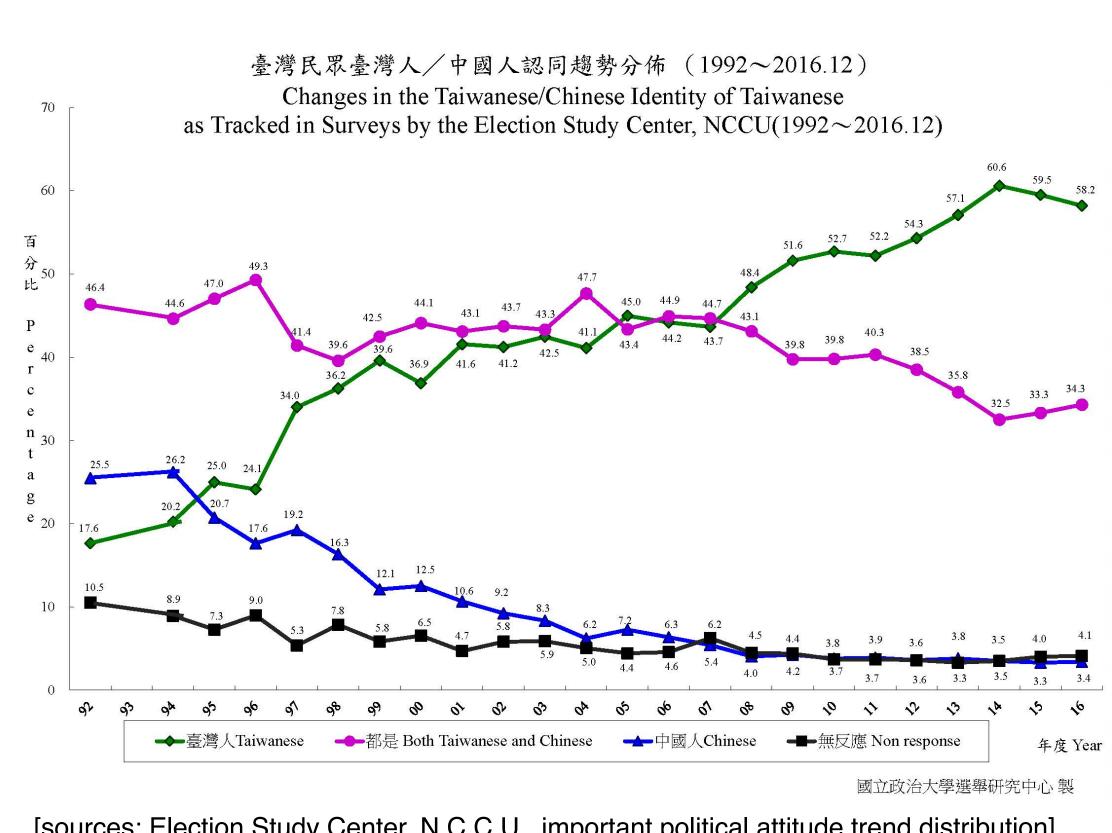
- definition of culture, political culture and culture theory in comparative political analysis, discussion of nationalism
- Historical analysis

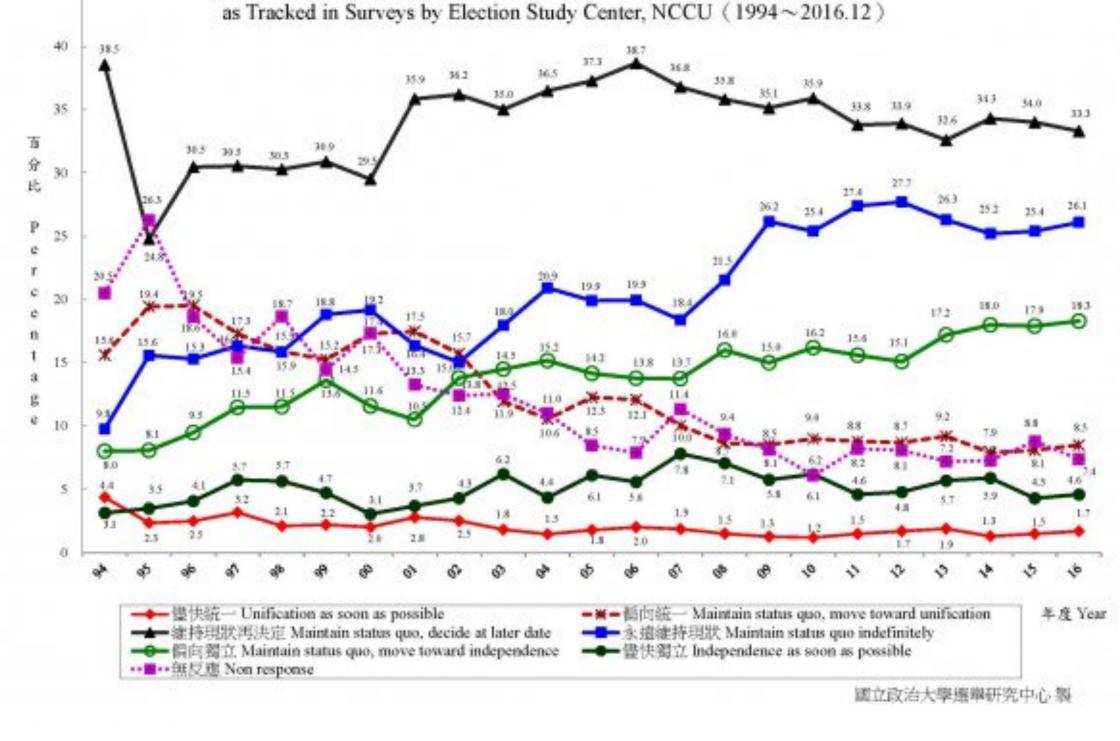
## Theory

"Cultures differ, among other ways, in how people view authority relations, in their members' commitment to particular religious or ideological views, and in the content and salience of their historical memories."

- Weber's action theory of political culture
- Interconnected concept of Taiwanese consciousness and political culture
- Taiwanese nationalism and newfound national identity
- Taiwanese consciousness must be defined in relation to cultural identity, political culture, and national identity

## The Evolution of Taiwanese Identity (1996-2016)





臺灣民眾統獨立場趨勢分佈 (1994~2016.12)

Changes in the Unification - Independence Stances of Taiwanese

[sources: Election Study Center, N.C.C.U., important political attitude trend distribution]

## Historical Analysis

#### Era of Foreign Rule

**Dutch Colonization** 

- Trading Post 1642-1661 Qing Dynasty
- Zheng Cheng-gong (1661-1683)
- Shi Lang conquers Taiwan (1683)
- Qing Dynasty Rules Taiwan and sets up a predominantly Han Chinese culture Japanese Colonization
- Taiwan is ceded to the Japanese in the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) Kuomingtang (KMT) Rule
- Cairo Declaration and Potsdam Declaration hand Taiwan back to the KMT
- February 28, 1947 Incident
- Chiang Kai-shek loses the Chinese Civil War and relocated the ROC capitol to Taiwan
- Martial law declared (1949-1987)
- Chiang Kai-shek dies (1975)

#### Post-Democratization Lee Teng-hui Era

- Taiwanization of the KMT
- First Freely Elected President in 1996
- Promoted a new cohesive Taiwanese identity
- Deutsche Welle interview on special stateto-state relations with the PRC (1999) Chen Shui-bian Administration

#### First Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) President in the history of Taiwan

- "De-sincization" effort to divest Taiwan from Chinese national identity references Ma Ying-jeou
- Rehabilitation of cross-strait relations
- Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) and the Sunflower Movement
- Ma meets with PRC President Xi Jin-ping for the first meeting between leaders since 1949 (2015)

### Tsai Ying-wen

## Findings

- An emergence of Taiwanese consciousness following democratization
- Taiwanese consciousness creates a clear cultural cleavage between Taiwan and the mainland that is politically salient as it affords the Taiwanese people the freedom to take social action
- Taiwanese consciousness can explain the fervor towards nation building and civic engagement of a Taiwanese government rather than a unified country with the People's Republic of China (PRC)

## Current Implications

Taiwanization is likely to continue under the current Democratic Progressive Party regime. Cross-strait relations, with the exception of a call for full fledged independence, will remain at status quo leaning toward seperatism.



