Time matters in cross-Strait relations: Tsai Ing-wen and Taiwan's future

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Abstract

In this article, I examine the ROC President's discursive response to PRC efforts to limit Taiwan's future possibilities and undermine confidence in Taiwan's future. I argue that the capacity to imagine the future, and perceiving agency to affect future outcomes, is crucial for national resilience. Since Taiwan is routinely exposed to factors known to cause reduced self-efficacy and morale – uncertainty, threat, marginalization, restricted agency, circumscribed action repertoires – it is crucial that Taiwanese people have a meaningful sense of "what are we striving for?" and confidence that they have the agency to realize these aspirations. The article sets out an empirical examination of discursive constructions of the future as a vector for enhancing cohesion and resolve in Taiwanese society. Foregrounding a novel dimension in the study of Taiwan, the article contributes both an interpretivist account of President Tsai Ing-wen's discourse and opens a new avenue for research on the largely neglected issue of futurity in cross-Strait relations.

本文将研究中华民国总统对于中华人民共和国对于台湾未来可能性的限制及破坏其对自身未来的信心所做出的话语回应。是否拥有对未来的想象能力及对未来愿景的感知能力对于一个社会韧性至关重要。台湾经常面临众多会导致其国民感知能力及自信心消退的因素，包括不**确定性**，**威**胁，边缘化，受限的主观能动性和行动范围等等。在此背景下，台湾民**众是否能**对于"我们在为什么而努力" 这一问题有一个切实的认识及是否能拥有实现自身愿景的主观能动性便显得至关重要。本文认为对于"未来"的话语建构是作为增强台湾社会凝聚力和决心的载体，并对此展开实证检验。基于对台湾研究的新颖视角，本文既对蔡英文总统的话语做出了解释性的解读，也针对此前被忽略的海峡**两岸的未来前景**这一研究话题开辟了新的可能性。

Keywords

Discourse; the future; cognitive warfare; resilience; Tsai Ing-wen; Taiwan

话语；未来; 认知战；韧性; 蔡英文；台湾

Introduction

Two decades ago a high-level Taiwanese defence official declared that "the greatest threat we face is psychological warfare from the People's Republic of China (PRC)."[1] Successive iterations of the Republic of China (ROC) Quadrennial Defence Review (*sinianqi guofang zongjiantao* 四年期國防總檢討) show that such concerns have not diminished,[2] as the PRC has expanded and honed operations under the Three Warfares (*san zhan* 三战) concept.[3] The 2021 ROC National Defence Report (*guofang baogaoshu* 國防報告書) depicts a multitude of actions designed to "cause mental disarray and confusion in order to weaken our fighting will [and] determination to defend ourselves."[4] As part of the PRC's sustained information warfare campaign against Taiwan, analysts have noted concerted efforts to convince Taiwanese people that "Taiwan's future is bleak or hopeless" and of "the inevitability of unification."[5] Taiwan is subject to deliberate efforts to undermine and constrain its future possibilities: To the extent that the PRC intrudes on the time horizon in which Taiwan might continue to exist as an autonomous entity. Taiwanese autonomy, it is implied, is on borrowed time, pending a definitive shift in the military balance or the countdown to "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing* 中华民族伟大复兴), from which "complete unification of the motherland" (*zuguo wanquan tongyi* 祖国完全统一) is indivisible.

A communication strategy that seeks to erode Taiwanese people's perceptions of their agency to determine possible futures is not accidental. The capacity to imagine potential futures and perceiving agency to affect future outcomes are fundamental psychological needs associated with resilience and morale. Hence, I argue that passively "waiting for the inevitable" or allowing external actors to undermine faith in the future could reduce confidence in the viability of Taiwan's continuing autonomy and determination to resist coercive unification. I argue further that national cohesion requires a vision of the future and a meaningful sense of "what are we striving for?" and "what do we want to be?" The central questions motivating this article are thus substantively important. First, does the ROC President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) address Taiwanese people's perceptions of the future? Second, does she present a vision for Taiwan's future?

At the national societal level envisioning the future relies on processes of social construction, hence the focus in this article on discourse.[6] Foregrounding discourse does not negate the importance of policy, but this article explicitly seeks to contribute an interpretivist account of Tsai's articulation of ideas, values and identity. The purpose of the article is neither normative nor advocacy. It is an examination of how the communication strategy of Taiwan's most prominent political actor - the ROC President and Chairwoman of Taiwan's party-in-power for much of the same period - articulates the issue of Taiwan's future.[7] To some extent all political

[1] Roy 2003, 1.
[2] Available at: https://www.mnd.gov.tw/PublishForQDR.aspx. Accessed: 5 July 2022.
[3] Appearing first in the Political Work Guidelines of the People's Liberation Army in 2003, the Three Warfares refer to the domains of public opinion, psychology and law.
[4] Ministry of National Defence 2021, 46.
[5] Harold et al 2021.
[6] Phillips and Hardy 2002.
[7] Scholars making similar arguments about the prominence of the ROC President and the utility of studying their speeches include Lams and Liao 2011; McConaghy 2021; Sullivan and Lowe 2010.

leaders speak to the future of the nation, since time is intrinsic to political meaning[8] and central to the articulation and practice of politics.[9] Hence political speech couched in the "future tense" is commonplace. Yet, in the Taiwanese context, where possible futures are contested and subject to circumscriptions imposed by the PRC, and where Taiwan's future national status is a dividing line in domestic politics, it takes on particular significance. Some Taiwanese scholars have identified a "collective insecurity mentality"[10] and "lost confidence in Taiwan's future,"[11] although other indicators show that Taiwanese people are not easily cowed or influenced.[12] Despite the significance of time and perceptions of the future in Taiwanese politics, explicit conceptual and empirical treatments are limited.[13] I thus seek to show in this article that futurity is an important component and framework for analysing presidential speech in Taiwan.

Future perspectives and the nation

Taiwan scholars have produced a wealth of work on the connections between historical time and Taiwanese subjectivity and identity,[14] and have explored Taiwan's *spatial* liminality and ambiguities.[15] Survey work has begun to explore attitudes toward the future in terms of support for democracy and national identity.[16] However, analyses of political speech at the elite level, while often sensitive to cross-time variation, do not explicitly consider time/futurity a framework, motivation or variable.[17] This is an important gap, since I will argue that perceptions of the future are associated with resilience, efficacy and confidence. This is germane to Taiwan, which faces concerted external efforts to undermine faith in the future and its range of future options. As national leader, the ROC President has the capacity and responsibility to address this issue in their communications, and analysts should thus take note of how they are articulated.

The capacity for individuals to picture "possible selves" in future time is related to the speed and quality of aging.[18] Indeterminacy, i.e. waiting for an uncertain future outcome, decreases morale and self-efficacy.[19] People who experience "future anxiety,"[20] "fatalistic time perspectives,"[21] or "dark futures"[22] exhibit reduced levels of self-confidence and resilience. Fearful or pessimistic attitudes toward the future can inhibit collective action,[23] and reduce capacity to address pressing issues in various economic[24] and social settings.[25] These findings

[8] Heidegger 2010 [1927]; Reynolds 2012.
[9] For an overview, see Pierson 2011.
[10] Wu 2015, 288.
[11] Li and Song 2020, 287.
[12] Batto 2019; Quirk 2021; Templeman 2020.
[13] Exceptions include Ono's (2003) analysis of Taiwanese student's attitudes towards the future and Tsai and Lee's (2021) analysis of the Taiwan genome project.
[14] Brown 2004; Harrison 2016.
[15] Corcuff 2012; Szonyi 2008.
[16] Hsiao and Yu 2020; Wu and Lin 2019.
[17] Chang and Holt 2009; Cheng 2006; Wei and Duann 2019.
[18] Turner and Hooker 2022.
[19] Turnbull 2016.
[20] Zaleski 1996.
[21] Zimbardo and Boyd 1999.
[22] Zaleski et al. 2019.
[23] Zaleski et al. 2019: 108
[24] Miyazaki 2006.
[25] Cook and Cuervo 2019.

are noteworthy because Taiwanese people are routinely exposed to stimuli – uncertainty, threat, marginalization, restricted agency, circumscribed action repertoires – associated with such outcomes. The architects of the PRC operations described in the next section and the institutions in Taiwan responsible for national security cited at the start of this article evidently believe in the potential for such causal effects.

There is increasing acceptance within constructivist approaches that nations can collectively manifest what we normally think of as individual psychological and emotional conditions[26] and their responses to stimuli like trauma.[27] Further literature connects societal perceptions of the future to national resilience. One classic study concluded that "the individual or nation which has no sense of direction in time, no sense of a clear future ahead, is likely to be vacillating, uncertain in behaviour and to have a poor chance of surviving."[28] A contemporary analysis identifies a connection between national leaders' optimistic or pessimistic outlook on the future and foreign policy behaviours.[29] Approaching the issue from the opposite direction, studies have found a mutually reinforcing relationship between optimism and cultural vitality[30] and between positive images of the future and the wellbeing of society.[31] A common thread in these studies is that nations require confidence in the future.

A separate literature suggests nations also require an idea of what the future might look like. This need is acutest in new, marginalised or otherwise precarious nations where the process of "imagining a future allows the nation to become present."[32] The construction of a "future imagined community" [33] is founded on "building collective imaginations about the commonality of the nation."[34] Such processes involve the contestation and construction of "visions of the normative, valuable, and desirable future for a political community."[35] During authoritarian one-party rule, the Kuomintang's (國民黨; KMT) hegemonic and exclusionary national imaginary was rooted in history, place and nostalgia (an alternative form of imagining). Democratization facilitated a new phase of contestation over political and cultural imaginaries [36] and new possibilities for the (re-)discovery and (re-)animation of distinct historical, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic experiences. These processes contributed to the emergence of a broader conceptualization of "Taiwaneseness" and created potential for alternative Taiwanese futures.[37]

Historical experience, notably the February 28 incident, provided a starting point for Taiwanese subjectivity,[38] but it did not remain fixed in the past. As Arif Dirlik argued, the goal of Taiwanese "indigenism" was "not to restore the bygone past, but to draw upon the past to create

[26] Hall 2015; Mercer 2014.
[27] Hirschberger 2018.
[28] Boulding 1956, 7.
[29] Drezner 2022.
[30] Polak 1973.
[31] Ono 2003 740.
[32] Nguyễn-võ 2017, 69.
[33] Tsai and Lee 2021. For a sophisticated critique of Andersonian theorizing applied to Taiwan, see Harrison 2016.
[34] Yiftachel 2002 219.
[35] Tsai and Lee 2021, 93.
[36] Chang 2015.
[37] Jacobs and Liu 2007.
[38] Gold 1986.

a new future."[39] It thus resembled "a utopian project that opens to an alternative future,"[40] as Taiwan's rejection of nativist traditionalism and restorative nationalism in favour of a liberal and civic form of multicultural nationalism have subsequently demonstrated.[41] Visions of Taiwanese futures are not unanimous, since national identity and future national status remain major political and social dividing lines. Former President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), for instance, envisaged preservation of a more traditional rendition of the ROC and productive relations with the PRC under the auspices of a "one China" framework. In its current democratic form, Taiwan is better placed to accommodate such contestation over alternative national futures. However, these deliberative processes are vulnerable to concerted external efforts to exacerbate latent and emerging divisions and to undermine confidence that Taiwan possesses any future possibilities outside unification.

PRC actions and the circumscription of Taiwanese futures

Past and future time are ideologically charged battlegrounds and reservoirs of political symbolism in China, but most germane to this article is the juxtaposition of Chinese modernization framed as inexorable open-ended progress and a "Taiwan question" (*Taiwan wenti* 台湾问题) bounded by a discrete endpoint: "Reunification." Taiwan features prominently in PRC futures. Reunification is a "sacred duty" (*shensheng zhize* 神圣职责) and a marker of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) claim to legitimacy as the true representative and defender of the Chinese nation. Unlike the Belt and Road Initiative, which is unfolding and unbounded with fuzzy time horizons and an undefined endpoint,[42] unification has a definitive quality that can't be finessed – Taiwan is either under PRC control or it is not. Progress toward "peaceful unification" (*heping tongyi* 和平统一) has been frustrated by political and popular opposition in Taiwan,[43] yet PRC leaders persist in framing it as an unavoidable fact awaiting realization, while simultaneously accelerating capacity-building for future military contingencies.

Deng Xiaoping's willingness to defer resolution of the Taiwan question to an indeterminate future juncture has fallen out of favour. Confidence that "time is on China's side" has yielded to impatience and anxiety about Taiwan's prolonged separation, despite the PRC's success in deterring formal independence. In 2019, on the 40th anniversary of the "Message to Taiwan Compatriots" (*gao Taiwan tongbao shu* 告台湾同胞书) Xi Jinping declared that political separation "cannot be passed down from generation to generation" (*buneng yidai yidai chuanxiaqu* 不能一代一代传下去).[44] The scope and intensity of actions against Taiwan have increased accordingly. While the large-scale People's Liberation Army (PLA) drills in August 2022, routinization of PLA Air Force incursions into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) and across the Median Line of the Strait understandably command news headlines, it is in the domain of hybrid warfare (information, cognitive, psychological and cyber warfare, supplemented by diverse grey-zone activities) that PRC operations have been even more active.

[39] Dirlik 2000: 218.
[40] Yang and Mak 2021, 473.
[41] Schubert 2004.
[42] Loh 2021.
[43] The PRC's preferred framing emphasizes the role of treacherous individual Taiwanese politicians and the US.
[44] Speech available at: http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0102/c64094-30499664.html. Accessed: 11 July, 2022.

Some analysts characterize the PRC's approach as the pursuit of "winning without fighting,"[45] through "political warfare."[46] Sustained information warfare efforts attack the legitimacy of the Taiwanese government and seek to exacerbate social divisions and destabilise Taiwan's democracy.[47] Social penetration, co-optation and United Front operations threaten to corrupt Taiwanese elections,[48] media[49] and law and order.[50] Military exercises and incursions, intimidatory rhetoric and strangulation of Taiwan's international space aim to disempower and marginalize.[51] Infiltration of the military is used to frame ROC forces as compromised and unable to defend Taiwan's interests.[52] Successful efforts to "poach" diplomatic allies remind Taiwanese of the ROC's minimal remaining formal ties.[53] Systematically orchestrated domestic propaganda cultivates unified public opinion toward Taiwan, a show of strength and resolve.[54] In sum, it resembles a full spectrum "anaconda strategy" designed to constrict Taiwan until it can no longer resist unification.[55] Deliberate efforts to inculcate feelings of hopelessness and resignation stand alongside PRC leaders' promises of familial reconciliation (*liangan yijiaqin* 两岸一家亲) and immediate access to respect, prosperity and security under the auspices of "one country, two systems" (*yiguo liangzhi* 一国两制).

As the differential in cross-Strait economic and military power has grown, so Zuo argues that "Taiwan's leaders are increasingly lacking confidence in the future."[56] My analysis of Tsai's speeches does not lead me to a similar conclusion. However, the divergent trajectory Zuo notes is reflected in urgent policy debates around arms procurement, reforms to military service and a panoply of countermeasures to strengthen national security and safeguard the democratic system.[57] The following empirical analysis will seek to identify if such developments, and a response to them, are manifest in the ROC President's speeches.

Methods and data

To explore how Tsai articulates her thoughts on Taiwan's future, I employ a discourse analytical approach to a corpus of speech data. Mindful of context and the motives behind the production of a text and interpreting linguistic choices for what they reveal, discourse analysis differs from content analytical approaches that make inferences based on observed variance in frequencies of word choice. Since the ROC President produces a vast corpus of public text, in all manner of spoken, written, visual and multimedia formats,[58] selection criteria were imperative, leaving scope for further research. First, only texts that were directly attributable

[45] Gershaneck 2020.
[46] Mattis 2018.
[47] Charon and Jeangene Vilmer 2021; Hartnett and Su 2021. Civil society organizations monitoring misinformation like Taiwan Fact Check (https://tfc-taiwan.org.tw/) or MyGoPen (*màikohphiàn* 嘜搁騙 https://www.mygopen.com/) show the volume of "fake news" (i.e. fabricated, manipulated or misleading content) claiming to show Taiwanese economic decline, social decay or security vulnerabilities.
[48] Quirk 2021.
[49] Rawnsley et al. 2016.
[50] Cole 2022.
[51] Bush 2019.
[52] Bolt and Brenner 2004.
[53] Shattuck 2020.
[54] Brady 2015.
[55] Dreyer 2018.
[56] Zuo 2021, 551.
[57] Templeman 2020.
[58] Sullivan and Sapir 2012.

to the President rather than the government or Democratic Progressive Party (民進黨; DPP) were chosen. Second, only verbal "texts" were included. Visual and digital communication methods (e.g. images, video and memes) are an increasingly important component of political communications and public diplomacy, but they require a discrete set of analytical tools that are outside the scope of a single research article. Third, the timeframe was limited to the current ROC president's tenure, from May 20, 2016 to the conclusion of data collection in April 2022. Comparative analysis of former presidents or other Taiwanese political actors is thus another avenue for further research. Finally, the selection of texts was limited to "major addresses." Over the course of any administration, the ROC President delivers thousands of speeches, the majority of which represent quotidian (e.g. encounters with school children or firefighters) or specialized (e.g. talks to business leaders) communication acts.[59] The core sample for this article was restricted to recurring set-piece addresses generally recognized as meaningful vehicles for expressing the ROC President's "ideational vision,"[60] namely New Year's Day and National Day addresses, plus two inaugural addresses (a total of 14 speeches). I supplemented these core speeches with items designated "important speeches" (*zhongyao tanhua* 重要談話) by the Office of the President. This selection of 118 items at time of writing includes responses to the cessation of diplomatic relations, communications with foreign allies, announcements of major pieces of legislation, end-of-year press conferences, anniversaries in office etc.[61]

The analysis was conducted using Chinese language transcripts of Tsai's spoken addresses. English translations in the reporting are mine, with the original language in parentheses. Verbal communication involves more than just words (e.g. intonation, pauses, physical gestures etc.), but given my research questions and the purpose of the analysis I deemed this loss of data acceptable. Tsai's speeches are available via https://www.president.gov.tw/ and direct links to cited texts are footnoted. For analysts, political speech has important advantages over less structured forms of natural language since the first rule of democratic political communications is accessibility and consistency ("staying on message.)" Political speech thus tends to be relatively simple, disciplined, and repetitive. Repetition of keywords functions as a signal of what the speaker deems important and often constitutes "the linguistic hooks on which the discourse hangs."[62] Following established discourse analytical processes involving multiple readings and intra-/inter-textual cross-referencing, the corpus was categorized and coded to identify key themes, symbols and indicators. The coding process was guided by two questions derived from the literature discussed above. First, in light of the centrality of future perceptions to psychological resilience, how does Tsai prime Taiwanese people to face the future? Second, given the importance of narratives to national coherence, what is Tsai's vision for a future Taiwan?

Galvanizing Taiwanese to face the future

[59] Sullivan and Lowe 2010, 631.
[60] Lams and Liao 2011, 80.
[61] A small proportion of Tsai's speech output includes interviews with western media. Although not included in the paper, separate analysis of these English language engagements demonstrates a high level of thematic consistency with the major formal addresses that form the empirical basis of my analysis. This is consistent with Sullivan and Lowe's (2010) argument that the ROC President's formal set-piece addresses are in part delivered in the expectation they will reach foreign leaders and publics (in translation or mediated).
[62] Daddow 2019, 9.

Tsai's speeches are mindful of threats to Taiwanese people's confidence in the future, with numerous themes designed to galvanize and promote resilience. The association between themes such as reassurance, validation and self-reliance that I identified in Tsai's speeches, and the inculcation of self-efficacy, self-esteem and optimism at the individual level, is well established in the psychology literature.[63]

Reassurance and encouragement

Tsai does not avoid the perils Taiwan faces nor sugar-coat the "extremely severe" (*jiwei yanjun* 極為嚴峻) nature of cross-Strait relations and Taiwan's diplomatic situation.[64] However, bleakly realistic representations of darkness and obstacle are invariably juxtaposed with motivational metaphors of passage and light. Taiwan is often portrayed as moving forward and overcoming challenges, and the future is associated with brightness. In one National Day address she expressed this through the Taiwanese lyrics of singer-songwriter Hsieh Ming-yu's (謝銘祐) song (*Lu* 路), invoking the joyful traverse of formidable rivers and mountains in the absence of a pathway.[65] Tsai is clear that negotiating Taiwan's challenges requires effective policy foundations, particularly in the economic and security domains. This is evident in the abundant policy detail in her speeches. She also notes the need for qualities like staying-power, self-reliance and vigilance, since "[we] don't have the luxury of dropping our guard" (*meiyou songxie de benqian* 沒有鬆懈的本錢).[66] Tsai is extremely mindful and attentive to psychological resilience. Entreaties to positivity, proactiveness and optimism are accompanied by repeated exhortations to "overcome challenges with determination" (*jianding kefu tiaozhan* 堅定克服挑戰),[67] and positive reinforcements like "the nation's direction is correct" (*guojia de fangxiang zhengque* 國家的方向正確).[68] These statements might appear like trivial platitudes set against the relentless seriousness of PRC information campaigns, but they are a response to what Tsai identifies as a pernicious crisis of confidence afflicting Taiwanese people, which prevents them from internalizing Taiwan's achievements and embracing future challenges. In this context, what would otherwise be a flimsy or self-regarding rhetorical question like "is there anything we Taiwanese can't accomplish?" (*you shenme shiqing women Taiwanren zuobudao de ne*有什麼事情是我們臺灣人做不到的呢?),[69] becomes a meaningful invitation to reflect on Taiwan's capacities. The then-gold standard early-stage pandemic response was framed as proving Taiwan's "ability to survive in adversity" (*zai nijingzhong de shengcun nengli* 在逆境中的生存能力).[70] This was partly due to the government's demonstrated capacity to keep people safe during a public health crisis, which PRC propaganda and online information campaigns actively misrepresented, but also because it generated substantial external attention and validation. This is a significant issue given Taiwan's insecurities and the longstanding salience of, and contestation over the appropriate means to achieving, "national dignity" (*guojia zunyan* 國家尊嚴).

[63] Karademas 2006; Magaletta and Oliver 1999.
[64] National Security Conference, 11 March 2019. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/24140
[65] National Day, 10 Oct 2020. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/25628
[66] National Day, 10 Oct. 2021. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/26253
[67] National Day 2019. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/24860
[68] New Year, 1 Jan. 2021. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/25836
[69] Pension reform announcement, 30 June 2017. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/21454
[70] National Day 2020.

Self-confidence and validation

Tsai explicitly accepts that Taiwan's precarity and isolation have resulted in Taiwanese people lacking confidence in themselves (*Taiwanren dui ziji quefa xinxin* 臺灣人對自己缺乏信心).[71] Diminishment (*beiaihua* 被矮化) and marginalization (*bianyuanhua* 邊緣化) have been a feature of Taiwanese political discourse for decades, and they are implicit drivers of Tsai's many references to external sources of validation. Whether multinationals investing in Taiwan, foreign media relocating their operations to Taipei, or the number of foreign visitors, such engagement is framed as demonstrating "the affection and regard the world has for Taiwan" (*shijie dui women de xi'ai he zhongshi* 世界對我們的喜愛和重視).[72] The pandemic allowed the international community to see Taiwan's capabilities as an "Island of Resilience" (*jianren zhi dao* 堅韌之島),[73] a well-chosen slogan for National Day in 2020 that resonates beyond its immediate context. Like Taiwanese semiconductor manufacturers, Olympic champions and other exemplars Tsai cites, Taiwan's pandemic response fostered the belief that Taiwan could "stand proud on the international stage" (*neng zai shijieshang yangmei tuqi* 能在世界上揚眉吐氣).[74] Since Taiwan's opportunities to achieve international recognition are circumscribed and incommensurate with Taiwan's status as a major global economy and successful democracy, successes in science, sports, technology are invariably foregrounded by Tsai as sources of national pride and self-confidence. In another context this could be interpreted as boosterish back-slapping, but the evolution of the government's public diplomacy pandemic hashtag from the proactive #TaiwanCanHelp to the plaintive #LetTaiwanHelp, illustrates why it suggests pathos not bombast.

Strength in diversity

Togetherness is necessarily a key theme given Taiwan's historical and emerging cleavages and outside efforts to exacerbate social divisions. Tsai encourages a sense of unity by invoking shared history and shared values, such that Taiwanese people constitute an "indivisible community of shared destiny" (*shengsi yugong de mingyun gongtongti* 生死與共的命運共同體).[75] Statements like this risk finessing divisions rooted in national identity, but Tsai does not shy away from "historical baggage" (*lishi baofu* 歷史包袱) in the context of Taiwanese domestic issues or cross-Strait relations. Indeed, she acknowledges the need to confront uncomfortable realities as a foundation for progress. Speaking to the mistreatment of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples, she says a reckoning with the past is necessary so that history can be transformed from a cause of division to a source of "momentum to move forward together" (*wangqian zou de dongli* 一起往前走的動力).[76] It is also key to moving beyond the older mainlander/native Taiwanese cleavage (*waisheng* 外省/*bensheng* 本省) and continuing divisions over future national preference. Tsai acknowledges that settlers arriving at different times all contributed to Taiwan's development and portrays an inclusive nation where membership of the shared community is not dependent on origin.[77] This is redolent of former

[71] Third year anniversary, 20 May 2019. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/24394
[72] New Year, 1 Jan. 2019. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/23999
[73] National Day 2020.
[74] National Day 2021.
[75] Second Inauguration, 20 May 2020.
[76] First Inauguration 2016.
[77] National Day 2021.

Presidents Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) and Ma Ying-jeou's "New Taiwanese" (*xin Taiwanren* 新臺灣人) formulation from the late-1990s, although Tsai's version is more capacious, including new migrants from Southeast Asia and Indigenous peoples. Tsai argues that it is continuous work towards "reconciliation" (*hejie* 和解), "shared existence" (*gongcun* 共存) and "shared prosperity" (*gongrong* 共榮) that create the conditions for "a new future for Taiwan" (*Taiwan xin de weilai* 臺灣新的未來).[78]

Unity and self-reliance

Accepting that the composition of Taiwanese society is evolving, with diverse peoples and migration waves, is a key foundation of Tsai's vision for Taiwanese society. It also helps frame unity and togetherness as central to Taiwanese self-determination. Responding to an earthquake in Hualien, Tsai delivered a message on unity and resilience that occurs elsewhere metaphorically: "It is because we're united and together that no disaster can knock us down" (*yinwei tuanjie yizhi cai buhui zai zaihaizhong daoxia* 因為團結一致才不會在災害中倒下).[79] Unity is depicted as a product of shared life experiences and shared feelings and it is on the basis of this collective experience that all Taiwanese "must shoulder a shared future" (*yiqi chengdan gongtong de weilai* 一起承擔共同的未來).[80] Unity is also engendered through collective ownership, since ultimately "Taiwan's story belongs to everyone" (*Taiwan de gushi shuyu meiyige ren* 臺灣的故事屬於每一個人).[81] No matter how unity is framed, Tsai is adamant that remaining "united under the banner of freedom and democracy" is imperative for Taiwan's future (*tuanjie zai ziyou minzhu de qizhi xia* 團結在自由民主的旗幟下).[82] In this framing, it was togetherness and commitment to democratic values that allowed Taiwanese to protect themselves from the ravages of the Covid pandemic.[83] Invoking Taiwanese self-reliance, as Tsai often does, is meaningful since Taiwan has been subject to the actions of external actors and/or the interplay of external interests for much of its history. Even after the achievement of economic prosperity and democratization, Taiwan's choice structure remained constrained by outside actors. It is likewise significant that Tsai frequently invokes Taiwanese agency and the power to determine Taiwan's own futures. Statements like, "we decide our future" (*women de weilai women ziji jueding* 我們的未來我們自己決定)[84] and the imperative to "seize the future" (*zhangwo weilai* 掌握未來) lest "our fate be decided by others" (*bei bieren jueding le mingyun* 被別人決定了命運),[85] reinforce the belief that Taiwan is not passively subject to the preferences and actions of others. Tsai emphasizes that Taiwan's future is founded on collective responsibility and requires every citizen to "carry the future of this nation" (*kangqi zhege guojia de weilai* 扛起這個國家的未來).[86] A preferred narrative device is citing past adversity and connecting future challenges to historical struggles that have been overcome. Hardships endured during economic modernization and democratization are used as inspiration

[78] Apology to Indigenous People, 1 Aug. 2016. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/20603
[79] Lunar New Year, 15 Feb. 2018. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/23129
[80] National Day, 10 Oct. 2017. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/21662
[81] Second Inauguration 2020.
[82] National Day 2019.
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] National Security Conference 2019.
[85] National Day 2020.
[86] First Inauguration, 20 May 2016. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/20444

to encourage contemporary resilience and resolve.[87] In one speech, Tsai followed the enumeration of more than a dozen military, economic, developmental and health challenges by listing Taiwanese achievements and linking their realization to the resilience of the Taiwanese people.[88] Reformulated as Tsai's favoured metaphor of passage and light, there are many examples of arduous uphill climbs rewarded with beautiful views.[89]

Tsai's vision for Taiwan's future

Since the election campaign of 2016, "maintain the status quo" (*weichi xianzhuang* 維持現狀) became the mainstay of Tsai's discourse on cross-Strait relations. However, it would be wrong to interpret this as favouring stasis. Early in her first term, Tsai hinted that for her "maintaining the status quo" contained a "more proactive meaning" (*geng jiji de yiyi* 更積極的意義).[90] In her second inaugural speech, Tsai declared her intention to "reinvent Taiwan" (*rang Taiwan tuotai huangu* 讓台灣脫胎換骨) and "lead Taiwan into the future" (*dailing Taiwan yingxiang weilai* 帶領台灣迎向未來).[91] This dynamic intent is reflected in a number of discursive and conceptual movements that form the basis of Tsai's vision for a future Taiwan: A sovereign nation committed to democratic values that is an active regional and global stakeholder.

A sovereign nation

Tsai consistently and explicitly rejects a Taiwanese future authored by the PRC. The PRC's offer of "one country two systems" would negate both Taiwan's democracy and sovereignty and is thus unthinkable.[92] This is Tsai's longstanding stance, but it has become more emphatic in speeches since the deterioration of conditions in Hong Kong beginning in 2019, which Tsai references in support of her rejection of unification and to highlight the preciousness and precarity of Taiwan's democracy.[93] Tsai's retort to domestic opponents who interpret her posture, including her refusal to accept the "1992 Consensus" (*jiu er gongshi* 九二共识), as an unnecessary provocation, is that "safeguarding national sovereignty is not provocative" (*shouwei guojia zhuquanbushi tiaoxin* 守衛國家主權不是挑釁) but a fundamental duty.[94] Due to Taiwan's vulnerabilities and need for international support the "provocateur" label is a serious liability for an ROC President, as former President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) discovered to his cost. After her China policy was criticised during her failed bid for the presidency in 2012 (including by the Obama administration), Tsai sought the protective veil of the "status quo." However, the meaning of "status quo" is dynamic and malleable. Tsai's interpretation is that Taiwan is an independent nation under the ROC name, which renders the pursuit of another hypothetical and dangerous form of "Taiwan independence" (*Taidu* 臺獨) superfluous. Assuming this logic, Tsai positions herself as a defender of the "status quo" juxtaposed with a "revisionist" PRC. The apparent acquiescence, or support, among some western leaders for Tsai's "existing independence" interpretation is consistent with their own evolving strategic preferences, and has likely contributed to the PRC anxieties and intensifying actions against

[87] National Day 2020.
[88] National Day 2019.
[89] End of year press conference, 29 Dec. 2017. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/21895
[90] National Day, 10 Oct. 2016. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/20773
[91] Second Inauguration, 20 May, 2020. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/25319
[92] National Day 2021.
[93] Remarks on the Hong Kong issue, 13 June 2019. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/24467
[94] National Day 2019.

Taiwan. The result is that Tsai could channel Lee's "special state to state relations" (*teshu guoyuguo guanxi* 特殊國與國關係) and Chen's "one country on each side" (*yibian yiguo* 一邊一國) statements and insist that "neither side of the Strait belongs to the other" (*haixia liangan hubu lishu* 海峽兩岸互不隸屬) without generating the international concern attached to her predecessors.[95] Domestically, Tsai's position has been criticized by those Taiwanese for whom decolonization is incomplete until Taiwan achieves formal independence from both the PRC *and* the ROC, which they see as an alien regime inseparable from the KMT's four-decade authoritarian rule. However, after re-election Tsai addressed this issue by distinguishing between the pre-1947 ROC on the Chinese mainland and the post-1947 ROC on Taiwan.[96] Since 2020, she has promoted the formulation "ROC Taiwan" (*Zhonghua Minguo Taiwan* 中華民國台灣), conjoining two "affective structures" that embody nativist and pan-Chinese visions for Taiwan.[97] It represents a significant conceptual contribution to Taiwanese national identity formation within the "status quo" framework, since it implies that democratization liberated the ROC from the KMT colonial regime by making self-rule by the Taiwanese people possible.

Democratic deepening

Democracy is a key foundation in Tsai's articulation of Taiwan's future, facilitated by strength in the economic and security domains. Democratic values are used to instil unity and pride in Taiwanese people, while democratic institutions provide mechanisms for improving governance, ensuring fairness and building consensus. Notably, these issues are all favoured targets of PRC propaganda and misinformation activities. The freedoms guaranteed by democracy and their juxtaposition with conditions in the PRC and latterly Hong Kong is a central frame Tsai uses to consolidate resistance to unification among Taiwanese people. Taiwan's commitment to democratic values is also invoked as a powerful resource for generating international support. Under the auspices of "deepening democracy" (*minzhu shenhua* 民主深化) Tsai envisions a future Taiwanese society that is fair and just, caring and equitable, able to accommodate diversity and deliver ethnic, gender, generational and ecological justice. In short, "a just nation" (*zhengyi de guojia* 正義的國家) that embraces genuine diversity and equality.[98] This aspiration, she acknowledges, requires "thoroughgoing reform" (*gaige daodi* 改革到底) to create fair institutions, efficient governance and respect for human rights, which is an integral foundation of the nation (*renquan liguo* 人權立國).[99] Alongside her progressive aspirations for Taiwanese democracy, Tsai has articulated an increasingly robust position on national /security and defence, declaring that "showing weakness and making concessions will not bring peace" (*shiruo tuirang bu hui dailai heping* 示弱退讓不會帶來和平). This stiffening posture has been accompanied by increasingly reverential framing of the military, for example describing the army as "our family and the staunchest defenders of national sovereignty, freedom, and democracy" (*guojun shi women de jiaren yeshi guojia zhuquan ziyou minzhuzuiqiang de houdun* 國軍是我們的家人，也是國家主權、自由民主最強的後盾). Tsai's reverence for the military can appear incongruous,

[95] National Day 2021.
[96] *Ibid.*
[97] McConaghy 2021, 39.
[98] Apology to Indigenous People 2016.
[99] Second Inauguration 2020.

however she argues that tangible threats to Taiwan's future necessitate harder deterrence. The aspiration to defend and enhance democracy is framed as protecting an inheritance to Taiwanese youth, given that it is only through democracy that "the next generation has the right to decide their future" (*xia yidai baoyou jueding weilai de quanli* 下一代保有決定未來的權利).[100] Reverence for youth recurs in statements like "if a nation's young people have no future, this nation is bound to have no future" (*yige guojia de nianqingren meiyou weilai zhege guojia biding meiyou weilai* 一個國家的年輕人沒有未來，這個國家必定沒有未來).[101] Youth is consistently invoked as the driving force of progress towards an aspirational future, and as a rhetorical device to implicitly justify her policies, e.g. "what sort of nation do we want to leave for our young people" (*women daodi yao liuxia yige shenmeyang de guojia gei nianqingren* 我們到底要留下一個什麼樣的國家給年輕人).[102]

Global and regional stakeholder

Tsai frames Taiwan as a committed member of the global community of democracies, celebrating Taiwan's courage to "emerge from the shadow of authoritarian China" (*zouchu weiquan Zhongguo de yinying* 威權中國的陰影).[103] In a bifurcating world of strategic rivalries, Tsai depicts Taiwan at the vanguard of resistance to authoritarianism, standing on "democracy's first line of defence" (*minzhu fangxian de zuiqianyuan* 民主防線的最前緣).[104] The rationale for this positioning is clear, but it is apparent in Tsai's acknowledgement of potential conflict that it is not cost-free. Conflict scenarios have increased in salience after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the PLA response to Speaker Pelosi's visit, in popular venues and among government officials.[105] Tsai also frames the trend in western cooperation to combat the PRC's challenge to international rules and norms as a demonstration of international solidarity with Taiwan, burnishing Taiwanese self-confidence and resolve. Tsai acknowledges that sustained support requires Taiwan's active contribution to regional peace, prosperity and development, but evinces confidence that as a "model student" (*mofansheng* 模範生) and "firm guardian of peace" (*heping de jianding weihuzhe* 和平的堅定維護者) Taiwan has the credentials to accede to the "alliance of shared values" (*jiazhi tongmeng* 價值同盟).[106] One of the implications of these developments is that peace and security in the Taiwan Strait have been elevated to issues of regional and global concern. The internationalization of the "Taiwan question" is in Taiwan's strategic interest and Tsai is not coy about that. The injunction that Taiwan must be outward looking and connect with the international community is partly strategic, since sustaining Taiwanese resistance to coercion requires it, but it is also central to Tsai's vision for a globally connected future in which Taiwan is permitted and recognized for contributing goods as a responsible regional and global stakeholder. At base, it is an aspiration "to find Taiwan's place in the new international order" (*wei Taiwan xunzhao zai guoji xin zhixuzhong de weizhi* 為臺灣尋找在國際新秩序中的位置),[107] something that

[100] National Day 2019.
[101] First Inauguration 2016.
[102] National Day 2016.
[103] New Year, 1 Jan 2022. https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/26475
[104] National Day 2021.
[105] Hsiao 2022.
[106] First Inauguration 2016.
[107] National Day 2017.

Taiwan has long sought but been unable to realize.[108] Taiwan cannot change its physical proximity to the PRC, but in the ideational sphere Tsai has sought to reposition Taiwan as a regional and global actor. Taiwan's future according to Tsai, goes beyond the Taiwan Strait. Instead of an actor defined by cross-Strait relations, Tsai depicts a future Taiwan as an Indo-Pacific democracy participating in regional development and security, and a global actor involved in the contest over liberal rules, norms and values. Tsai cites her New Southbound Policy (*xin xiangnan zhengce* 新向南政策) to illustrate how Taiwan is not just a cross-Strait economy, but one that is literally and metaphorically invested in the region. This fits Tsai's ambition for a Taiwan willing and able to "actively participate in establishing future regional and international orders" (*jiji canyu weilai de guoji he quyu xin zhixu de jianli* 積極參與未來的國際和區域新秩序的建立).[109]

Conclusion

Taiwan's refusal to relinquish *de facto* independence has resulted in sustained PRC military threats, strictures on international participation, economic sanctions and hybrid warfare campaigns. These efforts are designed to weaken Taiwan's resolve, circumscribe future options and reduce the sense that Taiwan possesses agency to author its own futures beyond unification. The motivation for this article was to ascertain whether and how President Tsai Ing-wen has responded to this threat in her own communications. Drawing on psychological literature on perceptions of the future and constructivist literature on nation building, I identified two responses: galvanizing Taiwanese people to face the future and setting out a vision for a future Taiwan. Both responses are significantly present in Tsai Ing-wen's presidential speech, and futurity is evidently an important component of her political discourse. Tsai's vision of an outward-looking and responsible nation unified by a commitment to liberal democratic values and confident in its capacity for progress is the antithesis of a stagnant and demoralized Taiwan helpless to withstand PRC threats. Her exhortations to unity, resolve and confidence in the future are, in theory, an antidote to PRC efforts to the contrary. The fundamental limitation of this study is that speech data do not speak directly to community effects. In other words, I cannot say whether Tsai's discursive treatment of the future has had a positive, negative or no influence on the attitudes or psychological state of Taiwanese people. And since communication models show that meaning-making from political messaging is subject to complex and contingent cognitive-emotional processes, the individual level reception and effects of Tsai's discourse is not something to speculate on without appropriate evidence.[110] However, it is possible to identify the political reception and implications of Tsai's future vision, and to discuss what the framework presented in this article contributes to understandings of Taiwanese and cross-Strait politics.

Tsai's position that Taiwan's future should be decided by the Taiwanese people and that Taiwan's democratic system is fundamental to a future Taiwan is the national consensus.[111] However, her efforts to advance her vision for a more equitable democratic society, for example through Indigenous policy and same-sex marriage legislation, have been divisive.[112] Some criticism can be explained by partisanship, traditional values and proximate variables

[108] Wu 2015, 281.
[109] National Day 2020.
[110] Redlawsk 2006; Zaller 1992.
[111] Batto 2019.
[112] Schubert and Lee 2021.

like Tsai's deficiencies as a communicator. However, Taiwanese people's commitment to democracy appears unequivocal and a significant factor in national identity formation.[113] Tsai's vision for a "sovereign independent" (*zhuquan duli* 主權獨立) ROC Taiwan is fundamentally irreconcilable with the PRC's "one China principle" (*yige Zhongguo yuanze* 一个中国原则). PRC leaders' evolving definition of "independence", which it credibly threatens to use military force to prevent, appears increasingly to incorporate Tsai's efforts to consolidate and prolong Taiwan's separation, increasing the likelihood of conflict. Her rejection of "one China" in any guise is opposed by Taiwanese people who are genuinely committed to the concept and by those who see the conceit as a tolerable concession for productive cross-Strait relations. The counterpoint, that Ma's acceptance of "one China" did not forestall PLA military preparations or the PRC's demands for unification, reflects the major political division in Taiwan: Not independence or unification per se, but how to co-exist with Taiwan's biggest trade partner and sole existential threat. Supporters of Tsai's resolute vision accept that risk and uncertainty are a necessary cost for preserving Taiwan's autonomy and democracy. Opponents point to the economic and security risks associated with a hard oppositional stance, painting Tsai's posture as an antagonistic and futile gamble to "protect Taiwan by opposing China" (*kangzhong baotai* 抗中保台). Others invoke the risk of becoming over-dependent on a self-interested US and embroiled in unpredictable US-China rivalry.[114] Tsai has rightly pointed out on numerous occasions that peace in the Strait is not solely Taiwan's responsibility, while alternative approaches, such as Vice President and DPP presidential candidate Lai Ching-te's (賴清德) "peacefully protect Taiwan" (*heping baotai* 和平保台), remain under-specified.

Significantly, given Taiwan's marginalization and vulnerabilities, Tsai's commitment to democracy, liberal values, the international rules-based order and her determination to resist the PRC resonates in many western capitals. In western democracies, where systemic rivalry with the PRC has prompted a re-evaluation of former engagement policies and newly pronounced debates around threat perceptions and values-based international competition, assessments of Tsai are more unanimous than in Taiwan itself. American support for democratic Taiwan has never been stronger, which Tsai argues validates her vision for Taiwan and should give Taiwanese people the confidence to resist PRC coercion and threats. However, it doesn't change the reality of an intractable, motivated and powerful PRC, which will seek to continue to exploit divisions in Taiwanese society, to depress morale and diminish the determination of Taiwanese people to resist unification. Contestation is an inevitable part of Taiwanese politics while national identity, future national status and the appropriate approach to handling cross-Strait relations are the major issues being contested. As a liberal democracy, Taiwan can accommodate competition between alternative visions for the future. In the 2020 presidential election, voters assessed the respective merits of Tsai and her opponent Han Kuo-yu's (韓國瑜) vision of economic and cultural rejuvenation predicated on close relations with the PRC. Irrespective of their political affiliation, the ROC President's vision for a future Taiwan is of substantive importance. And while Taiwan's future status remains uncertain and Taiwanese perceptions of the future remain vulnerable to the PRC's hybrid warfare interventions, the psychological dimensions of the contest over Taiwanese futures will continue to necessitate scholarly attention. Temporality encompasses key concepts and variables in cross-Strait politics, including various timeframes, time horizons, countdowns, deadlines,

[113] Muyard 2018.
[114] Wu and Lin 2019.

anniversaries, election cycles and the CPC leadership's predilection for "chrono-ideological narratives."[115] Frameworks for analysing cross-Strait political discourse will thus benefit from incorporating them accordingly.

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[115] Holbig 2018

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