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# **The Opinion of The Taiwanese Media on Pro-Independence and Pro-Unification with People Republic China During Tsai Ing-Wen Era**

Ahmet Yiğitalp TULGA\*

**Abstract:** Taiwan-People's Republic of China (PRC) relations have attracted a lot of attention in recent years. These relationships are at the core of Taiwan's social and political life. The pro-independence and pro-unification social cleavage line affected by Taiwan-PRC relations divides Taiwan's political life into two separate camps. These camps are pan-blue coalition (pro-unification) and the pan-green coalition (pro-independence). In this study, the views of Taiwanese newspapers containing both camps on Taiwan-PRC relations are analyzed quantitatively. The study focuses specifically on the Tsai Ing-Wen period. Within the scope of the study, dictionary-based and sentiment analysis methods are used, and the selected newspapers are examined with these principles. As a consequence of the quantitative analysis of these three English Taiwanese newspapers, it is shown that the media adopted a perspective similar to the views of the government and the DPP throughout the Tsai Ing-Wen period. Furthermore, sentiment analysis is done of the news from these newspapers relevant to PRC-Taiwan ties. It has been noted that the reporting regarding PRC-Taiwan ties in all three newspapers has a positive language.

**Keywords:** Taiwan, PRC, Text Analysis, Pro-Unification, Pro-Independence, KMT, DPP

## **Tayvan Medyasının Tsai Ing-Wen Döneminde Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti ile Birleşme ve Bağımsızlık Konusundaki Görüşü**

**Öz:** Tayvan-Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti (ÇHC) ilişkileri son yıllarda akademik çevrelerde büyük ilgi görmektedir. Bu ilişkiler Tayvan'ın sosyal ve politik yaşamının da merkezinde yer almaktadır. Tayvan-ÇHC ilişkilerinden etkilenen bağımsızlık yanlısı ve birleşim yanlısı toplumsal bölünme hattı, Tayvan siyasi yaşamını iki ayrı kampa ayırmaktadır. Bu kamplar pan-mavi koalisyonu (birleşme yanlısı) ve

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pan-yeşil koalisyonudur (bağımsızlık). Bu çalışmada, her iki kampı da içeren Tayvan gazetelerinin Tayvan-ÇHC ilişkileri üzerine görüşleri nicel olarak incelenmiştir. Çalışma özellikle Tsai Ing-Wen dönemine odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında sözlüğe dayalı ve duygu analiz yöntemleri kullanılmış ve seçilen gazeteler bu ilkelerle incelenmiştir. Bu üç İngilizce yayın yapan Tayvan gazetelerinin nicel analizlerinin bir sonucu olarak, medyanın Tsai Ing-Wen dönemi boyunca hükümetin ve DPP'nin görüşlerine benzer bir bakış açısı benimsediği bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, Tayvan-ÇHC ilişkileriyle ilgili bu gazetelerden alınan haberlere duygu analizi yapılmıştır. Her üç gazetede de PRC-Tayvan ilişkileri ile ilgili olan haberlerin olumlu bir dil kullanıldığı bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tayvan, ÇHC, Metin Analizi, Birleşme Yanlısı, Bağımsızlık Yanlısı, KMT, DPP

## Introduction

Taiwan- People's Republic of China (PRC) relations have been one of the most unresolved problems of Northeast Asia for many years. Especially in recent years, Taiwan-PRC relations are one of the issues that attract attention in the academic environment. However, PRC-Taiwan relations are remarkable because this relation is the basis of identity and pro-independence / pro-unification issues that shape Taiwan's political and social life.

Many academic studies suggest that the system of political parties is created by lines of social cleavage in countries (Duverger, 1959; see also, Özbudun, 2000; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). One of the best examples of this situation is Taiwan. The pro-independence and pro-unification social cleavage line by PRC-Taiwan relations shaped Taiwanese political and social life and this social cleavage line divides political life in Taiwan into two camps.

The first of these camps is the pan-blue camp, which also includes the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). This camp is known to support unification with PRC. The second camp is a pan-green camp with Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The second camp is mostly called the pro-independence camp, which advocates Taiwanese independence.

Pan-green coalition and DPP were the winners of the last two general elections (2016 and 2020) in Taiwan. In other words, there

are two elections won by the pro-independence camp. Along with these electoral victories, many questions have emerged about PRC-Taiwan relations.

In this context, this study is quantitatively analyzed the media's thoughts on PRC-Taiwan relations and the language they used in their news about PRC-Taiwan relations during the Tsai Ing-Wen era. The study aims to show what language the media used about PRC-Taiwan relations during the Ing-Wen period in their news and which side they locate themselves in the pro-independence or pro-unification split.

Cascade model theory is used in this study and the results of this research are interpreted with this theory and explained. Cascade model theory implies that at various rates and under some circumstances, government leaders, media, and the public control and engage with each other collectively (Yüksel, 2013). Specifically, the presence of four separate variables (cultural congruence, authority, policy, and motivation) affects the capacity of the government to set direction, the dissemination of desired structures, and the public's interest and help (Yüksel, 2013).

*H1: During the Ing-Wen period, Taiwanese media follow the government's rhetoric, without any social cleavage about PRC-Taiwan relations.*

In the first part of the study, Taiwan's political life is explained. In the following part of the study, social cleavage and social split in Taiwan and its reflection on politics are shown. In the third section, the process followed in the quantitative text analysis is explained and in the final section, the results of the analysis try to be explained.

### **Taiwanese Political System**

Taiwan was under KMT authoritarian control since they fled to Taiwan in 1949. This authoritarian regime continued for many years. However, in the late 1980s, Taiwan moved in a democratic direction, it was mainly because of a rapid economic and social development that weakened the influence of traditional Confucianism (Huntington, 1991:25). In this democratization process, the constitution was a central role. Actually, the Constitution was first formulated and promulgated in Mainland China in 1947, and not originally designed for Taiwan, however,

KMT fled and brought it to Taiwan in 1949. Then it did not fully being implemented until the Martial law was lifted in 1987. Therefore, it has undergone thought seven times amendment, making it more relevant to Taiwan's conditions.

Before Taiwan stepped on the road of democracy, it was a regime of authoritarian control by Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-Kuo. It was a time that executive and judicial power were both in their hand, judicial power was merely a tool to maintain the authority of the state. In 1980, the administration of the courts and the prosecution was separated. The basic ideal of design is separations of power, each one can check and balance others. There are five powers in the design instead of three, which are the Executive Yuan, Legislative Yuan, Judicial Yuan, Examination Yuan and Control Yuan, exercising five governing powers. According to the Constitution, Judicial Yuan exercises mainly four powers, power to interpret, to adjudicate, to discipline and of judicial administration. Among those powers, the power to interpret is probably the most important, the Justices hold meetings to interpret the Constitution and to unify the interpretation of laws and orders. The Examination Yuan and Control Yuan are two unique features that come with the other three yuans become the so-called Five-power Constitution. Examination Yuan is the highest authority to administrate all national exams and responsible for the examinations and management of all civil service personnel. It exercises independently from administration in order to prevent interference of other powers or individuals. Control Yuan is the highest supervisory agency that monitors the other yuans except for Legislative Yuan. Its primary functions are receiving people's complain, investigation, proposing corrective measures, issuing impeachment against functionaries and auditing (Legislative Yuan, 2019; Executive Yuan, 2019). High Courts and all of the lower courts have since been placed under the administration of the Judicial Yuan. Hence, there is a clear delineation between the judicial and the executive powers, and Taiwan's judicial system has made great progressive strides (Judicial Yuan, 2019).

Local elections were being held regularly and were open to ordinary people, non-KMT candidates were able to be elected, although most elections were KMT-dominated. Follow these

elections, there were three factors converged together to expedite democratic development in Taiwan: economic growth, the development of political journals and the tangwai, or opposition, movement and changes in Taiwan's relationship with PRC (Huang, 2017). These three factors pushed Taiwan into the road of democracy. Martial law was lifted in 1987. The first general election with universal suffrage was revealed in 1996. Taiwan has been four times peaceful party alternation in 2000, 2008, 2016 and 2020. Overall, Taiwan is commonly considered as one of a democratic country in the world.

Both main groups, pan-blue (KMT) and pan-green (DPP), have staked out the most fundamental split in Taiwanese politics on the 'China issue' (Templeman, 2019). Institutionalizing political processes in Taiwan tend to resolve some underlying problems in the governance process involving voters and elected officials (Templeman, 2019). The political environment in the Republic of China (ROC) is split into two main camps or cleavages, with the pro-unification KMT, People First Party (PFP), and New Party joining the Pan-Blue Camp; and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), pro-independent, establishing the Pan-Green Camp. Due to the prominence of the issue of reunification-independence in the political scene in Taiwan, it is difficult to categorize any group as "right" or "left" on the traditional basis of economic or social policies (Templeman, 2019). In this context, the division in Taiwan is different from many countries.

In the following section, the reason for such cleavages and the reflection of this division in Taiwan's political life will be explained.

### **Social Cleavage**

Elections crystallize the collective priorities of a country and provide the electorate with a forum to distinguish between political choices (Dalton, 1996). Political party systems embody the nature of the social cleavage of nations (Özbudun, 2013). Concerning the number of political parties, a population split basically by a one cleavage line is likely to offer birth to a two-party system, while a society with two different cleavage lines is likely to create a four-party system (Duverger, 1959). Similarly, Arend Lijphart supports that if there are numerous lines of political disagreement within a country, it will be anticipated that a fairly large number of parties are required to communicate both

of them until they match. However, an existing structure of two parties can not comfortably handle as many aspects of problems as a multiparty framework (Lijphart, 2012).

Most academic studies also identified a clear methodological association between the effective amount of political parties in a country and the number of problems in that country (Lijphart, 1999; Taagepera & Grofman, 1985; Ingelhart, 1977)

. One of these researches was prepared by Rein Taagepera and Bernard Grofman. According to Taagepera and Grofman, adding 1 of the number of issues gives us the effective number of political party (Taagepera & Grofman, 1985).

$$N = I + 1 \quad ^1$$

The number of effective political parties gives up clues about social cleavage. As seen above, scholars such as Duverge have revealed the correlation between political parties and social cleavage.

The level of social cleavage strength often influences a significant aspect of the political party system, an essential feature that differs between moderate and divisive multi-party systems (Sartori, 1986). Lipset and Rokkan clarified how "*ideological and partisan divisions*" emerged out of the social cleavages that occur within a country (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Lipset and Rokkan analyzed two axes of the cleavage structures in Western democracies (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). These two generated four dimensions of opposition in Western politics. Two of them, central-peripheral and state-church, were the result of the national revolution and two of them, urban-rural and worker-employer, were the product of the industrial revolution. (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Lipset and Rokkan suggested that political party systems became "frozen" in European healthy democracies around the cleavages that occurred during formative times (1920s-1960s) (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

Many academic articles have been written on modern social cleavage. One of them is Lijphart's article. Lijphart's analysis of modern party structures described the class division as a significant aspect of social cleavage in nearly all societies (lijphart,

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<sup>1</sup> N= Number of effective political parties, I = Number of problems

1981). Richard Rose (Rose, 1974) and Derek Urwin (Urwin, 1969) examined the social foundations of political party that "religious divisions are the main social bases of the parties in Western democracies." (Rose, 1974; Urwin, 1969). Lijphart (1979) explored religious, class and linguistic cleavage differences in four democracies. He noticed that religious cleavage was the biggest effect on the preference of vote (Lijphart, 1979). Elections crystallize the collective interests of people and offer a forum for the electorate to distinguish between political options (Dalton, 1996).

Neto and Cox tried to find an answer of effective number of political parties based on the social cleavage (Neto & Cox, 1997). They think that there are two approaches to answer that question. The first approach/camp focuses on the role of electoral laws and the second camp focuses on the social cleavage. First camp and Duverger suggest that simple plurality rule in SMD<sup>2</sup> creates two-party system (Duverger, 1954). The first camp argues that social cleavages do not indicate an only/alone set of "politically activated cleavages" (Olson, 1965; Neto & Cox, 1997). Second camp and Lipset and Rokkan think that Duverger's idea is over generalization and party system in Western Europe's healthy democracies "frozen" for 1920s until 1960s (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

However, Neto and Cox think that there is no definite distinction between two camps and there is a possibility to merge the two camps' idea (Neto & Cox, 1997). Neto and Cox support both approaches and they suggest that the best way to answer their question is to merge and combine both approaches (Powell, 1982; Net & Cox, 1997).

The Taiwan political party structure is one of the best examples of Duverge, Lijparth and Taagepera and Grofman's model. In particular, Taagepera and Grofman's model describes the social cleavage and the number of effective parties in Taiwan quite well (Taagepera & Grofman, 1985). In the past two decades, national identity issues have risen in salience in Taiwan (Fell, 2018). In other words, theoretically, Taiwan society is divided into two by the identity problem. This division led to the emergence of two main camps in Taiwan's political life. The first camp is the KMT

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<sup>2</sup> Single Member District



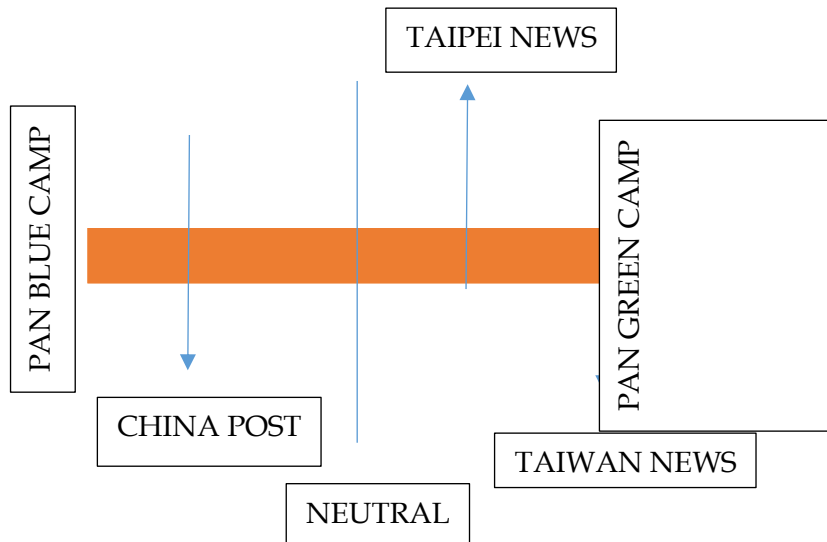
camp. This camp support pro-unification with mainland China and they emphasize the importance of Chinese ethnic identity. On the other hand, the second camp is DPP. DPP camp supports independence. As could be seen, the main debate is about independence or reunification and this debate creates two-party system (Tsai, 2001).

Under martial law, during KMT era, educational and cultural policies were placed in force in Taiwan to establish a modern Chinese nationalism of the Republic of China (ROC) (Fell, 2018). While the KMT had the reputation of being inflexible on its roles of national origin, in the final years of Chiang Ching-kuo's presidency and the early Lee Teng-hui era there were several adjustments. First, under Chiang Ching-kuo the idea of 'Unification under the People's Three Values' substituted the strategy of re-occupying the mainland militarily (Fell, 2018; Templeman, 2019).

After martial law, much of the unresolved political problems of the 1990s remain on the political agenda throughout the DPP period, especially the unification of Taiwan, sovereignty in Taiwan, democracy and political corruption (Fell, 2018). However, several major shifts have also arisen, as a variety of topics have fallen out of the news, such as social security. Despite all these new problems, the most important factor behind Taiwan's social cleavage is still a matter of pro-unification and pro-independence. Today, it is necessary to understand this social cleavage and its causes in order to analyze PRC-Taiwan relations.

## **Research Design**

This empirical research consists of 209 news from 2016 to 2020 related to PRC-Taiwan relations or Cross-Strait relations, which I code using automated text analysis. All 209 news are in English and are selected among the most read news on the subject of this article. Since this news are in English, they generally strike foreigners' fancy. The unit of analysis of this research of the material is the news about PRC-Taiwan relations. This research depends on news from the Taipei Times, Taiwan News and China Post. The dataset covers the Tsai Ing-Wen era and this dataset involves one general and one local election period.

**Table 1:** Political View of Selected Newspaper

I combined the news-level details with data on each newspaper role and years after Tsai Ing-Wen came to power to examine how news and backgrounds are correlated with trends of pro-independent and pro-unification claims-making. I even separate between specific news, using the month and the week every news was given.

First, I conduct a sentiment analysis based on the Harvard dictionary. Performs an examination of the meaning of textual material in R. This application uses dictionary Harvard IV. As a mathematical method, the above utilizes the regularization of LASSO to pick specific words dependent on an exogenous response vector (Feuerriegel & Pellochs, 2019).

Dictionary with a list of terms that are good and derogatory according to several different dictionaries and one of them is the Harvard dictionary (Feuerriegel & Pellochs, 2019).

Second, I use dictionary-based research to automatically identify pro-independent and pro-unification rhetoric in the news despite the complexity of manually coding over 100 long texts. As a classical content analysis is a very time-consuming and potentially costly endeavor, I have also established a much simpler

accessible pro-independent and pro-unification metric focused on computer-driven content analysis.

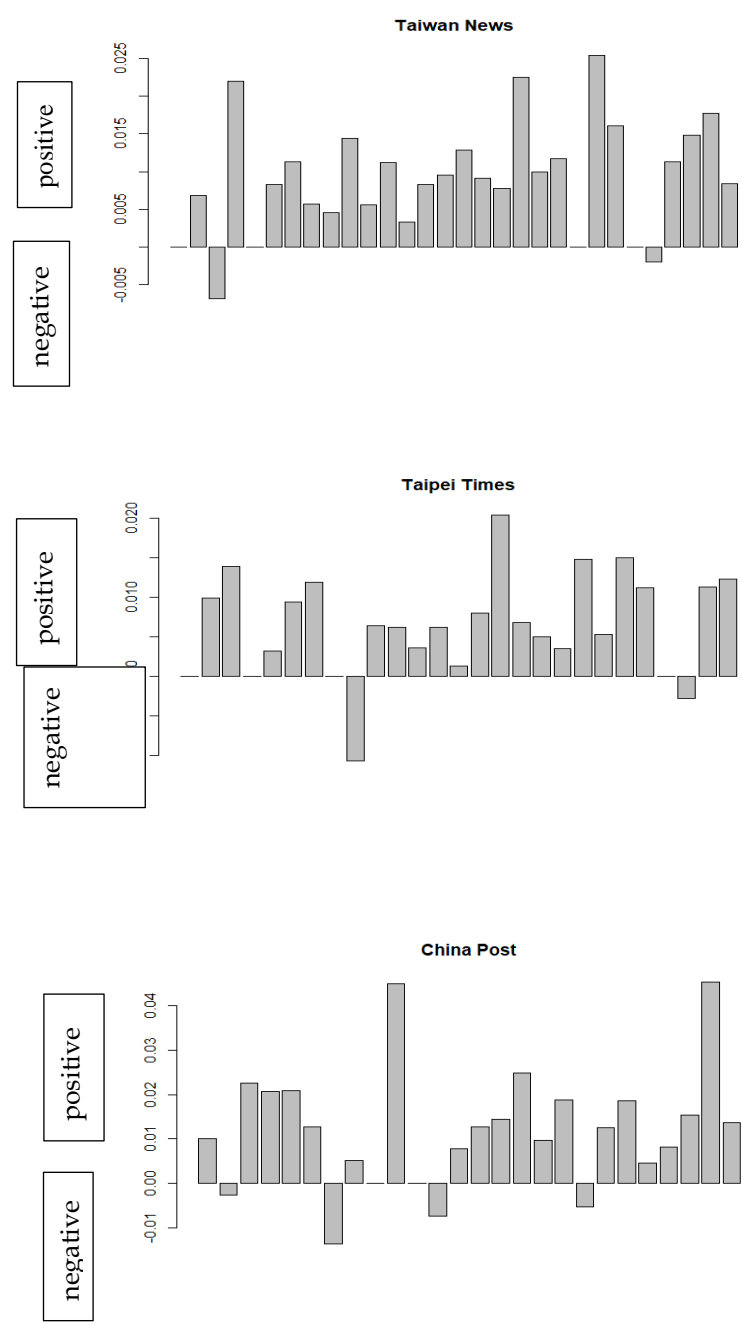
This metric is based on the dictionary method where a program calculates the proportion of terms that I find to be pro-independent or pro-unification markers. This indicates that terms are the standard of measurement, instead of paragraphs (Roodijijn & Pauwels, 2011). The choice of terms for the dictionary from this analysis was based on both analytical and theoretical logic (Roodijijn & Pauwels, 2011; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015). For motivation, I used analytical samples to draw up a collection of terms used by some newspapers to describe their skepticism or positivity against ties between the PRC and Taiwan.

This method scans the records for a specified set of words to occur and gives each record a prevalence score for each word (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015). This helps one to analyze pro-independence and pro-unification counts and proportions by interest factors, including years, and months (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015). I create the dictionary of independence and unification words, then reading a random subset of news and defining possibly applicable words, then running the study centered on those terms, and eventually discovering additional terms in documents defined by the algorithm as pro-independence or pro-unification.

## Results

The sentiment of the three selected newspapers' news about the PRC-Taiwan relations in the Ing-Wen period was examined in the first stage of this study. As mentioned above, the Harvard dictionary was used in sentiment analysis.

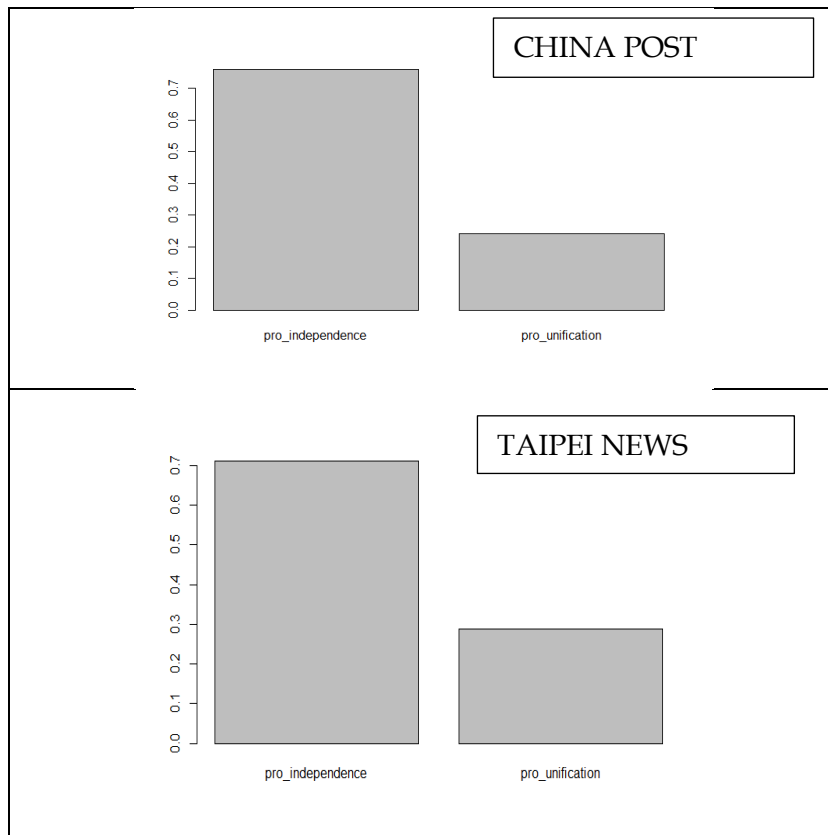
Table 2: Sentiment Analysis Results

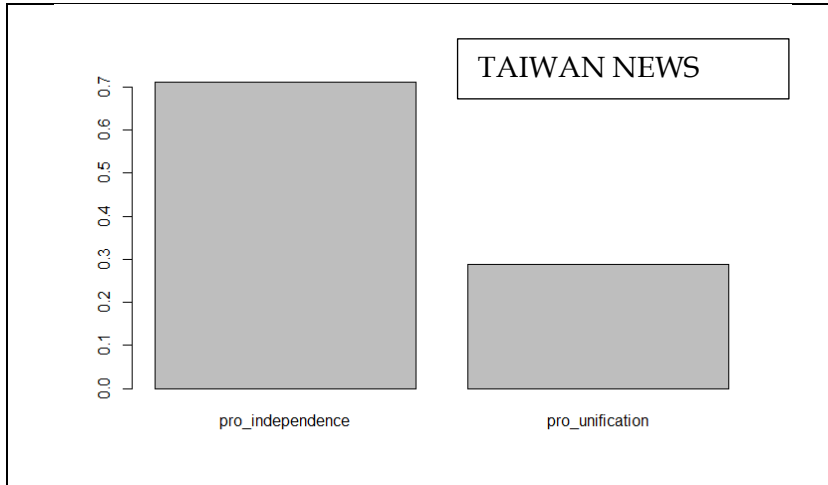


As a result of sentiment analysis, three newspapers selected have a positive opinion on PRC-Taiwan relations. However, the language used in China Post is more negative than the other two newspapers. Notwithstanding, overall, China Post generally has a positive view on PRC-Taiwan relations.

In the second stage of the study, dictionary-based pro-unification and pro-independent analysis were performed. The three selected newspapers reflect two main views in Taiwanese society. However, as a result of dictionary-based analysis, it was found that three newspapers used a pro-independence language about PRC-Taiwan relations.

**Table 3:** Dictionary-Based Analysis Results





A robustness test was also performed for these results. Within the scope of the soundness test, the created dictionary was divided randomly into two separate parts and the analysis was repeated with randomly separated dictionaries. The same results were found as a result of the robustness test. As a result of the robustness test, it was found that Taipei Times use 0.66 pro-independence and 0.33 pro-unification language. Taiwan News used 0.71 pro-independence and 0.28 pro-unification languages during Ing-Wen era. Finally, China Post used 0.75 pro-independence and 0.24 pro-unification languages.

## Conclusion

PRC-Taiwan relations in recent years have been one of the most important issues of Northeast Asia and it has attracted attention in the academic community. These PRC-Taiwan relations are at the heart of Taiwan's political life and social cleavage today. Despite many new issues, this problem is still the most important cause of social cleavage and Taiwan's political life is shaped around this problem. In theory, PRC finds Taiwan's reunification with the Mainland to be the most significant issue on its agenda. Yet Taiwan's continued development as one of Asia's most stable independent democracies and its changing culture in Taiwan are increasing the political and psychological disparities between Taiwan and PRC.

In this study, PRC-Taiwan relations and social cleavage in Taiwan during Tsai Ing-Wen era are analyzed with the news of

three selected Taiwanese newspapers about PRC-Taiwan relations in a quantitative way. As a result of the quantitative analysis of these three English Taiwanese newspapers, it is found that during the Tsai Ing-Wen period, the media followed a view close to the government and DPP's view. This result provides a finding that supports my hypothesis. Besides, sentiment analysis of the news of these newspapers related to PRC-Taiwan relations is conducted. It was found that all three newspapers' news about PRC-Taiwan relations has a positive language.

In this study, it is tried to be reflected in both camps that show Taiwan's political life and social cleavage. However, it is found that even China Post, which is thought to support the pan-blue or KMT view, to use a pro-independence language about PRC-Taiwan relations. Interestingly, China Post's news about PRC-Taiwan relations is expected to use a more positive language than pro-independence newspapers. However, as a result of the study, it is seen that China Post uses a relatively more negative language than the other two newspapers.

These findings reached as a result of the research support the Cascade model theory. Cascade model theory implies that at various rates and under some circumstances, government leaders, media and the public affect and engage with each other collectively. Specifically, the presence of four separate variables (cultural congruence, authority, policy, and motivation) affects the capacity of the government to set direction, the dissemination of desired structures, and the public's interest and help. As seen in Taiwan's case, media and government use a similar language against PRC, which is seen as an important cause of the problem.

However, this study has a limitation. This limitation is that the study focuses only on English newspapers' news. It is possible to obtain a more in-depth result for future research by including the papers published in Chinese. However, despite this limitation, the results of the study are quite remarkable. The primary reason for this is that the study focuses specifically on the Ing-Wen period, and the second is the small number of English studies focusing on PRC-Taiwan relations, using sentiment analysis and dictionary-based methods at the same time.

Taiwanese social cleavage is based on pro-unification and pro-independence. However, it is very important to create a new

dimension and increase the number of important camps and political parties in Taiwan's social cleavage and political life. In this way, it may be possible to represent the vast majority of society in politics. If the blurring of party lines persists and Taiwan's parties are unable to identify new topics to rally support, there is a risk that Taiwan's elections could transform into unprovoked fights between nationalist politicians, culminating in an increasingly pessimistic electorate. In this context, the role of the media is very important, and the Taiwan media has the objectivity to achieve this.

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