

The Uses of Cuteness: Gender, Identity Politics, and Elections in Taiwan

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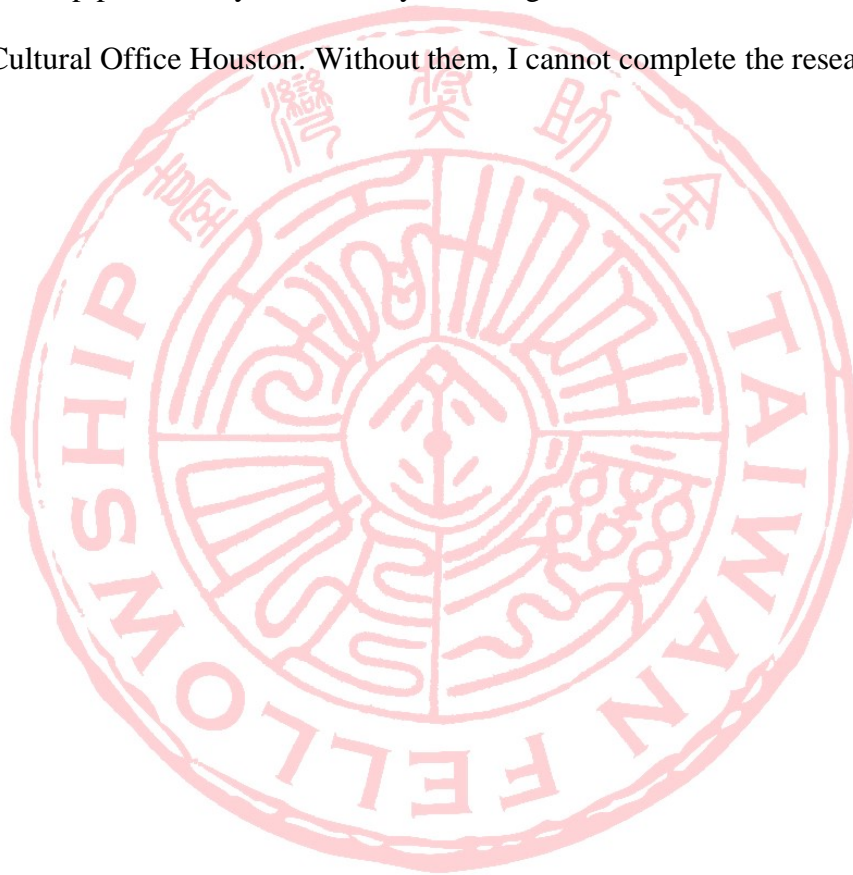
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Research Purpose

Since the 1990s, as the pace of democratization has increased, Taiwan (ROC) has become a popular case study among political scientists and political communication scholars (Chang, 2009; Chao & Myers, 1994; Rigger, 1999; Tien, 1996). Elections have become a site for observation of Taiwanese voters' consensus on various public affairs, such as Taiwan's sovereignty and relations with China (PRC) (Schubert, 2004). Thus, elections in Taiwan not only demonstrate its own independently executed, democratic political participation, but also encourage like-minded citizens to gather and release their emotions in affect-laden campaigns and rallies.

An under-explored field in studying Taiwan's politics and democracy is the use of cute elements in political campaigns. Cute elements have been part of political campaigning since the 1998 Taipei mayoral election. The then DPP candidate, Chen Shui-bian, launched a cartoon doll nicknamed "A-bian," as well as other accessories for supporters to purchase. Although his attempt at re-election failed in 1998, Chen won the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Scholars argue that part of Chen's success lies in his constant use of cute commodities in the campaigns to promote his approachability to young voters. Through the consumption of the commodities, political participation has become a fun game and an easy everyday practice (Y. Chuang, 2011; Parry, 2016).

It is also found that Taiwanese politicians tend to exaggeratedly express their emotions in public. For example, unlike a solemn apology often seen as the norm in press conferences in the United States, a public apology in Taiwan might involve tears, kneeling down, wailing, and other affective performances. This emphasis on one's helplessness, vulnerability, and powerlessness in

such a public performance is somehow expected or even encouraged by the viewers. To many Taiwanese, showing one's soft side is a way to shorten the distance between people and arouse others' empathy and compassion. The combination of such expressions of emotion with the use of cute elements has become a unique tactic for Taiwan's politicians to persuade their voters (Chen, 2018; Sandel et al., 2016; Yueh, 2017).

This trend of cuteness can be found in the 2020 presidential election as well. All the first-round candidates launched cartoon personified stickers on social media. They also designed cute and humorous campaigning commodities that aimed to affectively appeal to young voters. Some supporters would voluntarily "cutify" the candidates in the hopes of influencing other voters. For example, President Tsai Ing-wen was portrayed as a girl with cat ears and a tail by many visual artists in her 2016 campaign. In countries other than Taiwan, "cutifying" a candidate in this way might be done by the opposing camp in order to mock the candidate's incapacity through likening them to a kitten. However, it seems that the Taiwanese way to garner support for a politician and to increase their popularity must first involve adopting cute elements.

Research Questions

The Japanese "kawaii" (cute) culture is the origin of Taiwan's cute culture (T. Chuang, 2005). However, the kawaii symbols in Japan do not cross the line into the political arena: most Japanese politicians do not develop the same communication strategies as Taiwanese politicians. In order to understand the unique culture and the prevalent usage of cute elements in political discourse, I plan to conduct fieldwork in Taiwan.

Original Plan

In my original plan, which was submitted in July 2020, I intended to explore why politicians in Taiwan employ cute elements in their campaigning and/or in their everyday communication with constituents. I have touched on this issue in my previous study, in which I argue that the Taiwan Mandarin term “*sajiao*,” the tactics of the weak, is one of the keywords to understand Taiwanese culture (Yueh, 2017). While I conducted extensive fieldwork in Taiwan, observing how people persuaded others using this childish and feminine method, I did not pay sufficient attention to the uses of cuteness in political discourse. Thus, this study aims to focus on this type of political communication in the following aspects: (1) how do politicians use cute elements in communication? (2) Does the politician’s gender influence the use of cuteness and the effect of their campaigning? And (3) what would be the limitations of using cute elements in campaigning?

Revised Plan

Originally, I planned to start my fieldwork in June 2021. However, due to COVID-19 outbreak in Taiwan in May 2021, my trip was delayed and I had to shorten my original research plan. Also, due to the pandemic, many local politicians reduced their face-to-face visits in their districts, or canceled some regular face-to-face events. These changes led me to modify my original plan: following their daily schedule to observe their interactions with constituents. On the other hand, some large-scale political activities were postponed as well. For example, a recall vote was postponed from August to October. A referendum vote was also rescheduled in December due to the pandemic. Thus, these two unexpected political events became the foci of my fieldwork. I was able to enter Taiwan in September, and left on December 31. With the new foci, I observed a ten-day anti-recall campaign in Taichung City, and more than twenty

referendum-related events in Taiwan. In order to answer the three research questions, I collected data in the following areas:

(1) I participated in the anti-recall and the referendum campaigns. I observed these two events by participating in various rallies and collecting media coverage about politicians' speeches. I visited the offices of the related politicians, participated in their events, and observed how they interacted with constituents. Note-taking was my primary method to collect data. Because these rallies were open to the public, I either recorded the process or watched the live streaming on social media. I followed the anti-recall campaign for ten days until the voting day, and I attended at least ten rallies for referendum as well as watched ten live stream events.

(2) I interviewed office staff, volunteers, and other related personnel during my fieldwork in Taichung City and Taipei City.

(3) I gathered logos, slogans, small products on site. For example, rally participants would receive free masks, small bottle water, hand sanitizers, flyers, or stickers. Some organizers asked all participants to change the sponsored mask for the rally (as masks are required in all public gatherings in Taiwan). As more and more politicians utilize social media to promote their political visions and beliefs, I also attended to these records for understanding the evolution of candidates' communication strategies.

Methodology

The research methods for this project are primarily participant observation and interviews. Secondly, I include analyses of archival documentation in journalistic reports, candidates' social media posts, and other campaigning records. The participant observation approach permits

an in-depth investigation of politicians' rhetorical strategies, their interactions with constituents, and other communication practices behind the scenes. This method is also conducive to a more intimate understanding of the specific persuasive moments when politicians enact and explain the tactics in this election culture. The proposed interviews are semi-structured and accompanied by participant observation.

Data Collection

The Recall Campaign (October 13–October 23)

I spent ten days observing the anti-revenge recall campaign organized by a legislator in Taichung City.

Background: Chen Po-Wei, a young man in his early thirties, was the first elected legislator of a small political party: Taiwan State-building Party (TSP), to represent the second electoral district in Taichung, Taiwan, in 2020. Before Chen, a powerful local family, the Yan family, had been representing the district for over twenty years. Chen's triumph in the 2020 general election was an unexpected miracle. Chen received 112,839 votes (51.15%) and defeated his opponent with a difference of 5,073 votes. However, in 2021, the Yan family attempted to recall Chen, because only 73,744 voters (25% of total qualified voters) would make the case pass.

Taiwan's recall law was revised in 2016 in response to progressive activists' request. In the past, the signature requirements for recalls were much more difficult, and the turnout rate had to be 50%, which, according to the reformists, made impossible for all recalls. The major changes in 2016 include a much lower turnout voting rate, from 50% to 25%, and a comparative easier procedure of establishing a recall case, only one percent of voters' signatures are needed.

Thus, the new recall law has fundamentally changed the strategy of recalls. It is now much easier to recall someone than to elect someone.

According to Batto (2021a), the new recall law has proven to be a disaster. We have seen the abuse of this emergency mechanism. Before Chen's recall, there have been already four other recalls, and three of them were held within a year, including New Taipei City legislator Huang Kuo-Chang (failed in December 2017), Kaohsiung City mayor Han Kuo-Yu (recalled in June 2020), Taoyuan City councilor Wang Hao-Yu (recalled in January 2021), and Kaohsiung City councilor Huang Chieh (failed in February 2021).

As soon as Chen surprisingly replaced the Yan family in 2020 to execute the legislator's duties, the defeated local forces were preparing to recall him. Without waiting for another four years to compete with Chen again in the 2024 general election, the Yan family and its affiliated political party, the Kuomintang (KMT), rushed to take advantage of the comparatively easy recall law in the hopes of taking back their lost seat within two years.

Chen's Strategies in the Anti-Recall Campaign: On February 8, 2021, a resident in the second district in Taichung submitted a proposal to the Central Election Commission to recall legislator Chen Po-Wei. On July 2, 2021, the case was accepted. Originally, the case was supposed to be voted on August 28, 2021, but was postponed to October 23, 2021, due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in Taiwan. Whether the unexpected extension helped recall the legislator requires further investigation. Regardless, once the case was officially announced by the Central Election Commission, both sides, the recall proponents and the recall target, could rally to seek voters' support. At the beginning, the TSP used a "cool down" or "ignoring" strategy in response to the recall proposal, but after finding out that the opposition team might mobilize more than 25%



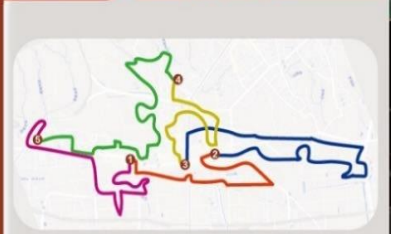

eligible voters against the legislator, they changed to a “hot war.” I particularly pay attention to the last ten days before the recall vote, as Chen and the TSP officially announced to hold a “100-hour Long March” campaign in the second district of Taichung.





In the press conference, Chen and his team announced the beginning of the “long march” campaign. Naming his campaign after the famous military retreat operated by the Chinese Communist Party’s Red Army might be merely a coincidence. He said in Taiwanese, “我會開始在選區走踏，我會開始在選區苦行” (I will begin to walk around my district; I will begin a humble pilgrimage). He added, “I will keep walking, walking, walking, until everyone in this district see the value of democracy.” In this context, the name “long march” probably aimed to emphasize the endurance and the persistence of this campaign. The campaign attempted to remind voters of Chen’s achievements, diligence, and sincerity with emotional appeal. During the ten-day campaign, Chen was still a legislator, and he did not take a leave to fight for the recall, but chose to participate in the “long march” before and after work. His goal was to spend 100 hours walking every corner in the second district of Taichung. His restless, death-defying, and strong will to serve people was emphasized in the ten-day campaign.


Every night, Chen’s Facebook page released a schedule for the next day, marking the stop sites, and the route of the marching. On the day, his team members started a live stream, broadcasting his walk with team members and followers. The audience could see Chen talk to the audience, while waving, saying hi, bowing, and taking picture with residents, followers, scooter riders, and car drivers on site. The marching was accompanied with music, occasional travel-guide-style introduction of local shops, chatting, joking, and cheering. Special guests, such as Chen’s colleagues, local councilors, YouTubers, key opinion leaders, and so forth, would join

the live stream, walking with Chen, to show their support. They held several on-site rallies during the marching, too.

The Ten-Day Schedule:

<p>Day 1 10/13/21</p>	<p>06:00 Wuri: Chen's Office (1) 08:00 Wufeng: a gas station (2) 10:00 Wufeng: Chen's Office (3) 12:00 Wufeng: a temple (4) 14:00 Wufeng: a temple (5) 16:00 Wufeng: a community development association (6) 18:00 Wufeng: a crossroad (7) Total Distance: 42.6 km</p>	<p>10/13 三 12 / 100</p> 
<p>Day 2 10/14/21</p>	<p>16:00 Dadu: a convenience store (1) 18:00 Dadu: a rally at Wanhxing Temple (2) 19:00 Dadu: a community park (3) 20:20 Dadu: a convenience store (4) 21:10 Dadu: a community (5) 22:00 Dadu: Chen's office (6) Total Distance: 12.5 km</p>	<p>10/14 四 18 / 100</p> 
<p>Day 3 10/15/21</p>	<p>10:00 Shalu: Chen's office (1) 12:00 Shalu: a temple (2) 14:30 Shalu: a bank (3) 16:30 Shalu: a community development association (4) 18:30 Shalu: a restaurant (5) 20:10 Shalu: Chen's office Total Distance: 8 km</p>	<p>10/15 五 28 / 100</p> 
<p>Day 4 10/16/21</p>	<p>08:00 Longjing: a temple (1) 10:00 Longjing: a temple (2) 12:00 Longjing: a family ancestral hall (3) 15:00 Longjing: a rally 17:00 Shalu: Halloween Celebration 19:00 Wuri: Councilor Chen Shi-Kai's Office Total Distance: 11.5 km</p>	<p>10/16 六 38 / 100</p> 

<p>Day 5 10/17/21</p>	<p>08:00 Dadu: a temple 09:00 Dadu: a temple 10:00 Dadu: a market 11:00 Dadu: Councilor Chen Shi-Kai's Office 15:00 Dadu: a temple 16:00 Longjing: a temple 17:00 Longjing: a shopping center square 19:00 Longjing: a fast-food restaurant 20:00 Longjing: a parking lot 21:00 Longjing: a skywalk Total Distance: 14.2 km</p>	
<p>Day 6 10/18/21</p>	<p>09:00 Taipei: Legislative Council 15:00 Wufeng: a museum 16:00 Wufeng: an audio shop 17:00 Wufeng: a temple 18:00 Wufeng: a temple 19:00 Wufeng: a temple 20:00 Wufeng: a business circle 22:00 Wufeng: Chen's Office Total Distance: 18.4 km</p>	
<p>Day 7 10/19/21</p>	<p>09:00 Wuri Highspeed Railway 11:00 Taipei: Legislative Council 15:00 Shalu: a community association 16:30 Shalu: a temple 17:30 Shalu: a restaurant 18:30 Shalu: a convenience store 19:30 Shalu: a convenience store 20:30 Shalu: a convenience store 21:30 Shalu: a temple 22:00 Shalu: Chen's Office Total Distance: 11.4 km</p>	
<p>Day 8 10/20/21</p>	<p>09:00 Legislative Council 15:00 Dadu: a temple 16:00 Dadu: an ice shop 17:00 Dadu: a temple 18:00 Longjing: a temple 20:00 Longjing: a temple 21:00 Longjing: a convenience store 22:00 Longjing: Chen's office Total Distance: 16.3 km</p>	

<p>Day 9 10/21/21</p>	<p>06:00 Dadu: a tourist spot 13:00 Longjing: a restaurant 15:00 Longjing: a park 17:00 Shalu: a park 19:00 Longjing: a convenience store 21:00 Longjing: a train station</p> <p>Total Distance: 15.9 km</p>	
<p>Day 10 10/22/21</p>	<p>04:00 Shalu: Ching-yi Night Market Square 07:00 Longjing 09:00 Dadu 10:00 Zhuifen Station 12:00 Wuri 7-11 15:00 Wufeng 18:00-21:30 Wuri: Sunrise Square</p> <p>Total Distance: No detailed data</p>	<p>Walking from Shalu, Longjing, Dadu, Wuri, to Wufeng Return to Wuri to hold a live concert</p>

The first four maps come from Chen Po-Wei's Facebook fan page, and the rest of them are the results of google map search. I drew the route based on the itinerary provided by the campaign team. (They changed the way to announce their routes since Day 5, so no official map was available.)

The Range of the “Long March” Campaign:

Taichung City is located in the middle of Taiwan. The area occupies 855.18 square miles. The second district of Taichung includes the following areas: Wufeng, Wuri, Shalu, Dadu, and Longjing; the size is about 99.2211 square miles. As for January 2020, there were 291,122 people living in this district.

Chen's campaign was a daunting task. I calculate Chen's total walking distance from Day 1 to Day 9 based on the stops on his daily visiting schedule. He and his team walked more than 150.9 km (=93.76 miles) in nine days, exclusive of the tenth day. On average, Chen walked

about 10 miles per day, so it is fair to estimate that he walked another 10 miles on the last day, which made the distance of his walking campaign over 100 miles in total.

Summary of Data Collection:

(1) Marching (on-site): Chen Po-Wei and his team encouraged supporters to join the daily marching. They did not request every follower to complete the whole trip with them, so most of the supporters joined a part of the route, taking a picture with Chen or shaking hands with him before they left. For example, several joggers joined the marching around 7:30 p.m. in Dadu on Day 2. They were living in the neighborhood, and were heading back home after workout. They joined the walking and had a short chat with Chen. No political comments were made. They cheered Chen up by shaking hands and saying “add oil” in Taiwanese before they left for home.

To walk with Chen for a short period created a sense of belongingness, or a sense of community. One of the purposes of the marching was to make the local voters aware of Chen’s visit, and encourage them to vote. One of the methods was direct request; Chen and the team kept greeting people on the road and asking them to support him. They actively waved at everyone they saw, uttering greetings with proper address forms, such as “Good morning, big brother, I am Chen Po-Wei. Please come to vote ‘no’ on October 23!” When they received a response from the supporters, either a “yes” hand gesture, an enthusiastic “sure,” or a horn sound from a car, they would say, “Thank you! Thank you! Please let your friends know! Please ask them to support me, too!” When in the marching, all people, even the followers, volunteers, would start voicing for Chen. When the team members and Chen started to say “thank you” to people on the road, others in the team would follow accordingly.

Not every moment did the team interact with supporters on the road. Sometimes, they passed a quiet community or a rural village without seeing people around. The theme song of the TSP became a proper background music. Team members would sing with the music, or silently walk in the marching. Although more and more supporters joined the march to walk with Chen, the interactions between supporters and the anti-recall team were slightly awkward. Chen's team members were composed by comparatively inexperienced young people, most of whom were shy to greet supporters or express hospitality like those experienced politicians. Thus, I did not see natural small talks take place between the party members and followers. Supporters might come to join as a small group, and they chatted with each other quietly, but not many interactions among different small groups. The legislator Chen, and a few TSP officials, took the lead to speak to the live-stream audience and onlookers during the marching.

When the voting date was getting closer, more supporters came out to join the marching. The TSP members had to watch out the traffic and guide participants to walk in line. The number of participants would reach 300-400 people. Participants were given a sticker that could be put on their clothes or face; a fan that they could hold or wave while walking with the team; or a strip banner that they could tie on their head or arms. All of these accessories were printed with the image of Chen or slogans of supporting Chen. For the core members, they wore tailored T-shirts, and were equipped with towels, water bottles, and larger posters with the party logo.

The end of the daily walk provided opportunities for supporters to take a photo with Chen. The team would choose a spot for participants to wait in line, such as a skywalk. On Day 5, after finishing a rally at a public square in a shopping center near the Tunghai University business circle, Longjing, Chen continued his marching to the nearby Tunghai night market. Most of the rally participants (200-300 people) followed him to the night market. They walked

through the narrow streets and alleys, greeting the vendors and customers, and the crowd eventually gathered outside the entrance to the night market, uttering “supporting Chen, anti-revenge recall” out loud together. A few city police men stood on the spot to maintain the traffic. Then, the team announced: “it’s photo time!” Anyone who wanted to take a picture with Chen could wait in line on the skywalk. Chen stood at the other end of the skywalk, and the followers could walk downstairs after taking photos. Team members were in charge of controlling the mass line. At least two photographers were assisting the process. This was a smart arrangement of public space: they quickly reduced the traffic jam outside the night market and dispersed the crowd.

(2) Regional rallies: In these ten days, several rallies were held. In addition to the TSP members, local politicians of the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) also supported Chen and mobilized their supporters to vote “no” on the recall. Those rallies were held outside of a temple, on a public business square, at a parking lot, or outside of a local city councilor’s office. Depending on the size of the location, the number of attendants varied. But all the rallies were full of people, over the location capacity.

For example, the DPP city councilor Chen Shih-Kai hosted a rally for Chen Po-Wei on Day 4. The location was outside Chen Shih-Kai’s Wuri Office, allowing around 100-200 people. A typical rally proceeded as follows: (1) chairs were arranged on the scheduled location (it’s ideal that the location has a cover shed); (2) small gifts were put on the chairs, so the participants could self-help receive them (including a small tissue pack, a small bottle water, a fan, and a flyer); (3) the staff led the participants to be seated, and usually ten minutes before the rally started, the seats would be fully occupied; (4) music or recorded videos related to the theme repeatedly broadcast while waiting for everyone to be seated; (5) an MC announced the

beginning of the event, and introduced important guests on the site (the MC is usually an experienced assistant or the politician themselves, and the important guests are neighborhood headpersons, community leaders, religious leaders, and local association leaders); (6) four to six invited speakers gave a 5-10 minute speech each to endorse legislator Chen, saying good things about him, commenting on current politics, or criticizing the opponents (usually in Taiwanese and using a lot of emotional appeals); (7) the main character, legislator Chen, came to give a speech; (8) all the speakers stood on the stage together, the MC led the participants to cheer with slogans, and announced the end of the rally; (9) speakers left the location first, and the participants left; they were given snack boxes as souvenir (all the staff would be busy dispatching the snack boxes to the participants until all the boxes were given out); (10) all the temporary objects on the site, such as chairs, lights, audio, tables, recyclable sheds, etc., were withdrawn from the site. The whole rally usually took one hour or one and a half hour.

While speakers would tell jokes or make humorous comments, it was rare to see their stage performance with cute elements. Their style can be identified as masculine, passionate, interactive, straightforward, and provocative. All the invited speakers were speaking fluent Taiwanese, except some guest speakers from urban Taipei city; they would give their speech half-Taiwanese and half-Mandarin. The language choice reflected the popularity of Taiwanese as a spoken language in this district. Some young politicians' Taiwanese was less fluent, but they managed to use this language to complete their speech. Storytelling was a popular method on these occasions. Many speakers talked about how they got to know legislator Chen. Several of them illustrated Chen as a next-door boy, who created his own political career without a particular family background, and achieved his dream on his own hands. He was portrayed as a tragic hero, who was defamed and discredited by the opponents in order to pull him down from

the position. The appeal to the injustice also associated Chen with the image of a victim when facing the powerful local family. This particular rhetoric would be most similar to the “sajiao” strategy mentioned in my previous research (Yueh, 2017).

Cute elements are part of the sajiao culture. However, sajiao is a speech act that has practical communication purposes. It serves to greet people, apologize, negotiate, make connections, shorten distance, etc. These rallies emphasized one of the sajiao functions, which I categorize as “seeking help/response/answer.” The audience, the message recipients, plays a role in response to such a performance. For example, the speakers often posed questions repeatedly, in hopes of eliciting loud and certain confirmations from the audience. Tag questions, such as “你們說對不對?” (You say, is it right?), were common in these rallies. Repeating a question three times, such as “民主政治可以這樣嗎?” (Can we do politics like this in a democratic society?), was another popular way to engage the audience. The questions that are suitable for this occasion should be yes/no questions. “這樣公道嗎?” (Is this fair and just?) would be a good example. The speaker blamed the opponent for unjust action, and expected the audience to say “no” in response. Such a rhetorical question made the speech a teamwork between the speaker and the audience. The question had to be answered promptly with certainty, and then the speaker would continue the presentation. If questions were not used, skillful speakers would deliberately make pauses to allow the audience to applaud or cheer. This way of speaking reveals the nature of interdependence between the speaker and the audience, in this particular persuasive genre.

In most rallies sponsored by the DPP, the above presentation style was conventional. To a certain degree, voters, supporters, and rally goers expected the repetition of the same formula in a political gathering, as this election culture has been developed this way since the 1990s (Fell,

2007). In other words, the audience also expected to attend the events to vent their passion and emotion. A cultural term, “爽” (shuang), might be the best word to describe the feelings those participants were looking for when attending a rally. This word can be translated as “refreshing,” “feeling good,” or “happy to death.” The opportunities to be with like-minded citizens for a moment satisfy many individuals’ emotional needs. However, the TSP members might have a different thought in arranging those rallies. There’s push and pull between the two parties regarding the campaign styles, although they shared the same goal. The big music concert held on the last day near the Wuri high speed rail station demonstrated the TSP’s ideal that differed from the traditional DPP rallies.

After the nine-day restless promotion in the form of long marching, Chen’s supporters were excited to attend the live concert, the TSP-hosted rally on Day 10. The weather was not good, comparatively cold in October, but there were about 3,000 people gathering on the spot. The TSP aimed to engage the participants in an alternative way, by showing several pre-recorded clips, reflecting on Taiwan’s democratization process and narrating several important Taiwanese fighters for social justice. Between the clips, they invited non-mainstream music bands and folklorists to play music. Several local community activists gave speeches to support Chen Po-Wei. And finally, Chen stepped on the stage, giving the closing speech. The TSP chose not to arrange any politicians except Chen to talk in this concert, because they wanted to show the cultural, local, and communal parts of this district. They wanted to reduce political elements to encourage civil participation. But those inexperienced speakers could not create sufficient interactivity with the audience. They might be good speakers in a cultural salon or at a university classroom, but a political rally requires certain rhythms and tempos.

I would not say this concert was a failure, or it determined the voting result the next day, but this non-traditional rally did not properly release participants' passion or reach their expectation. This live concert did not offer the opportunities for participants to actively "join" the event, i.e., to allow them to yell, cheer, and vent their emotion with the speakers sufficiently. Thus, the ending of the event was a little bit anticlimax. Chen's speech sounded lack of confidence, without the energy and the high-spirit he expressed in previous days.

(3) Marching Campaign (live stream): The social media has been playing a significant role in politicians' campaigning. In Chen's ten-day anti-recall campaign, we witness how social media technologies facilitated to increase the momentum of the campaign. The team managed to live stream every moment of their campaign. A live streaming clip usually lasted two or three hours, loyally recorded their routes and people they met on the way. This kind of marathon live streaming indeed helped gather more participants to join the marching during the last few days. In order to allow supporters to follow the daily walking, there would be at least two media teams in charge of the live stream. These technicians were the only people that could be on a truck accompanied with the marching team, including MCs as the voice-over of the whole process, drivers, and several video photographers. Occasionally, team members who got tired would get on the truck for a short rest, and then continue the walk.

Through the live stream camera, the audience could receive the following information:

(1) the live show of the marching, how many people were there, where they were, and how they interacted with supporters; (2) an advertising banner on the left side of the screen, providing an account for donation, legislator Chen's slogan, and Chen's image; (3) the information of the next destination, so people who would like to join them could easily find them; (4) the number of viewers of the live stream.

The voice-over was probably the most important character for live streaming. He seldom stopped talking, and strived to narrate the scenes on the street, introduce the members, summarize Chen's achievements, recount the purpose of this campaign, appreciate participants and supporters, and remind the viewers of their upcoming events. While the voice-over took a break, the TSP theme songs broadcasted nonstop. In addition to its 2018 promotional song, "Lán khiā-tshut-lâi" (Let's undertake it), the team also broadcasted the Taiwanese artist Hsieh Ming-Yu's song "The Road" (2019). The lyrics of both songs are written in Taiwanese, emphasizing the spirit of exploring new possibilities despite all the hardships. Although the TSP did not defend Chen Po-Wei successfully, all the experiences they have learned in the campaign would become useful assets for their future political participation.

After Chen was recalled, a by-election must be held to fill the vacancy of the legislator position in the second district of Taichung. Not surprisingly, the Yen family represented the KMT party to run for the position. The ruling party, the DPP, recruited a local politician, former legislator, Lin Ching-Yi, to complete. This time, the TSP and Chen Po-Wei invested all their resources to support the DPP candidate. And eventually, the DPP and TSP collaborated to defeat the KMT candidate, sending Lin back to the Legislative council after the by-election on January 9, 2022.

The Referendum Campaign (October 23–December 18)

After observing the recall campaign, I started to focus on Taiwan's referendum campaigns. I have observed over twenty events in person or have watched them online.

Background: In Taiwan, a referendum functions similarly to a recall. Both aim to be a supplemental option of the current general elections. A referendum follows the same rules as a

recall: A referendum is considered passed when the yes votes outnumber the no votes, provided those voting in the affirmative consist of more than 25% of the voters (Guy, 2018).

There were four initiatives on the 2021 referendum ballot. They included: (1) should the receiving terminal of natural gas be moved to a different location? (2) should a nuclear power plant be activated? (3) should we stop importing American pork that may contain a possible dangerous additive? And (4) should referendums be held together with general elections? Item (3) and item (4) were sponsored by the opposition party, the KMT. The first two were not directly sponsored by the KMT, but the KMT was heavily involved in the signature drives to get these items on the ballot. On the surface, these issues looked non-political. They were about environmental sustainability, energy effectiveness, food safety, and tax money saving. However, these issues were packaged with very political languages in the referendum rallies.

Taiwan started to practice referendum votes in 2004 with two cases. In 2008, there were four referendums. None of the six referendums were passed, due to the strict old regulations. Because of the revision of the referendum law in 2017, there were ten referendums in 2018. All the results in the 2018 votes favored the opposition KMT party's wishes. Therefore, in 2021, the KMT intended to use these four referendums to make the ruling DPP party suffer again. It's a practice of democracy in the name, but according to the past results, most voters did not spend time figuring out what the issues were about; their votes still reflected on their personal connections, party affiliation, and identity politics (Batto, 2021b).

In particular, after the KMT and the Yen family successfully recalled the legislator Chen Po-Wei in October 2021, the DPP government realized that they could not just wait and expect a low turnout for the four referendums. They started to mobilize their voters to actively reject these

four issues, as the KMT party had already done so for several months. Therefore, one month before the referendum voting day, we saw both parties turned the campaigns into another political competition between parties, rather than an opportunity for public policy debates. In my opinion, the referendums in 2021 were still related to people's political choice. Who you are? What value or memories you identify with? And what you want this country to be? It's about national identity, ethnic identity, and cultural identity.

The opposition party, the KMT, used the belligerent rhetoric to promote their positions in referendums. The main message aimed to persuade the supporters to give the DPP government a lesson, in hopes for increasing its possibility to return to power in 2022 or 2024. On the other hand, the ruling party, the DPP, promoted their positions in referendums as if they were running for a general election. In addition to urging the voters to support their positions, the DPP took this opportunity to highlight local legislators' achievements, to introduce young candidates. In a sense, the issues on the ballot are not that important. Both parties use this opportunity to reach their political goals.

The Campaigns I Have Observed:

About one month before the referendum voting day, I started to search public events related to referendums. The schedule of the DPP rallies was open to everyone on Facebook, so I could arrange my itinerary accordingly. However, the KMT rally information was hard to find. It often posted the news on Facebook after the event took place or simply addressed these issues in the form of press conferences, not really mobilize the general public to support the KMT's positions. The following table recorded my participant observation of about twenty referendum-related rallies. They included both party-sponsored rallies, TV briefings, and social media live streams.

Dates	Parties	Sponsored	Locations
11/03/2021	DPP	Legislator Wu Chi-Ming	New Taipei City (in person)
11/06/2021	DPP	Legislator Ho Hsin-Chun	Taichung City (live stream)
11/07/2021	DPP	Legislator Chiang Yung-Chang	New Taipei City (in person)
11/07/2021	DPP	Joint Rally	Hsinchu City (live stream)
11/12/2021	DPP	International Affairs	Taipei City (live stream)
11/17/2021	DPP	Legislator Kao Chia-Yu	Taipei City (in person)
11/18/2021	----	Second TV Briefing	FTV
11/21/2021	DPP	City Councilor Hsu Shu-Hua	Taipei City (live stream)
11/25/2021	DPP	City Councilor Jian Shu-Pei	Taipei City (in person)
11/27/2021	KMT	City Councilors	Taipei City (live stream)
11/30/2021	DPP	City Councilor Wang Min-Sheng	Taipei City (in person)
11/02/2021	----	Fourth TV Briefing	TTV
12/04/2021	KMT	Legislator Lai Shi-Bao	Taipei City (live stream)
12/04/2021	KMT	Legislators	New Taipei City (in person)
12/04/2021	DPP	President Tsai Ing-Wen	Taipei City (in person)
12/05/2021	DPP	Joint Rally	Taipei City (in person)
12/06/2021	DPP	City Councilor Jian Shu-Pei	Taipei City (live stream)
12/11/2021	DPP	City Councilor Ruan Chao-Hsiung	Taipei City (in person)
12/11/2021	KMT	Blue Fighters	Taipei City (in person)
12/11/2021	DPP	Legislator Yu Tian	New Taipei City (live stream)
12/11/2021	DPP	Legislator Fan Yun	Taipei City (live stream)
12/12/2021	DPP	Joint Rally	Tainan City (live stream)
12/17/2021	DPP	Joint Rally	Taipei City (live stream)
12/17/2021	KMT	Joint Rally	Taipei City (live stream)

Here, the different strategies of the two parties were salient. For example, in terms of social media usage, the DPP rally schedules were more available than the KMT. In terms of the rhetoric in the rallies, the DPP rallies invited officials and bureaucrats to explain their policies, while the KMT tended to use affective and provocative languages. Affective communication is used in the DPP rallies, but most of the time the invited speakers talked about dry data with PowerPoint style presentations. The KMT rallies invited hawk politicians to criticize the government. More KMT speakers simply asked the audience to vote for yes on all the referendum questions, without detailed reasoning.

Other persuasive elements in these rallies reflected that the supporters of these two parties belong to divided memory groups. Both KMT and DPP rallies attracted older generations. However, their memories about the good old time were very divided. The KMT stayed in the 80s, while the DPP focused on the past six years, from 2016 to 2021, under the DPP administration. Also, the language choice of these rallies delivered important identity messages as well. Most DPP rallies were conducted in Taiwanese, while the KMT rallies were performed in Mandarin. Later on, as the DPP successfully mobilized its supporters, these rallies also became a perfect place for DPP's city councilor candidates to promote themselves for the pre-election in April 2022. These young candidates were inexperienced and not so fluent in public speaking, but the DPP allowed them to talk directly to the supporters before the primary officials came. On the contrary, the KMT did not grasp this opportunity to promote their new faces. Those KMT city councilors who sought to be re-elected took advantage of the referendum rallies for self-promotion.

General Observation of the DPP's Persuasive Strategies:

If the referendums had taken place in October, the DPP would have lost all four. According to several polls in October, the Taiwanese people would predominantly vote to pass the four referendums (Batto, 2021b). This was because the DPP administration had been busy fighting against the pandemic, and the situation was not under control until September. Meanwhile, the KMT had already promoted their positions for a couple of months via mass media and social media. It was by the end of October that the DPP decided to directly face the challenge by the KMT. One of the DPP's strategies was to ask all the incumbent DPP legislators to hold at least one referendum rally in their district to make their supporters aware of the issues and the DPP's stance. Those legislators did not hold the events alone; many incumbent DPP central and local

administrative leaders participated in these rallies as guest speakers, including the Chief Executive Su Chen-Chang, Vice President Lai Ching-Te, Taoyuan Mayor Cheng Wen-Tsan, Minister of Economic Affairs Wang Mei-Hua, Minister of Council of Agriculture Chen Ji-Chung, and so forth.

I attended several such rallies in November and December, and found that the structure of a referendum rally was very similar to a traditional election rally. The difference is that the rallies for the general elections promote candidates, while the rallies for the referendums defend the public policies. In early November, a typical rally would last for an hour only, and the host legislator would invite two or three local councilors and one or two central government officials to talk about the referendums. The locations would be indoor, such as at a community center, a city park, a square in front of a temple, etc. A good number for such gathering would be 100 to 300 people. Later, things changed. The DPP's rallies became bigger and bigger. The DPP held several large-scale joint rallies in Central and Southern Taiwan, in an open space, which could gather up to 3,000 people. President Tsai Ing-Wen, as chairperson of the DPP, also attended and spoke to the supporters in such joint rallies.

Hosting a rally became a show time for the DPP legislators to display how many supporters they could mobilize, and how many local connections they have developed in their district. It's an opportunity to display their achievements to the constituents, and also to the DPP high-level leaders. Take the rally hosted by Legislator Chiang Yung-Chang on November 7 as example. Chiang was elected in 2016 and re-elected in 2020 as the legislator of the Chung-Ho district of New Taipei City. He held the rally in the community center for the Chung-Ho residents, which allows around 300 people to gather. I was a few minutes late for the event, but I could not find a seat at all in the community center. I believe that there were more than 300

people on the spot when I arrived. In addition to his own introduction, Chiang arranged at least three local city councilors and two councilor candidates to speak to the audience at the beginning, including the DPP director of New Taipei City. Each of them was expected to finish their talk in five minutes, but two talked longer than that. He also invited another New Taipei City legislator, and Taoyuan Mayor Cheng Wen-Tsan to give a talk. This group talked longer, about ten minutes for each. Finally, the most important guest for this rally was Chief Executive Su Chen-Chang. He talked about 25 minutes. This rally started at 2:30 p.m., and ended around 4:00 p.m.

People wore masks, sat on red plastic chairs, chatted with each other, while the moderator was introducing the guests, and making some announcements. There were police officers on site because Chief Executive was scheduled to come. Chiang's staff and volunteers were greeting all the participants and arranging the seats for them. However, since so many people were there, people like me who were late had to stand in the back of the room. More chairs were delivered from outside, but still not enough. Not all the participants sat on the chair all the time. While the speakers were talking on the stage, people stood up, waving at their friends, left their seats to go to restroom, or simply walked around the room to look for their acquaintances. People came and left, and empty chairs appeared. After about thirty minutes, I finally found a seat. However, the whole room was still very crowded and noisy. The speakers needed to speak loud with a microphone, but the noisy atmosphere was perfect for a rally like this. Although the audience did not pay their full attention to the speakers, they still collectively responded to the speakers' questions at the right moments. All the speakers spoke in Taiwanese, except Taoyuan Mayor; his language choice was a mixture of Taiwanese and Mandarin.

What did they say? Basically, their content was similar. They talked about the four referendums, and explained to the audience why they should vote no on all the issues. What they emphasized the most was the nuclear plant issue, as the majority of Taiwanese people have been cautious about the safety of nuclear power, especially after the nuclear power plant crisis caused by the 2011 Fukushima earthquake in Japan. The KMT government announced to suspend the construction of the fourth nuclear power plant in 2014, but a pro-KMT group proposed to lift the suspension, complete the construction, and activate it after it is done in 2021. Thus, in these DPP-sponsored rallies, speakers criticized the proposal as irrational, as it would put all the citizens' lives in danger, and they emphasized the DPP government's energy policy as sufficient to supply power in Taiwan. The main messages were that the KMT tried to cause trouble while the current government worked well. They asked the participants to support the DPP administration, and vote no on all four. They gave the imported pork issue the least spotlight, because this was the least favored topic among the four. Even the diehard DPP supporters would hesitate when it comes to food safety. A skillful speaker always mentioned the pork issue the last, in hopes that the audience would agree all four, after being convinced by the other three.

However, the imported American pork issue was not that difficult to defend. The DPP framed this issue as fair trade in the international world. They tried to convince the audience, if Taiwan wanted to be a responsible global member and enjoy the profit of tax-free international trade, it was necessary to lift the bar and use the international standard to inspect the additives of the imported meat. They also reminded the participants that, while the KMT strongly objected the import of the American pork this time, it was the KMT government that lifted the bar on American beef in 2012. The consumption of American beef in Taiwan has been increasing every year since then, and it was strange to import only beef, not pork, while these two were inspected

and quality controlled with the same standard. This persuasive strategy seemed to work, as the result showed, all four referendums were not passed on December 18, which means that the DPP could continue its policies without interruption.

Every DPP speaker took the same stance on these four issues, and the reasons to support their stance were also similar, but their persuasive strategies varied. For example, some speakers in Chiang's rally persuaded the voters by finding fault with the KMT party with an angry and agitated mood. Others took the emotional strategy to narrate inspiring stories and reminding the audience of the past achievements of the DPP. Still others presented the facts with detailed PowerPoint to convince the audience with rationales. No matter which style or styles they were using, a successful speech required interactions with the audience. Just like in the recall rallies, the audience expected certain interactions with the speakers to vent their emotions. When a speaker did not interact with the audience, the atmosphere cooled down soon. More audience members started to talk to each other, or waited for the moment to applaud. A cold air in a rally was a bad sign, so the moderator tried hard to maintain the high spirit on the site. Most high-profiled politicians, who regularly comment on political issues on TV, had better performance in general. They were experienced in composing their messages with examples that interest the audience.

The speech of Chief Executive Su Chen-Chang combined the three approaches. His team arranged a piece of intro music for him. "Wenwu Chifei" (All the Soldiers Fly Up), a theme song for a popular Taiwanese puppet theater, was selected to broadcast every time when Su entered the stage. This grand prelude, as well as his old theme song for electoral campaign, became a signature feature of Su's presentation. Another feature of Su's talk was a detailed PowerPoint visual aid, with appealing images, concise texts, and excellent aesthetic design. There was also

an exquisite step before his formal talk. First of all, he thanked all the participants, expressing his gratitude toward voters. Afterwards, his assistant passed a cue stick to him, as the replacement of his PowerPoint pointer. The PowerPoint screen was usually gigantic, or hung up high. His use of a cue stick to reach the content of the PowerPoint required him to stretch his body and walk around on the stage, which created a perfect picture for the media to capture.

I probably watched seven or eight rallies where Su was also present. To my surprise, I was not bored, although the main points of every Su's speech were repetitive. I noticed that the content of the PowerPoint was evolved throughout the time. In other words, the PowerPoint content was frequently updated to reflect the latest situation, such as the most accurate economic growth number, and tailored to introduce the local hosts. For example, he spent quite a length summarizing Chung-Ho Legislator Chiang Yung-Chang's achievements and applauding Chiang's performance at the Legislative Council at the beginning of his presentation. The rhetoric of praising Chiang was also interesting. He said, "All the voters in Chung-Ho were so smart to choose such a wonderful legislator!" It implied that they were merely civil servants, and it was voters' decision that made all the good things happen, in the democratic society of Taiwan. Su inserted several slides about Chiang, such as a photo of Chiang and him, and that of the new constructions in Chung-Ho. These slides changed to show other host legislators' achievements when he went to their rallies.

Then, the conventional slides appeared when he started to talk about his record as Chief Executive. He talked about how he rushed to the airport on the first day of his term, and successfully stopped swine flu from entering Taiwan. Under his leadership, Taiwan was free from COVID, and other threats from China. He then continued to mention the economic, social welfare, and education policies, how the government would take care of children, young parents,

and seniors. While boasting the government's achievements, he inserted some images to make humorous criticism of the KMT, the opposition party. These comments on the KMT were sarcastic, describing the KMT as an irresponsible opposition party, who caused turbulence in the society without constructive supervision. Furthermore, he reminded the participants that he used to serve as the old New Taipei City mayor for eight years, and smoothly brought his first main point: Why people should vote no on the completion of the nuclear power plant, as the plant was located in New Taipei City. "I knew the best what the issue is!"

Although the data and numbers were convincing, the DPP's arguments were not flawless. However, since the KMT did not come up with strong counterarguments throughout the referendum period, the DPP rallies successfully mobilized their supporters to establish a sense of solidarity, a sense of pride of being the DPP supporters. Later, they gathered at the rallies not because they wanted to hear anything new about referendum, but because they knew where to find like-minded citizens, and they wanted to spend one and two hours seeing each other, cheering with each other, and feeling fulfilled on the way home.

General Observation of the KMT's Persuasive Strategies:

The KMT started to promote its stance on these four referendums early in 2021, so the polls showed that the Taiwanese people would have voted all yes in October. However, after the DPP decided to mobilize their supporters, the KMT's campaign became weak and disorder. The problem was probably the change of its party leader during the referendum promotion period. The former chairperson Chiang Chi-Chen initiated the ideas to propose the referendums, but the new chairperson Chu Li-Luen was reluctant to follow Chiang's direction. Such a sudden attitude change from the leadership level resulted in the confusion and aloof of the KMT supporters.

Without a consistent strategy, the KMT's referendum campaigning strategies were divided, too. Several different figures in the KMT party dominated the events, with inconsistent messages, and eventually caused the failure of their proposals.

Compared with the DPP's quick decision of hosting large and small party-sponsored referendum rallies in November, the KMT did not organize its events systematically. First, there was no unified statement; spokespersons and local politicians sometimes said different things. For example, the decision circle spent time debating whether the KMT supporters should vote yes on all four issues or only two. This message resulted in the morale loss of its supporters and the disappointment to the party. In a few KMT-hosted referendum rallies I attended, I overheard many participants explicitly express their frustration and criticize its weak leadership. Second, the KMT's referendum rhetoric went to the extreme as the referendum date was approaching. The speakers in the rallies did not perform as reasonable politicians, trustworthy leaders, or respectful representatives for the citizens. To please its loyal but aging supporters, the KMT speakers used much of emotional appeal to reinforce their dislike of the DPP government. This highly emotional language might make the diehard supporters happy, but did not work for those neutral voters. Third, there were small-scale rallies sponsored by local councilors, but it was doubtful whether these councilors really wanted to persuade their supporters or not. These events were announced in a short time, usually took place in a busy morning market. While these politicians used amplifiers and microphones to promote the KMT's stance on the referendums, not so many market goers stopped and listened to them. It seems that these local politicians wanted to show the KMT leadership: "I completed the task you requested," but they did not care if people on the spot really listened to them or changed their attitude toward the four issues. Otherwise, the KMT politicians would reduce many communication barriers, inviting their

supporters to sit in a quiet and uninterrupted place, explaining their stance, rather than talking to random people who were heading somewhere else.

A large-scale KMT rally was held on December 11 at the square near the Legislative Office. I attended this event with a Malaysian scholar who specializes international relations in East Asia. She was interested in observing political events in Taiwan, so I invited her to this KMT rally with me in a sunny Saturday afternoon. We took bus to the location. The stop we got off was near the end of the bus route. Interestingly, all the other passengers, five senior men and women, got off as well. They might not know each other, but they were heading to the same spot. Before we entered the outdoors space, the host team set up the entrance to check every attendant's temperature, and dispatched small souvenirs, such as stickers, small national flags, flyers, and small packs of tissues with promotional logos. We bumped into a lady who was on the bus with us at the entrance, and she was holding a super large national flag while chatting with the receptionists. I was not sure if this was a souvenir from the host or she brought it on her own. Obviously, she was a diehard KMT supporter.

I estimate that the space can accommodate more than 3,000 people. When we arrived, about ten minutes before the scheduled time, we could still find seats in the middle rows. Later, more and more people joined the rally. The majority of the participants were senior citizens. Most of them belonged to certain veteran groups. Different organizations had their own flags and designated areas of seats. The flags marked where they sat, and invited the organizational members to gather there. Individual participants came with friends. When waiting for the rally to start, they spoke to each other in very high spirits. For example, the two men sitting behind us seemed to be old friends. On the one hand, they expressed their excitement to see a grand gathering like this by saying "It's been a long time we haven't seen such a grand event!" On the

other hand, they criticized the DPP party agitatedly, ranging from issues of the COVID vaccine, imported pork, and other policies. The repeated comments included “the DPP are all liars!”, “the DPP is authoritarian!”, and “the DPP is hurting Taiwan!” It is hard to tell if their perception of the DPP has shaped the KMT’s belligerent rhetoric or the KMT has nurtured its supporters to behave in such a hawkish way.

The rally started at 2:30 p.m. and lasted almost three hours. The basic message at this rally was clear: “The KMT supporters should give the DPP government a lesson!” The KMT arranged so many city councilors, legislators, and mayors to give a talk, so everyone had a very short time elaborating the reasons for supporters to vote yes on the four referendums. Some speakers only reinforced the proposal without salient reasons: “Please vote yes on all four issues! Thank you! Please! Please!” Those KMT speakers who included a more complete argument usually started with the imported pork issue by criticizing the DPP government’s carelessness of food safety. However, few talked about scientific numbers or research data, and no one displayed a PowerPoint on stage. The speakers usually uttered a statement of anti-imported pork, with an emotional story or criticism, and then directly persuaded their supporters to spread the message to others. They emphasized how many stickers and flyers they had already sponsored, and encouraged participants to actively promote the KMT’s positions to their friends. They also praised these supporters and asked a lot of rhetorical questions at the end of their talk in order to interact with the participants. When the speakers did so, the whole crowd shouted out loud happily. The two men behind us also responded to the speakers enthusiastically.

While many KMT politicians participated in the event, the stage arrangement was chaotic. For example, when a group of the KMT Taipei City councilors (8-10 people) were present on the stage, they did not stand still and listen to each other speak. Instead, several

councilors took a selfie, chatted with each other, or texted with their cell phone when the speaker delivered her talk impassionedly. Their behaviors revealed their own carelessness toward their colleagues or the position they were defending. The moderator of the rally also did a bad job introducing these speakers, as the city councilor group did not arrive on the spot altogether. She had to introduce councilors who were late using the interval time. This made the process confusing because it was unclear that the named councilor was the next speaker, or was simply given a short welcome introduction. Some inside jokes did not make sense to the audience, and speakers did not have a unified slogan. They created their own slogans and asked the participants to follow. The slogans I heard from the councilor group included “四個同意! 四個同意!” (Agree all four! Agree all four!), “四個都同意, 台灣更美麗!” (Vote yes for all four, Taiwan will become beautiful), “四個都同意, 堅定蓋下去!” (Vote yes for all four, show our resolution), “四個同意, 重視民意!” (Vote four yes, value our voice), and so forth.

The next group of speakers were the KMT legislators. They were given more time to elaborate their speeches; however, these speakers talked various topics other than the four issues. They seemed to blame everything wrong on the DPP government. It seemed that their mission completed as long as their words triggered the audience's emotion. For example, Legislator Fei Hong-Tai gave a four-minute speech, beginning with the message about the DPP's diplomatic failure. Then, he went on discussing a current scandal between a DPP legislator and her abusive partner. This scandal, according to him, proved that the DPP utilized several social media teams to manipulate people's opinions or spread disinformation. He also criticized that the DPP blamed all the wrongdoings on the KMT and the Chinese government. Only in the last minute, he spent approximately twenty seconds talking about the issue of imported pork. Then, he asked the participants to cheer with the slogan “Vote yes for all four, Taiwan will become beautiful.”

Finally, his last words were “打倒蔡英文!” (Overthrow Tsai Ing-wen [the incumbent Taiwan president]). This short and arbitrary speech might not convince the neutral voters, but the KMT supporters gave Fei a wholehearted applause.

These groups or individuals needed the KMT politicians to offer proper excuses for them to vent their dissatisfaction, frustration, and anger. They felt that they were left behind by the DPP government, due to a series of reformation policies. Several active KMT supporters have become celebrities among this congregation. They attended the KMT rallies every time, and attracted lots of spotlight. For example, a middle-aged woman, nicknamed “激動姐” (Agitated Sister), always came to KMT-sponsored events with a drag-like costume. She wore a red wig, big sunglasses, red clothes, bling accessories, feather shawl, and a matching red self-made pair of shoes. At the December 11 rally, “Agitated Sister” were there, too. Instead of sitting on a chair and listening to the speakers, she enjoyed her time more when walking around the square, greeting all the participants, hi-fiving with them, and actively interacting with her fans. She was looking for her “supporters” who wanted to take a picture with her. While she responded to the KMT speakers’ questions, and repeated those slogans, I felt her presence in these rallies was for her own vanity, not really a political solidarity.

As researchers, the Malaysian scholar and I conducted our observation differently. I immersed myself more to the environment, while she preferred to keep a distance from the event. Thus, when everyone waved the national flags, she did not do so. When everyone answered the speakers’ rhetorical questions, she did not respond. When everyone clapped, she sat there quietly. She took a lot of pictures, and occasionally walked to the front to see those famous politicians. After the rally, she told me, she felt the “peer pressure” or the “critical gaze” from

other participants. They might feel her presence strange because she did not react to the excitement. Even I felt somehow uncomfortable. We looked comparatively young and less involved in the rally, and it was easy to be identified as “different” or members of “out-group” in this particular occasion.

Similar to the DPP-sponsored rallies, the participants in the KMT rallies were not there to be persuaded. They already had their opinions. They came to confirm their belief and values. The DPP’s referendum rhetoric attempted to package the persuasive message with rational and logical evidence, but the KMT referendum rhetoric was highly emotional. To a certain degree, I would label the KMT language as the politicians’ emotional blackmail, because there were full of illogical statements, and exaggerated comments. However, I do not think that these KMT rally participants cared that much. They just wanted to spend time with their old friends, complaining about their lives, and seeking some comfort in reminiscent of their glorious past. Some of these senior supporters left early, even before the most famous and important political figures gave their speeches. They were usually arranged to speak in the end. More and more empty chairs appeared, and I did not see a sense of solidarity forming at the end of the rally.

Initial Analysis

My participant observation can offer some initial understanding of Taiwan’s political culture. In the above paragraphs, I focused on the backgrounds and procedures to offer a large picture, so I did not include cute-related details. In this section, I turned my analysis to the theme of my research. I summarized my data to answer the three research questions. (1) how do politicians use cute elements in communication? The cute elements were present in these two rallies, in the details. They played a supplemental role in shortening the distance and furthering the existing connections. (2) Does the politician’s gender influence the use of cuteness and the effect of their

campaigning? With limited samples, I did not think that I have identified salient difference. However, it seems that female politicians tended to use their nonverbal characteristics more to conduct the persuasive performance with cute elements. And (3) what would be the limitations of using cute elements in campaigning? In fact, it was not easy to spot on cute elements in face-to-face communication between politicians and constituents. Those cute elements were used to intensify the already persuasive messages, not in a way to change people's attitude from unconvinced to convinced. In other words, cute elements are facilitators in persuasive communication. Politicians used them moderately in face-to-face communication.

The following includes several examples of how politicians or campaigns adopted the cute elements.

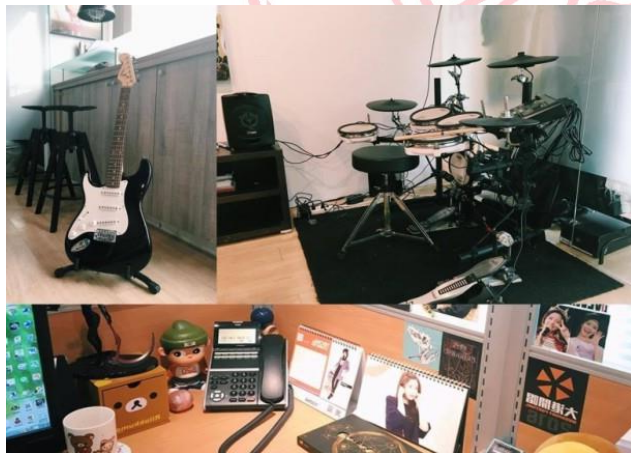
(1) The decorations of the office space: When I followed the anti-recall campaign, I visited several offices of Legislator Chen Po-Wei in the second district of Taichung. Chen used a cartoon icon to represent him. The creator added a pair of tiger ears and a tiger tail to this cartoon figure. The figure was situated in the middle of the red wall poster, smiling, with a super-sized head. His name and job title were on the right, and a map of his district was behind his cartoon figure. He posed the hand gesture that means "to send you my love," by crossing his thumb and pointing finger to make the V shape (Photo 1). Animal features and an imbalanced body proportion are some common skills to cutify a person or an object.

This seems to be a common strategy for all the politicians. They need to create a signature cute figure to represent them, but they still use the more realistic style to communicate serious issues and express their professionalism to the voters. Thus, cute elements appear more in the office space as decoration, on the covers of their regular promotional publications, rather than

specific important and serious messages. In general, younger politicians incorporated more cute elements in their office space. For example, Freddy Lim (46 y/o), a rockstar turned legislator, decorated his office with music instruments and cute stationary. Su Chiao-Hui (45 y/o), a female legislator, decorated her office with cartoon figures, pink color tone, to make the space approachable and welcome (Photos 2 and 3).



(Photo 1: The office of Chen Po-Wei)



(Photo 2: The office of Freddy Lim)

https://hk.on.cc/tw/bkn/cnt/news/20160509/bkntw-20160509124450271-0509_04011_001.html



(Photo 3: The office of Su Chiao-Hui)

<https://www.104.com.tw/company/1a2x6bj46k>

(2) Souvenirs, publications, and promotional flyers: The styles for these products vary. For example, Chen alternated the cute style with the realistic style. When he hosted an anti-recall rally, the sponsor offered free promotional gifts to support Chen, including a flyer, a fan, a bottled water, and a tissue pack. The logos and the images on these gifts did not contain cute cartoon elements (Photo 4). At another rally, I saw a young supporter put a cute sticker of Chen on his backpack to show his support. He also tied a banner of slogan to his backpack (Photo 5). These small gifts without cute elements serve to reach the same goal as those cute promotional stuffs. They want the supporters to feel closer to the politicians, and then strengthen their emotional connections with the politicians.



(Photo 4)



(Photo 5)

As for the referendum rallies, more types of souvenirs were present, and each host created different styles. For example, the free tissue packs are a popular item when it comes to rally gifts. People tend to take a tissue pack with them after finishing the rally, rather than leave it on the spot. Therefore, the rally hosts printed their proposal on the package of the tissue packs, in hopes that the supporters would read them. To draw their attention, cute elements were usually used. The following is several photos of tissue packs I received in various occasions. Some were party-sponsored, and the others were individual-sponsored.

Photo 6 captured the referendum tissue pack and a mask from a smaller political party in Taiwan, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). The TPP had its stance on these four issues, so it produced these promotional gifts during the referendum period. The cover of the tissue pack featured a cutified TPP politician image. Photo 7 included a tissue pack and a flyer from the KMT party. The tissue pack drew a pig, and two warning slogans to emphasize the danger of the American pork. Cute elements were present. Photo 8 showed four packs of tissue, with pro-DPP slogan on the package. These were not official promotional products approved by the DPP, but

sponsored by a young supporter, who printed all the tissue packs out of her own pocket.

Although all three adopted cute elements, the styles were different.



(Photo 6)



(Photo 7)



(Photo 8)

Another popular gift provided at these rallies was masks. I collected five different styles, and four of them contained cute elements (Photo 9). The Legislator Wu Chi-Ming dispatched the light-blue mask with numerous icons of cute cats and dogs. There was no information about the name of the politician on the mask, though. Wu hosted the rally quite early, so he might not have had sufficient time to produce his own signature masks. The mask next to Wu's was from Taipei City councilor Wang Min-Sheng. This one included Wang's full name, a Mandarin and an English slogan: "good life!" The mask also showed several drawings: a koala holding a feeding bottle, an elephant-shaped playground slide, a building with a giant cat head, and a castle with a huge burger on the top (Photo 10). All the images were cute, but seemed irrelevant to the theme of the rally.

The dark-blue mask was given by Legislator Kao Chia-Yu. The theme was the celebration of the Autumn Moon festival, so the images included a moon, several cute rabbits,

(3) photo pose and costume: In addition to the office space and promotional gifts, politicians in Taiwan tend to pose various gestures to play cute. Younger politicians would also wear particular outfits to express their uniqueness. Moreover, taking a picture with a politician is a common practice when a constituent actively participates in a political event. How to build relationships and enhance connections through this opportunity is an important aspect when a politician conducts so-called “services” in the district. For example, during his anti-recall campaign, Legislator Chen Po-Wen arranged many opportunities for his supporters to be photo-taken with him. Most of the times, Chen would pose certain hand gestures. Photo 11 captures the hand gesture of three as his signature mark, as he nicknamed himself as 3Q. Sometimes, supporters or the politicians would request everyone to pose the same hand gesture together. In most cases of the referendum rallies, the host politicians would ask all the participants to wear the customized masks and take a group picture. This visual presentation symbolizes consolidation, unification, and togetherness (Photos 11 and 12).



(Photo 11: Legislator Chen Po-Wei posed a cute hand gesture to signify his nickname “3Q” when taking a picture with rally participants.)



(Photo 12: At the end of a DPP referendum rally, the photographer asked all the participants to pose a “no” sign by crossing the two “thunder sticks” provided by the host team. The thunder sticks are colorful and designed in a cute way with slogans.)

Taiwan as a free and democratic society is known for its toleration of politicians’ self-expression, not only in their speech, but also in their outfit. Lai Pin-Yu, the youngest DPP legislator in Taiwan, was elected when she was 28 years old in 2020. In addition to her identity as the legislator of the twelfth district of New Taipei City, she is also well-known for her leisure hobby: manga character cosplay. During my stay in Taiwan, I did not see Lai in her cosplay costumes when she attended public or political events, but her style demonstrates well how Taiwanese politicians communicate her image and build up connections with constituents in various creative and non-conventional ways. The following are a few examples:



(Photo 13: Legislator Lai Pin-Yu in various cosplay costumes. She does not hide her personal interest from her public service even when she was running for the legislature.)

<https://www.setn.com/News.aspx?NewsID=659860>



(Photo 14: Legislator Lai Pin-Yu in a cosplay costume participated in an electoral rally with other politicians and candidates.)

<https://www.storm.mg/article/2092028>



(Photo 15: Legislator Lai Pin-Yu was interviewed in a TV show in her Lolita fashion after she won the election.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0kiBEdRGec>

Although Lai's cosplay costumes always captured the attention of Taiwan's media, her triumph in election was not just based on her appearance. She participated in many social movements when she was a college student. Before she was recruited by the DPP, she worked as

a research assistant for a legislator. Although the majority of the residents in her district were old KMT supporters, she surprised everyone by running and defeating a very senior politician in 2020. During the referendum promotion time, she also hosted several rallies and attended other DPP-sponsored rallies. Lai was elected for the first time as a young and non-traditional politician, and we need more time to observe if her style of “being herself” could continue winning her constituents’ support. But her presence shed light on a unique political culture in Taiwan at this moment, which is full of energy, passion, out-of-box thinking, and true inclusion. In other words, allowing cute elements to play a role in the supposedly serious politics is solid evidence of this special political culture.

Conclusion

In this report, I summarized my observation of two political events in Taiwan. I found a general pattern of political rallies in Taiwan, no matter what theme or purpose they aim for. This pattern has been proved effective since the late 1990s, and politicians have developed more elaborations, including cute materials as supplements. I believe that the DPP is the innovator of such creative political campaigns, and its practices have been imitated by other political parties in Taiwan. However, I do not believe that voters in a democratic society will be persuaded simply by those external, supplemental materials. Otherwise, the referendum results would not have shown the victory of the DPP. All the parties used cute images in their referendum campaigns, but only the DPP’s proposal won the support. Citizens choose politicians and support issues that serve their best interests. What the politicians eventually persuade their constituents is still their value and vision, not their cute performance and appearance.

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