

Analyzing the New Power Party as The Reflection of Social Change in Taiwan

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Abstract

Concerning the fact that the New Power Party has become the third largest party in the Legislature Yuan (Congress) and its connection with social activities, it is meaningful to have a comprehensive understanding on NPP's policy and how NPP is related to the change in public opinion in Taiwan. Using data analysis, we can better understand exactly which factors led to its recent rise and we can make a prediction on its subsequent development.

After the 2016 election on Taiwan Island, despite the winning of Tsai Ing-wen in the "Presidential election," what is also astonishing might be the fact that the newly-established New Power Party (NPP) became the third largest party in the Congress (the Legislature Yuan) (NPP has five seats in total). As a result of the social activities within the Taiwan Island, NPP has published a series of policies aimed at more transparent party politics, a more justified society and a Taiwan Island which is not heavily influenced by the Mainland of China. Unlike other parties favoring the independence of Taiwan such as Taiwan Solidarity Union, NPP, which was established in 2015, engaged in the Legislative Election and became the third largest party in the Legislature Yuan. Many of the party leaders including the current president Huang Kuo-chang, more or less, has participated in the social activities in recent years. Thus, considering its fast rise in domestic politics, its connection with those social activities, and the fact that there is little research relating to the NPP, it would be meaningful to analyze the NPP itself and how NPP is associated with the public opinion in Taiwan.

The New Power Party

In 2014, students in Taiwan launched a huge social activity against the passing of Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement. It was called the “Sun Flower Movement.” After the “Sun Flower Movement,” to pursue “an equal, just and environmentally sustainable society” (一個平等、正義及環境永續的社會)¹, many leading figures in a series of social movements decided to form a new party, which was the Taiwan Citizen Union. However, due to the differences in nominating legislators, TCU was divided into two separate parties and one of them was the New Power Party. NPP was established on January 25th, 2015. The current executive president, Huang Kuo-chang, was a researcher in the Academia Sinica and is currently a legislator in the Legislature Yuan. Other senior leaders include Freddy Lim, a rock singer and currently a legislator, and Kawlo Iyun Pacidal, a Taiwanese aborigine who was also elected a legislator. The convener of the party, Hsu Yung-Ming, is a professor in Soochow University in Taipei who teaches political science. He was also elected a legislator.

On the level of domestic politics, NPP seeks to enforce the check and balance between different branches of the government. Also, NPP seeks to eliminate the “black box operation,” which is the unofficial trade-off between various parties in the Legislature Yuan. The problem with the “black box operation” is that it may violate the rights of the public. Specifically, the Caucus negotiation process within the Legislature Yuan allows different parties to negotiate with each other in order to pass the act while NPP claims that the video and audio of the negotiation should be totally opened to the

¹ “基本主张 (basic claims)”, Last modified January 25th, 2015, <https://www.newpowerparty.tw/pages/%E5%9F%BA%E6%9C%AC%E4%B8%BB%E5%BC%B5>.

public².

On the policy level, domestically, NPP seeks to enforce the status of Taiwanese aborigines (one of its party's leaders is a Taiwanese aborigine). NPP's claim on the domestic level can be perceived as a way to enforce the culture identity of Taiwan itself. Compared to DPP, NPP shows similar preferences on domestic affairs including energy, environment and human rights. On the national level, NPP seeks to push the normalization of Taiwan as a country. On the international level, NPP claims that Taiwan should actively participate and should be a responsible member of the international society. These claims show that NPP is a pro-independence party, and it seeks to let Taiwan be considered as a sovereign state in the international community³.

Just like the Democratic Progressive Party, which also originated in Taiwan, NPP is pro-independence. However, NPP is more radical than DPP when it comes to issues related to the Cross-Strait Relations and statehood of Taiwan. According to Bonnie Glaser from Center for Strategic and International Studies, “on the matter of Taiwan independence, the NPP's stance is more radical than Tsai's recent pronouncements.”⁴ It shows that since NPP, as a party out of power, does not have to directly face the pressure from the Mainland, NPP can be more constant on issues related to the statehood of Taiwan, for it does not have to balance both sides of the Taiwan strait. If

² “時代力量提修法 要求立院黨團協商「同步轉播」” (NPP proposed amendment to the law which requires the live broadcast of negotiation among parties), Last modified October 11th, 2016, <http://www.worldjournal.com/4437888/article-%E6%99%82%E4%BB%A3%E5%8A%9B%E9%87%8F%E6%8F%90%E4%BF%AE%E6%B3%95-%E8%A6%81%E6%B1%82%E7%AB%8B%E9%99%A2%E9%BB%A8%E5%9C%98%E5%8D%94%E5%95%86%E3%80%8C%E5%90%8C%E6%AD%A5%E8%BD%89%E6%92%AD%E3%80%8D/>.

³ “基本主张 (basic claims)”, Last modified January 25th, 2015, <https://www.newpowerparty.tw/pages/%E5%9F%BA%E6%9C%AC%E4%B8%BB%E5%BC%B5>.

⁴ Bonnie Glaser, “Prospects for Cross-Strait Relations as Tsai Ing-wen Assumes the Presidency in Taiwan,” Center for Strategic and International Center, April 20th, 2016.

Tsai makes concessions on issues related to the status of Taiwan for economic interest, the group of people who are pro-independence are more likely to turn to NPP.

How the Public Opinion reflects the Rise of NPP?

Change and difference in public opinion often lead to change in domestic politics. Election Research Center in NCCU (National Cheng-chi University) and TISR (Taiwan Indicator Survey Research) have conduct polls on local public opinion. While the former uses time (year) as an independent variable to research on people’s opinion on identity and unification v. independence over the past two decades, the latter uses age as an independent variable to research on people’s preference on issues related to the Cross-Strait Relations. In comparison, time (Years) as an independent variable does not adequately reflects how NPP rise. Instead, age as an independent variable can better explain NPP’s rise. Specifically, young generation prefers more polarized options such as “one country on each side” on the Cross-Strait Relations. This explains why they might support party with radical ideology such as NPP.

Time (year) as independent variable

Election Study Center in NCCU has conducted polls on people’s opinion on their identity (Chinese/Taiwanese) and on their preference on unification vs independence using time (year) as independent variable.

Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese									
	Year	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2017	Mean
Identification									
Taiwanese		20.2	36.2	41.2	44.3	52.7	60.6	56	44

Both Taiwanese and Chinese	44.6	39.6	43.7	44.9	39.8	32.5	36.6	40
Chinese	26.2	16.3	9.5	6.3	3.8	3.5	3.6	10
Non response	9	7.9	5.6	4.5	3.7	3.4	3.8	5

Table 1: The change in self-identification (Chinese/Taiwanese) over the past 2 decades of People within Taiwan Island is demonstrated in the table.

(Sources of data: Election Study Center, N.C.C.U., important political attitude trend distribution

<http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/app/news.php?Sn=166>)

From the table, we can find that public opinion on identity has changed over the past two decades. The population which consider themselves as Chinese has decreased from 26.2% to 3.6%. The population which consider themselves as both Chinese and Taiwanese has slightly decreased from 44.6% to 36.6%. The population which consider themselves as purely Taiwanese has increased dramatically from 20.2% to 56%. The population which has no response has decreased from 9% to 3.8%. In comparison, we find that during some year between 1994 and 1998, the population which consider themselves as Taiwanese has exceed the population which consider themselves as Chinese. Also, currently as well as in general (according to the mean), majority in the society would like to consider themselves as Taiwanese.

A few factors may result in this situation. First of all, while the elder generation which still maintains ties with the mainland is dying, the younger generation which grows up without formal connection with the mainland is increasingly participating the poll. In the future, if no accident occurs, the developing trend is very likely to continue with more people consider themselves as Taiwanese and less consider themselves as Chinese. Second, in 1990s, people are more likely to participate in political affairs, which suggests that more people are willing to voice their opinions

instead of keeping silent.

Changes in the Unification-Independence Stances of Taiwanese									
	Year	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2017	Mea
Stance									
Unification ASAP		4.4	2.1	2.5	2	1.2	1.3	2.2	2.
Maintain status quo, decide at later date		38.5	30.3	36.2	38.7	35.9	34.3	32.9	35.
Independence ASAP		3.1	5.7	4.3	5.6	6.3	5.9	5.7	5.
Non response		20.5	18.7	12.4	7.5	6.2	7.7	6.5	11.

Table 2: The change in idea on unification over the past 2 decades of People within Taiwan Island is demonstrated in the table.

(Sources of data: Election Study Center, N.C.C.U., important political attitude trend distribution <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/app/news.php?Sn=167>)

From the table, we can find that: 1) The population which prefer immediate unification has slightly decreased from 4.4 in 1994 to 2.2 in 2017; 2) The proportion which strongly favors immediate independence has slightly increased from 3.1 in 1994 to 5.7 in 2017; 3) The proportion which favors maintaining status quo has been fluctuated between 30 and 40; 4) The proportion which has no response on this affairs has decreased from 20.5 in 1994 to 6.5 in 2017; 5) Generally, the majority of the respondents prefers maintaining status quo.

Thus, we can suppose that: 1) People in Taiwan are increasingly interested in expressing their positions on unification/independence since less people are willing to have no response on this issue; 2) The majority of the society still prefers maintaining current status quo. The fact might have led to Tasi's victory (Her position on the Cross-Strait Relations is to "maintain the status quo") in January. In comparison, the proportion of the society which prefers immediate solutions (unification asap or

independence asap) has been relatively small.

In comparison of two tables, we may find that 1) currently, majority of the society consider themselves as Taiwanese and would like to prefer maintaining status quo; 2) although most people consider themselves as Taiwanese, not many people prefer immediate independence. However, this does not explain why NPP, a party which push for “normalization of Taiwan as a country”, gain such support in a short time.

Age as independent variable

2015	Age Group	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	Above 70
Issues							
One country on each side		78.3	79	72.4	69.3	58.5	46.9
One China, One Taiwan		73.5	75.8	67.9	61.6	59.5	40.3
No Unification, No Independence, No use of force		56.2	67.2	62.7	62.8	62.7	63.1
Two sides belong to the same country		7.7	14.6	22.1	20.9	13.5	18.3
Ultimate Unification		9.2	10.7	10.2	13.7	7	12.3

Table 3: People’s preference on a series of solutions to the Cross-Strait Relations in 2015/10 is demonstrated in the table. (Sources of data: <http://www.tisr.com.tw/?p=6423#more-6423>)

2016	Age Group	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69
Issues						
One country on each side		86.2	82.7	71.5	73.6	67
One China, One Taiwan		76.8	80.9	68.8	70	67
No Unification, No Independence, No use of force		65	74.3	76.9	74.8	69
Two sides belong to the same country		13.7	23.6	33	25.7	20
Ultimate Unification		7.7	10	10.9	12	12

Table 4: People’s preference on a series of solutions to the Cross-Strait Relations in 2016/01 is demonstrated in the table. (Sources of data: <http://www.tisr.com.tw/?p=6423#more-6423>)

In both table 3 and 4, on issues including “One country on each side” and “One China, One Taiwan”, the younger the people are, the more supportive they are of those issues. On “No unification, No independence, No use of force”, there is fluctuation among various age group. On “Ultimate Unification”, the more senior people are, the more supportive they are on these issues. Generally, over 50% of the population in each age group support “One country on side” and “One China, One Taiwan” (with the exception that 45.5% of the people over 70 supports “One China, One Taiwan”). Also, over 50% of the population in each age group support “No unification, No independence, No use of force” (with the exception that 48.2% of the people over 70 supports “No unification, No independence, No use of force”). What’s more, less than 50% of the population in each age group support “Two sides belong to the same country” and “Ultimate Unification”.

Since young people are more likely to prefer radical solution on the Cross-strait Relations, they are more likely to prefer the ideology of NPP on the Cross-strait affairs. Thus, they are more likely to support NPP and we have seen that many NPP supporters are quite young compared with supporters of other parties. Also, from the table, we can see that the elder people are, the less likely that they will prefer “One country on each side” and “One China, One Taiwan”. Thus, there is possibility that as those NPP supporters grow up, they may prefer parties with more moderate ideology. If that’s the case, NPP might lose their support in the future if they continue to hold the stance on Cross-strait affairs.

In short, since over time, the majority of the population does not favor immediate

independence, time is not the determining factor in the rise of NPP (especially on the Cross-strait Policy). Instead, when we consider how the difference in age affects the idea of people, we find that the younger the people are, the more supportive they are on radical solution on the Cross-strait Relations. Thus, the younger the people are, the more likely that they will feel familiar with the NPP's stance on the Cross-strait Relations and they are more likely to support NPP for similar ideology. However, further observation is required to find out if they will change their mind when they grow up.

The Future of NPP?

On the domestic politics level, NPP might cause some effects to the current party structure. According to Bonnie Glaser, "If Tsai makes concessions to Mainland China that are not supported by her party, the DPP could lose support to the NPP in the 2018 local elections and beyond."⁵ It shows that since NPP, as a party out of power, does not have to directly face the pressure from the Mainland, NPP is more constant on issues related to the statehood of Taiwan, for it does not have to balance the stance from both sides of the Taiwan Strait. If Tsai makes concessions on issues related to the status of Taiwan for economic interests, the group of people who are pro-independence are more likely to support NPP. Explicitly, it also demonstrates a certain level of uncertainty in NPP's future. Since NPP is a party with a radical ideology, it might face trouble in the future in case there is change in public opinion when their current supporters grow up and decide to take a more moderate stance on political affairs. For the reason that the

⁵ Bonnie Glaser, "Prospects for Cross-Strait Relations as Tsai Ing-wen Assumes the Presidency in Taiwan," Center for Strategic and International Center, April 20th, 2016.

economic, cultural and military power of the Mainland of China is too strong, how to maintain the stability and the peaceful development of the Cross-Strait Relations is the issue which any party in power has to consider. Thus, NPP may have to adjust its policy or its tone in the future, or it will face serious trouble in domestic politics.

On the domestic affairs level, NPP pushes for “an equal, just and environmentally sustainable society.” However, since NPP has not come to real positions, it is hard to say how it will actually pursue this idea.

On the international and Cross-Strait level, NPP has not dealt with the Mainland, US, and Japan as a party in power. However, we may assume that they might adjust their policies once they come to real positions.

What’ more, when young generation grow up, they may have different understanding on politics and it is possible that they will pursue more moderate policies. This creates huge uncertainty for the future development of NPP.

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