

Taiwan's Midterm Elections: How Did the Chinese View Them?

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“Bravo!”ⁱ A Chinese netizen cheered after the pro-China Kuomintang won the Taiwanese local elections. Although this appears to be the logical response from China, it merely reflects a part of the story. The communist party is not a monolithic, undivided whole. Just like any other regimes, democratic or authoritarian, China has its own factions. Both Chinese elites and the public are divided in how to deal with Taiwan.

To begin with, there are Taiwan Doves in China. For them, the Middle Kingdom (Zhongguo) is ascending as never before. With the rise of China, Taiwanese should be charmed by the greatness of the Chinese nation. More and more Taiwanese are supposed to voluntarily and wholeheartedly identify themselves as Chinese. Just as a lost child returning to her beloved mother, there should be a happy ending where mainland China peacefully reunifies with Taiwan. One example of the Dovish camp is Liu Junchuan, a high-ranking official at the Taiwan Affairs Office. In a party newspaper, he claimed “time and momentum are on our side.” As China grows, “the idea of peaceful reunification and ‘One country, Two systems’ will become more appealing and attractive to Taiwanese people.”ⁱⁱ In a very subtle and polite way, Liu urged his Hawkish comrades to keep patient for now. Driven by the peaceful reunification ideal, the Dovish camp has been enthusiastic about making trade deals in favour of Taiwan, inviting Taiwanese politicians to visit mainland China and so on. Ironically, they are the ones who are most friendly to the Taiwanese.

The comrades that Liu warned are the Taiwan Hawks in China. They consist of a wide-ranging group of people from ordinary nationalists, to military officers and party cadres (including the Taiwan Affairs Office, for example, its former deputy director Wang Zaixi). For them, there seemed to be a moment of truth striking them that Taiwanese people are hopelessly pro-independence. The speech of Wang Hongguang, a retired PLA general, is particularly revealing: “Nowadays Taiwan independence is the mainstream opinion in Taiwan.” He said, “a decade ago, 55% [of Taiwanese] didn't think they were Chinese. Now 75% [of Taiwanese] don't think they are Chinese. A generation later, ... there will be no one in Taiwan who consider themselves as Chinese.” The day of reckoning does not lead to any empathy of Taiwanese identity; quite the opposite, it invites a sense of urgency. The Hawks in China concluded that the only way to reach reunification is by military force, and Beijing should do that sooner rather than later. As a result, the past five years witnessed the emergence of extremely belligerent newspaper articles, with titles such as “how to fight a forceful reunification war with Taiwan?” and “on the day PLA arrives in Taiwan, where can Tsai Ing-wen flee to?” just to name a few.

How did the Doves and Hawks in China view the Taiwanese local elections? Their reaction to the election results could not be more different. The Taiwan Doves were of course thrilled to bits. Four days after the elections, China's Taiwan Affairs Office announced that “the 31 preferential policies towards Taiwanese compatriots have obvious effects,” referring to the Dovish policies aimed at attracting Taiwanese to work in mainland China. The announcement was equivalent to claiming victory, “Look at the election results, the Dovish approach works!” The

positive sentiment was shared among some ordinary Chinese. A Sichuan netizen commented on Weibo immediately after KMT's victory, "those who love this country breathed a sigh of relief."ⁱⁱⁱ

The Hawkish camp, however, was rife with disappointment instead of relief. A netizen from Beijing lamented, "What a pity, we could be further away from the day of reunification."^{iv} The next day, a sarcastic netizen called out Tsai Ing-wen's name as if she is a governor of a Chinese province, "Governor Tsai (蔡省长), please hang on. Because of what you have done, the great plan of forceful reunification could be postponed again!"^v Not only disappointment, but a strong sense of even more urgency was built up. "Governor Tsai is going to step down," one said, "when it comes to the blue's [KMT's] turn, they will simply shuffle. Again, reunification will never be realized"^{vi}. Not surprisingly, some nationalists lost their patience. "Using my real name, I request the mainland China to issue a timetable of reunification," an outraged nationalist wrote. "Whether peaceful or forceful, please don't drag out this again and again. Don't let our whole generation fail to see the day of recovering Taiwan."^{vii}

Part of the frustration came from the Hawks' increasing doubt about KMT's true motivation. "Within the Kuomintang, how many of them are willing to have reunification?"^{viii} A netizen from Sichuan asked after KMT's victory. Another replied, "almost none of them."^{ix} In the Hawks' mind, "while DPP is explicitly supportive of independence, KMT implicitly advocates independence." "If we say DPP is a bastard, then KMT is a petty person," an insurance agent commented on Weibo, "KMT has never said they want reunification. It only says they won't go for independence and drag things out slowly. In fact, the Kuomintang is the biggest obstacle of China's reunification."^x And Ma Ying-jeou is the biggest culprit of all. His signature slogan, "no reunification, no independence, and no war," speaks for itself. Beijing was played by Ma, according to the Taiwan Hawks, because Ma had never supported reunification during his presidency.

In sum, while Taiwan's midterm elections finished this November, the disagreement between Doves and Hawks in China continues. Unfortunately, the Chinese popular opinion has tilted in favour of the nationalist Hawks. The road ahead across the Taiwan Strait may not be optimistic.

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- ⁱ *Sina Forum*, available at: <http://comment5.news.sina.com.cn/comment/skin/default.html?channel=gn&newsid=comos-hmutuec3551957&group=0> (accessed December 6, 2018).
- ⁱⁱ Liu Junchuan, "The Great Renaissance of the Chinese People Inevitably Requires the Complete Reunification of the Motherland," *Study Times*, <http://dzb.studytimes.cn/shtml/xxsb/20171225/30958.shtml> (accessed December 8, 2018).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Mingjing ru shuiyue, "Those who love this country breathed a sigh of relief..." November 24, 2018, <https://www.weibo.com/1850145517/H4bMDBK0E?type=comment> (accessed November 29, 2018).
- ^{iv} Huaishan Qiaofu, "What a pity, we could be further away from the day of reunification." *Weibo*, November 25, 2018, <https://www.weibo.com/1974576991/H4gYticya?type=comment> (accessed November 29, 2018).
- ^v UGG de chaowu, "Governor Tsai, please hang on...." *Weibo*, November 26, 2018, https://www.weibo.com/1974576991/H4s9XuXsy?type=comment#_rnd1544391640452 (accessed November 29, 2018).
- ^{vi} Xiongshou shi Sun Xiaochuan, "Governor Tsai is going to step down,..." *Weibo*, November 26, 2018, https://www.weibo.com/1974576991/H4s9XuXsy?type=comment#_rnd1544391640452 (accessed November 29, 2018).
- ^{vii} Qidanche ke lvxing, "Using my real name, I request the mainland China to issue a timetable of reunification..." *Weibo*, November 25, 2018, <https://www.weibo.com/1974576991/H4gYticya?type=comment> (accessed November 29, 2018).
- ^{viii} DadaYes_106, "Within the Kuomintang, how many actually desire reunification?" *Weibo*, November 25, 2018, <https://www.weibo.com/1974576991/H4gYticya?type=comment> (accessed November 29, 2018).
- ^{ix} Heiheihe de Liulian, "Almost none." *Weibo*, November 25, 2018, <https://www.weibo.com/1974576991/H4gYticya?type=comment> (accessed November 29, 2018).
- ^x Baoxian-Xiaozhu, "If we say DPP is a bastard, then KMT is a petty person ..." November 24, 2018, <https://www.weibo.com/1850145517/H4bMDBK0E?type=comment> (accessed November 29, 2018).