

THE “HONG KONG FACTOR”

*Preliminary Research on Social Media Discourses during Taiwan 2020
Presidential Election Campaign*

Eva Mazzeo
Taiwan Studies
Visiting Student (ERASMUS programme)

ABSTRACT

As unrest erupted in Hong Kong in June 2019, the political scenario in Taiwan started to change as well. The aim of this preliminary research is to explore the changes that have occurred on Tsai Ing-wen and Han Kuo-yu discourses on social media after the beginning of the protests in Hong Kong and throughout the 2020 presidential election campaign in Taiwan. The main argument of the article is that the “Hong Kong factor” became a popular issue in the Taiwanese context to the extent that it influenced the narrative of both the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Kuomintang (KMT). In order to prove this claim, the article analyses the posts on Facebook of Tsai Ing-wen and Han Kuo-yu shared between June 2019 and January 2020, and it seeks to reveal the discourse strategies they put into practice when talking about the Hong Kong situation and comparing it with the one in Taiwan. Although some early conclusions are reached in this paper, the research is still preliminary due to the extensiveness of the topic investigated.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eva Mazzeo is an MA student of International Relations at the University of Turin, Italy. She holds a BA cum laude in Chinese Language and Culture from Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. Across her academic career, she has been an exchange student at Fudan University in Shanghai and at SOAS University of London, thanks to Hanban and Erasmus scholarships respectively. She was also recently awarded the Huayu Enrichment Scholarship from Taiwan’s Ministry of Education to study in Taipei. Her research interests comprise, among others, Taiwan’s politics and Cross-Strait relations, social movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and East Asian politics.

Keywords: Taiwan; Hong Kong; Hong Kong factor; social media; political discourse analysis; Tsai Ing-wen; Han Kuo-yu; 2019 Hong Kong protests; Taiwan 2020 presidential election

INTRODUCTION

On 11 September 2019, the media company *Bloomberg* published an article with the title “Taiwan’s President Rises From the Ashes With a Hand From Hong Kong”¹⁹⁸. The article asserts that, as the protests concerning the extradition bill began in June last year in Hong Kong, the firm posture of President Tsai Ing-wen on China and cross-Strait relations became “her biggest selling point” to the voters.

Similar conclusions can be reached if we look at opinion polls taken in Taiwan in July and October 2019¹⁹⁹. In July, 64.7% of the respondents approved of the government’s support of the protests in Hong Kong to protect freedom, rule of law and human rights, whereas, in October, 72% of the public supported the Taiwanese government’s call for Hong Kong officials to meet people’s demands for freedom and democracy and start a dialogue with the protesters. Even more interestingly, opinion polls taken in May 2019 see 83.6% of the public disapproving of the “one country, two systems” scheme, whilst in October, the number of people opposing the scheme rose to 89.3%.

In light of the outcome of the 2020 presidential election, it is possible to assume that a “Hong Kong factor” did influence the political environment in Taiwan. In this essay, the “Hong Kong factor” is understood as a coefficient that produces an effect on public opinion and politics in Taiwan. It derives from the perception of a potential threat from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as a consequence of the treatment that the people of Hong Kong receive from their government in the context of popular demonstrations. More specifically, it concerns the Taiwanese people’s sentiment towards China that stemmed from the awareness – embodied in the slogan “Hong Kong today is Taiwan tomorrow”²⁰⁰ – that what happened in Hong Kong in 2019 is what would happen in Taiwan if the government of the

¹⁹⁸ Cindy Wang and Miaojung Lin, “Taiwan’s President Rises From the Ashes With a Hand From Hong Kong”, *Bloomberg*, 11 September 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-09-10/taiwan-s-tsai-rises-from-the-ashes-with-a-hand-from-hong-kong> (accessed 4 April, 2020).

¹⁹⁹ Mainland Affairs Council, https://www.mac.gov.tw/en/Content_List.aspx?n=854C3E4EF191080E.

²⁰⁰ Adrian Chiu, “The ‘Hong Kong Factor’ in the 2020 Taiwanese Presidential Election”, *Taiwan Insight*, 21 January 2020, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2020/01/21/the-hong-kong-factor-in-the-2020-taiwanese-presidential-election/> (accessed 14 February, 2020).

Republic of China (ROC, the official name of Taiwan) was to accept “one country, two systems” for a possible unification with the PRC.

However, the definition of the “Hong Kong factor” requires further specification. The purpose of this essay is thus to explore the debate at a political level, in particular the political discourse about the protests in Hong Kong posted on the social media pages (i.e. on the Facebook platform) of the two main candidates for the 2020 presidential election in Taiwan, namely the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairman Tsai Ing-wen and the Kuomintang (KMT) candidate, and former Kaohsiung Mayor, Han Kuo-yu.

The primary argument of this paper is that the “Hong Kong factor” became a popular issue in the Taiwanese political context that shaped the discourse of both the DPP and the KMT. Using data collected from Tsai and Han’s Facebook pages, this essay analyses the discourse strategies they put into practice when talking about the Hong Kong situation and comparing it with the one in Taiwan.

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section, the methodology of the analysis and the political and social context are described. The following section looks at and confronts the posts on Facebook of Tsai and Han about the unrest in Hong Kong and seeks to understand how they were framed and utilised throughout the election campaign. Finally, the conclusion lists the main contributions of this preliminary research.

THEORETICAL STRUCTURE

Methodology

As far as the methodology is concerned, this paper utilises political discourse analysis as described in Fairclough and Fairclough²⁰¹. Their approach is based on argumentation and, more specifically, on practical argumentation. The main idea is that political discourse is the result of deliberation, which involves making a decision on how to *act* in response to certain circumstances and goals. In particular, “analysis should focus on how discourses ,

²⁰¹ Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough, *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*, London: Routledge (2012), Kindle e-book.

as ways of representing, provide agents with reasons for action”²⁰². This research thus looks at the claims that the candidates make on Facebook in relation to the context in which they act and the goals they want to achieve, as well as the values or concerns that lead them to make a certain decision.

In addition, the data for the analysis were collected through what is called by Kozinets²⁰³ “netnography”, similar to an ethnography done on social media but with a more specific procedure which in this research was not followed in its entirety. The data collection was hence made through the five operations listed in the eighth chapter of Kozinets’ book²⁰⁴: simplifying, searching, scouting, selecting and saving. I simplified the subject of the research when searching posts on Tsai and Han’s Facebook pages that concerned Hong Kong protests. I then scouted and collected 30 of Tsai’s posts and 13 of Han’s shared between June 2019 and January 2020, which were all the posts in their Facebook pages during that time period that included the word “Hong Kong” (*xianggang*). Then, I saved and translated them from Chinese to English. Finally, the last step was the review process through the political discourse analysis above mentioned. Nonetheless, before starting the empirical analysis, it is imperative to give the reader the political and social context in which the research is embedded.

Taiwan’s political environment and the Hong Kong –Taiwan nexus

Owing to the PRC’s claim over its territory, Taiwan’s relationship with China has always been a delicate matter. The two main parties in Taiwan – namely, the KMT and the DPP – have developed in time different approaches towards the “Giant Neighbour”²⁰⁵, which originated from distinct perceptions of what that neighbour represents for Taipei. The main subject of debate has been whether Beijing is a foe or a friend of the ROC. For its part, the DPP is usually concerned about the aggressive approach through which the PRC tries to lead Taiwan towards reunification and thus considers the mainland as a possible threat to

²⁰² Ibid., 1.

²⁰³ Robert Kozinets, *Netnography. The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, 3rd edition, London: SAGE Publications (2020).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Mumin Chen, “Embracing or Resisting the Giant Neighbour: Debates between KMT and DPP on the Mainland Policy”, *China Report*, 49 (2013): 4, 399, doi: 10.1177/0009445513506649 (accessed 10 April, 2020).

Taipei's democracy and freedom—an argument often raised in Tsai's posts on Facebook. From the KMT perspective instead:

the DPP's manipulation of Taiwan-China rivalry was dangerous since most people in Taiwan did not see China as an immediate threat. Rather, they believed Taiwan ought to utilise its advantages in geographic proximity and cultural bonds with China to maximise economic profit.²⁰⁶

In this regard, under the leadership of former President Ma Ying-jeou, the KMT was able to find a *trait d'union* in Taiwan-China relations through economic partnership while avoiding stressing the political implications of such choices. Implications that, on the contrary, the DPP and its Chairman Tsai Ing-wen had emphasised many times. Even on 12 June 2019, she claimed on Facebook that “everyone in Taiwan should join hands in opposing the people that accept the end of national sovereignty or the transfer of free democracy for a temporary benefit”.

Another aspect where we can see the discrepancy in DPP and KMT attitude is the way in which the political elites *name* China and Taiwan – and, in this case, Hong Kong as well. As argued by Chang and Holt²⁰⁷, if names are an effective means of political manipulation, they are even more so in the Taiwanese and Chinese environments, where an “intricate dance of name use”²⁰⁸ has always characterised politicians' discourse in order to be in line with specific political agendas. For instance, using Taiwan (*taiwan*) instead of ROC (*zhonghuaminguo*), or using mainland (*dalu*) instead of China (*zhongguo*), gives a very different political message and creates diverse political realities. Although it is not possible to go into much detail in this essay, the rectification of names in the Taiwanese context is worth close attention, and it is also relevant for the qualitative analysis of this research. In the case of Hong Kong, for example, even though in Chinese there are no politicised differences in naming the city, when a politician like Han Kuo-yu refers to people in the

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 403.

²⁰⁷ Hui-Ching Chang and Richard Holt, *Language, Politics and Identity in Taiwan. Naming China*, London: Routledge (2015), Kindle e-book.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 197.

former British colony as “dear friends” (*hao pengyou*) in his Facebook posts, the political message that is sent is very clear.

Those “dear friends”, together with Taiwanese civil society, are indeed the main characters of the Hong Kong–Taiwan nexus. In his book *Challenging Beijing’s Mandate of Heaven. Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement and Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement*, Ho²⁰⁹ studies this nexus in depth: he finds the reasons of the linkage between the Sunflower and Umbrella movements not only in “a synchronised surge in protest activities”, but also in “the more intrusive presence of Beijing in the two societies”²¹⁰. The latter cause is also known as the “China factor”, which is a consequence of the PRC’s agenda to consolidate or take control in Taiwan and Hong Kong²¹¹. In defining the “China factor”, it is also important to consider the way in which China is *perceived* by the two civil societies. For instance, Hsu claims that “the manifestation of the China factor is thus also a social construction”, since it is interpreted differently by various actors “with their own social, economic, and political predispositions and prejudices”²¹².

In this context, it is also relevant to mention what civil society organisations in the ROC called the “Hongkongization” of Taiwan²¹³ and what Sonny Lo²¹⁴ called the “Taiwanization of Hong Kong politics”. The former refers to the preoccupation of Taiwanese people that the “one country, two systems” formula implemented in Hong Kong could also be a reality for Taipei if it continues to slip “slowly but inexorably into China’s orbit”²¹⁵. On the other hand, “Taiwanization” pertains to the “demonstration effect” from Taiwan to Hong Kong, as the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong was inspired by Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement and “borrowed some political tactics” from it²¹⁶. Even though Hong Kong and Taiwan used to be two worlds apart, nowadays, these two perspectives show that what happens in one of the

²⁰⁹ Ming-sho Ho, *Challenging Beijing’s Mandate of Heaven. Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement and Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press (2019).

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Szu-chien Hsu, “The China factor and Taiwan’s civil society organizations in the Sunflower Movement. The case of the Democratic Front Against the Cross–Strait Service Trade Agreement”, 135, in Dafydd Fell, ed. *Taiwan’s Social Movements under Ma Ying-jeou. From the Wild Strawberries to the Sunflowers*, London: Routledge (2017).

²¹³ Ho, *Challenging Beijing’s Mandate of Heaven*, 41.

²¹⁴ Cited in Richard C. Bush, *Hong Kong in the Shadow of China: Living with the Leviathan*, Brookings Institution Press (2016), 234.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

two entities has implications for the other and vice versa. Then, if we consider the unrest in Hong Kong in 2019, it would not be illogical to think that it had an impact on Taiwan as well. Nonetheless, these considerations require a better understanding of the discourse in Taipei on the Hong Kong protests, and in particular, the political debate on social media between the two main candidates of the 2020 presidential election, Tsai Ing-wen and Han Kuo-yu.

As Budge²¹⁷ claims, in fact, “texts are the main medium of political communication through which political parties present themselves to the public.” As such, they require us to have adequate tools through which we can understand their workings. One of these tools is issue ownership theory. For a party, owning an issue means to be recognised by the voters as being better able to deal with that issue, and it hence implies that the party holds an advantage over opposing parties due to its association with that particular issue²¹⁸. During an election campaign, nonetheless, some issues may be more popular than others. In that case, according to saliency theory²¹⁹, the *context* of the campaign increases its relevance: parties may then try to debate on the same, most *salient* issue in order to gain votes, even if they never quite converge on the topic. In doing so, they are likely to start a competition to “own” the issue that is most prevalent in the public agenda. In this essay, I argue that, during the 2020 presidential election campaign, considering its recurrence in the media coverage, the “Hong Kong factor” has been believed to be a salient issue, whose potential ownership has been fought for by both the DPP and the KMT.

Another lens through which we can look at this research is securitisation theory. When analysing the political debate in Taiwan on the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) with China, Lai²²⁰ describes securitisation as a theory that “considers security as a process of social construction of threat”, in which “political elites declare certain issues as urgent threats that require extraordinary measures to deal with them”.

²¹⁷ Ian Budge, “Issue Emphases, Saliency Theory and Issue Ownership: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis”, *West European Politics*, 38 (2015): 4, 761, doi: 10.1080/01402382.2015.1039374 (accessed 9 April, 2020).

²¹⁸ Jonas Lefevere et al., “Introduction: Issue Ownership”, *West European Politics*, 38 (2015): 4, 755–760, doi: 10.1080/01402382.2015.1039375 (accessed 4 April, 2020).

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Christina Lai, “Dancing with the Wolf: Securitizing China-Taiwan Trade in the ECFA Debate and Beyond”, *Asian Security*, 15 (2019): 2, 141, doi: 10.1080/14799855.2018.1437145 (accessed 10 April, 2020).

Thus, when considering securitisation theory as a medium of analysis, attention is given more to the framing of the discourse rather than emphasising the real existence of a potential threat. This research, therefore, points out the way in which the posts on Facebook of Tsai and Han are phrased and seeks to reveal the construction process of their securitisation discourse.

ANALYSIS

Tsai Ing-wen

Since the very beginning of the protests in Hong Kong, which started on 9 June 2019, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has been very vocal in expressing her concern about the uneasy situation in the former British colony. In fact, that same day, she wrote on Facebook that under “one country, two systems”, freedom in Hong Kong was not sure anymore. This situation, in her opinion, should have made Taiwanese people deeply alerted and concerned. Then she emphasised the three claims that will become the *leitmotifs* in her social media discourse about Hong Kong.

First, she affirms her support for the people of Hong Kong, and she calls on the city’s authorities to respect people’s demands. This statement is often accompanied by the request not to use violence on the protesters and, as she said in a post on 13 November 2019, “not to utilise young people’s blood sacrifice to save face in front of Beijing authorities”. With such declarations, not only does she want to reiterate that people in Taiwan “stand with Hong Kong”, but she is also sending a clear message to Hong Kong’s (or the Chinese) government: people should be free to express themselves, and the use of violence against them is unacceptable.

Second, she declares that the values of democracy and freedom, which are fought for in Hong Kong, are cherished in Taiwan as well. The primary objective of such a discourse is to highlight that Taipei is determined to protect democracy, freedom and the rule of law, which “are so natural in Taiwan” and that “do not fall from the sky”²²¹. The latter words, in

²²¹ 29 September 2019

particular, refer to the difficult path which Taiwan had to go through to achieve democracy and thus leverages on Taiwanese people's emotions and fears. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of protecting Taiwan's sovereignty vis-à-vis mainland China.

Finally, she asserts that "one country, two systems" is not a possible formula for Taiwan. In fact, as she mentions in a post on 10 October 2019, "Hong Kong, not far from us, is on the edge of disorder because of the failure of 'one country, two systems'", and refusing it "is the greatest consensus among the 23 million people in Taiwan, regardless of their party affiliation or position". In this case, the reference to the "China factor" is undoubted: Tsai not only reiterates her firm stance on China, but she also feels such confidence that she is able to consider it the "greatest consensus" in Taiwan.

An additional element that is possible to find in some of her posts is the reference to her *responsibility* towards defending and guarding Taiwanese people's democracy and freedom, claiming that, as long as she is in power, people in Taiwan "do not have to worry that Taiwan will become a second Hong Kong" and that she will "work hard to defend the country's sovereignty"²²². Towards the end of the election campaign, in addition to these claims, Tsai affirms quite directly that people should vote for her because "if our generation does not defend Taiwan, those who will go to the streets [like Hong Kong's young people] will be our children".

Overall, the argumentation of these posts is quite demagogic: Tsai does not usually take objections and counterclaims into account, but she rather tries to bring about an effective discourse on an emotional level, making references to Taiwanese people's core values and ideals. What can be considered relevant to this analysis, though, is her consistency with the past. In fact, in September and October 2014, she was showing support on Facebook for Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement, and even in her post on 4 June 2015 (the anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre), she declared:

Whether it is the June 4th, Wild Lily, Sunflower, or Umbrella Movement, they all send a message that the young generation has unlimited

²²² 12 August 2019

possibilities, and their ideals and enthusiasm are an important driving force for social progress.

Her declarations on social media, thus, seem to have taken Hong Kong into consideration even before the outbreak of the 2019 protests. In fact, supporting social movements that counter China's influence has always been in line with the DPP's ideology and principles, to the extent that even some leaders of the Sunflower Movement, such as Lin Fei-fan, have joined the DPP later on. Nonetheless, as Chiu²²³ contends, "although both Hong Kong and Taiwan were arguably under the influence of the China factor for some time [...], this is the first time that Hong Kong has become a salient issue in Taiwan's national elections". Therefore, even if Tsai had not exploited social movements in the former British colony as part of her political strategy before, it is clear that this time, the saliency of the "Hong Kong factor" pushed the DPP into using it to its advantage, thus giving rise to a securitisation discourse that gained momentum vis-à-vis the KMT, whose response to the Hong Kong unrest was quite slow and not as resolute.

Han Kuo-yu

"The first time they asked me about the anti-extradition bill issue, since I did not have complete information, I said: 'I do not know'". This is how former Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu started his first post on Facebook regarding the Hong Kong protests on 12 June 2019. Such a defensive approach will be one of the main characteristics of his social media discourse in the following declarations as well. Indeed, even in the last post on the issue, on 29 December 2019, he declares:

I have expressed my position more than once. I support Hong Kong universal suffrage, I oppose "one country, two systems" and I insist on defending the sovereignty of the Republic of China. I have been very clear, there is no grey space. Please, do not pretend that you do not hear, or that you do not understand, and repeatedly question my approach to cross-Strait relations.

²²³ Chiu, "The 'Hong Kong Factor' in the 2020 Taiwanese Presidential Election", 21 January 2020.

Looking at these words, it is clear that he is responding to criticism and that he is claiming that his declarations were either not comprehended or misunderstood. Nonetheless, if a broader look at his social media narrative on the issue is taken, it is possible to see that he is sending heterogeneous messages to the electorate.

First, Han criticises Tsai Ing-wen for “comparing Taiwan and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) all day”²²⁴. He declares that his party, conversely, does not use the anti-extradition movement in Hong Kong “as an instrument to gain votes”²²⁵. Furthermore, he calls on the DPP to “make laws and not to fill its mouth with empty promises without practical actions”²²⁶.

Second, he emphasises the role of judiciary sovereignty in Taiwan. In other words, he suggests that “any suspect that committed crimes in Taiwan should come back to Taiwan to face justice”²²⁷, since giving up judiciary sovereignty “for political factors [...] means stepping on national dignity”²²⁸.

Third, Han invites the governments in Beijing and Hong Kong to seek a dialogue with the protesters. On 14 November 2019, for instance, after the police had entered the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Han asserts that he “cannot accept it” and that “the Hong Kong and Beijing governments should listen to the voices of the people”. Overall, he reiterates his support for democracy in the former British colony.

Finally, Han refuses the idea of comparing Hong Kong and Taiwan. In other words, he stresses the fact that Taiwan, unlike Hong Kong, is a free and sovereign country, and thus they cannot be comparable. In addition, he promises that he will defend Taiwan’s way of life, reiterating his non-acceptance of “one country, two systems”.

Altogether, these comments have a substantial lack of *fil rouge*. In fact, they show that Han Kuo-yu’s narrative is missing a clear strategy, which appears, instead, quite contradictory. On the one hand, Han insists on the need to preserve Taiwan’s judiciary sovereignty, thus

²²⁴ 10 October 2019

²²⁵ 12 June 2019

²²⁶ 12 December 2019

²²⁷ 21 October 2019

²²⁸ 25 October 2019

disregarding the reason that brings Hong Kong people to the streets. On the other hand, he highlights the importance of a dialogue between the government and the protesters, even suggesting that “a democratic universal suffrage, to directly elect the chief executive and the members of the parliament, should be implemented”²²⁹. These latter declarations, in particular, show potential support for the protesters in Hong Kong. Yet, Han criticises Tsai for her claims on Hong Kong and rejects the idea of exploiting the situation for political ends. Therefore, it is very likely that the absence of a coherent narrative has confused his followers in Taiwan.

Furthermore, when looking for posts on his Facebook page regarding Hong Kong, nothing is found prior to June 2019. In other words, Han’s political discourse strategy on social media had never before taken uprisings in the former British colony into account, whether in a positive or negative manner.

As mentioned above, the more an issue is weighing on the public agenda, the more parties will try to fight for its ownership. However, the argument here is that moving towards the ownership of an issue that is not in line with the party’s *recognised* ideals and principles could be counterproductive. On the one hand, it could temporarily raise support for the party. On the other hand, though, it could confuse the electorate even more, which would likely choose the party that was perceived as the “owner” of the issue for longer. Here, again, the consistency with the past is essential: if Han had been vocal on similar issues before 2019, his position would have been more stable and trustworthy for Taiwanese people. Conversely, brief and contradictory declarations on social media cannot supposedly make up for the lack of engagement showed during the rest of his career.

In general, Han’s comments on the protests in Hong Kong are few and chaotic, and the real intention of his discourse is difficult to identify. The perception that is gotten here is that, due to its perceived saliency, he could not completely ignore the topic, but at the same time, he was neither eager to, nor capable of, exploiting it. What media usually call a “China-friendly” politician, thus, probably felt constrained to refer to the issue, whilst he failed to

²²⁹ 14 November 2019

gain resonance among the public, as the outcome of the 2020 presidential election demonstrates.

CONCLUSION

The reason this research is “preliminary” is that much more could be said – and should be explored – about the “Hong Kong factor” and its impacts on Taiwanese politics. Nonetheless, some early conclusions can be made. First, the “Hong Kong factor” did influence the political discourse in Taiwan. The difference lies in the degree of influence that it had on Tsai and Han’s discourses: whereas Tsai’s narrative focused greatly on the issue and obtained considerable attention from the public, Han was not able to design a comparably effective discourse strategy to implement on his social media, in particular, because of his nonuniform claims.

Second, Tsai gave rise to a successful securitisation discourse, whilst Han tried to understate the implications of the “Hong Kong factor” for Taiwan. Indeed, President Tsai was able to evoke existential anxiety among Taiwanese people – namely, the potential threat coming from China and its desire to implement “one country, two systems” in the ROC as well. On the other hand, Han did not construct a narrative based on people’s fears and feelings, but he rather concentrated on criticising Tsai for doing so and focused on the impossibility of Taiwan becoming like Hong Kong. It is likely that people in Taiwan were touched more by Tsai’s discourse because she spoke to them on an emotional level, whereas Han brought about a more aggressive and pragmatic position.

Thus, the “Hong Kong factor” probably constituted the winning card for Tsai Ing-wen. As Christina Lai states, “as the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong evolved into violent confrontations, President Tsai began to rise in the polls”²³⁰. It is fair to assume that the President of Taiwan was able to be re-elected not only due to the context she had been presented with but also for the way in which she was capable of exploiting it. In other words,

²³⁰ The National Bureau of Asian Research, “The Impact of the Hong Kong Protests on the Election in Taiwan. Interview with Christina Lai”, 23 January 2020, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/the-impact-of-the-hong-kong-protests-on-the-election-in-taiwan/> (accessed 25 April, 2020).

if her narrative had not taken Hong Kong into account, the results of the election would have likely been different.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Budge, Ian “Issue Emphases, Saliency Theory and Issue Ownership: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis”, *West European Politics*, 38 (2015): 4, 761–777, doi: 10.1080/01402382.2015.1039374 (accessed 8 April, 2020).
- Bush, Richard C. (2016) *Hong Kong in the Shadow of China: Living with the Leviathan*, Brookings Institution Press.
- Chang, Hui-Ching and Richard Holt, *Language, Politics and Identity in Taiwan. Naming China*, London: Routledge (2015), Kindle e-book.
- Chen, Mumin “Embracing or Resisting the Giant Neighbour: Debates between KMT and DPP on the Mainland Policy”, *China Report*, 49 (2013): 4, 399–411, doi: 10.1177/0009445513506649 (accessed 10 April, 2020).
- Chiu, Adrian (2020) “The ‘Hong Kong Factor’ in the 2020 Taiwanese Presidential Election”, *Taiwan Insight*, 21 January 2020.
- Fairclough, Isabela and Norman Fairclough, *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*, London: Routledge (2012), Kindle e-book.
- Ho, Ming-sho, *Challenging Beijing’s Mandate of Heaven. Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement and Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press (2019).
- Hsu, Szu-chien “The China factor and Taiwan’s civil society organisations in the Sunflower Movement. The case of the Democratic Front Against the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement”, in Fell, Dafydd, ed. *Taiwan’s Social Movements under Ma Ying-jeou. From the Wild Strawberries to the Sunflowers*, London: Routledge (2017).
- Kozinets, Robert, *Netnography. The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, 3rd edition, London: SAGE Publications (2020).
- Lai, Christina, “Dancing with the Wolf: Securitized China-Taiwan Trade in the ECFA Debate and Beyond”, *Asian Security*, 15 (2019): 2, 140–158, doi: 10.1080/14799855.2018.1437145 (accessed 10 April, 2020).
- Lefevere, Jonas, Anke Tresch, and Stefaan Walgrave, “Introduction: Issue Ownership”, *West European Politics*, 38 (2015): 4, 755–760, doi: 10.1080/01402382.2015.1039375 (accessed 4 April, 2020).
- The National Bureau of Asian Research, “The Impact of the Hong Kong Protests on the Election in Taiwan. Interview with Christina Lai”, 23 January 2020 (accessed 25 April, 2020).
- Wang, Cindy and Miaojung Lin (2019) “Taiwan’s President Rises From the Ashes With a Hand From Hong Kong”, *Bloomberg*, 11 September 2019 (accessed 4 April, 2020).

SOURCES

- Tsai Ing-wen Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/>
- Han Kuo-yu Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/twherohan/>

Mainland Affairs Council:

https://www.mac.gov.tw/en/Content_List.aspx?n=854C3E4EF191080E