

**The research report
from the research project
“Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar:
a Comparative Analysis of Female Political Leadership in East and Southeast Asia”**

Introduction

This is the research report from the research project “Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar: a Comparative Analysis of Female Political Leadership in East and Southeast Asia” for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Center for Chinese Studies, National Central Library, Taipei, Taiwan. For this research project I was granted Taiwan Fellowship which I did in Taipei and other places in Taiwan between 3rd August 2022 and 19th November 2022.

This report presents research findings that form the intellectual basis for a series of academic articles that, at the time of submission of this report are being written, and are planned to be send in order to be published in respected global academic journals and edited volumes.

This research report consists of six parts. The first part is the theoretical background, followed by part 2, the methodology. Then I present my research on Aung San Suu Kyi (part 3) and Tsai Ing-wen (part 4) respectively. I conclude with a comparative analysis of these two political leaders (part 5). Bibliography and list of interview (part 6) conclude this report.

Theoretical Background: Female Leadership in East and Southeast Asia

Theoretical background of this research was based on feminist theory and leadership studies in political science applied to East and Southeast Asia. More broadly, it was an agency-centred explanation. Theories in political science either concentrate on focusing on structures or agency. A choice of theory is itself an answer to question whether the world is being shaped by social structure or rather by the activity of the individuals. This leads to debates along the philosophical divisions such as holism vs. individualism, objectivism vs. subjectivism, determinism vs. voluntarism, which all relates to core philosophical question of determinism against free will.¹ Structure-centred accounts favour explanations where structure dominates over agency. Structure is understood as observable, material conditions (law, political and economic system, political institutions, the distribution of wealth and power, environment) or as not visible, such as class, norms, ideology, kinship patterns, culture, political culture, patriarchy and others.² Description of the structure-centred theories should be started from the vague concept of *Zeitgeist* (an example of political science theory

¹ Stuart McAnulla, “Structure and Agency,” in: *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, D. March, G. Stoker (eds), Palgrave Macmillan 2002, 2nd ed., p. 273; Walter Carlsnaes, “The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sep., 1992), p. 245.

² Kurt Burch, “Agent-structure relations,” in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of International Political Economy: Entries A-F*, eds. R.J. Barry Jones, vo. 1, entries A-F, Routledge 2001, pp. 12-13.

based on Zeitgeist can be seen in the concept of “situational leader” where times make leaders),³ via structuralism, Marxism (and neo-Marxism, including world-system theory) and other.⁴ Agency-centred theories stress the ability of individual agents to (re)construct their worlds. Agents here can be individuals (politicians, decision-makers, activists), groups (interest groups, lobby groups, clans, protest movements and other) – here is understood as capacity of individuals to consciously make their own choices, realize their intentions and act in accordance with their free will (*human agency*).⁵ Such theories as “great man theory” (and its contemporary equivalents, such as “great leaders of crowds,” charismatic authority or “personal legitimization”) or different intentionist theories (rational choice theory; public choice theory; and pluralism) are individualistic, based on the idea of central importance of agents in social systems and/or on the presumption that only agents’ actions/deeds can be researched. Finally, there are theories that attempt to move beyond the agent structure dilemma, such as Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus⁶, Giddens’ structuration theory⁷, Hay and Jessop’s strategic-relations approach⁸, Margaret Archer’s morphogenesis⁹. Despite many achievements of all these theories, the dispute on agency-structure remains unresolved. In Taiwanese and Burmese conditions choosing agency-centred explanation is easier. Such aspects as the dominance of personalisation of power (individuals are much more important than institutions) in the Taiwanese and Burmese politics, the systemic transformation (from authoritarianism to democracy) carried out by the conscious elites, as well as other factors influence the agency-centred theoretical choice. The most important reason is simple: both Tsai Ing-wen and Aung San Suu Kyi are politicians, female political leaders who has played important in their country’s political systems. And since agency-centred theories focus on individuals, this makes the theoretical choice of this research rather natural.

Moving on to feminist theory. The traditional view of politics was that of men’s sphere of activity¹⁰. This was based on a stereotype of politics being “the masculine” sphere of life. Accordingly, only men were imagined to be capable of being able to manage political affairs, to present decisiveness politics is believed to require. This assumption has relegated women to the private sphere of life, to “human interest” column¹¹. Home, family and children were supposed to be their “proper” sphere; the public sphere belonged to men¹². Historically speaking, this unfair private-public distinction legitimized men’s dominance in politics and

³ Donelson R. Forsyth, *Group dynamics*, Wadsworth, New York 2009, p. 255.

⁴ Derek Laydler, *Understanding Social Theory*, Sage, London 1994, p. 22.

⁵ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Sage, London 2005, p. 448; Colin Hay, *Political Analysis : A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan 2002, p. 94; Stuart McAnulla, “Structure and Agency”, p. 276.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press: London 1977.

⁷ Giddens Anthony, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press 1984.

⁸ Colin Hay, Bob Jessop, *The Governance of Local Economic Development and the Development of Local Economic Governance: A Strategic-Relational Approach*, Lancaster Working Paper in Political Economy no. 53, 1995.

⁹ Margaret Archer, *Culture and Agency: the place of culture in social theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996.

¹⁰ Parts of this theoretical introduction were earlier published in the following article, Michał Lubina *From Feminisation to Masculinisation: Aung San Suu Kyi and her struggle with the double bind in Burma/Myanmar and beyond*, [in:] *Current Myanmar Studies: Aung San Suu Kyi, Muslims in Arakan, and Economic Insecurity*, ed. by Winterberger, Georg and Esther Tenberg, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2019, p. 29-59.

¹¹ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2014, p. 4

¹² Jean Elshtain, *Public man, private woman: Women in social and political thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1981.

served as counter arguments against women emancipation movements in late 19th and early 20th century, e.g. against women's right to vote.

Today, in many regards, this is history. Nevertheless, deeply ingrained assumptions based on this stereotype linger here or there; past dies hard. The private-public distinction has been muted over time, it is less obvious now but not non-existent. One may trace the remnants of this distinction in many contexts, like in media, when they scrutinize husbands and children of female aspirants; or when they express concerns about qualifications of female candidates¹³. Even today women who venture out of the private sphere may be designed other than politician or leader – as a ‘community activist’ or ‘pioneer’ – and/or they may face gendered/stereotypical assumptions about their (un)fitness for political posts¹⁴. In feminist literature this problem was labelled “double bind”¹⁵, sometimes compared to “catch –22 dilemma”¹⁶. The private distinction of this double bind means is the following: if a woman aspires to be a political leader and happens to be a wife and mother, then her commitment to family may be questioned; if, however, she is unmarried or does not have children, she may be vulnerable to speculations of being ruthless, careerist who sacrificed family life at the altar of political career¹⁷. For example, Julia Gillard, Australia's first female prime-minister (2010-2013) was exposed to comments of her being deprived of love due to consciously not having children¹⁸. This public (political) part of the double band is based on the spurious division between competence and femininity. If a female political leader behaves in an assertive way while holding her office, she may be considered aggressive, in the footsteps of Lady Macbeth. On the other hand, if she does not copy the “male style of political leadership” (so presumably hard and strong), she risks accusations of being too weak to be a political leader, unfit for demanding posts¹⁹. So, in short, the double bind means that “women who are considered feminine will be judged as incompetent and women who are competent, as unfeminine”²⁰.

One of the roots of the double bind lie in the popular assumption of politics being dominated by power and, by extension, intrinsically prone to violence. This assumption distances woman from the notion of power due to several stereotypes that attribute different psychological traits to women and to men²¹. Consequently, if politics is about power and violence, then men are apparently more capable of comprehending it: women have traditionally been believed not to have interest in fighting for or having power due to the latter being too tough, too remote and too violent for women²². The positive stereotype of women being “too good” for politics is to blame for that; if woman are supposed to be morally better, then power can corrupt them more,

¹³ Farida Jalalzai, Mona Lena Krook “Beyond Hillary and Benazir: Women's Political Leadership Worldwide.” *International Political Science Review* 31(1): 5-21, 2010, p. 6.

¹⁴ Amanda Sinclair, “Not just 'adding women in': Women re-making leadership.” In *Seizing the initiative: Australian women leaders in politics, workplaces and communities*, edited by R. Francis, P. Grimshaw and A. Standish. eScholarship Research Centre, The University of Melbourne 2012.

¹⁵ Kathleen H. Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind. Women and Leadership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995, p. 16.

¹⁶ Georgia Duerst-Lahti, “Institutional Gendering. Theoretical Insight into the Environment of Women Officeholders.” In *Women and Elective Office. Past, Present and Future*, edited by Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox. New York: Oxford University Press 2005, p. 235.

¹⁷ Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind*, p. 16.

¹⁸ Sinclair, “Not just 'adding women in'.

¹⁹ Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind*, p. 16.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Donatella Campus, *Women political leaders and the media*. New Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2013, p. 3.

²² Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, p. 7.

and can bring more damage²³. But this is a stereotype, sex does not determine whether one is more or less prone to violence: “a woman isn't inherently or irreversibly anti-militaristic or anti-authoritarian”.²⁴ It is more about social processes as well as enduring social structures that keep such stereotypes alive.²⁵

Historically speaking there was a number of woman political leaders who manage to achieve leadership roles despite the above mentioned stereotypes, Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir or Margaret Thatcher, being the 20th century's most famous examples. However, they all proved to be quite assertive, if not militaristic (Gandhi during her tenures staged one war, several smaller conflicts and introduced emergency; Meir also had one war and smaller conflicts as well as ordered antiterrorist operations; Thatcher also had one war, antiterrorist operations as well as harsh measures against trade unions). Their leadership style resembled the traditional male style (they “played like men”) and as such they did not challenge the masculine presumptions and did not threaten male politicians.²⁶ That's why the above mentioned leaders were named “women added in”²⁷, and were afterwards accused of failing to enhance women's status during their leadership²⁸ or even perpetuating “masculinization vs. marginalization” no-win situation.²⁹ The latter criticism claims that such no-win situation appears when a female political leader tries to behave like her male counterparts and avoids challenging gendered norms (then she is “masculinized”) or, she raises concerns specific to women she is shunned by other politicians and/loses prestige (then she is “marginalized”)³⁰. Even if such criticism is far-fetched, and may lack historical perspective and cultural dimension, it nevertheless does show the tensions accompanying female political leaders. These tensions are differently answered – e.g. by female leadership less masculine than traditional ones, but not specifically feminine)³¹ – depending on the political systems (either democratic or authoritarian³²) and on region of the world.

Female political participation is distributed unevenly in the world. When one looks at yearly Forbes ranking of 100 most powerful women³³, top posts are occupied almost entirely by Western female leaders (for 2022 the first non-Western female leader is no other than Tsai Ing-wen, at position no. 17)³⁴, the most recent famous examples are Ursula von der Leyen or Kamala Harris. Although a trend towards more inclusiveness is noticeable globally (for example in Africa, with such leaders as Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia or Joyce Banda in Malawi), female political leadership is still very much Western-dominated phenomenon.

²³ Campus, *Women political leaders*, p. 47.

²⁴ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, p. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁶ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, p. 7.

²⁷ Sinclair, “Not just 'adding women in'.

²⁸ Jalalzai, Krook “Beyond Hillary and Benazir”, p. 6.

²⁹ Meg Rincker, “Masculinized or Marginalized: Decentralization and Women's Status in Regional Polish Institutions”, *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 30(1) 2009, p. 46-69.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ James McGregor Burns, *Leadership*, Harper and Collins, 1978.

³² currently there are no totalitarian countries ruled by a woman; though North Korea's Kim Yo-jong perhaps has a chance to change that in future.

³³ “The world's 100 most powerful women”, *Forbes* 06.12.2022, <https://www.forbes.com/lists/power-women/?sh=1abba3785a95> (access: 04.02.2023)

³⁴ *Ibid.*

In this regard, Asia represents a very peculiar case. Traditionally, in precolonial times in (East, South and Southeast) Asia, women's informal political and religious activities were highly valued as complementing men's formal political and religious roles³⁵. However, women's influence within the domestic realm usually did extend to the public political domain; women's political power has thus been derived from a complex network of social relationships, strengthened through kinship, marriage and other 'familial' ties such as those between patrons and their clients³⁶. Nevertheless, direct rule by a woman was rare (though not non-existent), much more often in order to be decision-makers, they employed the traditional strategy of "head and neck"³⁷, that is "staying in the shadows", informally influencing their male partners, formal political leaders. Postcolonial period brought a decisive break, paving the way for top political posts for women albeit in a specific way. In 20th century Asia women achieved top political posts much earlier than in the West: Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka was the first elected female leader³⁸ soon to be followed by Indira Gandhi of India, Corazon C. Aquino of the Philippines, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Sheik Hasina Wajed and Khaleda Zia Rahman of Bangladesh, Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo of the Philippines, Park Geun-hye of South Korea, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar and Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan. However, with the important exception of Tsai Ing-wen all these female leaders entered politics thanks to infectious charisma that came from being "widows-of-him" or "daughters-of-him" - the him being their martyred or revered husbands or fathers."³⁹ In Southeast Asia, as in South Asia or East Asia, a considerable number of female political leaders gained power by capitalising on the legacy of their dead (male) relatives. A female leaders' heritage became their political commitment and an essential political asset – the widows and daughters replaced the male leaders as a necessary figurehead in a sort of symbolic changeover.⁴⁰ Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar was exactly the case example of this tendency: she was able to use her "karmic credentials"⁴¹ to build her "moral capital"⁴² which translated into political influence and power. Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan, on the other hand, offers a fascinating, exceptional case study as she entered politics independently, without above mentioned dynastic "shortcut" to power. Thus, these two political figures, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar and Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan offer a good comparison between an Asian female leader who used traditional way to get to the power and a one who managed to achieve that without dynastical link.

The Methodology

³⁵ Wazir Jahan Karim, "Bilateralism and Gender in Southeast Asia" [in:] *'Male' and 'Female' in Developing Southeast Asia*, Oxford, Berg Publisher 1995, p. 35-74.

³⁶ Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Myanmar*, Singapore, University of Singapore Press 2009, p. 15-60, 375-384.

³⁷ Anne Stevens, *Women, Power, Politics*, Houndmills, Palgrave 2007, p. 9-24.

³⁸ Bandaranaike was the first democratically elected leader (Prime Minister): before her there were two other Asian female leaders who held highest posts: Khertek Anchimaa-Toka of Tuva and Sükhbaataryn Yanjmaa of Mongolia; however both were independent in name only as their posts only formalised USSR's policies.

³⁹ Arnold Ludwig, *King of the Mountain. The Nature of Political Leadership*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 2002, p. 22.

⁴⁰ (Ibid.)

⁴¹ Jessica Harriden, *The Authority of Influence. Women and Power in Burmese History*. Copenhagen: NIU Press 2012, 210-211.

⁴² John Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2001, 147-171.

This research was based on hermeneutic approach, centred around an attempt to understand social actions. Following Weberian understanding of sociology, his definition of action and social action⁴³, “the understanding of actions has to be based on the understanding of the subjective meaning,” while the latter “is, in turn, dependent on the particular context” – and hermeneutics is the method of understanding “a work in terms of its context”.⁴⁴ According to Bogdanor’s explanation of hermeneutics “in order to understand the way people behave, we need to understand their motives for doing what they are doing and what they think they are doing, and also to know their world outlook and how they see their place in the world.”⁴⁵ In other words, the aim is to place Tsai Ing-wen and Aung San Suu behaviours and her actions within specific cultural and socio-cultural context. This follows Gadamer’s “horizon of understanding” (determined by all socio-cultural environments a person is integrated in) – a person understands the world as a result of complex interaction of specific horizons of understanding that are constantly overlapping.”⁴⁶ In this context, “the critical self-awareness applies to the gap between the horizon of the author and the horizon which the objective of investigation belongs to”, while “the inclusion of critical self-awareness in the process of hermeneutic understanding prevents from evaluating in comparison with one’s own norms and values.”⁴⁷ This guarantees value-free criterion of social science.⁴⁸ This approach responds to the cognitive and methodological directive formulated by Herbert Schnädelbach (“to understand something is to understand how it came into being.”)⁴⁹ This is not a frequently used perspective in political science, where usually considerations over constitutive elements of politics (such as power, order, state, interest, good etc.) in a decontextualized, depersonalized sphere (occupied by disembodied entities) prevail. However, a political science that abstracts or neglects the everyday meaning of politicalness and the meaning of intersubjective relations, is a science that deals with anatomized political exhibits. Instead, this research tried to look for the sources and dynamics of political phenomenon and processes in interaction between the domestic sources of personality and identity of a political agent, and structured forms of external for her/him reality. That is why it focused on the cultural schemes of Taiwanese and Burmese policymaking and tried to extract from their meaning and their orientated activities a certain logic: an order of everyday concepts, signs and symbols as well as associated with it practices that condition the *differentia specifica* of political and social institutions. This is an attempt to catch meanings and casual connections that originates from a theoretical line that demands getting to know everyday meanings and symbols that shape the attitudes towards politics in a local context in order to make the intentional acts of a political agent meaningful in the social and cultural context. Through the structuralised meaning of everyday practice this research tried to understand and explain the

⁴³ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Univ. of California Press London, Los Angeles 1978, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Franziska Blum, *Teaching Democracy. The Program and Practice of Aung San Suu Kyi’s Concept of People’s Education*, Regiospectra, Berlin 2011, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Vernon Bogdanor, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Science*, Blackwell Reference, Oxford (et al.): 1999, p. 153; Blum, *Teaching Democracy*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Herbert Schnädelbach, *Vernunft und Geschichte. Vorträge und Abhandlungen* (vol. 1), Frankfurt a. M. 1987.

norms and values of local policymaking and axiological and normative background of their system of motivations and behaviour⁵⁰. As such this attempt was an example of interpretative political science.

In order to achieve data for this research, I used a qualitative methodology and a single case study method⁵¹; this allowed to get in-depth, multi-faced explanations about a complex phenomenon⁵². The case study is applied in this study as a primary research method.⁵³ This qualitative methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of Tsai Ing-wen and her policies. I didn't have to do the same with Aung San Suu Kyi as I already researched her person and her policies in the last decade; now I needed to learn and research more about Tsai Ing-wen; for this reason I went to Taiwan. I collected the primary data for this research through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and reading of documents and secondary sources. I did it on the bases of qualitative methodology. This methodology is valuable by the fact that it increases the acceptability of the interpretations of research findings, helps to understand and interpret the data from secondary sources and helps create knowledge. Qualitative research is inductive, it enables the researcher to discover the sense of perceptions in a specified situation⁵⁴; it also helps to explore and understand human behaviour, feelings and textured experiences.⁵⁵ A holistic, single-case, in-depth case study approach was employed here in order to achieve in-depth, multi-faced explanations of the complex phenomenon.⁵⁶ As for the case study approach – “case” understood her as the subject of study, a person, organization, behavioural condition, event or some other social phenomenon,⁵⁷ in this research it is a person, Tsai Ing-wen – it is an empirical research method adopted in investigating a contemporary real-world case; this approach assists to grasp the context, surrounding conditions.⁵⁸ The case study approach is helpful in order to gain an in-depth understanding of an issue or phenomenon.⁵⁹ Case study helps to research and get an in-depth holistic view of the research problem.⁶⁰ The case study approach is both descriptive and analytical: it hopes to understand complexities in order to get substantial insights into a particular example of social (in this research: political) phenomenon that is the focus of the study.⁶¹ Case study also allows in-depth inquiry into the case, to group

⁵⁰ I am grateful for Professor Kazmierz Dziubka from University of Wroclaw who inspired this part of theoretical background of my research.

⁵¹ in doing this methodological part, I was inspired by the following work: Iqthyer Uddin Md Zahed, “The Politics of Forced Migration in the 21st Century: The Case of the Rohingya,” PhD thesis University of New England, NSW, Australia 2022

⁵² Danny Jorgensen, *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies*. Sage Publications 1989, p. 18; Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*. London, Sage, 2012, p. 7.

⁵³ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. London, Sage, 2018.

⁵⁴ Anselm Strauss, Juliate Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, London: Sage 2008.

⁵⁵ Paul Atkinson, A.J. Coffey, Sara Delamont, ”A debate about our canon.” *Qualitative research*, 1(1), 5-21.

⁵⁶ Jorgensen, *Participant Observation*, p. 18; Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 7.

⁵⁷ Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, p. 31 and 145.

⁵⁸ Ibid.; Robert K. Yin, Darnella Davis, “Adding new dimensions to case study evaluations: The case of evaluating comprehensive reforms”. In George Julnes & D. J. Rog (Eds.), *Informing Federal Policies for evaluation methodology (New Directions in Program Evaluation)*, Jossey-Bass 2007, p. 5, 18, 75-93.

⁵⁹ Sarah Crowe, Kathrin Cresswell, Ann Robertson, Guro Huby, Anthony Avery, Aziz Sheikh, “The case study approach”. *BMC medical research methodology*, 11(1), 1-9, 2011.

⁶⁰ Saša Baškarada, “Qualitative Case Study Guidelines,” *The Qualitative Report*, 19(40), 1-25, 2014; Pamela Baxter, Susan Jack, “Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers”, *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), p. 544-559, 2008.

⁶¹ Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*.

even various characteristics when trying to interpret the factors.⁶² Case study approach's strength is that in this approach the data can be collected from various sources, both primary and secondary ones: documents, archival record, direct observation and interviews; this all increases the quality of the research.⁶³

This research was based on data collected from documents, observations and interviews, on primary and secondary written sources in English, Mandarin Chinese and Russian as well as on individual semi-structured interviews with the academic and political elites of Taiwan: researchers, analysts, commentators, journalists and politicians. The written sources meant published books, articles, reports, policy papers and media (both traditional and social) texts relevant to the research; this also included online materials. Methodologically speaking, the primary sources, documents and archive records are valuable source as they produce accuracy, specific details, names of people and/or organisations and other data that can be correlated against arguments from other sources.⁶⁴ I used Republic of China government documents (sometimes PRC documents as well), UN (and its agendas) documents, NGO-produced documents and other type of documents. Document verification followed up the extensive usage of media materials in this research. As for secondary written sources, I used books as well as articles and other papers published in respected journals and edited volumes as well as other scientific papers. The full list of used materials is included in the Bibliography, at the end of this report. This was accompanied by direct observation and interviews. The former is an important source of evidence for qualitative research,⁶⁵ this is a traditional method in field research, including in case studies.⁶⁶ By observation the researcher familiarises himself with the culture of a particular group being studied (here it was the political culture of Taiwan). I spent almost four months in Taiwan on this Taiwan Fellowship. During this time I observed media coverage of Tsai Ing-wen, I watched her speeches (e.g. the one during "fourth Strait Crisis"⁶⁷, or on the occasion of 10/10 anniversary⁶⁸ as well as other), and observed the reaction of people (both elites and ordinary) when mentioning her name and the topic of my research. Specifically, I made my observations at the following places: NCCU; Soochow University; Tamkang University; Academia Sinica; NYCU in Hsinchu; National Defense University; National Central Library; among the diplomatic community of Taipei; in the Foreign Correspondence Club in Taipei; at the European Values Center in Taipei; at the Wenhua Academy in Taipei; and at the following museums: Human Rights Museum; 28.02.Museum; National Palace Museum; and during 10/10 celebrations. Throughout my stay I made comprehensive field notes of all things relevant to the study. This observation helped me to better understand Taiwan and its

⁶² Robert K. Yin, "Case Study Methods". [In:] Harris E. Cooper, Paul M. Camic, Debra L. Long, A. T. Panter, David E. Rindskopf, & Kenn J. Sher (eds.), *Apa Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol 2: Research Designs*, American Psychological Association, 2012, p. 143.

⁶³ Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, p. 111; Michael Patton, *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage Publications 2012, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, p. 115-117.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 121; Sonya J. Morgan, Susan R. Pullon, Lindsay M. Macdonald, Eileen M. McKinlay, Ben V. Gray, "Case study observational research: A framework for conducting case study research where observation data are the focus," *Qualitative health research*, vol. vol. 27, no. 7/2017, p. 1063.

⁶⁶ Harry F. Wolcott, Harry F., *The Art of Fieldwork*. California, Altamira Press 1995.

⁶⁷ *President Tsai delivers remarks on the live-fire military exercises China conducting in areas around Taiwan*, Office of the President of Republic of China (Taiwan), 04.08.2022, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/6295> (access: 26.02.2023).

⁶⁸ *President Tsai delivers 2022 National Day Address*, Office of the President of Republic of China (Taiwan), 10.10.2022 (access: 26.02.2023).

policies. Last but not least, I conducted interviews with the intellectual and political elites of Taiwan. Methodologically speaking, in the qualitative approach, there is the need to interview at least 30-50 interviewees from a particular group.⁶⁹ The samples shouldn't be either too small (which would make it challenging to get data and/or theoretical saturation) or too large (which would make it challenging to analyse it).⁷⁰ Yet, if the "golden mean" of 30-50 interviewees is impossible to meet for this or that reason, it is better to conduct less interviews as a small sample helps analyse the data in a meticulous and creative way, while large sample risks doing research for too long.⁷¹ There are no set, strict rules in selecting the number of participants; it all depends on the approach, method and possibilities on the ground.⁷² The purposive sampling approach chose here means that the interviewees were selected based on their knowledge, availability and will to talk to the researcher.⁷³ Here "random sampling" was used to choose interviewees from among those people identified through purposive sampling.⁷⁴ In doing my fieldwork, conducting semi-structural interviews in Taipei and beyond, I used "an informal strategy" named "judgmental sampling," that is relying on researcher's own judgment to find the appropriate interviewee.⁷⁵ In purposive sampling, an appropriate interviewee should possess a valuable information concerning the undertaken research.⁷⁶ The interviews were more a guided (sometimes loose) conversations than a structured questioning, which is in line with the case study research.⁷⁷ Semi-structured questions for a case study should be fluid, not rigid.⁷⁸ Through this type of interview, the researcher gets data, facts, information, ideas, opinions and other insights into the research he does.⁷⁹ Through this kind of interview the researcher learns the facts, interpretations and opinions about the research topic; this is also a way to get suggestions from the interviewees about other people to interview as well as about other sources that can be useful in the research.⁸⁰ I used an open-ended semi-structured technique to achieve a holistic and detailed understanding of Taiwan in general, its policies, including that of Tsai Ing-wen in particular. I conducted 38 semi-structured in-depth interviews in Taipei and beyond (one was conducted earlier during preliminary research prior to arrival to Taiwan) with the Taiwanese academic and political elites: academics (political scientists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, security studies researchers and other), analysts, commentators, journalists and politicians, including government officials, as well as social activists, including NGO activists. I include the anonymized list at the end of this report, below Bibliography. The interviewees would not be identifiable from the information they

⁶⁹ Janice M. Morse, "Designing funded qualitative research", [in:] Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, Sage 1994, p. 220-235; Bryan Marshall, Peter Cardon, Amit Poddar, Renee Fontenot, "Does sample size matter in qualitative research?: A review of qualitative interviews in IS research," *Journal of computer information systems*, vol. 54, no. 1/2013, p. 11-22.

⁷⁰ Margarete Sandelowski, "Sample size in qualitative research," *Research in nursing & health*, vol. 18, no. 2/1995, p. 179-183.

⁷¹ Sara. E. Baker, Rosalind Edwards, *How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research*. National Centre for Research Methods, University of Southampton 2012, p. 30.

⁷² Nastasi, Bonnie *Study notes: qualitative research: sampling & sample size considerations*, Studypool 1998/2015, <https://www.studypool.com/documents/90822/sampling-sample-size-considerations-adapted> (accessed: 26.02.2023).

⁷³ Max Van Manen, *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press 2014, p. 353.

⁷⁴ Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative research from start to finish*, New York, Guilford Press 2011, p. 311.

⁷⁵ David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-step*, Sage, London 2010, p. 35.

⁷⁶ Yin, *Qualitative research from start to finish*, p. 311.

⁷⁷ Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, p. 118.

⁷⁸ Herbert J. Rubin, Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*, London, Sage 2011.

⁷⁹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, London, Sage, 2014, p. 190.

⁸⁰ Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, p. 119.

provided. These interviews form the core of this research as the data from interviews helps to gain comprehensive knowledge and contextual information on the research topic. The interviewees were chosen from experts on Taiwan, both Taiwanese and foreign, from those who willing to participate in the interviews. Interviews usually took 30-120 minutes. They were interviewed via purposive sampling with each expert chosen from a group of knowledgeable individuals with expertise on Taiwanese politics; thanks to these interviews I was able to enrich my knowledge about Taiwan and complete this research project.

I used secondary data to back up and validate the findings from primary sources, the interviews and observation. I was able to compare the accuracy of secondary data against the primary data collected during fieldwork. I used the thematic analysis method⁸¹ for data analysis which produces systemically, relevant, trustworthy and insightful findings.⁸² This thematic analysis is an effective method for analysing different perspectives of qualitative interviews as it stresses similarities and differences and produces insights, sometimes surprising.⁸³ The thematic analysis helps to summarise key features of data; it also enables to use structured approaches in handling data in order to produce a good, well-organized report.⁸⁴ I analysed data by using both inductive and deductive approaches for analysis to make sure that information relevant to the research questions was obtained by data analysis that provided deeper insights with respect to conceptual and theoretical differentiation; this ensures that data analysis is able to provide deeper insights with conceptual and theoretical contrast.⁸⁵ I triangulated the data by a method called “data source triangulation” method, that is collection of data from different groups, at different time and from various locations in order to get comprehensive, multiply perspectives of the same topic. I used triangulation of data sources with theory⁸⁶ as well as peer discussion and secondary literature⁸⁷ to validate the case study research. During the research, issues pertaining to Taiwan, its politics and history, identity politics, Cross-Strait relations and other international dimensions as well as gender issues, including the political aspects of it, were the central focus of my research.

Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar

Aung San Suu Kyi represents the traditional pattern of achieving positions of power in Asia: dynastic link⁸⁸. Historically speaking, women in Myanmar were excluded from political offices and discriminated religiously,

⁸¹ Yvonna Lincoln, Egon Guba, *Naturalistic inquiry*, Sage, California 1985.

⁸² Lorelli S. Nowell, Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, Nancy J. Moules, “Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria” *International journal of qualitative methods*, vol. 16, no. 1/2017, p. 1-13.

⁸³ Virginia Braun, Victoria Clarke, “Using thematic analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2/2006, p. 77-101.

⁸⁴ Nigel King, “Using templates in the thematic analysis of text,” [in:] Cathrine Cassell, Gillian Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*, Sage, London 2014, p. 257-270.

⁸⁵ Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, “A debate about our canon,” p. 5-21; Lincoln, Guba, *Naturalistic inquiry*.

⁸⁶ Robert K. Yin, “Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations,” *Evaluation*, vol. 19, no. 3/2013, p. 324.

⁸⁷ David Byrne, “Evaluating complex social interventions in a complex world,” *Evaluation*, vol. 19, no. 3/2013, p. 217-228; Robert K. Yin, “Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations,” p. 321-332.

⁸⁸ this part is based on my previous research on Aung San Suu Kyi, published in the following books/articles: Michał Lubina, *A Political Biography of Aung San Suu Kyi. A Hybrid Politician*, Routledge: New York-Abington 2020; Michał Lubina, *The Moral Democracy. The Political Thought of Aung San Suu Kyi*, Scholar, Warsaw 2018; Michał Lubina, “From Feminisation to Masculinisation: Aung San Suu Kyi and her struggle with the double bind in Burma/Myanmar and beyond”, [in:] *Current Myanmar Studies: Aung San Suu Kyi, Muslims in Arakan, and Economic Insecurity*, ed. by Winterberger, Georg and Esther Tenberg, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2019.

as local version of Theravada Buddhism asserted men's spiritual superiority (possession of ဘုရား, *hpoun*, or glory) blocked most women from reaching top positions in formal institutions of power⁸⁹. This was true to both precolonial and colonial times, in the latter case, women took part in the national liberation movement of 1920-1930s though as secondary actors⁹⁰. Derived from local interpretation of Buddhism, there was (and often still is) a popular assumption that women are inferior to men; as such they cannot be political leaders.⁹¹ They are, on hand hand, associated with the realm of desire; on the other, their traditionally important role is the sphere of commerce made them "polluted spiritually".⁹² Given these circumstances, it is unsurprising that Burmese women interested in politics have traditionally used the local version of "head and neck" strategy to achieve political importance⁹³. The most famous example of employing this strategy remains Supayalat, a 19th century queen⁹⁴, more recent examples involve wives and daughters of senior Burmese generals, including ruling dictators from military juntas⁹⁵; here the most famous one is Kyaing Kyaing, wife of Than Shwe, Myanmar's dictator in the years of 1992-2011.

Aung San Suu Kyi had broken these unwritten rules of "head and neck". When she entered politics in 1988 she did this directly – and that led to backlash from Burmese generals, traditionally-thinking men.⁹⁶ They responded by employing slandering propaganda that portrayed Suu Kyi in a racist way as un-Burmese and un-Buddhist.⁹⁷ Burmese regime's propagandists exploited the private-public distinction and tried to trap Suu Kyi in the double bind. Suu Kyi, however, proved to be competent in neutralizing this propaganda. Externally, she started dressing in Burmese cloths and putting flowers in her hair, just like women traditionally did in Myanmar.⁹⁸ This was risky as it could result in "trivialization effect" (women's appearance undermines the seriousness and credibility of female candidates)⁹⁹ and produced a tension between femininity and power (to what extent can a powerful woman be feminine?¹⁰⁰, but it proved to be a winning strategy. Suu Kyi's feminine dress matched well with her political determination which in Myanmar produced an image of a powerful yet very feminine leader at the same time.

More important challenge was her personal situation. Well before entering politics Suu Kyi married Michael Aris, a British academician, which in postcolonial Myanmar became an issue as it exposed her to local

⁸⁹ Milford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, University of California Press, 1982, p. 257-258; Thant Myint-U, *The River of Lost Footsteps. A Personal History of Burma*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2007, p. 34; Gustaaf Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy*, Tokyo University for Foreign Studies, 1999, p. 157-179.

⁹⁰ Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2011, p. 88.

⁹¹ Jessica Harridan, *The Authority of Influence. Women and Power in Burmese History*, NIU Press 2012, p. 216.

⁹² Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*, p. 149.

⁹³ Stevens, *Women, Power, Politics*, p. 9-24.

⁹⁴ Nilanjana Sengupta, *The Female Voice of Myanmar. Khin Myo Chit to Aung San Suu Kyi*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 4.

⁹⁵ Christina Fink, *Living Silence in Burma. Surviving Under Military Rule*, White Lotus, Bangkok 2009, p. 153-171.

⁹⁶ Maung Maung, *The 1988 Uprising in Myanmar*, Yangon, Digest Media Bank 2012, p. 231-274; Harridan. *The Authority of Influence*, p. 26-222.

⁹⁷ Sengupta, *The Female Voice of Myanmar*, p. 323.

⁹⁸ Hans-Bernd Zöllner, *The Beast and the Beauty. The History of the Conflict between the Military and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, 1988-2011, Set in a Global Context*, Berlin, Regio Spectra 2012. p. 303; Sengupta, *The Female Voice of Myanmar*, p. 323-325.

⁹⁹ Stevens, *Women, Power, Politics*.

¹⁰⁰ Campus, *Women political leaders*, p. 7.

xenophobia and resentment (she was the daughter of the founding father of Burma, Aung San). The military regime used this fact to attack her, quintessentially exploiting the private-public distinction in order to politically annihilate a female politician. In Suu Kyi's case it was done in openly racist, primitive manner¹⁰¹ - in constant attacks from state media. Suu Kyi employed various means to defend herself: she kept repeating that country was more important for her than her family; she hid her husband during electoral campaign¹⁰², apparently even considered divorcing him¹⁰³ and certainly distanced herself from him in her international interview¹⁰⁴; she also minimized her personal cost (separation from family due to house arrest) when compared to repressions suffered by the Burmese society.¹⁰⁵ In 1999, when her husband was dying of cancer in London, she didn't risk to come back to the UK as the generals might have not let her return to Myanmar. Personal cost aside, her actions meant that she sacrificed the "private" sphere of her life in order to fulfill her cause in the public sphere. This was well understood and appreciated in Myanmar as it underlined her commitment to the cause, just like some Burmese women did during anticolonial movement.¹⁰⁶ Politically speaking it proved to be the winning strategy.

Simultaneously, Suu Kyi transcended the double bind she faced as female politician by using three interconnected strategies: the notion that women are needed in times of crisis; lineage; and mother of the nation. The first one was the Burmese version of a universal stereotype that when the country's situation became bad, economically or socially serious, women are perceived as the savers. They are believed to have not interests and/or good reputation and are seen as less limited in their action – to put it shortly: "women clean up politics."¹⁰⁷ Suu Kyi used it brilliantly in her Shwedagon speech that marked her entry into national politics. She justified her decision to enter politics as enforced by the political crisis, called by her "the second struggle for national independence."¹⁰⁸ Although this comparison was, historically speaking, far-fetched¹⁰⁹, she won the hearts and minds of the audience, and then of the majority of Burmese nation. Thanks to her Shwedagon speech she legitimized herself and de-legitimized the military government.

This was possible thanks to her lineage. She used it, too – that was her second strategy. Being the daughter of Aung San, Burma/Myanmar's founding father (killed just before independence which secured his legendary status), she became the Burmese version of wider Asian phenomenon: a "daughter-of-him", a

¹⁰¹ For example: 96-06 *Burma Press Summary*, Vol. X, No. 6, June 1996, Online Burma Library, <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/BPS96-06.pdf> (access: 05.02.2023); "The Unforgettable 19th July, by Bo Daewa", *New Light of Myanmar* 18.07.1996, 96-07 *Burma Press Summary*, vol. X, No. 7, July 1996, <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/BPS96-07.pdf> (access: 05.02.2023); "Is it Thakin Blood or Slave's Blood, by Byatti", *New Light of Myanmar*, 21.07.1996, 96-07 *Burma Press Summary*, vol. X, No. 7, July 1996, <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/BPS96-07.pdf> (access: 05.02.2023).

¹⁰² Barbara Bradley, *Dark Victory in Burma*, „Vogue Magazine” Oct. 1995, Online Burma Library, <http://www.burmalibrary.org/reg.burma/archives/199511/msg00224.html> (access: 05.02.2023).

¹⁰³ Barbara Victor, *The Lady. Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Laureate and Burma's Prisoner*, Faber & Faber 2002, p. 101-117.

¹⁰⁴ Aung San Suu Kyi, Alan Clements, *The Voice of Hope. Conversations with Alan Clements*, New York, Seven Stories Press 1997, 141-142.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁶ Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁷ Campus, *Women political leaders*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁸ Aung San Suu Kyi, "Speech at Shwedagon", [in:] *Freedom From Fear and other Writings*, eds. Michael Aris, London, Penguin Books 1991, p. 193.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, *The State in Myanmar*, p. 404.

reverted (and martyred) famous father¹¹⁰. She capitalized on the legacy of her famous father, she replaced him as figurehead in a sort of symbolic changeover.¹¹¹ This was her “moral capital”¹¹² her “karmic credentials” that translated into political influence.¹¹³ Finally, her last strategy was a Burmese version of the “mother of nation” approach. Theoretically speaking, “the mother of nation” is one the not-that-many alternatives path to leadership for female politicians. It centers on the image of power based on care and provision of goods (just like traditional mother in the family), not on authority, traditionally attributed to father of family. This is a “softer” approach, as it emulates the role of the mother in the family on the political level.¹¹⁴ Myanmar is no different here, mother here is also “the traditional source of female authority” and Suu Kyi was able to attach herself to that image¹¹⁵. Sacrificing her marriage played a key role here as it was understood as a personal sacrifice of family for the country, for the greater good, just like mother sacrifices her life for her children.¹¹⁶

Thanks to using these three strategies as well as other tactics, Suu Kyi survived the unfair and uneven political struggle with the generals. They have always been politically stronger in Myanmar and the political competition in the country took form of non-level playing field, where the generals had the last word. Nevertheless, Suu Kyi survived twenty seven years in opposition, including over fifteen (in total) in three house arrests. After many years of waiting she finally had her chance. When the generals liberalized the system in 2011, she moved in. She negotiated and maneuvered her way up to the top, becoming MP in 2012, and winning general elections in 2015. After that she achieved the position of power by becoming the State Counsellor, the de facto chancellor of Myanmar in 2016. For five years she ruled the country with moderate successes yet with continuing popular support. Unfortunately, in 2021 she was toppled in another coup d'état, which plunged the country into turmoil and civil war. Suu Kyi was subsequently arrested and then jailed. Currently she is in prison and yet again is the world's most famous political prisoner. That is why Aung San Suu Kyi's story is that of limited or partial success of a female politician in Asia.¹¹⁷ She managed to survive uneven political competition and ruled for five years; yet ultimately she lost to superior might of the Burmese generals.

Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan

Tsai Ing-wen is a fascinating, exceptional case study on the map of global and Asian female leaders. To start with, she is from a non-political family. Furthermore, she became a self-made woman: achieving everything by herself, including political prominence. In her bureaucratic and political career, she was a minister in the Republic of China's mainland office (2000-2004), member of legislative Yuan, or parliament (2005-2006),

¹¹⁰ Ludwig, *King of the Mountain*, p. 22.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital*, p. 147-171.

¹¹³ Harridan, *The Authority of Influence*, p. 210-211.

¹¹⁴ Campus, *Women political leaders*, p. 62.

¹¹⁵ Sengupta, *The Female Voice of Myanmar*, p. xxi, 324; 241-243.

¹¹⁶ Harridan, *The Authority of Influence*, p. 227.

¹¹⁷ And that of failed hopes in the West, but this is a different story consciously not mentioned here. More about it, see: Andrew Selth, “Aung San Suu Kyi and the Politics of Personality” *Griffith Asia Institute Regional Outlook Paper*, no. 55 (2017).

vice premier of the Republic of China (2006-2007), three times chairwoman of the DPP, Democratic People's Party (2008-2012, 2014-2018, 2020-2022) and finally twice the president of the Republic of China (2016-currently). She succeeded in both her bureaucratic career (she had her role in paving way for Taiwan to WTO in 2002), and in political one. As a president so far she enhanced the global profile of her country, awed the world by aptly handling Covid-19 pandemic and skilfully navigated the stormy waters of Cross-Strait relations. At the time of writing this report, she still has one year in her last presidential term which, unless something dramatic happens, may sum up her successful political career. In 2020 she was included in "Time" magazine's most influential people,¹¹⁸ while in 2021 she ranked 9th in the annual Forbes ranking of most powerful women (in 2022 she was 17th).¹¹⁹ In terms of being a female leader, Tsai is a fascinating case study.

Tsai Ing-wen was born on 31st August 1956, in Taipei City, from a family of Hakka and Aboriginal descent: her family comes from Southern Taiwan, from Fenggang Village, Fangshan Township, Pingtung County; one of her grandfathers came from Hakka family (originally from Guangdong) while and one of her grandmothers was from Paiwan indigenous people.¹²⁰ Her father, Tsai Chieh-sheng (Jiesheng), was a wealthy merchant who made money on car repair: he ran a SME enterprise, an auto repair shop, then moved to expand his freight business, that included repairing cars for the US military and other American staff in Taiwan; subsequently he also invested in restaurants, construction, real estate and other businesses and became a wealthy man.¹²¹ Tsai Chieh-sheng had four spouses and, according to different sources, nine to eleven children; Tsai Ing-wen was the youngest in the family.¹²² Her siblings live now in Taiwan and in the

¹¹⁸ "The 100 Most Influential People of 2020: Tsai Ing-wen," *Time*, 22.09.2020, <https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2020/5888307/tsai-ing-wen/> (access: 23.02.2023)

¹¹⁹ "Profile. Tsai Ing-wen," *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/tsai-ing-wen/?sh=1a8748423e71> (access: 23.02.2023); "Tsai ranks ninth on 'Forbes' list of powerful women", *Taipei Times*, 10.12.2021, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2021/12/10/2003769339> (access: 23.02.2023).

¹²⁰ "Progressive Leadership", *Taiwan Today*, 01.05.2016, <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?post=8046&unit=4,28,29,31,25,181> (access: 23.02.2023); "解密 富商之女蔡英文," *商周雜誌* 25.11.2015, https://www.businessweekly.com.tw/magazine/Article_page.aspx?id=27374 (access: 23.02.2023);

"總統候選人蔡英文第三場電視政見會 第一輪政見發表全文", *Ing.Tw*, 2016-01-08, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180818190056/http://iing.tw/posts/507>; "全台掃街 楓港出發 讓屏東女兒做總統: 小英", *中國時報* 10.01.2016, <https://www.chinatimes.com/newspapers/20160110000280-260102?chdtv> (access: 23.02.2023).

¹²¹ "對蔡英文政治性格的觀察與思考", *中國評論新聞網* (CRNTT), 04.02.2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160304122122/http://hk.crntt.com/crn-webapp/cbspub/secDetail.jsp?bookid=47921&secid=47959> (access: 08.02.2023); *President Tsai*. Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), <https://english.president.gov.tw/Page/40> (access: 08.02.2023).

¹²² *Tsai Ing-wen. President of Taiwan*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 02.02.2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tsai-Ing-wen> (access: 08.02.2023); "Tsai Ing-wen: Taiwan's quiet revolutionary", *The Globe and Mail*, 15.01.2016, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/tsai-ing-wen-taiwans-quiet-revolutionary/article28215643/> (access: 08.02.2023); "Democratic Progressive Party's Tsai Ing-wen becomes Taiwan's first woman president", *The Strait Times* 16.01.2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180824111228/https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/democratic-progressive-partys-tsai-ing-wen-becomes-taiwans-first-woman-president> (access: 08.02.2023); "Progressive Leadership";

"父親有4、個女人11位子女...解密富商之女蔡英文", *TW News Yahoo*, 25.11.2015, <https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E7%88%B6%E8%A6%AA%E6%9C%894%E5%80%8B%E5%A5%B3%E4%BA%BA%E3%80%8111%E4%BD%8D%E5%AD%90%E5%A5%B3---%E8%A7%A3%E5%AF%86%E5%AF%8C%E5%95%86%E4%B9%8B%E5%A5%B3%E8%94%A1%E8%8B%B1%E6%96%87-081310528.html> (access: 08.02.2023); 站在山峰高处的一只野豹"成为台湾? "总统"她是谁, 的女人", *唐人街*, 01.2016, <https://news.china.com.au/2016/01/%E7%AB%99%E5%9C%A8%E5%B1%B1%E5%B3%B0%E9%AB%98%E5%A4%84%E7%9A%84%E4%B8%80%E5%8F%AA%E9%87%8E%E8%B1%B9%EF%BC%9F%E6%88%90%E4%B8%BA%E5%8F%B0%E6%B9%BE%E6%80%BB%E7%BB%9F> (access: 08.02.2023).

US and keep a low profile, do not give interviews.¹²³ Traditionally speaking, being the youngest daughter in a Chinese family must have been a handicap. Whether it was a case here is unclear, as there are only circumstantial evidences. Apparently, when her father gave her name, Ing-wen, he chose the simple character, ying (英), instead of the most sophisticated 瀛 although according to family tree, it should have been the latter¹²⁴. One of my interviewees speculated that the choice of a simple character was because for her father “she was only a girl”, and so he gave her much simpler name than to other siblings.¹²⁵ The interviewee moved on say that “Tsai had a difficult childhood”, presumably because of being the youngest daughter, from the last spouse of her father,¹²⁶ a father who “was of the Confucian kind: he encouraged her to study hard but also expected her, as the youngest daughter, to devote herself to his care.”¹²⁷ As she herself admitted, “I was not considered a kid that would be successful in my career.”¹²⁸ Apparently, the family experience made her “cautious” since childhood; on the other hand the same source claim she was “much loved youngest daughter”¹²⁹ and such similar lines about can be found in other references, too¹³⁰. Although she was the youngest daughter from the last spouse, Tsai Ing-wen apparently said that her father treated every spouse and his offspring “fairly”¹³¹. As a child Ing-wen enjoyed reading and, encouraged by parents, developed an interest in studying.¹³² She was interested in archaeology, wanted to study it and became an archaeologist; until today she has plenty of books on archaeology.¹³³ She was also strong at Chinese and history and was interested in literature as well¹³⁴. But she went to study law because her father wanted her to do so; apparently because he believed that at least child in the family should be a lawyer to protect the interest of his business and since all elder kids already “had their vocations,” Ing-wen was persuaded to do so.¹³⁵ This would suggest a handicap from being the youngest daughter yet there is no proof that following her father’s will rather than her own interest was in any way dramatic; it is equally possible that young Ing-wen considered going along the way of her father as a natural order of things. Whatever the nature of her childhood was, it was a childhood spent in comfortable conditions: Tsai has been rich since childhood.¹³⁶ When I interviewed a female civil

¹²³ “站在山峰高处的一只野豹”？成为台湾“总统”的女人，她是谁”。

¹²⁴ 22个关键词带你认识蔡英文, QQ.com, 30.08.2018,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180830142256/http://news.qq.com/cross/20160111/00K3uZS3.html> (access: 08.02.2023).

¹²⁵ Interview no. 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ “‘Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:’ Breakfast With Taiwan’s Tsai Ing-Wen”, *Time* 18.06.2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161215013232/http://time.com/3926330/taiwan-tsai-ing-wen-china-reunificaiton-phone-call-donald-trump/>(accessed: 27.02.2023).

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ “父親有4、個女人11位子女...解密富商之女蔡英文”。

¹³⁰ “對蔡英文政治性格的觀察與思考”。

¹³¹ “站在山峰高处的一只野豹”？成为台湾“总统”的女人，她是谁”

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Interview no. 35

¹³⁴ “站在山峰高处的一只野豹”？成为台湾“总统”的女人，她是谁”。

¹³⁵ “A Woman of Many Parts: Tsai Ing-wen”. *Taiwan Panorama*

07.2012, web.archive.org/web/20150919135745/http://www.taiwan-panorama.com/en/show_issue.php?id=201270107030E.TXT&table=2&h1=QWJvdXQgVGFpd2Fu&h2=R2VuZGVyIElzc3Vlcw%3D%3D (access: 08.02.2023).

¹³⁶ In her 2015 declaration, Tsai Ing-wen listed four land properties, two buildings, and a savings account totaling NT\$18 million (including mortgage), “About Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen”, *Taiwan News* 23.09.2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180825120123/https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/2809116> (access: 08.02.2023).

servant from President's Administration and I started a small talk by saying, "you're just like Tsai Ing-wen, you'll be president one day", the interviewee replied "No, I'm not from a rich family"¹³⁷. Other respondent, a Tsai Ing-wen former high school colleague, approached me after a conference where I presented my preliminary research and told me: "Tsai Ing-wen had a privileged childhood, she came from a rich family. When she was a child she had a car and a chauffeur; and then she could afford studies at Cornell. We couldn't have dreamed of anything like that".¹³⁸ The interviewee continued to disagree with the notion of Tsai not coming from politically influential family¹³⁹. However, I beg to disagree: there is a significant difference between coming from upper class/elites and being a member of a political dynasty, the former is much wider category. Tsai certainly comes from elites, more commercial than political, quite similarly, by the way, to Kamala Harris's lineage. But it does not equal coming from a political dynasty: being part of elites although evidently beneficial in terms of finances, cultural capital and contacts, doesn't give a political candidate the "dynastic" shortcut to power, offered only by belonging to a political dynasty.

Once she entered education, Tsai Ing-wen studied at Shuanglian Kindergarten, Chang'an Elementary School (1963), Jilin Elementary School (1966), Taipei Municipal Bei'an Girls' Secondary School (1968, graduation in 1971), and finally at Zhongshan Girls' High School (graduation in 1974), an elite high school in Taiwan's capital.¹⁴⁰ Having graduated from high school, Tsai Ing-wen enrolled at law at Taiwan National University, receiving a bachelor in laws in 1978.¹⁴¹ She then moved to study in the US, at Cornell University (Ithaca, NY), obtaining a master of laws from Cornell's in 1980.¹⁴² She made the choice of Cornell because New York "seemed the place for a young woman who 'wanted to have a revolutionary life,'" as she herself declared.¹⁴³ Other, however, point out possible political, or ideological motives as well: "it was a conscious choice", one of the interviewee, a political scientist close to Presidential Administration, told me, "it was a very Taiwanese choice. Given her rich family, she could have studied anywhere, but she chose Cornell, where Lee Teng-hui studied. Studying at Cornell is like a rite of passage for the DPP people"¹⁴⁴. Having graduated from Cornell, she moved to the United Kingdom to pursue PhD at London School of Economics and Political Science and received her doctorate in law from LSE in February 1984, specializing in international trade law and competition law¹⁴⁵. She did it in less than three years which "pleased her father" as she admitted.¹⁴⁶ According to one influential political scientist, her stay in London resulted in not only with her obtaining a "quirky little British accent" but also gave her "international perspective" that many in

¹³⁷ Interview no. 30.

¹³⁸ Interview no. 1.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ "我長大也要當總統：雙連幼兒園學弟妹 小英當選【更新】", *果日報* 17.01.2016,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190114004207/https://tw.appledaily.com/new/realtime/20160117/777199/> (access: 08.02.2023).

¹⁴¹ *President Tsai*. Office of the President.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ "'Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:' Breakfast With Taiwan's Tsai Ing-Wen."

Naturally, Cornell University is in Ithaca, not in New York City; Ithaca is a few hours away from New York City; given American perspectives on space, this is not that much but from European perspective, this is quite far from the heartbeat of a city.

¹⁴⁴ Interview no. 26

¹⁴⁵ *President Tsai*. Office of the President.

¹⁴⁶ "'Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:' Breakfast With Taiwan's Tsai Ing-Wen."

the DPP lacked.¹⁴⁷ Her London part of life proved to become grotesquely controversial when Tsai already became the president as the uncontroversial fact of obtaining a PhD title in Taiwan's tense electoral campaign proved to be a source of controversy. A popular celebrity Dennis Peng has groundlessly accused Tsai Ing-wen of not completing her PhD; he was later backed by two Taiwanese professors¹⁴⁸. These speculations were finally over once LSE issued official statement confirming Tsai Ing-wen's title¹⁴⁹ with a link to the digitalized version of her PhD.¹⁵⁰ This settled the issue. If anything, the story of this bogus accusations showed the volatile nature of democracy.

Having finished her studies, Tsai Ing-wen returned to Taiwan and started academic career shared between National Chengchi University (NCCU) and Soochow (Dong Wei) University. She was first an associate professor and then a professor in the Department of Law at NCCU (1984-1990), then a professor at the Soochow University School of Law (1991-1993) and a professor in Department of International Business at National Chengchi University (1993-2000)¹⁵¹. She was then, in her own words, "a university professor and member of the social elite" and, as written in one article about her, "there didn't seem to be any obstacles to continuing on this path for the rest of her life."¹⁵² One interviewee, a high ranking official in current Republic of China's Presidential Administration dotted the "i" by saying "if she was asked she would answer she didn't want to become a politician."¹⁵³ But politics gradually swallowed her, at first more on administrative-diplomatic level and only much later on a full-scale electoral basis. Tsai Ing-wen joined Republic of China's trade negotiation delegation (International Trade Commission of the Ministry of Economic Affairs) in late 1980s, in 1992 becoming Chief Legal Advisor (until 2000) to the Taiwan's team negotiating joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that paved way for Taiwan's admission (as Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu) to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2002; as Chief Legal Advisor, Tsai Ing-wen regularly attended Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings and chaired the Group on Services (GOS) of the Committee on Trade and Investment (CTI)¹⁵⁴. Besides that she was a commissioner in both the Fair Trade Commission (1995-1998) and the International Trade Commission (1993-May 2000) of the Executive Yuan¹⁵⁵, a Convenor of the Drafting and Research Group on the Statute Governing Relations with Hong Kong and Macau" for the years 1994-1995 (a body designed to draft legislation for Taiwan's economic relations with Hong Kong and Macau), and member of

¹⁴⁷ "Tsai Ing-wen: former professor on course to be most powerful woman in Chinese-speaking world", *The Guardian* 15.01.2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161207235934/https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/15/tsai-ing-wen-former-professor-on-course-to-be-most-powerful-woman-in-chinese-speaking-world> (access: 27.02.2023). It begs to comment that if this remark is adequate in its second part, then her stay in New York may have played the same role.

¹⁴⁸ "LSE reaffirms that President Tsai has doctorate in law", *Taipei Times* 07.02.2022, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2022/02/07/2003772696> (access: 08.02.2023).

¹⁴⁹ University of London statement on missing thesis, University of London, 02.2022, <https://www.london.ac.uk/news-opinion/media-statements/university-london-statement-missing-thesis> (access: 08.02.2023).

¹⁵⁰ Tsai Ing-Wen, *Unfair trade practices and safeguard actions [A digital copy of Ing-wen Tsai's personal copy of the original thesis presented to the Library in 2019.]*. PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, LSE Theses Online, <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/3976/> (access: 08.02.2023).

¹⁵¹ *President Tsai*. Office of the President.

¹⁵² "A Woman of Many Parts: Tsai Ing-wen"

¹⁵³ Interview no. 35.

¹⁵⁴ *President Tsai*. Office of the President; "Progressive Leadership".

¹⁵⁵ 委員蔡英文, 立法院, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220202013155/https://www.ly.gov.tw/Pages/List.aspx?nodeid=1510> (access: 08.02.2023).

MAC the Advisory Committee (1994-1995), and a member of the Copyright Commission to the Ministry of the Interior (1997-1999).¹⁵⁶ She was also a spokeswoman during Koo Chen-fu (C.F. Koo), a businessman and diplomat who arranged first talks between ROC and PRC, visit to China as Chair of the Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF)¹⁵⁷. Politically most importantly, she became a member of two influential councils: Senior Adviser to the Mainland Affairs Council (1994-1998) and Senior Adviser to the National Security Council (1999-2000)¹⁵⁸. This was the result of the trust from then president Lee Teng-hui, “the father of Taiwan’s democracy”¹⁵⁹ the key politician in contemporary history of Taiwan. Tsai Ing-wen became one of Lee’s “most valued counselors”¹⁶⁰ and is credited to be one of the authors,¹⁶¹ if not the author,¹⁶² of the “state-to-state” theory announced by Lee Teng-hui in 1999.¹⁶³ Lee Teng-hui’s influence cannot be underestimated: he had a profound effect on Tsai Ing-wen: “Lee Teng-hui with his charisma was impressive for her” commented one interviewee, an important bureaucrat in her administration, adding that if Tsai Ing-wen had a role model in politics, then it was Lee Teng-hui¹⁶⁴ (other sources claim Tsai admires Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel)¹⁶⁵. Another interviewee, a political scientist, added that Lee Teng-hui “is a source of inspiration for Tsai Ing-wen”, she has “poured her content into his idea of the Republic of China on Taiwan.”¹⁶⁶ Becoming advisor to Lee Teng-hui became the first turning point of Tsai Ing-wen’s (political) life.¹⁶⁷ The second turning point was when Tsai was appointed as the chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council of the Executive Yuan in May 2000.¹⁶⁸ This is de facto a ministry in all but name, a one that handles relations with People’s Republic of China, so by nature it is a very powerful political body, in the past chaired by a handful of influential Taiwanese politicians,¹⁶⁹ including one future vice president, Vincent Siew (2008-2012).¹⁷⁰ It is also considered as one of the most difficult ministries in the cabinet to handle due to the complexity of

¹⁵⁶ *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*, 06TAIPEI221_a, Confidential, Taiwan American Institute, Taipei, Public Library of US Diplomacy, Wikileaks, https://web.archive.org/web/20160426044810/https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06TAIPEI221_a.html (access: 25.02.2023); Tsai Ing-wen, “A New Era in Cross-Strait Relations? Taiwan and China in the WTO”, *Heritage Foundation Report* 14.01.2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180824114821/https://www.heritage.org/trade/report/new-era-cross-strait-relations-taiwan-and-china-the-wto> (access: 08.02.2023).

¹⁵⁷ *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*.

¹⁵⁸ *President Tsai*. Office of the President.

¹⁵⁹ “Taiwan's 'Mr Democracy' Lee Teng-hui championed island, defied China”, *Reuters* 30.07.2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-lee-obituary/taiwans-mr-democracy-lee-teng-hui-championed-island-defied-china-idUSKCN24V2AF> (access: 08.02.2023); “Lee Teng-hui, Taiwan's 'father of democracy', dies aged 97”, *The Economist*, 30.07.2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/30/lee-teng-hui-taiwan-father-of-democracy-first-president-dies-aged-97>

¹⁶⁰ “A Woman of Many Parts: Tsai Ing-wen”.

¹⁶¹ “Tsai Ing-wen: Taiwan’s quiet revolutionary”.

¹⁶² *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*.

¹⁶³ “Two-state’ theory considered Lee Teng-hui’s main political legacy, Taipei Representative Office, Bratislava 30.07.2020, https://www.roc-taiwan.org/sk_en/post/2331.html (access: 08.02.2023); more about the background: “The Glorious Contradictions of Lee Teng-hui”, *The Diplomat* 18.08.2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/the-glorious-contradictions-of-lee-teng-hui/>(access: 08.02.2023).

¹⁶⁴ Interview no. 35.

¹⁶⁵ “Tsai Ing-wen: former professor on course to be most powerful woman in Chinese-speaking world”; “Tsai Ing-wen’s Taiwan quiet revolutionary.”

¹⁶⁶ Interview no. 34.

¹⁶⁷ “A Woman of Many Parts: Tsai Ing-wen”.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ “Tsai Ing-wen: Taiwan’s quiet revolutionary”

¹⁷⁰ 组图：盘点民进党历届党主席，第十二、第十三届党主席：蔡英文，人民网 25.05.2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200115024454/http://tw.people.com.cn/GB/26741/17990591.html> (access: 27.02.2023).

Cross-Strait relations, limited funds (and unlimited emotions accompanying these relations on both sides of the Strait) as well as due to pressure from three sides: the CPC, one's own party and Taiwan's opposition party.¹⁷¹ For Tsai Ing-wen, the chairwomanship of the Council (de facto ministership) became the first top political position to hold. She was the first female to lead this Council¹⁷². Some, like one of her current top officials, say she was given this post thanks to her “experience”¹⁷³; others suggest it was a political decision¹⁷⁴ by the first ever ROC President from the DPP, Chen Shui-bian¹⁷⁵, who nominated Tsai after becoming the President in May 2000. Probably it was both. Although Tsai was not a member of political party back then, a nomination for such key, sensible post must have been political. Apparently Tsai was “well-trusted”¹⁷⁶ by Chen Shui-bian¹⁷⁷ and the DPP and was later called a strong supporter of Cheng Shui-bian's policies.¹⁷⁸ She is considered to be “the mastermind” behind Chen's “active opening, effective management” policy for cross-Strait economic exchanges adopted in late 2001.¹⁷⁹ And this is evidenced by the fact that it was Tsai who mediated between Chen and the Americans in 2002 after the president caused stir with his remarks that Taiwan and China are “one country on each side” of the Taiwan Strait; Tsai went to Washington D.C. to explain what her boss had in mind and she convinced the Americans that Taipei was not changing the status quo.¹⁸⁰ Later on she was “the architect” of Taiwan's efforts to secure a free trade agreement with the USA.¹⁸¹ So, Tsai must have been close to Chen Shui-bian. Later proved to be a burden for her after he left his post in disgrace in 2008.

Politicalness, however, doesn't exclude expertise. Tsai Ing-wen proved to be a competent minister: she became the first chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council to serve a full 4-years term and she ranked first in the satisfaction polls of the cabinet ministers¹⁸². Her most important achievement was opening the “mini three links” (small-scale trade, air and post) between ROC and PRC from 1st January 2001.¹⁸³ This required

¹⁷¹ “中國如何看待蔡英文”, 美麗島電子報 02.10.2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20180128134329/http://www.my-formosa.com/DOC_13717.htm/ (access: 08.02.2023).

¹⁷² 【台灣演義】蔡英文傳奇, 民視新聞, 15.03.2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190114004206/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvvOEp2qXU> (access: 08.02.2023)
歷任主任委員任期,大陸委員會, 23.02.2021, <https://www.mac.gov.tw/cp.aspx?n=69594088D2AB9C50> (access: 08.02.2023)

¹⁷³ Interview no. 35.

¹⁷⁴ “Тайваньские выборы: напрасна ли встреча лидеров Тайваня и КНР?” ЭКД, 27.11.2015, <http://ekd.me/2015/11/taiwan-election-2016/> (access: 08.02.2023).

¹⁷⁵ Chen Shui-bian won the 2000 elections as a result of a split of factions within the KMT, when a popular candidate James Soong, sidelined in party politics, ran for the presidency as an independent against the party nominee Lien Chan. Combined voices for Chan and Soong would have guaranteed one of them presidency but since they ran separately, it was Chen Shui-bian who benefitted from it, becoming the first ever DPP president.

¹⁷⁶ “Vice Premier Tsai is nobody's fool,” *Taipei Times* 13.08.2006, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2006/08/13/2003322996> (access: 26.02.2023).

¹⁷⁷ she was assertive with her boss, at one time even contradicting his policy in public (in 2000, over the interpretation of “1992” consensus, *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ “Vice Premier Tsai is nobody's fool”.

¹⁸¹ *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*.

¹⁸² “中國如何看待蔡英文”.

¹⁸³ 抵金造勢 蔡英文：將致力兩岸和平, 金門日報 03.12.2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180830181207/http://www.kmdn.gov.tw/1117/1271/1272/261244> (access: 26.02.2023); “A Woman of Many Parts: Tsai Ing-wen”

amending the Cross-Strait Act from 1992¹⁸⁴ in the Legislative Yuan and, equally difficult if not more challenging, negotiating with Beijing, always ill-inclined towards the DPP. As Tsai later remarked, she made “three mini links” from the scratch in six months.¹⁸⁵ Besides that continued the practice of direct cross-strait charter flights for the Spring Festival¹⁸⁶ and ended dispute with Hong Kong over aviation rights.¹⁸⁷ During her chairmanship of the Council, Tsai employed a low profile style in her work and private life which she retained throughout her career; she either did not talk to the press at all or did so by cautious and reserved way; she drove her car by her own (despite having the right to a driver) and refused the service of bodyguards¹⁸⁸. Her work style was praised by the both sides of the Taiwanese politics, the pan-blue and pan green parties, impressed by her “professionalism”, “perseverance”, and “firmness”; she was “highly respected by everyone” and one of the legislators even called her performance a “role model” for government officials¹⁸⁹. Tsai was “one of the few cabinet members who won the respect of members of the Legislative Yuan”; when presenting her policies she was “tough but expressed herself clearly and persuasively in defending the administration's cross-Strait policies.”¹⁹⁰

In 2004, after Chen Shui-bian's re-election, which came as an unwanted surprise for both Beijing and KMT,¹⁹¹ Tsai joined the DPP, confirming widely held conviction about her pro-green sympathies¹⁹². This made her a “latecomer” to Taiwan's political life.¹⁹³ Soon afterwards she was nominated by the party to be a candidate for Legislative Yuan; she was also the DPP campaign manager for the Taipei County local elections.¹⁹⁴ On 11th December 2005 she was elected as a legislator-at-large, starting her work from 11th January 2005 and serving in the Legislative Yuan for a bit more than one year.¹⁹⁵ Among her other activities in the Yuan, Tsai was a member of the Finance Committee.¹⁹⁶ On 2th January 2006 Tsai quit as a legislator to become appointed as Vice Premier (or to use the exact nomenclature, the Vice President of the Executive Yuan) under Su Tseng-chang, former President Office Secretary General, on 26th January 2006.¹⁹⁷ She was

¹⁸⁴ *Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area*, 31.07.1992, Law&Regulations Database of the Republic of China (Taiwan), <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=Q0010001> (access: 27.02.2023).

¹⁸⁵ “抵金造勢 蔡英文：將致力兩岸和平,金門日報”

¹⁸⁶ 「兩岸直航」政策之研究—從「春節包機直航」個案談起, NPF Research Report 11.03.2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190114004207/https://web.archive.org/web/20160304071131/http://old.npf.org.tw/PUBLICATION/SD/094/SD-R-094-006.htm> (access: 26.02.2023).

¹⁸⁷ 台港航約主權歧見終獲解決, New Taiwan, 15.04.2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190114004206/https://web.archive.org/web/20180128190555/http://www.newtaiwan.com.tw/bulletinview.jsp?bulletinid=8859> (access: 26.02.2023).

¹⁸⁸ “Vice Premier Tsai is nobody's fool”.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*.

¹⁹¹ This time KMT candidates, Lien Chan and James Soong went together in the elections, they did not repeat the same mistake, but they lost again to Chen Shui-bian, much to their own surprise, and to the surprise of Beijing.

¹⁹² 组图：盘点民进党历届党主席，第十二、第十三届党主席：蔡英文。

¹⁹³ “Tsai Ing-wen: former professor on course to be most powerful woman in Chinese-speaking world”.

¹⁹⁴ *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*.

¹⁹⁵ Tsai concurrently served as chairwoman of the Consumer Protection Commission, “About Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen”.

¹⁹⁶ “委員蔡英文,立法院”.

¹⁹⁷ “About Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen”.

the first female Vice Premier¹⁹⁸ and was tasked to take charge of the economic and financial issues which were considered not a strong point of Su Tseng-chang.¹⁹⁹ Premier Su presented her as “a talented person well-versed in economic and financial affairs and cross-strait relations.”²⁰⁰ Already then she was described as a “cool strategist,” an “articulate academic-turned-politician (...) known for her negotiating skills.”²⁰¹ After a while of working at this position, Tsai Ing-wen was called “nobody’s fool” and continued her low-profile, professional style.²⁰² By some she was called more informally as “Xiaolongnü”, or Little Dragon Girl,²⁰³ a reference to a fictional protagonist from a kung-fu (*wuxia*) novel “The Return of the Condor Heroes” by Jing Yong; in this novel Xiaolongnü “appears cold and indifferent” but “cannot be underestimated.”²⁰⁴ A leaked US cable from 2006 called her “tough,” “extremely capable and very persuasive,” a “tenacious negotiator,” who “acquired impressive economic experience”; and “the kind of lawyer most skilled at finding reasons not to do things.”²⁰⁵ Already then she was considered “a technocrat,” which was later complemented by characteristics of her “moderate and soft spoken personality” that coupled with “academic and professional qualifications” disarms her competitors “who would do well not to underestimate [her].”²⁰⁶ The last advice was ignored by many political competitors in late 2000s and early 2010s.

During her Vice Premiership tenure her father, Tsai Chieh-sheng, passed away on 7th July 2006, month before the important economic conference on Sustaining Taiwan's Economic Development which took place at the end of July and where Tsai played key role. Despite the death of her father, Tsai continued her work and took a leave only after the conclusion of the conference.²⁰⁷ Tsai Ing-wen served as Vice Premier for a bit more than one year. After Su Tseng-chang lost DPP’s primary for the 2008 presidential election to Frank Hsieh, he resigned in May 2007 from premiership along with his cabinet, Tsai Ing-wen including.²⁰⁸ After ending her vice premiership, Tsai collaborated with Academia Sinica and with the Institute for Biotechnology and Medicine Industry to help draft the 2007 Act for the Development of Biotech and New Pharmaceuticals Industry; the law is said to have fostered the growth of the local biotech sector.²⁰⁹ Subsequently, she moved to business, becoming the chair of Yu Chang Biologics Co. (later known as TaiMed Biologics Inc.), a biotechnology company, where her family invested (by her own account, persuaded by Tsai).²¹⁰ This seemingly uncontroversial appointment became a political issue in during the presidential campaign of 2011. When Tsai challenged the incumbent President Ma Ying-jeou as DPP candidate for presidency, the KMT

¹⁹⁸ “【台灣演義】蔡英文傳奇, 民視新聞”

¹⁹⁹ *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*.

²⁰⁰ “Tsai Ing-wen confirmed as Su deputy”, Taipei Times 21.01.2006, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2006/01/21/2003290001> (access: 27.02.2023).

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² “Tsai Ing-wen: former professor on course to be most powerful woman in Chinese-speaking world”; “Vice Premier Tsai is nobody’s fool”.

²⁰³ “中國如何看待蔡英文”, 美麗島電子報

²⁰⁴ *Xiaolongnü*, Wikipedia.org, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiaolongnü> (access: 27.02.2023).

²⁰⁵ *Taiwan's New Vice Premier Tsai Ing-Wen - Biographic Information (C-A15-01647)*

²⁰⁶ “Tsai Ing-wen: former professor on course to be most powerful woman in Chinese-speaking world”;

²⁰⁷ “Vice Premier Tsai is nobody’s fool”.

²⁰⁸ Taiwanese prime minister resigns, BBC 12.05.2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6649101.stm> (access: 27.02.2023).

²⁰⁹ “Progressive Leadership”.

²¹⁰ “Taiwan DPP presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen strongly defends integrity in biotech investment case”, *Taiwan News* 16.12.2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20150102090712/http://www.taiwannews.com.tw/etn/news_content.php?id=1788969 (access: 27.02.2023).

alleged that when she was Vice Premier, the cabinet of Su Tseng-chang invested in Yu Chang company with the knowledge that Tsai would join the company after serving in the government.²¹¹ She defended herself vocally and was cleared of all allegations by The Supreme Prosecutors' Office Special Investigation Division in August 2012,²¹² so already after losing the elections to Ma Ying-jeou. Although she lost due to other aspects, this “mud-slinging” tactics as she herself called it,²¹³ might have played a role in her defeat, even if secondary.

This incidents shows, by the way, that by late 2000s and early 2010s relations between Tsai Ing-wen and Ma Ying-jeou soured, evidently due to political competition and disagreements over vision for Taiwan. The latter advocated close Cross-Strait relations, especially commercial ones, and was widely believed to be hoping for a reunification with the mainland in some future. The former preferred Taiwan-centric vision,²¹⁴ in line with the growing Taiwanese localisation movement, otherwise known as Taiwanese nationalism, Taiwanese nation-building or Taiwanese consciousness.²¹⁵ Since then they have remained bad, as one political insider told me, “they don't like one another,”²¹⁶ but it was not always the case. Apparently in the lead-up to 2008 presidential elections Ma Ying-jeou even considered Tsai, by then already a DPP member, to be his running mate. There are only a circumstantial evidences to that, like Ma's remarks about not set criteria for his deputy, not defined by gender or political affiliation, and such move would have attracted centrist votes for KMT,²¹⁷ but ultimately nothing came out of it. Ma Ying-jeou won the elections anyway, while Tsai Ing-wen remained loyal to the DPP and soon took over the party, which became “the third turning point in her life.”²¹⁸

The year 2008 was a bad year for the DPP. The party lost two elections in a row: January 2008 legislative elections gave KMT a landslide, while KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou decisively won May 2008 presidential elections beating DPP's opponent Frank Hsieh. This was the consequence of corruption and other scandals surrounding the DPP's presidency of Chen Shui-bian, who ended his presidency as compromised, unpopular leader and by doing so got the party into troubles.²¹⁹ The party was in crisis, with financial and image problems, and even at the risk of a breakup.²²⁰ That opened the way for Tsai Ing-wen, who “arrived at the right time.”²²¹ On 18th May 2008 she defeated Koo Kuan-min, one of DPP legends, a dissident in 1980s,

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² “Tsai cleared of Yu Chang allegations”, *Taipei Times* 15.08.2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20141231140207/http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2012/08/15/2003540320>

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ “‘Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:’ Breakfast With Taiwan's Tsai Ing-Wen”

²¹⁵ More about the origins of it is, Shih-Jung Tzeng, *From Honto Jin to Bensheng Ren: The Origin and Development of Taiwanese National Consciousness*, University Press of America, Lanham 2009.

²¹⁶ Interview no. 33.

²¹⁷ 又傳創意組合 蔡英文會是馬英九副手搭檔? CRNTT 01.06.2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150104032844/http://hk.crntt.com/doc/1003/7/9/9/100379928.html?coluid=7&kindid=0&docid=100379928> (access: 27.02.2023).

²¹⁸ A Woman of Many Parts: Tsai Ing-wen”

²¹⁹ John F. Cooper, *The KMT Returns to Power: Elections in Taiwan 2008 to 2012*, Lanham, Boulder, Toronto New York, Lexington Books 2013, p. 111-112.

“‘Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:’ Breakfast With Taiwan's Tsai Ing-Wen”

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ “Tsai Ing-wen: former professor on course to be most powerful woman in Chinese-speaking world”;

and became the first ever chairwoman in the DPP.²²² She represented moderation, against Koo's too strong emphasis on independence,²²³ and, on a more general way, she was a face of a different DPP, outside of its core.²²⁴ The party was formed by dissidents against KMT dictatorship and its long lasting martial law, veterans of the Taiwanese democracy movement than got really off in after the Kaohsiung incident of 1979. This was "a fight Tsai mostly missed," as she was overseas "cocooned in the ivory tower."²²⁵ That made the old DPP elite obsessed with the independence, come what may, whereas Tsai represents a more centrist approach. As my interviewees told me, she is not from DPP's core,²²⁶ she represents a moderate faction within the party,²²⁷ Tsai is rather a specialist who joined the party and took it over.²²⁸ She is Taiwan-centric but will not risk declaring independence, she is fine with keeping the status quo.²²⁹ The ideas translates into political style, "If the archetypal DPP operative is a bare-knuckle street fighter, Tsai is an Olympic fencer—restrained and precise"; and that makes her "an unlikely politician, especially for the DPP."²³⁰ Nevertheless, after the Chen Shui-bian catastrophe – his failure had more to do with lack of economic successes and corruption scandals than with his pro-independence agenda but in the general mood these two things were combined – the party needed to reinvent itself. Tsai came as pragmatic choice, a technocrat who would rebuild the ruined party. At the same while many praised her professionalism and hardworking, qualities very much needed in the tedious, everyday reconstruction of a party, few believed in her as a future "promising leader."²³¹ One of her colleagues and legislator even said that she was "hiding" behind him during door to door campaign and her compared her to "a lost bunny in the forest, with wolves surrounding, both from within the party and outside."²³²

Yet she proved her critics wrong. Now, after years, Tsai is credited for transforming the DPP: she "very quickly was able to rehabilitate the DPP and make it once again a viable party within a matter of two or three years."²³³ But the beginnings were hard. Already half year after Tsai became the chairwoman of the DPP, Chen Yunlin, the chairman of ARATS (Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits, PRC's office for handling the Cross-Strait relations) visited Taiwan, becoming the first high ranking official from mainland China to do so; he signed agreements on direct passenger flights, cargo flights and cargo shipping.²³⁴ The royal reception Chen was given was a clear sign of Ma Ying-jeou's pro-Beijing stance.²³⁵

²²² "Tsai Elected as new DPP head," *The China Post*, 19.05.2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190114004206/https://web.archive.org/web/20160308113709/http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/national/national%20news/2008/05/19/157020/Tsai-elected.htm> (access: 27.02.2023).

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Interview no. 34.

²²⁵ "'Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:' Breakfast With Taiwan's Tsai Ing-Wen"

²²⁶ Interview no. 27; another respondent said that now she is the core, but agreed that Tsai is not from the origins of the party, Interview no. 34.

²²⁷ Interview no. 27.

²²⁸ Interview no. 27, no. 31 and 33.

²²⁹ Interview no. 22.

²³⁰ "'Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:' Breakfast With Taiwan's Tsai Ing-Wen"

²³¹ Cooper, *The KMT Returns to Power*, p. 111; "Progressive Leadership".

²³² "'Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:' Breakfast With Taiwan's Tsai Ing-Wen"

²³³ "Tsai Ing-wen: former professor on course to be most powerful woman in Chinese-speaking world."

²³⁴ "Security tight as Chinese negotiator visits Taiwan to cement closer ties", *The Guardian* 04.11.2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/nov/04/chen-yunlin-china-taiwan-independence> (access: 27.02.2023).

²³⁵ Jerome F. Keating, *Taiwan. The Struggle Gains Focus*, SMC Publishing, Taipei 2020, p. 28.

In protest against the visit DPP under Tsai staged rallies, but these went out of hand and turned into riots; DPP that was blamed more for it than KMT.²³⁶ To make matters worse, Tsai back then was considered to be under influence of now strongly unpopular Chen Shui-bian. She, however, liberated herself from too close association with him once his corruption activities became obvious and couldn't have been presented as only KMT's political revenge.²³⁷ In 2008 Chen resigned from the party, while Tsai and the chairman apologized to the public, and declared the DPP "would not cover up for Chen,"²³⁸ and declared that he and his family (including his influential wife) "should face their moral problems"; politically speaker, it was a critical pivot for her.²³⁹ She moved away from one of her previous political patrons, who now became a burden for both her and the party. Throwing a former boss under the bus was a necessary price to be paid by Tsai for both the party and her own career. It allowed the reconstruction of the DPP.

Nevertheless, it took time before the DPP fully recovered after Chen Shui-bian's stigma. The party lost, albeit not decisively, the 2009 (partial) local elections; such defeat on honourable terms was even considered by some "an important, though small, victory" for the DPP.²⁴⁰ The growing trend continued in another local elections in 2010, where DPP won the total vote count (but KMT won more mayoral seats).²⁴¹ This another steady sign of party's progress and political recovery came to Tsai with a bitter pill: this time she herself has lost her own bid to become mayor of New Taipei City (she lost with Eric Chu from KMT). This was her first bid for a top political position.²⁴² In 2012 she lost again, this time presidential elections narrowly to Ma Ying-jeou²⁴³. This was another turning point for her, from then on she rebuilt her position, and won two presidential elections in a row (2016, 2020), becoming the first female president in Taiwan's history and currently the most important female politician in Asia. Tsai Ing-wen succeeded in her presidency: enhanced the global profile of her country and awed the world by combating Covid-19 pandemic in a model way. Her successful policymaking both before becoming a President (her role for paving way for Taiwan to WTO in 2002) and after (rebuilding economy, aptly handling Covid-19 crisis, skillfully navigating the stormy waters of Cross-Strait relations, initiating New Southbound Policy as well as other successes) deserve praise and attention. It makes Tsai Ing-wen an inspiring example of female political leadership.

A Comparative analysis of Tsai Ing-wen and Aung San Suu Kyi

Now it is time to compare Tsai Ing-wen and Aung San Suu Kyi, two remarkable female political leaders. Why such choice? Why these two? First, because these two female politicians are very different leaders, and these differences make it an interesting case study. Second, it is because Tsai Ing-wen is now the most

²³⁶ Cooper, *The KMT Returns to Power*, p. 112.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112-113.

²³⁸ "Disgraced Chen quits the DPP," *The China Post*, 16.08.2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150102082038/http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/national/national-news/2008/08/16/170280/Disgraced-Chen.htm> (access: 27.02.2023).

²³⁹ Cooper, *The KMT Returns to Power*, p. 113.

²⁴⁰ Stefan Braig, "Signs of Change? An Analysis of Taiwan's December 2009 Local Elections", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, vol. 39, no. 1/2010, p. 175-197.

²⁴¹ Qi Dontdao, "Taiwan's 2010 Municipal Elections", *EAI Background Brief* no. 584, NUS, <https://research.nus.edu.sg/eai/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/BB584.pdf> (access: 27.02.2023).

²⁴² "Tsai Ing-wen: former professor on course to be most powerful woman in Chinese-speaking world"

²⁴³ Due to time constraints in preparing this report, the last part of Tsai Ing-wen's profile (the 2010s decade and post 2020 years) is presented here only briefly; it will be more developed in the planned articles about Tsai Ing-wen.

important, most influential and most famous Asian female political leader,²⁴⁴ whereas Aung San Suu Kyi used to be that one, at the peak of her career in 2000s and 2010s she was probably one of the most famous Asian leader.²⁴⁵ So a comparison between the currently most important and influential female political leader and a previous one makes sense, let alone given the differences between these two.

The differences and similarities between Tsai Ing-wen and Aung San Suu Kyi overlap in an intriguing way. The family background is the obvious first difference between them. Aung San Suu Kyi was born into a political dynasty (or rather created one as she followed up her father's footsteps in politics), Tsai Ing-wen was not. Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of Aung San, the legendary leader of Burma/Myanmar, which is even reflected in her name.²⁴⁶ Tsai Ing-wen, on the other hand was not born into a political dynasty, her father was a wealthy businessman from commercial elites, but was not a politician. Theoretically speaking it means that Suu Kyi could have used the Asian "shortcut"²⁴⁷ for power for female leaders (dynastic link), and she did, whereas Tsai Ing-wen could not. Tsai in politics is a self-made woman. At the same time, there is one unexpected similarity, a common thing between Suu Kyi and Tsai: regardless of being or not from a political dynasty, they both did not plan their political career. If Suu Kyi had specific plans about her professional life, it was in the sphere of academia, first in political science, then in literature studies. Prior to entering politics she tried to enroll into PhD in political science (and failed) and successfully pursued MPhil in literature studies (yet did not finish it due to political engagement in Burma).²⁴⁸ The illness of her mother (which forced her to come back to Rangoon) and the outbreak of 8888 revolution in Burma changed her plans and made her a politician.²⁴⁹ Initially, in 1988 she was "an accidental" politician,²⁵⁰ but developed into a full-time politician by late 1980s early 1990s. Tsai Ing-wen was in a way also an "accidental" politician, though her entry into politics was more gradual and less dramatic. Probably, in accordance with her father's will, she had planned her career as a lawyer, and initially did so, at academia. She was a professor at NCCU and Soochow University and might have lived her life this way if she was not invited to serve as an expert-advisor to a number of government units. From there she gradually entered politics, first as government bureaucrat, then as politician. Tsai also did not plan to be a politician, rather politics "swallowed" her on the way. Just like Suu Kyi, Tsai adjusted and managed quite well. So, the notion of "accidental" politician is common to Tsai and Suu Kyi despite the difference of family background.

²⁴⁴ Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh comes to mind as another candidate for this title, although global importance of Bangladesh (let alone its influence or development) cannot be compared to that of Taiwan.

²⁴⁵ Probably the second most famous after the the Dalai Lama.

²⁴⁶ The Burmese don't have surnames, only names. In case of Aung San Suu Kyi, first two names were given after her father, third after her grandmother and fourth after her mother. The third one, Suu, is used as informal name; internationally it is accepted to write about her using either full name or shorter version Suu Kyi or sometimes acronym ASSK which she uses herself. Girls in Burma/Myanmar rarely get their names after their fathers, even after famous one. There is a set of names for both sex and "Aung San" (meaning "great victory") is definitely a masculine one, so Aung San Suu Kyi is a rarity, the daughters of other political leaders usually don't have the name of their fathers. This exception reflects Aung San's towering political position in mid-20th century Burma.

²⁴⁷ Ludwig, *King of the Mountain*, p. 22

²⁴⁸ Justin Wintle, *Perfect Hostage. Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma and the Generals*, London: Arrows 2007;

Peter Popham, *Aung San Suu Kyi. The Lady and the Peacock*, London: Rider, 2011.

²⁴⁹ More: Michał Lubina, *A Hybrid Politician. A Political Biography of Aung San Suu Kyi*, London-New York: Routledge 2021.

²⁵⁰ Martin Morland, "Valedictory Dispatch to Douglas Hurd," 26.04.1990, Confidential, "Internal Affairs" FCO, The National Archive, Kew.

As far as family is concerned, there are other similarities. The first in the influence of fathers. Suu Kyi's father, Aung San was bigger-than-life person, mythologized by both her family and the state propaganda. Although Suu Kyi did not know him as he was killed when she was only three years old, almost all her life she tried to prove to be worthy of him. This is evidenced directly (by her quotes of him being her life's biggest love or about her talking to his picture during the house arrest) as well as indirectly.²⁵¹ Her idea of "finishing her father's task" is probably Suu Kyi's most important political idea, albeit vague as "the task" is unspecified (probably it means making Myanmar great, restoring the country's status).²⁵² Although Suu Kyi with time developed her own political identity, politically speaking she ceased to be just the daughter of Aung San, his influence has always been present in her life. Politically without Aung San there would not have been Aung San Suu Kyi, this is as simple as that. The influence of Tsai Ing-wen's father is not political (it would be interesting to know, by the way, if Tsai's father approved her DPP political outlook), as it is in Suu Kyi's case, but personal. It was her father who told her to study law and she finished her PhD studies quicker in order to please him. So it must have been important for her to prove her father (and siblings) wrong on the issue of not considering her capable of a successful career. So, although differently, both Suu Kyi and Tsai in their lives worked hard to prove to be worthy of the fathers.

The other aspect concerns Tsai's father indirectly. As written previously, when he passed away, she continued her work as Vice Premier in preparation for an important conference and took a leave only once the conference concluded. Aung San Suu Kyi's story is much more dramatic yet similar in a way. When her younger brother drowned in a pool next to family house, her mother, then already a widow after assassinated Aung San and a government servant, upon hearing the news of the death of her child, did not terminate her work; she stayed at the office and came back home only after finishing her daily schedule.²⁵³ Suu Kyi herself followed this way of prioritizing work/politics over family in a more dramatic setting. Throughout her political struggle with the generals in late 1980s and 1990s, they constantly attacked her marriage to an Englishman, Michael Aris, knowing well that this was her politically weak point. They kept the spouses separated and limited the opportunities for Suu Kyi's children to visit their mother. This was all done in purpose to force Suu Kyi to return to the UK. She didn't. By 1999 the events turned even more dramatic when her husband was diagnosed with cancer. The generals did not let him into the country, and even cut the last telephone conversation between spouses. All in order to break Suu Kyi. That proved to be in vain. Suu Kyi stayed in Myanmar, Michael Aris died without seeing his wife while Suu Kyi remained committed to her political struggle, understood as public service in the very footsteps of her parents.²⁵⁴ Thus, although circumstances were much different (Suu Kyi's life-cum-political choices deserve a good movie, or even a Shakespeare-style drama), both attitudes show a dedication to work, to public service at the expense of personal life. This, by the way, shows that the "double bind" dilemma mentioned in the theoretical part of

²⁵¹ Wintle, *Perfect Hostage*; "Dark Victory in Burma," *Vogue Magazine*, Oct. 1995.

²⁵² More: Lubina, *A Hybrid Politician*.

²⁵³ Wintle, *Perfect Hostage*; Barbara Victor, *The Lady. Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Laureate and Burma's Prisoner*, Faber & Faber 2002, p. 101-117.

²⁵⁴ More: Lubina, *A Hybrid Politician*.

this report was resolved by both Tsai Ing-wen and Aung San Suu Kyi by sacrificing family life at the altar of politics. In the case of Suu Kyi it was much more dramatic. In the case of Tsai Ing-wen there is no certain, confirmed information as she guards her private life quite effectively, rarely talks about it and does not reveal much.²⁵⁵ However, one of my interviewees revealed that just before the 2016 elections a person very close to Tsai had a car accident and ended up in a coma,²⁵⁶ so perhaps the sacrifice of private life at the altar of politics was more enforced than made voluntarily. In case of Suu Kyi the separation of her from her family was also not consensual, it was done by her political enemies, but she nevertheless had a choice: she could have chosen family over politics, but decided the latter was more important. Nevertheless, the very fact that female politicians are still forced to such agonizing choices is extremely unfortunate.

A side aspect of the discussion here concerns the private-cum-public sphere. Aung San Suu Kyi's private life was quite exposed to the public, in both Myanmar and beyond. It happened without her consent, it was done by both the Burmese generals and Western media, though her husband also played a minor role here as he revealed some important private details while editing "Freedom from Fear and other Writings," a collection of Suu Kyi's essays and speeches.²⁵⁷ Consequently, Suu Kyi's family drama became a global spectacle, with media delving into private details, and hurting Suu Kyi's children on the way. This was an important part of Suu Kyi's celebrity image in the West²⁵⁸; never mind that unplanned and unwanted by her. Due to this celebrity logic Suu Kyi was first a beloved figure in the West for a bit more than two decades (late 1980s-early 2010s) and then a detested person, accused of betraying the values.²⁵⁹ Tsai Ing-wen in this regard is much more happy. Her private life remains heavily guarded and is widely unknown to the public. Although gossiping is a norm in conversations about her, this is it. The media did not meddle into her personal affairs and do not cause havoc in her family life the way they did with Suu Kyi.

Moving on to other differences and similarities, both Aung San Suu Kyi and Tsai Ing-wen after completing their education at home (or in other Asian country, India in case of Suu Kyi) studied abroad, in the Anglo-Saxon universities: Suu Kyi at Oxford whereas Tsai at Cornell and LSE. Consequently, they both lived in both London and (in or around) New York²⁶⁰. And they both studied not what they really wanted: Suu Kyi enrolled at PPE, Philosophy, Politics, and Economy, probably at the influence of her mother (it is unknown what she herself had dreamed of studying; if there was anything specific); Tsai studied law and trade due to the pressure of her father although if given the choice probably she would have preferred archeology. At Oxford Suu Kyi lost her heart to her studies and tried to change the major into literature studies and even

²⁵⁵ For example: "Throughout our interview, Tsai was continually friendly and smiling, but always in a very composed way. It was only when the issue of "being single" came up that she seemed to let her hair down a little and, with a crooked smile, replied: "In today's society, a person who is not married can still get all the things that marriage has to offer," "A woman of many parts".

²⁵⁶ Interview no. 34.

²⁵⁷ Michael Aris, Introduction, [in:] *Freedom From Fear and other Writings*, eds. Michael Aris, London, Penguin Books 1991, p. 193. Apparently, Suu Kyi was furious about that and forbade him talking to the media later on.

²⁵⁸ Hans-Bernd Zöllner, *The Beast and the Beauty, The History of the Conflict Between the Military and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, 1988–2011, Set in a Global Context*, Berlin: Regiospectra, 2011; Lisa Brooten, 'The Feminization of Democracy Under Siege: The Media, "the Lady" of Burma, and U.S. Foreign Policy' *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 17, No.3 (2005).

²⁵⁹ Andrew Selth, 'Aung San Suu Kyi and the Politics of Personality' *Griffith Asia Institute Regional Outlook Paper*, no. 55 (2017).

²⁶⁰ Suu Kyi lived in New York City after finishing her studies, she worked at the UN and lived in Manhattan. Tsai studied at Cornell and presumably lived in Ithaca, near New York City.

into forestry but was rejected. She finished her studies but with a C mark.²⁶¹ This makes her an intriguing case study of an outstanding politician who was a poor political science student (perhaps the theory taught at Oxford University had little in common with Burmese political reality). Tsai was a much better student, finishing her LSE ahead of time. Maybe this translates into political styles. Tsai Ing-wen in my interviews was most often described as a “technocrat”, “pragmatist”, “moderate”²⁶², a person who “entered politics from the field of international trade and economics”²⁶³ which makes her a “balanced, calm and rational.” Some even describe Tsai’s style as that of a wonky.²⁶⁴ Certainly she is experienced in economy, both theoretically and practically; to put it simply, she is an economic expert. Suu Kyi, on the other hand is anything but a specialist in the economic field. In her public remarks, Suu Kyi has always shied away from economic topics, preferring philosophical and ethical themes instead.²⁶⁵ Apparently she is deeply uninterested in the economic aspects of politics; her critics even say that she is incompetent at it.²⁶⁶ Certainly she used to have several economic advisors, including foreign ones.²⁶⁷ The difference between Tsai and Suu Kyi in this regard could not have been greater.

Reversely, Aung San Suu Kyi is a charismatic leader, whereas Tsai Ing-wen is rather not. The former, since her Shwedagon speech of 1988²⁶⁸, has electrified the crowds in Burma/Myanmar and beyond. She knew how to win the hearts and minds of the Burmese people and foreigners alike (in the latter case up to a point, until mid-2010). The best examples of that are her remarks over the gate of her house in 1995 and 1996²⁶⁹ as well as many international speeches, including Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech²⁷⁰, speech to US Congress²⁷¹ or a speech to UK parliament.²⁷² Anyone who has ever heard or watched Suu Kyi, both live²⁷³ or on TV, will have to admit that she is charismatic speaker. It is very different with Tsai Ing-wen. She used to be a bad speaker, losing TV debate with Ma Ying-jeou during the campaign for 2012 presidency was one of the reasons why Tsai lost this competition.²⁷⁴ Since then she has improved,²⁷⁵ her speeches from mid 2010s are better yet they remain still more technocratic and hermetic than rhetorically attractive. My interviewees emphasized the fact that Tsai always reads from notes, is “always to the script”²⁷⁶ and never

²⁶¹ Wintle, *Perfect Hostage*; Popham, *The Lady and the Peacock*.

²⁶² Interview no. 27 and 33.

²⁶³ Interview no. 35.

²⁶⁴ “‘Reunification Is a Decision to Be Made By the People Here:’ Breakfast With Taiwan’s Tsai Ing-Wen”,

²⁶⁵ More: Michał Lubina, *The Moral Democracy. The Political Thought of Aung San Suu Kyi*, Warsaw, Scholar 2018.

²⁶⁶ Retired Ambassador Derek Tonkin, personal communication, 2020.

²⁶⁷ The most famous of these, Sean Thurnell, was jailed after the 2021 Burmese coup d’état and spent 650 days in custody. Probably the junta also believed that Suu Kyi was incompetent in economics and alleged that he, a foreigner, was the head economic strategist of Suu Kyi’s government.

²⁶⁸ Aung San Suu Kyi, “Speech at Shwedagon”, [in:] *Freedom From Fear and other Writings*, eds. Michael Aris, London, Penguin Books 1991, p. 193.

²⁶⁹ *Daw Suu’s 25 Dialogues with the People 1995–1996*, ed. H.-B. Zöllner, Hamburg–Yangon: Abera Verlag, 2014.

²⁷⁰ Aung San Suu Kyi, *Nobel Lecture*, 16.06.2012, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1991/kyi/lecture/> (access: 28.02.2023).

²⁷¹ Aung San Suu Kyi, *Congressional Gold Medal Acceptance Address*, 19.09.2012, Washington D.C., <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/aungsansuukyicongressionalmedal.htm> (access: 28.02.2023).

²⁷² *Aung San Suu Kyi’s Speech at the British Parliament* (Burmese Subtitles), VOA Burmese 22.06.2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtHfBJGrp-c> (access: 28.02.2023).

²⁷³ I did so in 2013, watching her Kapuscinski lecture in Warsaw, Poland.

²⁷⁴ Interview no. 33.

²⁷⁵ Interview no. 27.

²⁷⁶ Interview no. 7.

“spontaneous.”²⁷⁷ One of my interviewees, a diplomat, called Tsai style an “Asian charisma.”²⁷⁸ Another one was quite critical of that saying that Tsai never says anything by herself.²⁷⁹ Certainly this hermetic-technocratic style has many benefits. It reflects the volatile atmosphere of Cross-Strait relations where precise and accuracy matter: one wrong word could spark a crisis, if not a conflict. By being so technocratic, by the way, Tsai is a difficult opponent for the People’s Republic of China, as Beijing cannot catch her on saying a word too much.²⁸⁰ Nevertheless, this hermetic style probably reflects Tsai’s own character. All in all, public speaking is certainly Aung San Suu Kyi’s stronger card.

In other aspects of female leadership theory, Tsai Ing-wen and Aung San Suu Kyi also share one thing in common: direct or indirect rejection of feminism, or the Western understanding of it. Although Suu Kyi employed a feminine style of dress, she rejected feminist approach.²⁸¹ Later on she used mother of the nation style of leadership.²⁸² Tsai Ing-wen either hides her femininity or employs a masculine image, like in her famous film with a bazooka.²⁸³ This is probably the result of bad experiences in her first terms with certain group of people, especially men from Defense Ministry and more generally military men, who due to cultural reasons had problems with accepting a woman as the leader.²⁸⁴ However, with time Tsai managed to quiet these voices; today this is no longer a problem.²⁸⁵ Although, according to some of my interviewees, being a “soft but strong” female political leader helps her,²⁸⁶ she would prefer to be considered as a strong leader, regardless of her gender.²⁸⁷ This attitude is clear: when I interviewed one of the top members of her presidential administration, my interlocutor paid only a lip service to questions about gender, while comprehensively replying to other.²⁸⁸ This attitude has promoted some of my interlocutors to say that Taiwan is not using the political PR opportunities offered by a female leader to a full extent; Taipei could have “played” more this card.²⁸⁹ However, her administration does not do it probably because Tsai herself does not want it. This is, in a way, again an example of a strategy mean to resolve the “double bind”.

Finally, the last critical difference is the one about political effectiveness. At first glance there seems to be little doubt that Tsai Ing-wen achieved more political successes than Aung San Suu Kyi. She had her role in paving way for Taiwan to WTO in 2002, she rebuilt her party after 2008 and, having become the President, she rebuilt the economy, aptly handled Covid-19 crisis, skilfully navigated the stormy waters of Cross-Strait relations and enhanced the global profile of Taiwan Unsurprisingly Encyclopaedia Britannica labelled

²⁷⁷ Interviews no. 2, 6, 22

²⁷⁸ Interview no. 6

²⁷⁹ The respondent complemented this by given an anecdote of the respondent’s daughter who did not prepare for a school speech but improvised and succeeded; when she came back home her parents told her: “you are better than the president”, Interview no. 22.

²⁸⁰ Interviews no. 33 and 34.

²⁸¹ Sengupta, *The Female Voice of Myanmar*.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ “President Tsai Ing-wen shoulders a Taiwan-made bazooka”, 02.06.2022, *AFP*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ajbh7qjalga> (access: 28.02.2023).

²⁸⁴ Interview no. 4.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Interview no. 32.

²⁸⁷ Interview no. 35

²⁸⁸ Interview no. 35

²⁸⁹ Interview no. 19.

President Tsai “a patient and an effective leader.”²⁹⁰ Theoretically speaking, the fact that in a rather conservative Asian environment, Tsai managed to achieve her position without being a wife or a daughter or a widow of a famous male politician is quite remarkable. It makes her an inspiring example of female political leadership. With Suu Kyi it is more complicated. On one hand she managed to survive over two decades in opposition (itself a thing in a country like Myanmar) and, on the way, became a Nobel Peace Prize and “a beacon of hope”, a celebrity in the West (until mid-2010s). On the other, she ruled Myanmar for only 5 years, without great successes (though without spectacular failures as well), had to share power with the generals and was ultimately toppled by them in 2021. Suu Kyi remains a legend only inside Myanmar, to the Western world she is a compromised leader. So a mixed result at best. One may defend Suu Kyi by saying that in comparison with Tsai she is handicapped by the fact that Myanmar has not been a democracy whereas Taiwan is a model one. The Burmese generals proved to be a much more toxic and mortal opponents than the leaders of the People’s Republic of China are. One may wonder and speculate that if Suu Kyi had lived and functioned in a democracy, she might have achieved much more. But this is just a speculation, we live in an imperfect world and in this imperfect world in politics the results matter. So even with benefit of the doubt towards Suu Kyi, one has to admit that Tsai Ing-wen remains a more successful female political leader.

To summarize the findings, Tsai Ing-wen and Aung San Suu Kyi seem to be a world apart. Indeed, except gender, there is little in common between these two female political leaders. But this is precisely what makes a comparison between them an interesting research subject. Delving into pathways taken by these two female political leaders show new avenues and tells a word or two more general about female leadership in Asia. It is a good case study of interpretative leadership studies in political science.

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解密 富商之女蔡英文,” 商周雜誌

The list of anonymised interviews conducted during this research project

Interview number; Profession & expertise, location, date:

Interview 1; academic (professor); Warsaw, 12.07.2022

Interview 2; diplomat, Taipei, 12.08.2022

Interview 3; diplomat, Taipei, 15.08.2022

Interview 4; researcher & analyst, Taipei, 16.08.2022

Interview 5: academic (professor, political science); Danshui, 17.08.2022

Interview 6: diplomat, Taipei, 18.08.2022

Interview 7: diplomat, Taipei, 23.08.2022

Interview 8: academic (professor, security studies), Taipei, 24.08.2022

Interview 9: academic (professor, security studies), Taipei, 28.08.2022

Interview 10: diplomat & businessperson, Taipei, 01.09.2022

Interview 11: journalist, Taipei, 02.09.2022

Interview 12: academic (assistant professor, sociologist), Taipei, 05.09.2022

Interview 13: academic (visiting professor, cultural studies), Taipei, 06.09.2022

Interview 14: academic (professor, sociologist), 08.09.2022

Interview 15: academic (assistant professor, sociologist), Taipei, 08.09.2022

Interview 16: academic (professor), Taipei, 13.09.2022

Interview 17: academic (professor), Danshui, 18.09.2022

Interview 18: businessperson, Taipei, 21.09.2022

Interview 19: journalist, Taipei, 24.09.2022

Interview 20: academic (professor, development studies), Taipei, 07.10.2022,

Interview 21: academic (professor, development studies), Taipei, 07.10.2022,

Interview 22: academic (professor), Taipei, 07.10.2022

Interview 23: academic (professor, economy), Hsinchu, 12.10. 2022,

Interview 24: academic (assistant professor, sociologist), Taipei, 13.10.2022,

Interview 25: journalist, Taipei, 14.10.2022,

Interview 26: businessperson, Taipei, 24.10.2022

Interview 27: analyst, Taipei, 24.10.2022

Interview 28: academic (assistant professor, political science), 25.10.2022

Interview 29: academic (assistant professor, history), 25.10.2022

Interview 30: civil servant & academic (assistant professor, economy), Taoyuan, 27.10.2022

Interview 31: academic (professor, security studies) Taoyuan, 27.10.2022,

Interview 32: analyst, Taipei, 30.X.2022,

Interview 33: academic & diplomat, Taipei, 1.XI.2022

Interview 34: researcher & analyst, Taipei, 1.XI.2022

Interview 35: government official & politician, Taipei, 15.XI.2022

Interview 36: academic (assistant professor, political science), New Taipei, 17.XI.2023,

Interview 37: academic (assistant professor, sociology), Taipei, 18.XI.2022,

Interview 38: academic (assistant professor, sociology), 18.XI.2022

