

Dynamic Conservatism in Kuomintang Cross-Straits Discourse since Tsai Ing-Wen

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Abstract

The former ruling party of Kuomintang (KMT) in Taiwan has shifted in its policies and role wildly in its history while retaining their core identity and values, a pattern which has been described by some authors as “dynamic conservatism.” While often used to describe the way in which the KMT has adapted after events such as their move to Taiwan and during democratization, it has not been used in recent years. The election of Tsai Ing-wen was such significant moment which Taiwan observers suggest could force the KMT to rethink their position once more, especially their Cross-Straits policies. Using discourse analysis to examine various public speeches and interviews of KMT leaders which concern Cross-Strait politics, during Ma Ying-jeou’s presidency and after Tsai Ing-wen’s election, many commonalities in language use can be noted. However, at the same time, the context in which these terms and concepts are used has notably changed and suggests a different ideology underneath. These findings suggest conservatism dynamism is still a valid concept through which to analyze the KMT’s discourse surrounding their Cross-Strait policies. This adaptability should be noted for future analysis of what Taiwanese Cross-Strait policies might appear from a likely KMT government in the future which has a direct effect on US-China relations.

1 Introduction

After being the sole dominant party in power on Taiwan for nearly a century, the Kuomintang (KMT) has lost several recent critical elections from 2016 to 2020 by landslides. The re-election of the Taiwanese nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) president Tsai Ing-wen, indicates the KMT policy proposals did not resonate with the electorate, and that a fresh look needs to be had on their policy rhetoric. Since the most major divide between the two parties is their Cross-Straits policy, this area is that one which has received the most scrutiny from watchers. Historically however, the KMT has faced far worse in terms of their continued viability as a prominent party, and each time it found a way to reassert itself as the dominant party through a careful balance of both flexibility and rigidity. (Chu 2005)

This balance of flexibility and rigidity of a system to adapt to changing circumstances while still maintaining its core identity is referred to as "dynamic

conservatism." (Ansell, Boin, and Farjoun 2015) The KMT's historical experiences moving from mainland China to Taiwan, eventually to democratization has shown their great adaptability while maintaining their core identity through all this time. Following the failure of their economic engagement policy with China, there is an expectation of a reimagination of a Cross-Strait policy to adapt to a changing base of voters. (Rigger 2016)

With a discourse analysis of various speeches, press conferences, and interviews from the KMT regarding their Cross-Strait policy, the process of dynamic conservatism can be traced by comparing the consistency and the discontinuities in their language use. Understanding this process in the KMT can shed a light on the future Cross-Straits policy a KMT administration may have, and what policy possibilities exist for them depending on the political environment. This dynamic between policy changes and consistencies have implications both for U.S. policy towards Taiwan, as well as political parties in shifting political environments.

This paper will go over the concept of dynamic conservatism first, then to the ongoing discussions in the Kuomintang's development to today, and the origins of current Cross-Strait policies. The next part will focus on the specific findings from the analysis of KMT leader's discourses on Cross-Strait relations, and discuss their implications for the understanding of KMT as a party and the application of dynamic conservatism in the results. Finally, the conclusion will go over the further implications for U.S. policy-making and the possibility of transferability.

2 Dynamic Conservatism

Dynamic conservatism is a concept which has a broad use, originating from Donald Schon's "The resistance to change exhibited by social systems is much more nearly a form of 'dynamic conservatism,' or more simply as "a tendency to fight to remain the same." (Schon 1971) While it has originated from organizational theory, the term has been reconceptualized in a variety of fields such as public policy, political party theory, and management theory. (Noordegraaf 2009; Arian and Barnes 1974; Metcalfe 1993)

From its inception it can be said that there is a tendency to view this concept as something which is negative, or a process which actively resists change that needs to be fought against. This tendency can be seen mostly in the public policy sphere in which the term is used to describe the *failures* of policy reform, and how an institution has actively adapted to resist change. (Noordegraaf 2009; Mattei 2005; Clark and Purcell 1975) Here, the conservative part of the term is interpreted to indicate the inertia of a system which desperately needs reform, and dynamic is used to mean the strategy by which the system resists attempts to reform it. Therefore, this process is an *obstacle* which must be overcome. (Metcalfe 1993; Clark and Purcell 1975)

In the study of political parties, there is a different conception. The word "dynamic" is defined as a policy strategy to remain in power, however "conservative" either indicates the inertia of the system, or the ideology. The earliest use of "dynamic conservatism" as a process in a political party is in Arian and Barnes's paper on the dominant party system, and describes the strategy by which a party remains in power. (Arian and Barnes 1974) Here they defined

the term as "-being prepared to change in order to retain what he has." This is a clear use of conservatism as inertia. Conservatism can also describe a political party's ideology, and in this sense, dynamic conservatism means a conservatism party which uses strategic dynamism to remain in power. (Chebankova 2016; Hort 2007)

It is also notable that in the use of dynamic conservatism in party systems, the connotation is not necessarily a negative one. As opposed to seeing the process as an obstacle which prevents true change in a system, it can also be seen as a desirable process which allows for an organization to adapt to changing environments without collapsing from rapid change. (Ansell, Boin, and Farjoun 2015) This is the perspective taken in this paper, as it analyzes how dynamic conservatism as a process allows the Kuomintang to maintain their identity whilst simultaneously adapting to the constantly shifting environment of Taiwanese politics and Cross-Strait Relations.

This strategy of implementing dynamic conservatism is defined in organizational theory as *character as a source of adaptation*, where character is the set of core values and identity which define the organization, and the course of adaptation is to be found in what is consistent with its character. (Ansell, Boin, and Farjoun 2015) The KMT's character is in its ideology as a nationalist and democratic party. In order to adapt it looks inwards at its ideology and proceeds from it.

3 Kuomintang's Evolution to Today

The Kuomintang has continuously existed for more than a hundred years, survived a civil war, internal uprisings, and democratization all during this time. Several common factors have been given for the KMT's survival and adaptation, which are early indigenization, political clientelism, and ideological capacity, all of which could arguably be considered under the process of dynamic conservatism. For classifying political adaptations, Dickson distinguishes between two types: improving efficiency and responsiveness. (Bruce J Dickson 2016) The former is an adaptation by which the efficiency of the system is improved through the change in elite goals and policies, to better accomplish them. This type of adaptation is meaningful in that the impetus for change originates from internal elite pressures. However, the latter type of adaptation is when the system is no longer able to change its environment and must adapt to be more responsive to it. Again, the differentiating factor is that the pressure for change comes from external sources, and a changing environment for the organization. All of the aforementioned adaptations of the KMT fall under the improvement in responsiveness category, and these adaptations are usually ones which are more core to the system.

Early indigenization of the party was started by Chiang Ching-kuo, who realized that the mainlander minority could no longer maintain their dominance over the local Taiwanese, and therefore sought to co-opt them into the system. (Chu 2005; Choi 2015; Bruce J Dickson 2016) More Taiwanese politicians were able to run under the Kuomintang party and gain seats in local elections. A more open electoral system also served a secondary function of acting as a feedback system for the KMT government, which could allow them to detect changing currents in the environment and pre-emptively adapt or co-opt political figures

or policies. (Bruce James Dickson 1994; Rigger 2005) This can especially be seen in how Chiang Ching-kuo appointed a local Taiwanese, Lee Teng-hui, as his successor before his death. By Taiwanizing, or indigenizing the party early on and pre-emptively, the KMT was able to slowly blur the line between itself and the opposition, therefore maintain their dominance and quell the opposition. (Choi 2015)

The KMT could afford to make such concessions to the locals because of their strong patron-client networks in the local communities. (Chu 2005; Choi 2015; Bruce J Dickson 2016) This network was developed after the KMT's move to Taiwan in order to establish legitimacy for a party which many local Taiwanese viewed as a foreign mainlander elite ruling over them. (Bosco 1994). A main tenet of KMT ideology was also to base governance on the approval of those governed, therefore the KMT government needed local bottom up support for their new government on Taiwan. (M.-t. Chen 2016) These clients would typically be respected local community leaders such as businessmen, doctors, or religious leaders, and the patrons would be KMT officials running for office. The patrons would provide gifts in various forms, and the clients would use their local networks to mobilize voters to vote for the candidate. (Rigger 2005) While this was a clear case of corruption to maintain party dominance on the island, it ironically served to allow for more openness in the system because the party knew it could afford to make concessions with the clientele network still existing. (Bosco 1994)

The significance of these processes as mentioned is that they exemplify dynamic conservatism in the KMT's history. In order to stay as the dominant party on Taiwan while facing a quickly changing environment such as a new geographic location and hostile local population, the KMT was forced to be dynamic in its policies. But to do so, the KMT had to maintain conservatism in its identity and ideology, as can be seen in their support for patronage networks so as to not betray their founding principles of democracy.

Despite the dynamic conservatism which fueled many of these historical processes that contributed to the KMT surviving to the modern day, Cross-Straits policy has become the new battleground for the electoral success of any party on Taiwan. Analysis of recent speeches and press conferences indicate that dynamic conservatism is a process ongoing in the modern KMT still.

4 Cross-Strait Policies

The primary political division in Taiwan is around the question of national identity which by extension defines how they see mainland China and what policies they support with regards to it. (Chu 2004; Shih 2021)

The divergence between the parties in their Cross-Straits policy emerged during the democratization movement which led to the formation of the Democratic Progressive Party. KMT in the 1990s adopted a policy of continuing to maintain the "Republic of China" name and "reunification" only rhetorically and easing their aggressive stance against the mainland. (M. Chen 2013) Lee Teng-hui, the local Taiwanese successor of the KMT, sought to engage with the PRC through a set of policies known as the National Unification Guidelines. (M. Chen 2013, Wu 2005) The main breakthrough in this document was the shifting of the policy of the Republic of China being the sole representative of

China, to the *One China Policy* where *both* China and Taiwan belonged to Taiwan, albeit both sides may have differing interpretations. This allowed for new grounds for negotiations between the PRC and ROC. Years later, this consensus would be referred to as the 1992 Consensus.

The main opposition party of Democratic Progressive Party arose from the anti-KMT *tangwai* movement with a strong grassroots base in local Taiwanese people. Their main ideology revolves around seeing Taiwan as a nation separate from China and has a firmly Taiwanese national identity. (Rigger 2016) In its inception, their Cross-Strait was much more extreme, but moderated when they were poorly received by the electorate, which ended up nearly paralleling Lee Teng-hui's careful policy. (M. Chen 2013; Rigger 2016) However, the biggest exception was their rejection of the 1992 Consensus, which the Chinese government demands must be accepted for them to begin talks with a DPP government.

For a time, the rhetoric of the 1992 Consensus proved popular with the Taiwanese public, and under Ma Ying-jeou's KMT government, nearly 23 economic agreements were signed between the PRC and ROC. Over time however, the 1992 Consensus lost its appeal among voters, who began to question whether Taiwan was giving up sovereignty in its pursuit of engagement with China. When the 24th economic agreement, "Cross-Straits Strategic Trade Agreement" was nearly signed into law, demonstrations erupted in what would be called the "Sunflower Movement." (M. Chen 2013; Rigger 2016; Wu 2005) This was a clear sign that the KMT government had lost its legitimacy and the appeal of the 1992 Consensus was gone.

During its time, the KMT was also mired in internal strife, split between the nativist Mainlander faction, represented by Ma Ying-jeou, and the localist Taiwanese faction, represented by Wang Jin-pyng. This conflict ended up being disastrous for the KMT as a whole when after the 2016 presidential election, they lost both the presidency and their legislative majority. (M. Chen 2013) Following this performance, rather than reformulating their Cross-Straits policy, they instead doubled down on the 1992 Consensus and continued engagement with China. During the 2020 presidential election, another disappointing showing clearly demonstrated the failure of such a policy. It also showed that KMT's inertness in Cross-Straits Policy would be punished by voters.

The findings of this research indicates that following such a disappointing showing, and understanding the failures of being too conservative in policy, that there has been a reconceptualization of Cross-Straits policy from the KMT, as indicated in their rhetoric. There has been less of an emphasis on both engagement with China and as well as the *1992 Consensus*. However, the core ideology of the KMT which produced the Cross-Strait policies of the past remains the same, indicating a return of dynamic conservatism.

5 Methodology

The data analyzed consist of speeches, press conferences, and interviews from KMT leaders and other various prominent officials representing the KMT. The data is divided into two time periods: the first being the time period spanning Ma Ying-jeou's presidency, and the second beginning from Tsai Ing-wen's presidency to the year 2023.

In the Ma Ying-jeou era, 10 speeches from different points in Ma's presidency were taken, consisting of mostly those from Ma himself, as well as the then Mayor of New Taipei, Eric Chu. On the other hand, the second section also composed of 10 speeches, press conferences, and interviews tracks KMT leaders during Tsai Ing-wen's presidency, consisting of the party chair, Eric Chu, and other voices in the KMT mainstream such as Hou Yu-ih, mayor of New Taipei, and two-times presidential candidate Terry Gou.

This is to track the newest developments in the party's mainstream ideological line, and compare it to the mainstream from the period prior. This section's range also ends at 2023 to incorporate discourses which have occurred after the 2022 Taiwanese local elections in which the KMT gained major seats in crucial northern cities and counties. (Panigrahi 2022)

Analysis of these politicians' rhetoric will be relying on Teun van Dijk's conceptual framework of discourse analysis and its relationship to ideology. van Dijk provides a framework that uniquely defines ideology as the axioms that form the basis for shared social representations of specific social groups. (Van Dijk 2013; Van Dijk 2005) Discourse, then, is understood to be the mode by which ideologies are acquired, expressed, and reproduced over time. In theory, this means that any discourse may be ideologically marked, however given the specific context the text occurs in, ideology is difficult to see. By limiting and specifying the contexts of these speeches, such as a specific timeframe and a certain politician, it becomes more manageable to see certain patterns in texts and the coding embedded.

The identified KMT politicians' discourse are analyzed across the presidencies of Ma Ying-jeou and Tsai Ing-wen to look for patterns of "dynamic conservatism," especially conservatism of ideology and dynamism of policy. Ideology is defined here as a fundamental belief which other socially shared beliefs are based on, therefore able to present itself in various different beliefs or by extension policy. (Van Dijk 2005) Specifically Cross-Strait policies are focused on to analyze the identified politicians' development of stances over time. Firstly, for the first set of documents, the mainstream opinion is determined through looking at Ma Ying-jeou's policies and discourse, as they generally aligned closely with the mainstream faction of the KMT at the time. A code book is set up pertaining to the implicit ideas behind the text which justify his policies. This code book is then applied to the data from the new generation of KMT leaders. Conservative dynamism would hold that the core ideology of the party would remain the same but presents itself in different ideas that appeal to a changed environment.

As a qualitative data analysis software, *QualCoder* is used to set up such codebooks and mark up texts.

5.1 Positionality Statement

Being of neither Taiwanese or Chinese background, I have gained my understanding of these cultures and politics primarily through academic means, which could mean my interpretations are biased towards being based on what is available in the literature. I possess a CEFRL C1 level certification in Mandarin Chinese, however it is not my native language. To make sure I am not making mistakes in my reading and interpretations, I have made the concerted effort to consult with native speakers familiar with Taiwanese politics on my

translations and analysis with each document. Additionally, I have traveled to Taiwan once to study Mandarin Chinese, but did not immerse myself in the political environment.

6 Findings

This study finds that in Cross-Straits discourses, KMT leaders have consistently used language focusing around two terms: **peace** and **Republic of China**, around which other policies and concepts have revolved around ultimately. From the Ma administration (2008-2016) to the Tsai administration (2016-), they have shifted their discussions of how to best achieve peace as in stable Cross-Straits relations, from economic cooperation to domestic democracy. Secondly, when using the word “Republic of China”, they have shifted their focus away from their Chinese heritage to their democratic heritage.

6.1 Peace

During Ma Ying-jeou’s administration, to achieve peace and security across the strait, he based his Cross-Strait policy in the 1992 Consensus. From this common ground for negotiation between the CCP and KMT, economic agreements were made at a fast pace. By this process, Ma Ying-jeou claimed tensions across the strait would be reduced, and achieve prosperity for both the PRC and ROC. This policy can be seen in how the words “peace” most often appear simultaneously with “prosperity.”

“The objective of improving relations with mainland China is to pursue a peaceful and prosperous environment for Taiwan. . . . Mainland China of course is a threat to Taiwan. The mainland’s economic rise, however, has also brought opportunities for Taiwan.”

- Ma Ying-jeou 2011-05-19

“In the next four years, the two sides of the strait have to open up new areas of cooperation and continue working to consolidate peace, expand prosperity, and deepen mutual trust.”

- Ma Ying-jeou 2012-05-20

Furthermore, peace is also used as a justification for the increasing supply of arms by the American government to Taiwan. But ultimately this policy too is related back to the primacy of good economic relationship with Mainland China. The KMT argues that Taiwan needs these arms to be able to engage with China on better terms.

“Taiwan wants to negotiate from a position of strength, not weakness. That is why Washington understands very well that arms sales will help keep regional peace rather than the other way around.”

- Ma Ying-jeou 2010-04-30

However, this is contrasted with how the KMT later discusses self-defense and democracy as best being able to achieve peace after Tsai Ing-wen's taking of office. Many prominent politicians in the party have given differing ideas for what their Cross-Straits policy will look like. But they nearly always include "democracy" and some "security" aspect on their main platform. For example, the current Mayor of New Taipei, and the person most likely to be nominated as the KMT's presidential candidate, Hou Yu-ih, spoke of a 3D: Democracy, Defense, and Defrost. The current chairman of the KMT, Eric Chu, along much the same lines gave his conception of the 2D: Democracy and Deterrence. "Defense" and "deterrence" implies material abilities of Taiwan to defend itself, most likely with American arms sales.

At the same time, discussions of economic cooperation are now nearly gone, and the chairman Chu himself, says that he would like to see Taiwan's trade partners diversify if the KMT were to come to power once again while speaking at the Brookings Institute. Rather than "peace and prosperity," it is often "security" or "stability" which is paired with the term "peace." Another interesting new vocabulary which has popped up in discussions surrounding security is "war." During Ma's administration, the word "war" was never directly mentioned, but the KMT is now comfortable directly addressing the possibility of war.

"We know the peace and the stability is more important than everything. Besides this, I know, and we know, if you want peace you have to prepare the war. Self-defense is the Number One for peace, stability." ,

- Eric Chu June 6, 2022

Here we see that US arms sales have become more important than they were during the Ma-era when they were only considered for their negotiation power in developing Cross-Straits economic relations. During Tsai's presidency however, the party's main line has now shifted to seeing arms sales for their direct self-defense value and their deterrence factor for securing peace between China and Taiwan.

At the same time, they also frame their discussion for peace in not just security terms, but also further in an idealistic context surrounding the survival of democracy itself. Chairman Chu expands on his 2D idea further in a Facebook post:

"Then you can see if United States failure to defend the Taiwan's democracy properly, I cannot say for sure, will properly undermine U.S. leadership for the Western Society."

- Eric Chu June 6, 2022

Overall, the core point of legitimacy which the KMT is attempting to revive in these discussions is that they have the best means of achieving peace across the straits. At first it was through economic cooperation and engagement with China which would moderate the PRC's stance toward the island. However, after the severe pushback which the party and Ma's administration received for the CSSTA, they have reformulated how they will achieve peace. Rather than economic cooperation which the public now mostly see as sacrificing Taiwanese

sovereignty, they instead address the Chinese threat directly with mentions of war and deterrence.

Peace and security go hand-in-hand according to the new KMT, and American material aid would be the best way of ensuring that on the island. Beyond the security benefits, they argue that the U.S. would be protecting a strong democracy in the region. Democracy itself would be a protection against China according to the KMT, and therefore an ideal worth strengthening and supporting. The next section expands on this idea of democracy.

6.2 Republic of China

The word “Republic of China” is used to refer to the government on the island of Taiwan and the outlying islands by the KMT. But in the two differing eras, different parts of this word seem to be emphasized. During Ma’s presidency, he spoke much of Taiwan’s Chinese heritage and their common cultural values. Inherently when the word Republic of China is said, a connection to China, and Chinese culture is made, rather than to Taiwan.

"The people of the two sides of the strait share a common Chinese ethnic heritage. We share common blood lines, history, and culture."

- Ma Ying-jeou May 20th, 2012

This can be seen as a continuation of the KMT’s nationalist ideology. Ma Ying-jeou represents the mainlander faction of the KMT, and he was able to come into power through the support of the party elders who have heritage from the mainlanders who moved to Taiwan in 1949. This faction believes in the ethnic unity of Taiwanese and Chinese people, and see reunification as necessary, even if not possible in the near future. In this way, this faction and era of KMT politics can be described as ethnic nationalist.

On the other hand, after Tsai’s election, the KMT was faced with a strong Taiwanese identity that it was no longer tenable to hold a Chinese nationalist identity. Following from the new KMT emphasis on their commitment to democracy both as it exists in Taiwan, and as an ideal in general, a new nationalist strategy can be detected. Rather than fight against the wave of Taiwanese identity, they instead focused on what values they used to distinguish the Taiwanese identity from a Chinese one. The greatest difference between Taiwan and China is their system of government, and the Taiwanese people are indeed proud of their democracy as opposed to the Chinese model. This shift can be seen as a new form of civic nationalism in the country, based on a core KMT value of democracy.

"The democracy. Liberty and democracy is the center of KMT’s thinking, it’s a founding vision for us. We never, never step back for anything regarding to human rights, liberty, or democracy."

- Eric Chu June 6, 2022

Nevertheless, the use of the word “Republic of China” has ironically risen in use amongst KMT officials and often repeated back-to-back to emphasize its

existence as opposed to the previous era when the term was used quite interchangeably with "Taiwan" when referring to their country. The best example of this is the Mayor Hou, who was born and raised in Taiwan, with native Taiwanese lineage as opposed to the 49ers who moved from the Mainland who make up a significant portion of the KMT political base. During a press conference on his 3D policy, he used the word "Republic of China" the entire time.

This can indicate two things. One is for external purposes, and the other domestic. The continued use and expansive use of the term can signal to China that fundamentally there is not a change in the KMT policy towards the One-China policy. Secondly, it can signal to the mainlander base of the KMT, who feel sidelined by the new administration being more localist in nature, that the KMT still holds on to their mainlander roots. However, in the new civic reconception of the party's nationalist ideology, the Republic of China more so emphasizes the *Republic* in the term, and remains dynamic.

7 Discussion

In both instances, the process of dynamic conservatism can be seen. More specifically, a strategy of implementing dynamic conservatism that looks inward at its own *character* or in this instance, ideology, and adapts to the unchangeable environment accordingly. In both instances, the core ideology of the KMT was never put into question, instead a new policy shift was implemented in accordance with both core KMT values, and changing circumstances which made previous policy untenable.

First in the discourse of the word "peace," the core value of the KMT's focus on peace and security did not change, and was consistently emphasized on. However, the methods by which to achieve peace and security between Taiwan and China did change radically. Economic engagement with China nearly completely stopped being mentioned in the discourse, rather the discussion shifted to a focus on defense and arms instead. The most obvious example in which this shift can be seen in the discourse is the context in which "peace" appears in. Nearly always being coupled with "prosperity" in Ma Ying-jeou's speeches, to nearly always being coupled with "stability" and "security" in the later KMT politicians' press conferences and talks.

Economic engagement clearly proved unpopular as shown by the ferocity of the Sunflower Movement, and the Taiwanese public did not see the efforts of continued engagement pay off in the end. More Taiwanese were worried about the island's sovereignty and safety from what seems a more aggressive China that is more likely to resort to violent means to bring Taiwan under its control. As to be more responsive to this changing demand from the voter base, the KMT adapted its model of achieving peace to focus more on direct self-defense. It is also interesting to note the continuity of American arms sales from both administrations, however justified differently still.

Secondly, in their use of the term "Republic of China," they began to prefer using it more in their speeches, despite their actual policy indicating a shift away from a strong emphasis on a Chinese identity. With ever rising Taiwanese identity with consistent decline in Chinese identity in Taiwan, the policy of Chinese identity was no longer going to hold in modern Taiwanese politics. With this fundamental part of KMT being put into question, they used another

growing current in the country to shift their policy. When someone identifies as Taiwanese, they identify with the democracy built on Taiwan, in contrast to a Chinese identity which is inherently connected to the authoritarian system of China. Without necessarily shifting their nationalism focus to Taiwan, they instead connect it to one which satisfies both the mainlanders proud of the Republic of China they've built on the island of Taiwan, and the local Taiwanese who are proud to stand in contrast to mainland authoritarianism. The core nationalist ideology of the KMT remained stable, however this principle was applied in a style which adapts to the changing realities of shifting identities and systems.

While dynamic conservatism allows for a great possibility in policy shifts, it should be noted that ideology and core values still exist as the ultimate basis for adaptation. Therefore, some policies do not exist as possibilities for the KMT even with liberal uses of language. For example, Taiwanese independence will never be a serious policy advocated by the KMT without serious ramifications for the party. Such a policy would be going against all the established core values of the KMT which would be putting the government at unnecessary risk, going against the constitution which they themselves established, as well as its mainland roots. Thus, it is important to note that while dynamic conservatism opens up new opportunities for the KMT to adapt to, this does not mean an openness to every possibility.

8 Conclusion

This research demonstrates the concept of dynamic conservatism as a process through which Kuomintang ideology can be understood and can still be applied to modern developments in the party when it comes to Cross-Straits discourse. The success of the party is inherently linked to this ability, as can be shown when the party refused to adapt, and suffered a disastrous blow to its performance. Despite seemingly consistent use in language from public discourse from the KMT, there exists a dynamic contextual element to those core elements which shape how they're operationalized. These results contribute to the existing literature on the theory of the KMT's ideological evolution from the Mainland to Taiwan to democratization, as well as the ever shifting dynamics of Cross-Strait relations as they are conceptualized by both parties. Dynamic conservatism may be a helpful conceptual tool through which to further analyze ideological developments in the party, and in which ways they can or cannot shift their policies.

On the U.S. side these findings also have implications for how a future KMT administration's Cross-Straits policy may look like, as well as a testament to the party's adaptability to shifting circumstances. The KMT has existed as a long time ally of the U.S. on Taiwan and from a quick analysis of their rhetoric over nearly a decade-and-a-half, American cooperation has consistently been a policy priority. With indications of a recent shift to civic nationalism, and their argument of the defense of democracy as an ideal, not simply as a security measure may be more convincing arguments for the American public. However, whether this shift in language use will lead to definite changes in the minds of Americans or Taiwanese is yet to be demonstrated.

The adaptability of the KMT through its history and even modern times may

also serve as a model for other countries and parties going through a transition period. Dynamic conservatism was undertaken with great effort and intention, and further study into this process may lead to more replicable models and strategies for other studies of political parties in a quickly changing political environment. More intriguing is the external pressure to change and how the necessary environment for change can be constructed for the smooth transition the KMT experienced, along with their core identity withstanding.

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