



Why Can the Frail Status Quo in the Taiwan Strait be Preserved? Analyzing the Econ-political Synergy among China, Taiwan, and United States

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Abstract: This paper uses analytic eclecticism to answer why the fragile status quo in the Taiwan Strait remains resilient. After pragmatically framing the research question, this research chooses three symbolic scenes in the Taiwan Strait: (1) Beijing's economic statecraft towards Taiwan; (2) Taiwan's soft power in finding the leeway out of its international dilemma; (3) The Sino-America competition over the narration in the cross-Strait relations. As a practice of eclecticism where the analytical framework is constructed based on each major school of international relations theories, this paper combines cases and theoretical tools to draw the whole picture of Taiwan issues. Ultimately, this research reached empirical and theoretical conclusions, calling for an innovative international relations theory that observes political phenomena conceptually and practically.

Keywords: analytic eclecticism, relations between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan (cross-Strait relations), China, Taiwan, United States

1. Introduction

The Taiwan Strait's security has been exacerbated seriously in the past few years when the arguments between Taipei and Beijing surfaced. The temporary peace built upon nominal political consensus – the 1992 Consensus – seems to become endangered.[1] The status quo in the Taiwan Strait is described as a nominal agreement reached among three political bodies – the United States, China, and Taiwan – to preserve daily communication across the Strait without the outbreak of warfare. [2]

The status quo is clearly in crisis. Firstly, the nominal consensus is merely a transitional phase that lacks guarantees for continuity. Besides, the political disagreements expanded both when Beijing assertively pursued “complete unification” and when Taipei sought its survival as a widely unrecognized state, but the latter actions violated the former stance. [3] The formation of Taiwanese identity since the 1990s accelerated the deterioration when the cultural identity that encompasses post-colonial memories and local ethnic diversity is politicized into an “independence-versus-unification” political agenda in Taiwan's domestic environment. The partisan conflict between Kuomintang (herein KMT) and Democratic Progressive Party (herein DPP) forces any compromise towards mainland China into a “witch-hunt” topic, rendering the current cross-Strait relations into a situation where “no high-level contact” exists.[4] In addition, the Sino-American competition brings the possibility of military conflicts in the Strait, and the chaotic American domestic politics increases this possibility. Although some literature questions that Washington might abandon its “strategic ambiguity” in the Taiwan Strait, Washington keeps working as a “balancer” in this region to protect the American interest at the official level.[5] Incidents such as House Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan stimulated the military exercises from the People's Liberation Army (herein PLA) in Taiwan Strait for weeks and strengthened Beijing's desire for military annexation of Taiwan.[6]

Nevertheless, the status quo remains resilient so far. Not only because the war cost for both sides of the Taiwan Strait is huge but also because of the complex economic and social interactions that entangle mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States.[7] The composition of interactions in the Taiwan Strait includes realism (under the framework of military competition and deterrence between the US and China), liberalism (from the aspect of economic cooperation and interdependence under globalization), and constructivism (within the formation of Taiwanese identity and within the U.S.-China narration competition in the Taiwan issues). Considering the convolution of Taiwan issues, this research intends to select analytic eclecticism as an analytical framework, where “separate paradigms” are adopted to overcome the limitation brought by individual international relations (herein IR) school and to pragmatically connect the distance between the real-life issues and the theoretical analysis.[8]

Therefore, this research will use analytical eclecticism to answer why the frail status quo in the Taiwan Strait can be

preserved from both empirical and theoretical perspectives. This paper also explores how analytical eclecticism potentially develops IR theory by combining pragmatism and analytical tools from each school.

2. Methodology

According to the TRIP (Teaching, Research, and International Policy) survey conducted by William and Mary College, most IR scholars today tend not to identify themselves as researchers from any specific IR school, which demonstrates the fact that most IR studies utilize a mixture of paradigms and the clear gap between IR theories and the solution towards the real-life political issues.[9] Analytical eclecticism, however, discovers that both structure/agency from a metaphysical angle and the material/ideational gnoseology could become a major factor in the “open-ended world,” and hence a combination with the in-situ elements when starting research is necessary.[10] This methodology has the advantage of pragmatism, countervailing the problem that the answer is incompatible with real-life issues and avoiding to be struggled with “internal coherence” without external applicability.[11]

Maintaining the theoretical depth when pragmatically framing the research question into its context is the essence of analytical eclecticism. Since the détente period, three major political bodies (China, Taiwan, and the United States) have constructed trade and communication across the Taiwan Strait, which was previously suspended because of the China Civil War and the Cold War. The selection that Washington abandoned the official diplomatic ties with the Republic of China (herein ROC or Taiwan) and built relations with the People’s Republic of China (herein PRC) caused the dilemma of “Chinas” in the international world. After the proliferation of the concept – of “One China Policy” (or “One China Principle” in Beijing’s version), ROC Taiwan lost most of its formal international connections. As such, the survival dilemma of ROC Taiwan became a serious topic when PRC China rose as the second strongest econ-political body in the world and when Beijing assertively sought unification with Taiwan. Furthermore, the Sino-American dispute at the global level complicates this issue when democratic Taiwan is a potential card that Washington could adopt to deter the rise of authoritarian China. Similar to the South China Sea disputes, Washington and Beijing compete for the dominance of narration in Taiwan issues, whose logic and evidence are effective in the international space.[12] The purposes of these two global giants are different, for Beijing majorly seeks unification with Taiwan but Washington protects the American interest in East Asia by suppressing the rise of China.[13]

The originality of this paper focused on in-situ pragmatic implications with theoretical analytic tools, targeting to cover the whole picture of this issue. Unlike analysis of Sino-American competition that often adopts analytical frameworks from international relations, many papers relevant to cross-Strait relations focus on case studies. The case-oriented studies share the weakness of timeliness, and the analysis topic shifts when the situation changes. For instance, transportation policies across the Strait were under heated discussion in the early 2000s.[14] Because of the initiation of ECFA, the discussion of the cross-Strait economy became another popular topic, and the role of businessmen was emphasized.[15] After the Sunflower movement, the involvement of Taiwanese civil society started to be frequently mentioned.[16] Another significant omission is Beijing’s military assertiveness is usually covered in the Taiwan issues. However, few studies combine the current Sino-American competition with civil-level socio-economic interactions.

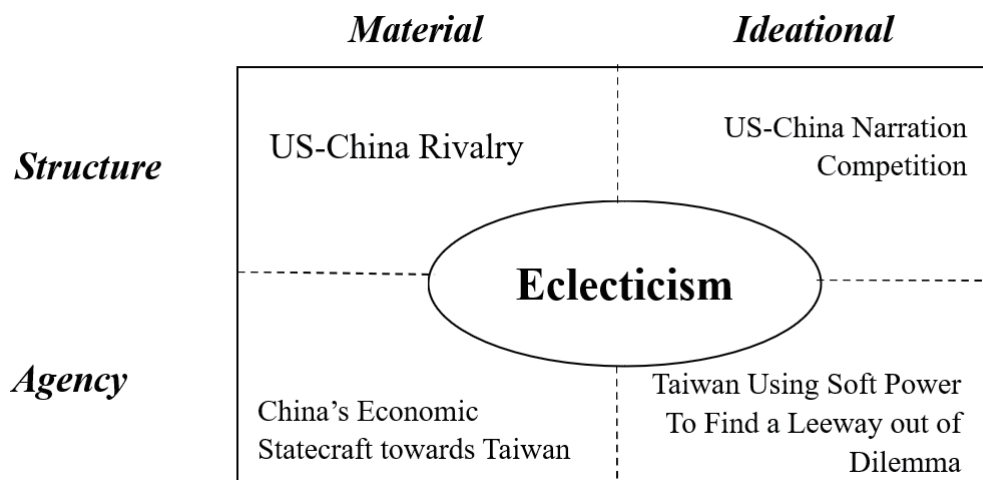


Figure 1. The Analytical Structure of This Thesis is Based on “The Basic Structure of Eclecticism.” Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics (Houndmills: Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein, 2011), page 21.

Therefore, this paper will examine this issue through the above analytical structure. On the one hand, Beijing selects economic statecraft to strengthen cross-Strait communication for achieving reunification with Taiwan. On the other hand, Taiwan adopts a soft power-based strategy to seek a leeway out of its unrecognized status. From the general aspect, the current Sino-American rivalry follows the logic of realism, but in the cross-Strait relations, they compete for the dominance of narration.

3. China's Economic Statecraft towards Taiwan

Since PRC China returned to United Nations in the 1970s, China has kept the blueprint of reunification with Taiwan and the model of the "One Country Two System" until today.[17] Although Beijing showed clear assertiveness after the 19th Party Congress, the general direction of China's Taiwan policies – peaceful reunification – does not alter.[18] Overall, Beijing's peaceful unification strategy follows two directions: (1) transportation and (2) economic policies.

3.1 Transportation Policies

Transportation policies mainly mean the Small Three Links Policy (2000-Today) and Three Links Policy (2008-The Outbreak of Coronavirus).[19] These transportation policies allow direct transportation among cross-Strait cities, aiming to support kinship communication for the family across the Strait and create a convenient business environment for cross-Strait economic activities.[20] Compared to Small Three Links which assists cities around the Taiwan Strait with direct transportation (i.e., Xiamen-Kinmen, Matsu-Mawei Port, and Penghu Islands), Three Links Policies permit all mainland cities to have direct transportation with Taiwan.[21] These transportation policies are productive because they boosted the cross-Strait trade volume and increased the cross-Strait social interactions. After a 20-year implementation, these policies are said to construct a tentative possibility for cross-Strait economic integration and a small-scaled life circle that could be regarded as a pioneering example of "One Country, Two Systems" in the Taiwan region.[22]

Direct transportation brings two important spillover effects on maintaining the current status quo. Firstly, a closer demographical junction is built via frequent socio-economic interactions. Because the Small Three Links policy provides convenience for residents who live on Taiwan's offshore islands, the promulgation of this policy makes significantly more Taiwanese decide on their household registration in these offshore islands, such as Kinmen and Matsu. According to statistics, Kinmen, as a larger island, accepted eminently higher registrations after establishing transportation policies.[23] Besides, these policies have impacted Taiwan's offshore islands and made them "have a loose relationship" with Taiwan but a "strong economic dependence" on mainland China.[24] The tight connection also brings political mutual trust for residents in offshore islands. In the study about Kinmen residents' attitudes towards mainland China, although merely 53% of them selected the political recognition as Kuomintang (a dominant Taiwanese party that is relatively more pro-China), more than 80% of surveyees have traveled to mainland and prefer a closer communication tie with mainland China.[25]

From an economic aspect, transportation policies bring affluence to cross-Strait trade and Taiwan's economy. The cross-Strait trade volume and investment amount duplicated from 160 trillion dollars (2011) to 328 trillion dollars (2022). [26] Research conducted after promulgating the Three Links Policy revealed that this policy positively affected Taiwan's domestic economy and Taipei's real estate.[27] The frequent exchanges also bring the crescendo of traveler volume, accelerating the cultural exchange across the Taiwan Strait.[28]

The general attitudes toward transportation policies are relatively benign, and most of these criticisms are from Taiwan's security aspect instead of the economic aspect. Although when these transportation policies initiate, alarmists worried that these policies might "hollow out the Taiwanese economy," the lower shipping costs brought by these policies favored the Taiwanese economy and cross-Strait business.[29] For Taiwan, although most Taiwanese residents agree on direct transportation with mainland China, only 10% continue assisting their opinion after considering the "potential security risks" that might happen in an "unconditional direct transportation" policy.[30] From the aspect of mainland China, the health issue was heatedly discussed after the coronavirus outbreak, especially when the Chinese resumed the Small Three Links with the "2+19" quarantine for most Chinese netizens that the quarantine period is too short to prevent the virus.[31] However, it is worth noticing that public health events rarely influence the continuity of cross-Strait transportation. SARS in 2002 and the coronavirus in 2019 did not cut down the citizen-to-citizen exchange across the Strait.[32]

Direct transportation has converted the previous kinship-based communication into an economic-based interdependence. The commonplace cross-Strait trade and travel stimulate hundreds of new family bonds across the Strait. For instance, over 300 thousand cross-Strait marriages were accomplished by 2017.[33] As such, the spillover effect conducts a circulation where economic interdependence and family-based social bonds mutually strengthen each other.

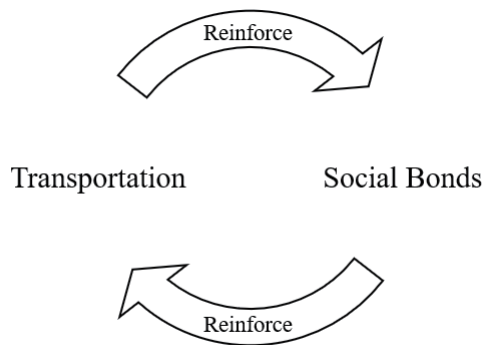


Figure 2. The Circulation of Transportation and Social Bonds. The author makes this figure.

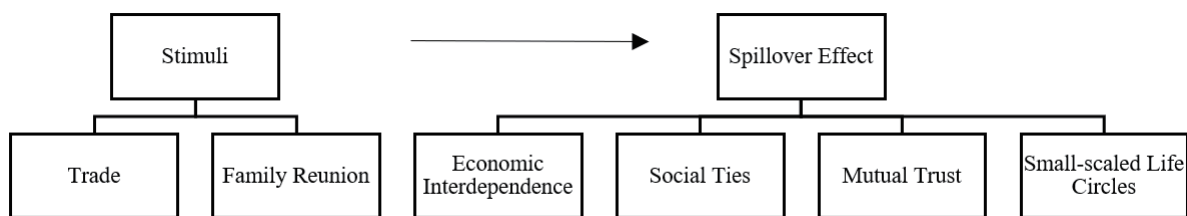


Figure 3. The Stimuli and Spillover Effect in China's Economic Statecraft towards Taiwan. The author makes this figure.

3.2 Economic Policies

Two important categories in the economic policies have impacted cross-Strait relations: (1) cross-strait economic cooperation frameworks; (2) Chinese preferential policies toward Taiwanese youths.

3.2.1 Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Frameworks

The most influential economic agreement is ECFA (Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement), referring to a “free trade agreement” that grants tax reduction for commodities in cross-Strait economic activities.[34] Taiwan’s domestic partisan conflicts put difficulties in promoting CSSTA – the following cooperation framework based on ECFA – and sparked the Sunflower Movement that criticized the Ma Ing-jeou government for standing too close to the Chinese government. [35] There is also opinion revealed that the Democratic Progressive Party (herein DPP), the opposition party at that period, planned this movement for winning the next presidential election.[36]

For Taiwan, accepting ECFA is to strengthen cross-Strait economic cooperation. But Beijing considers this economic interdependence as a tool to achieve reunification with Taiwan, and therefore this framework contains much more political meanings than economic cooperation.[37] Nevertheless, because none of the Taiwanese dominant parties appreciate the “identitive appeal of one China” that Beijing has assertively repeated, the spillover effect based on economic agreements is limited.

During the actual practice of ECFA, Beijing usually requires Taiwanese companies to admit the “One China Principle,” but such political commitment usually remains at the “nominal” level. These companies might commit this principle orally while insisting on their political understanding of Taiwan’s international status on a personal level. An obvious difficulty happened when the Chinese government tried to bring more political influence through China-Taiwan’s economic interactions: the economic influences and communications might not be able to change people’s political preferences.

Nevertheless, Beijing has at least maintained the political gray zone in the Taiwan Strait, where the vague understanding of “China” exists and no “Taiwanese independence” will occur. The Anti-Secession Law promulgated in 2004 showed China’s intolerance towards any behaviors of Taiwanese independence. Although this law does not produce legal validity, it has a deterrent effect on daily communication. It protects the current status quo and prevents the inflammation of possible Taiwanese independence movements in cross-Strait communications.[38] Besides, although ECFA might fail in completing “political reproaches,” the ECFA framework not only enhanced the cross-Strait economy but also rendered the business movements in the Taiwan Strait up to the level of global trade activities.[39] Companies that could benefit from the ECFA framework involve companies from Taiwan and companies that share business with Taiwan. Hence, this FTA also gives advantages to businesses based in ASEAN, Singapore, India, Japan, and Australia.[40]

3.2.2 Chinese Preferential Policies towards Taiwanese Youths

The Chinese preferential policies initially assist Taiwanese businesses to better adapt to the commercial environment in China. Recently, Beijing has started to emphasize its preferential policies on Taiwanese youths. In the “26 Points” and “31 Points” implemented in 2019, the Chinese government frequently addresses the support towards Taiwanese youths, encouraging them to work, study, and live on the mainland.[41] As such, more than 70 “Cross-Strait Entrepreneurship Bases” are constructed to assist Taiwanese youths in a start-up business programs in China.[42]

Since these preferential policies towards Taiwanese youths are relatively new, few in-field types of research exist. But so far, the direction encouraging Taiwanese youths to participate in cross-Strait communication is optimistic. According to Tang Ye and Liu Nan’s in-field investigation in 2021, the cross-Strait trade participation produces benign impacts on Taiwanese youth’s opinions towards China-Taiwan economic cooperation.[43]

3.3 China’s Taiwan Policy that Protects the Political Gray Zone

Although Beijing strives to transform economic influence into possible political influence towards reunification, Beijing’s ambition based on spillover effects has several practical problems. This is because Beijing overemphasizes the spillover effect that economic interdependence could bring on political integration. Besides, Beijing’s political understanding of the “One China principle” is incompatible with Taipei’s understanding of cross-Strait relations. Under Beijing’s interpretation, Taipei is an illegal government, which fundamentally denies the existence of Taiwan as an unrecognized state.

However, Beijing’s efforts in building cross-Strait economic interactions are not nullable, for it protects the current political gray zone in the Taiwan Strait. When the nominal political understanding was constructed in 1992, both sides of the Strait compromised on interpreting “China.” That is, China for Taiwan is the Republic of China, but for Beijing is the People’s Republic of China, sharing the mutual understanding that two sides of the Strait are “one country but split.” [45] As the result, the current political gray zone is built upon a vague definition that is open to interpretation for both sides of the Strait, making the gray zone itself a “tug-of-war” between definitions.[46]

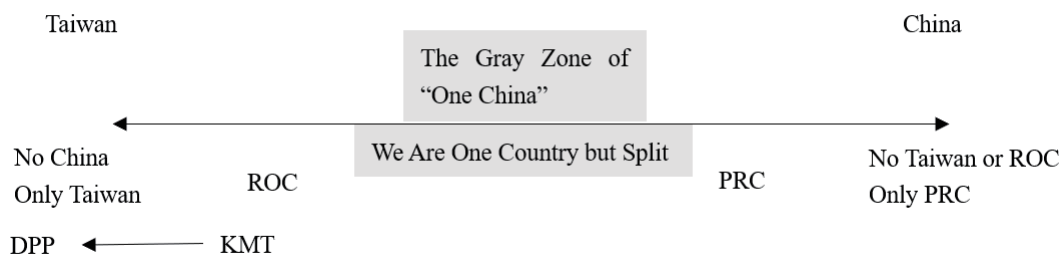


Figure 4. The Political Gray Zone of One China Principle. (The author makes this figure.)

In general, Beijing contributes by using economic tools to increase cross-Strait communication and trade activities, which at least protects the peace from a lower or a citizen level. Difficulties take place when Beijing tries to interpret the current status quo in the direction that Beijing prefers. This, interestingly, preserves the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.

4. Taiwan Utilizing Soft Power to Survive under the International Dilemma

4.1 Taiwan as a Widely Unrecognized State

ROC Taiwan encountered an international dilemma as an unrecognized state since PRC China represented “China” in United Nations during the détente period. Currently, Taiwan’s international recognition relies on ambiguity created by China and the United States.[47] The United States provides the Taiwan Relations Acts (TRA), and Washington and its allies unofficially connect with Taiwan. China, on the other hand, persists “One China Principle” but offers trade opportunities for Taiwan to participate in Beijing’s narrative framework.[48]

The international unrecognition endangers Taiwan’s economic participation in the global network but also causes a fatal influence on Taiwan’s political survival as a state.[49] After Taiwan’s relative strength in the economy became far weaker than China, Taiwan began to utilize soft power to continue surviving as an unrecognized state. Taipei’s previous money diplomacy lost its effectiveness when Beijing could offer countries in Latin America and Africa a better deal – and thus, most countries in the world prefer Beijing’s representation as “China” instead of Taipei.[50]

According to studies related to unrecognized states, these states’ global status is highly dependent on “great power

politics.”[51] Besides, they usually suffer from illegitimacy and receive survival pressures from international society and the domestic environment (i.e., they cannot officially join global institutes like IMF and World Bank as a state).[52] Unfortunately, when the internal legitimacy of an unrecognized state is often in danger. For instance, although more than 95% of Taiwan’s population is Chinese and Taiwan’s official name is still the Republic of China, Taipei cannot call itself a “China” in many situations, which triggers an identity confusion issue domestically.[53] Originally, Taiwan’s post-colonial memories and democratic nature did construct a unique Taiwanese identity. However, the identity issue becomes complicated when Taiwanese cultural identity is politicized and combined with the “unification-versus-independence” political agenda. [54] As such, the enhancement of Taiwanese external and internal legitimacy is Taiwan’s major purpose in implementing soft power.[55]

4.2 Taiwanese Soft Power in Increasing External Legitimacy

The slogan of Taiwanese soft power is “To Let the World See Taiwan.”[56] Taiwan boosts its international visibility through popular culture. Since democratic Taiwan does not receive serious censorship, Taiwan’s popular culture used to have a considerable market share in Asia. However, due to the small market size, Taiwanese popular culture lacks economic support for larger influence. In contrast, although popular culture in China receives harsh censorship, the benign commercial feedback renders mainland China’s popular culture a higher popularity worldwide today. Nevertheless, because Beijing officially promotes Chinese traditional culture in many countries, an opportunity for Taiwan might appear when American allies sanction Beijing-funded Chinese language schools for security reasons.[57]

Except for cultural diplomacy, Taiwan also seeks external legitimacy from its patron states via political values such as democracy and its strategic importance in restraining China. The effects of Taiwan’s soft power depend heavily on its recipient. Under the rise of China, Taiwan lost most of its options worldwide, and therefore American foreign policy has had a huge impact on Taiwan-US relations.[58] The major patron states for Taiwan are the United States and Japan; the former is based on US interest in Asia, and the latter is based on previous colonial history and politicians’ family trees. Taiwan needs to carefully maintain its relations with these patron states because getting too close to a patron state might trigger the irritation of Taiwan’s neighborhood parent state, China. Some Taiwanese politicians champion “saving Taiwan” by selecting a “neutral way” that will benefit both US and China.[59]

Taiwan’s attractiveness towards the US is majorly in the following three parts. Firstly, Taiwan’s strategic importance for restraining China; second, Taiwan as a democratic state can assist American democracy in East Asia; thirdly, Taiwan has crucial technological industries such as semiconductors. However, whether these three elements can contribute to Taiwan’s external legitimacy remains a fog. Although Washington tends to move towards “strategic clarity” in Taiwan Strait, the US does not officially abandon its position as a balancer in this region.[60] The reason is that stating strategic clarity in this region could trigger PLA’s military exercise and create unnecessary warfare.[61]

Contrary to Taiwan-US relations that could break the security balance in the Strait, the indirect relations between Japan-Taiwan politicians can offer Taiwan some invisible international political resources. Taiwan’s attractiveness towards Japan could be found in two perspectives: (1) interest groups pro-Taiwan in Japan’s domestic politics; (2) Japan’s interest in East Asia. The Taiwan-Japan relations remain significantly important even after Japan build an official diplomatic relationship with China. This is because Japan and Taiwan share core interests in important industrial genres, including fishery, agricultural, and food industries.[62] Besides, pro-Taiwan interest groups exist in Japan’s largest political party, Liberal Democratic Party (herein LDP). For instance, “The all-party Parliamentary Group (Nikka Gi’in Koudankai)” and “The Organization of Japan Overseas Chinese (Nikka Kyoukai)” are two important interest groups in Japan that ask for Japan to have a closer political relationship with Taiwan.[63] Some politicians champion a “US-Japan-Taiwan” strategic zone to boost Japan’s security in East Asia.[64]

In addition, Taiwanese politicians actively utilize these political resources from Japan, specifically catching Japan’s need for “country’s normalization.”[65] Since the end of World War II, Japan’s government cannot officially possess military power because of war crimes. Thus, Japan seeks a “prominent identity” as a “normal actor” in the international sphere.[66] The friendship among Taiwanese and Japanese politicians is usually along the family trees. Some could be traced back to the China Civil War. Kishi and Chiang’s family have a “Damon and Pythias” friendship because they shared the target of “anti-communism” in the Cold War era.[67] This friendship continues even today because of the diplomatic style of Abe Shinzo, who advocated for Japan-Taiwan security ties, following his grandfather Kishi Nobusuke.[68] These Taiwanese politicians sometimes would participate in constructing non-governmental organizations in Japan to reinforce Taiwan-Japan relations, and their connections focus on earning Japan’s right-winged politicians’ support. A famous example is Lee Teng-hui, the first democratic president of Taiwan. Not only do the Lee-related organizations have a strong tendency toward Japanese right-winged politics, but also Japanese who prefer Lee Teng-hui are usually classified as “conservatives.”[69]

4.3 Taiwanese Soft Power in Increasing Internal Legitimacy

Another pivotal composition of Taiwanese soft power is to build internal legitimacy – that is, to build a solid Taiwanese identity not to be replaced by Beijing’s narration.

We should notice that the formation of Taiwanese identity has naturally occurred in Taiwan island because of Taiwan’s unique local culture and Taiwan’s colonial past. Scholars describe the “Chinese identity” and “Taiwanese identity” in Taiwan’s civil society are two antitheses between “local civic nationalism” and “an elite-oriented authoritarian past,” which, therefore, separately shapes “anti-China power” and “pro-China power” in Taiwan.[70] As a result, the spectrum of Taiwanese political preferences is formed, varying from Taiwanese nationalism to Taiwanese identity, and Chinese identity.[71]

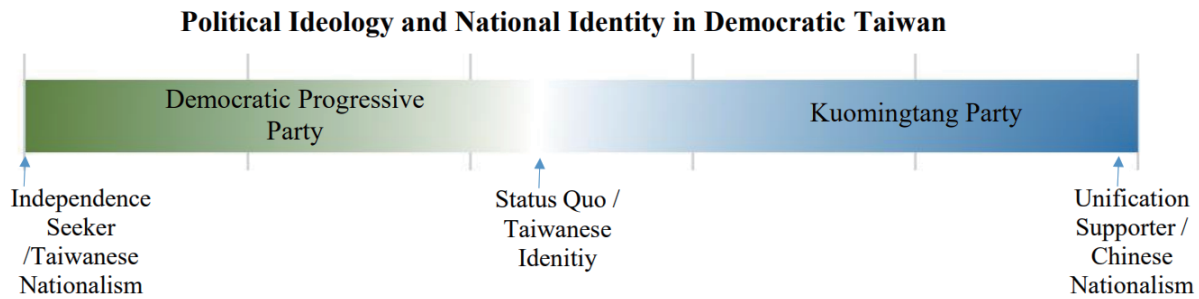


Figure 5. Political Ideology and National Identity in Democratic Taiwan. Yoshiyuki Osagawara, *Taiwan Political Overview: Political Changes in Democratization and Taiwanization* (Kyōto-shi: Kōyō Shobō, 2019), 9, Picture 3.(The author translates and revises this figure.)

Currently, Taiwanese identity has been politicized, causing an impact beyond the domestic level. Scholars pointed out in 2012 that Taiwanese identity developed at the international level, where the national identity is vital for the option of “China versus Taiwan.”[72] Indeed, researchers revealed in the segmentation statistics that residents who prefer a “Taiwanese identity” tend to select an “anti-unification stance.”[73]

However, there is confusion about “Chinese identity” under the cross-Straits relations context. Beijing plays a dominant role in explaining “Chinese identity” globally. Although Taiwan’s “Chinese identity” is different from Beijing’s definition, Taipei has already lost most of its ability to explain the difference to the world, which causes a deprivation of internal legitimacy. Therefore, the terror of missing the internal cohesion forces both two major parties in Taiwan – Kuomintang (herein KMT) and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) – to start to construct a solid Taiwanese identity to combat mainland China’s Chinese identity. Their efforts could be classified into the following two types: (1) to construct a Taiwanese identity without mainland China’s penetration; (2) to resist further interaction of any kind with the Chinese Communist Party and mainland China (herein CCP).

Taiwan’s domestic politics tries to formulate a Taiwanese consciousness without the influence of the mainland. For instance, the young generations in Taiwan are usually categorized as “Natural Independence (Tian Ran Du)” because the education they received from the Taiwan government is that Taiwan is an independent country, which is much different from the old generations’ contests over “mainlanders versus islanders.”[74] DPP accepts the unique Taiwanese identity as its core political agenda.[75] KMT members also champion the political ideals that “we are both Chinese and Taiwanese” to earn more median voters.[76]

Nevertheless, difficulties happen in constructing a completely innovative “Taiwanese” identity without the element of “China.” Since more than 95% of Taiwanese share Chinese cultural roots and ethnicities, the unique Taiwanese identity without the influence of mainland China remains a “man-made” political concept.[77] Besides, when the formulation of Taiwanese identity initiates, the Taiwanese government also tries to cut down the communication ties with mainland China, which could bring a great loss to Taiwan’s economy. As such, the Taiwanese government cannot demolish the economic ties with the mainland. However, the government terminated the political exchanges between mainland China and Taiwan, resulting in cross-Straits relations becoming an interaction without high-level contacts.[78]

5. Sino-American Competition over Narration in Taiwan Issues

5.1 The US. As a Balancer in Taiwan Strait

Washington has long been involved in the Taiwan Strait to protect the American interest in East Asia. But the significance of Taiwan in the security area is not that enormous for the United States. In the Cold War era, the US considered Taiwan not useful for combating the Soviet threat.[79] In the 21st century, the US Army admitted that Taiwan contributes “a marginal

help in logistics” for the possible military threats in North Korea.[80] For the US, Taiwan usually has economic value and democratic value, and thus Taiwan is worth “vesting future American interests.”[81]

Under the context of the US-China rivalry, Washington plays the Taiwan card to suppress China’s rise. Some commentators worried that the Sino-American competition might lead to the end of the US’s position as the security balancer in the Strait.[82] But studies found that the US continues selling low-quality arms at exaggerated prices to Taiwan.[83] This demonstrates that Washington would not truly assist Taiwan militarily, but the US sustains the arms sale in the Taiwan region. The military involvement in Taiwan Strait is not efficacious for Washington simply because Beijing puts too much security emphasis on Taiwan, and Taiwan is not strategically important to Washington.[84] Instead, US involvement in this issue might accelerate Beijing’s annexation of Taiwan, inciting more security risks.[85]

5.2 The Sino-American Competition over Narration in Taiwan Issues

Because military involvement in the Strait can bring serious confrontations in East Asia, the competition between Washington and Beijing in Taiwan issues focus more on narration at the public opinion level. The Sino-American competition over narration in Taiwan issues follows how they behaved in the South China Sea case – they compete for the “narrative leadership” in global issues.[86] When Washington focuses on “American democratic values,” Beijing emphasizes “harmony” and “non-intervention” in other countries domestic politics.[87]

Studies show that Washington usually has more advantages in global public opinion.[88] However, in Taiwan issues, Beijing could have more advantages than Washington. Beijing restates the fact that “more than 160 countries admit One China Principle,” and Beijing asks Washington to consider strong Chinese determination to unification supported by “one-fifth of the human population.”[89] On the contrary, the US media and public opinion do not pay too much attention to Taiwan’s issues. Instead, issues such as human rights violations in Xinjiang and during the coronavirus quarantine receive far more western audiences. In short, the difference in concentration on Taiwan issues renders the narrative battle prefer the Beijing side.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Why does The Frail Status Quo Still Preserve?

The current cross-Strait communication does not tarnish, and the status quo is still preserved. It is because none of the three major political bodies in cross-Strait relations break the political gray zone, which counterintuitively maintains the peace in the Strait.

On the one hand, Beijing actively retains the cross-Strait exchanges at the public and socio-economic levels. The spillover effects in civil society brought by Beijing’s economic statecraft reinforce the political gray zone of “One China” during the everyday interactions among people. On the other hand, although Taiwan suffers from international status as an unrecognized state, the top mission for Taipei is to survive instead of to become independent. The independence task is impossible for Taipei to achieve because the unique Taiwanese identity without mainland China’s influence is difficult to construct and because independence would significantly threaten Taiwan’s security. In Taiwan’s route towards increasing both external and internal legitimacy, Taiwan usually considers the channel not to infuriate its neighborhood parent state China. Therefore, in the implementation, Taiwan does not dare to disobey the political gray zone in the Strait. The deficiency of assistance towards independence at international and domestic levels restrains Taiwan from reviving itself as a newly independent country. This, intriguingly, preserves the status quo.

For Washington, although domestic division in political interests makes the US a “chaotic balancer” in the East Asian region, the US does not officially change its stance in the Taiwan region. In the Sino-American narrative battle, China may have more advantage because Beijing puts more effort into Taiwan issues than the United States. Beijing’s state-controlled narration acts in concert with Beijing’s active diplomatic ties with most countries in the world, which builds the “One China Principle” worldwide and effectively narrows down Taiwan’s narrative presence on the global stage. Since the US-China rivalry in the narrative battle does not break the political gray zone in the Strait, the status quo has been protected.

6.2 What does Analytical Eclecticism Portent the Future of IR Theories?

The gap between theories and political evidence has become so huge that many scholars today do not specifically rely on an individual school’s analytical tools, demonstrating the demand for a more comprehensive international relations theory. Analytical eclecticism – an integration of paradigms that explores the “complex interactions” among states and non-state actors – is a benign orientation towards an innovative theory.[90] However, this paper finds analytical eclecticism immature because it merely provides an analytical framework instead of a complete theory. While implementing this new orientation,

this research reveals the insurmountability among paradigms could be overcome. It is because this problem originates from each school's basic assumptions, but the pragmatic analysis does not spend too much time on these assumptions. Therefore, this paper further highlights pragmatism and disregards the insurmountability of each theoretical school, conducting the following trial path of the framework in analytical eclecticism:

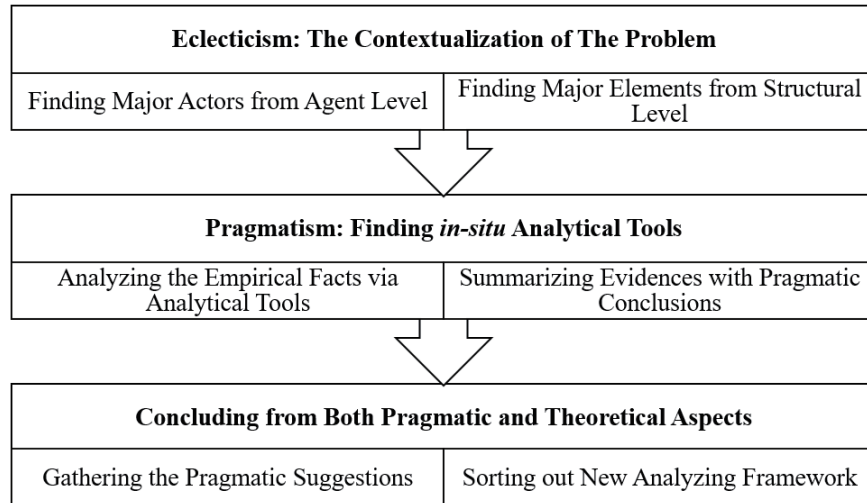


Figure 6. The Analytic Path of This Research: A Practice of Eclecticism.(The author makes the figure.)

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