

Taiwan Studies Workshop Featuring Lev Nachman – Why is Unification So Unpopular in Taiwan? It's the PRC Political System, Not Just Culture, March 24, 2022

– [Lev] Hello everyone, and welcome to today's talk. We will get started momentarily after we give another minute or so for people to log on. We thank you very much for joining us.

– I think I'm on. And if I am, I'm Steve Goldstein, and I'm the director of the Taiwan Studies Workshop at Harvard. Very pleased today to have a speaker who I actually read much of his work before he even came to Harvard, he was one of the most prolific graduate students on Taiwan Studies that I had ever encountered, and we were really pleased to have him join us. He spent this year as a Hou Family Fellow in Taiwan Studies. His work has been well on everything about Taiwan, but predominantly social movements within the context of political participation and political parties. This is part of what I think what he's gonna present today. I'll let him introduce it, but it's I think part of a larger study that's being done of public opinion in Taiwan. So I am honestly very pleased to introduce, Lev, and to give him the floor.

– Thank you very much, Steve, for the very kind introduction, and thank you everyone for joining today. First of all, I do not have COVID, but unfortunately I have a bit of a nasty head cold. So if I sound a little bit under the weather, that's why I might be pausing frequently to hydrate. So please pardon me. So today I'm going to talk about what is an ongoing large survey project that I've been working on over the last two to three years. Now, Why is Unification So Unpopular in Taiwan is the title of today's talk, but that's really only going to be one of the topics I'm going to touch on today. Today, I'm going to present a few of the main findings from a few different topics that are all connected to the larger survey project that I've been working on in Taiwan. So to begin with, I want this to be super clear that I am lucky to be working on an absolute rock star of a team with three other scholars on this project. This has become really a project of love for the four of us. Shelley Rigger, who in the world of Taiwan politics needs no introduction along with two other graduate student colleagues of mine from UC Irvine, John Mok in sociology and Nathan Chan in political science. Now, to give a little bit of background about how we started getting interested in doing survey work in Taiwan, originally, we were doing survey work in Hong Kong, looking at political participation in Hong Kong, but ever since the Anti-Extradition Movement began along with the new national security law, we've actually stopped conducting public opinion surveys in Hong Kong. And instead we've focused our attention to Taiwan. And there's a tie into that later that I'll get to. This is the first major survey that we conducted in Taiwan. It was conducted in May of 2021, and it was done at the National Chengchi University in Taiwan. Paul Christy lab, we had a thousand respondents. And our topics touched on a range

of issues from identity to Hong Kong, to military threats, and to COVID-19. And today, I'm gonna talk about these first three. I have some slides about our COVID-19 results ready for anyone who's interested during the Q and A, but I'm mostly gonna focus on these first three. And I'd first like to talk a little bit about the survey and the sample that we have and how it compares to kind the larger Taiwanese population. So the pie chart on the left is our survey, and the pie chart on the right is the NCC National Survey that's regularly conducted throughout the year. And we find a very similar demographic breakdown between who identified as Taiwanese, who identified as Chinese, who identified as both. It's no shocker if you follow Taiwanese politics and Taiwanese public opinion, that the number of people who identify as exclusively Taiwanese has only gone up. And we see this both in the national survey and in our own sample as well. We also see very much, and this is a very important reoccurring theme throughout the various results, is that the number of Taiwanese who identify as exclusively Chinese is very low and is only like continuing to shrink as time goes on. In terms of political makeup, I have two charts here. The first one on the left is our survey makeup. So about 20% of our respondents identified with the KMT, about 25 with the Democratic Progressive Party, the DPP, and about 30% were independent. And this was about, given that there's some other political parties on the pan-Blue side and the pan-Green side, we're pretty pleased with this result because this really kind of matches up with what we saw in the 2020 party vote results. So on the right is how Taiwan citizens voted for their party vote in the 2020 election, which again was about one third DPP, one third KMT, and one third other parties. So overall we feel very confident that the sample we ended up with in this survey being fairly representative of what we see in larger surveys in Taiwan. And with that, I'm gonna start with our first question. Why is unification so important? Now, of course, in Taiwan's politics, the question that everyone is constantly concerned with is the fundamental defining future of Taiwan's politics, which is how do Taiwanese people relate to China and how do they feel about Taiwan's future in connection to China? Do people identify as Taiwanese? Do they identify as Chinese or both? Do people support independence? Do they support unification? And what do these things mean? And as time goes on, the meaning of what it means to want independence or to be Taiwanese, of course, is a changing in dynamic question. And there's mountains of scholarship on Taiwanese identity and what this all means. And one kind of conventional common wisdom you hear increasingly from more pro-Taiwan voices, especially pro-Taiwanese independence voices is that Taiwanese culture has this more etho-nationalist angle to it. That there's something unique about Taiwanese culture that makes it separate from Chinese culture and that people who identify as Taiwanese see themselves as culturally distinct from Chinese culture. Now, even though this is something that you hear from some pro-independence groups, what our survey finds, oh, excuse me, is actually that there's far more connection to Chinese culture from Taiwan's citizens than we would actually expect. In our sample of

which again, a thousand people, 56% of Taiwanese in our total sample said that they felt some connection to Chinese culture. And we were very specific with our wording in this question. We used Zhongguo Wen Hua. And what's interesting is if you first look at the graph on the left, when we look at our different age breakdowns, is that at least 50%, I see that there is a cultural similarity between Taiwan and China, except for the 30 to 39 age group. Even the youngest cohort, the 20 to 29, we were surprised to see a such a high percentage still say that they found some sort of similarity, culturally between Taiwan and China. And to the right, you again see people who identify as Taiwanese are of course, less likely to find a cultural connection to China, but you do not see the kind of outright rejection that you might anticipate seeing when you ask this kind of question. So we see that it comes to this cultural connection, there's not really a lot of evidence from our survey that supports this idea that people in Taiwan see themselves as completely culturally separate from Chinese culture or that we don't really find support for this kind of nationalist understanding of what it means to be culturally Taiwanese. What we do find, however, is that there is a very strong rejection for political support for the PRC. In line with what we see from NCCUs, independence, unification, and status quo polling, which continually shows that more and more Taiwanese are against any kind of unification with the PRC, we see that people in Taiwan are increasingly against any sort of approving attitude or desire to unify with the PRC. What's interesting is you first look on the left with our age cohort breakdown is that every age range, even older generations had more negative perceptions of the PRC than positive. I think there's some common wisdom that would predict that older cohorts in Taiwan may have more favorable views of the PRC, but our survey suggests otherwise. On the right again, you see very low support or assessment of the PRC government and its people sort of across the board. And this in other questions was reflected as well. We found that 66% of our total respondents rated the PRC's influence on Taiwan as somewhat or very negative, and less than 10% of our respondents thought that China had any sort of positive impact on Taiwan. So what this kind of tells us is first of all, something that most surveys continuously point to over the years, which is that Taiwanese emphatically do not want unification with the PRC, not because though of this sort of idea of a cultural disconnect between Taiwan and China, instead, it's a very clear political disconnect. Taiwanese certainly do not want to be governed by the PRC because they do not see the PRC as a good government. They don't see it in a positive light, and they see the PRC as bad for Taiwan. Something else we asked when we were asking about cultural connections was to ask Taiwanese people to how they felt about connections to Hong Kong. They graph on the left is Hong Kong, and the graph on the right is the one I had earlier. And we actually find that Taiwanese respondents felt, or at least responded more positively to a cultural connection to China than to Hong Kong. And, we didn't press this question further in our survey, but I think it's interesting to at least hypothesize, but why this might be, I

think there's some good reasons to think that Hong Kong's political development being so separate from Taiwan's, and the history of British colonialism might make some Taiwanese respondents feel less connected to Hong Kong than they do the PRC. But the reason we bring up Hong Kong is because the next main portion of our survey was about how Taiwanese felt about Hong Kong. Now, of course, I hope that most of the audience are at least fairly aware of the ongoing struggle for Hong Kong Civil Society in light of the national security law. But of course, this issue has been present in Taiwan's Civil Society in Taiwan's politics ever since it began in 2019. What's interesting is that if you were to look at the political messaging from President Tsai and her party's response to the ongoing Hong Kong struggles against the national security law is you would assume that Taiwan would be overwhelmingly open to helping and supporting Hong Kongers. And Tsai and her party had actually done a number of very productive, positive steps in order to support Hong Kongers. One of which, for example, was the opening of a new immigration office in Taiwan that was specifically aimed at helping Hong Kongers immigrate to Taiwan. A previous survey that I conducted before this survey, we even found that Hong Kongers, if they planned to leave Hong Kong, their first choice of destination was Taiwan. So it made sense that we asked Taiwanese people how they feel about this potential influx of Hong Kongers, coming to Taiwan in light of both the protests and Hong Kongers direct attitudes of wanting to move to Taiwan. And what we find is that support for Hong Kongers in Taiwan is actually much more complicated than sort of the very positive messaging you see from the Tsai government. Now, if we start with the graph on the left, what we see is unsurprising and a outward overwhelming amount of support for the Anti-Extradition Movement, the protests that were ongoing from 2019 to 2020. You see a very, only 15% did not express support for the protests, but when it comes to whether or not Taiwan had a responsibility to assist Hong Kongers, you start to see a much more varied response. Taiwanese are less enthusiastic about explicitly expressing the idea that Taiwan needs to intervene on behalf of Hong Kongers, even though a lot of the political messaging from the Tsai campaign seem to insinuate otherwise. And we're very curious about this, like why exactly it would be that Taiwanese would be less enthusiastic about helping Hong Kongers, even though they clearly are okay with expressing clear messages of solidarity. And to better understand just exactly how the support for Hong Kongers varied, we asked a series of questions about different policies that Taiwanese would be supportive of for Hong Kongers. For example, we asked the right to vote, the right to migrate to Taiwan, and the right to purchase housing. So I'll start with the right to purchase housing. Now, this had a very low level of support. And the reason we asked this question is because in Taiwan specifically, when there was a lot of kind of public discussion about the idea of Hong Kongers, moving to Taiwan, economic anxieties was really kind of at the forefront of why a number of Taiwanese were very skeptical at the idea of Hong Kongers moving to Taiwan. And I'll talk more about that in the next slide, but

the idea of wealthy Hong Kongers coming to Taiwan and purchasing land and making it more difficult for Taiwanese to purchase land, especially in Taipei where land housing is incredibly expensive, was a legitimate concern for a lot of Taiwanese when it came to whether or not to allow Hong Kongers to migrate, Excuse me. But we did at the very least a actual bump in percentage of support for the right to migrate at 36%. But 36% is still lower than what we expected given kind of the outpour of positive messaging from a whole host of political parties in Taiwan. What our most interesting finding though, was is that the right to vote was actually relatively high. And how we interpret this as a form of civic nationalism from Taiwan, which is to say that even though Taiwanese may not be overly enthusiastic at the idea of Hong Kongers, moving to Taiwan and gaining access to Taiwanese institutions, if Hong Kongers are able to do so, and are able to live in Taiwan, that at the very least they should eventually be able to have the right to be citizens of Taiwan, which we see as a positive outlook at the very least for Taiwan support for Hong Kongers in the future. But we also asked, going back to this idea of economic anxiety, we're really curious about how Taiwanese saw the idea of Hong Kongers coming to Taiwan. And we really see a very response, the question on the left, what kind of effect will Hong Kongers have over my personal economic status? We saw not nearly as much of a positive outlook as you might expect. In fact, the negative response is almost equal to the positive response, but what we do see is that Hong Kongers will be helpful to Taiwan's national economy. We see a bigger percentage of people agreeing with this idea, which tells us that when it comes to how Taiwanese feel this economic anxiety, that even though they might personally not benefit from Hong Kongers coming to Taiwan, they at the very least are able to see that there might be some national effect on Hong Kongers coming to Taiwan. Now, this kind of discussion about what to do about Hong Kongers and Taiwan has continued. And even though we still kind of are seeing more and more Hong Kongers moving to Taiwan, there hasn't really been much of an institutional change in Taiwan. Taiwan still has no refugee law has made it explicitly clear that it will not write or pass any sort of refugee law, but it is doing what it can to assist Hong Kongers in whatever various avenues it's really come down much more to different civil society groups, reaching out to create pathways for Hong Kongers, whether it's academia or NGOs hiring Hong Kongers and making sure that they're able to support themselves while they're in Taiwan. And this became really a central political issue during the 2020 election, not just in what do we do about Hong Kong, but how should Taiwan respond to kind of this new national security law? And what does this really say about the future of Taiwan Cross-Strait relations. And I'd be very surprised if the issue of Hong Kong and Hong Kongers does not stay in the Taiwanese political spotlight as the next midterm and future presidential election come around. Now, the final kind of data that I'll talk about is our military anxieties. It's no shock that in the last year or so, I think the economist magazine cover that described Taiwan as the most dangerous place on

earth, really kind of summarize this pretty well. This idea that Taiwan's potential for military conflict is becoming increasingly existential and given the very unfortunate political reality that we live in today, I think that anxiety has only built. And what a lot of common wisdom says about Taiwanese Civil Society's response to military anxieties is that Taiwanese citizens are largely ambivalent or that they're not particularly worried about invasion, that this idea of military threat doesn't really faze them. And we were curious about that. And so we asked a host of questions about how Taiwanese felt about military invasion. And so what we see is that contrary to kind of this common wisdom, that there is much more worry about war than you might anticipate. And over the majority of respondents felt some amount of worry that there would be a potential for war in the future. And what's particularly interesting is that this finding is very consistent across age cohorts. What we originally anticipated is that younger generations would be more worried and older generations would be less worried. But contrary to what we predicted, we actually found that older generations were slightly more worried about the potential for war than younger generations, although younger generations still all consistently still felt some amount of worry. This also goes back to how people view the PRC. Something that we were really curious to know about is whether or not Taiwanese were aware of a change in the PRC's military activity. Because even though we see these kind of regular headlines in English language media about PRC planes or military drills in Taiwan's air identification zone, we very rarely kind of hear about what the Taiwan domestic response is to these types of military threats. And so we were curious to know more about is whether or not people in Taiwan are actually aware, cognitively aware of this kind of quantitative increase in military threats. And we find that they are. Taiwanese are perhaps more aware of their geopolitical surroundings than perhaps a lot of the discourse on military threats, and the United States gives credit for. But what we find is that overall they're not panicked, and that if the everyday lives of Taiwan Civil Society shows us anything, is that Taiwan has become very adept at kind of living in this very existential status in spite of being aware of kind of its own precarious position. And of course appraisals of the PRC government and how people feel about these issues is that they're much a partisan issue. DBP identifiers of course are much partier on the PRC government. At the same time though, people who identify with the KMT are not nearly as pro-PRC government, as you might anticipate. In fact, people who identified with the KMT who saw the PRC government as good for Taiwan is still relatively low. So to give a few concluding thoughts, perhaps the biggest challenge with the way that our data currently stands is that a very big world event is happening and going on right now, which is of course the war in Ukraine. And all three of kind of these sets of questions, both identity, how Taiwanese relate to China, how Taiwanese relate to the PRC and support their own government versus the PRC, how Taiwan see Hong Kongers, and their desire to move away from Hong Kong or their own precarious political struggle, and of course, Chinese

military threats. All three of these topics, we reason to believe responses might change because of today's political context and every social scientist who studies political opinion in Taiwan today is eagerly watching to see how Taiwan Civil Society will respond. Even before the war began, we've seen a desire, especially from the Tsai government to really push for more military support domestically. During her 2020, 2nd inauguration, after her second political victory, a big part of her campaign speech was talking about the need for civil society to support both the military and to be more engaged with military preparedness. And ever since then, we've seen a push for positive political campaigns for people to be more supportive of the military. And even ever since the war Ukraine started, you've now seen a renewed discussion about Taiwan's mandated military service and whether or not Taiwan's own domestic reserves are enough or sufficient, but how Ukraine will affect public opinion in Taiwan is something that I think we're all eagerly awaiting to see more about. I'd be very surprised if future public opinion does not change to a degree because of it. And we're very well aware of that. So our survey team is planning on conducting a second wave of this survey, hopefully sometime this summer. We have a number of different survey experiments that we have connected to each of these topics. We're continually interested in this idea of solidarity between Taiwan and Hong Kongers, and our future research will continue to work at how Taiwanese relate to Hong Kong and their linked fate. And we're also continuously interested in how Taiwanese feel about military threats. And future research, we plan to conduct surveys to better understand under what conditions Taiwanese are more willing to express support for military spending, and under what conditions they're more likely to express their desire to participate in emergency preparedness. So with that, I would like to thank you all very much for your attention. These are all the topics that I've covered today are in different outlets that I've published, and three at the Brookings Institute, and one informed policy. I didn't talk about the COVID piece here, but if anyone has questions about our COVID findings, I'm happy to go into them as well. And thank you all very much for your time and attention.

- Well, thank you very much. Before I get to the questions and let me encourage people to send in questions. And I'd like to add something to the introduction that I left out. The Hou Family Fellowship is a fellowship at Harvard's Fairbank Center donated by the Hou Family to promote Taiwan studies. It has a rather late deadline of April 29th. So if there is anybody out there, the description of the qualifications are on the Fairbank website, and we encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity of applying. So to get to the business of the seminar, Lev, your first point about Taiwan identity, not necessarily being separate from Chinese identity, still doesn't answer the question why people identify themselves as Taiwanese. And there are I other kinds of national identities other than cultural national identities, there can be identity that's based on the political system or on just being identified with a particular kind of

citizenship. And so my sense is that Taiwanese particularly young Taiwanese, when they say they are Taiwanren, they're saying more than I'm not culturally Chinese. They're saying I'm a citizen of an entity known as Taiwan. And I identify with that entity. My ethnicity is secondary much like American citizenship.

- Yeah, I would agree. I think there are so many different interpretations and misunderstandings of what it means to be Taiwanese. And I think, in the last, five to 10 years, I think there's a kind of a growing discussion about especially in English language discourse. Finally, I mean, these discussions have been going on in Taiwan for decades, but bringing up how factors of indigenous Taiwanese or different colonialization and their effect on Taiwan's identity, how all these kind of contribute to what Taiwan's culture is. And really what we're trying to say with our piece isn't to say what Taiwan's culture is or is not, or what Chinese culture is or is not rather to say that kind of attempts to frame the idea of Chinese culture as being an exclusive thing, separate from Taiwanese culture that cannot be compatible. We don't really find survey support for that. And when it comes to people identifying as Taiwanese as a political identity, I think that's most certainly true. I think the PRC has really pushed Taiwanese citizens away from wanting to identify as Chinese because of the political connotations that it has to be Chinese. But it's also not just about the PRC, because so much of Taiwan's identity is wrapped up in rejection from the ROC as well, and rejection of the KMT and kind of this longer history of KMT's role in making Taiwan more Chinese ever since it's kind of colonial era. And I think, as much as it is about the PRC's, rejecting the PRC as a political entity, I don't think it's just about rejecting the PRC, but that this idea of not identifying as Chinese is both a matter of rejecting the PRC, but also for many pro-Taiwan independence folks rejecting the ROC more so.

- Understood. Okay, let me go to some of the questions from the audience. One member of the audience writes, "If unification is unpopular because of the nature of the CCP regime, do we have data on how popular unification might be if Beijing had a democratic government?"

- Yeah, so you do see more support for the idea of unification, if China is democratic, but it's not a very big number. It only goes up, I believe, to about 15, 20%, if that, and it really depends on how the question, that particular question is phrased. More importantly, when it comes to conducting surveys, asking these counterfactual questions and hypothetical what ifs is really kind of, they're very interesting, and they can tell us kind of interesting data point. But I always caution against kind of putting too much weight into these hypothetical, what ifs, because especially the idea of if China was a democracy, would you support unification? In our political context in the world we live in, I don't see that happening anytime soon. And I



would say that anyone who thinks that China is on the verge of the democratic transition is probably not particularly paying attention to what's happening in the world today. So when we ask a survey question that asks this hypothetical, if China was democratic, would the support for unification increase? It's interesting to ask the question, but how much weight it actually has in how people would politically behave, I think is rather minimal.

- Okay, another set of questions or one question rather, on military anxieties, how much do the Taiwanese people expect the us military to step in to defend the island from mainland incursions?

- Yeah, it's a great question. And when it comes to, why are Taiwanese not more supportive of public spending on military? There's a whole lot of reasons ranging from historic institutional support for the military, being a much more pan-Blue institution. But another key reason is that a lot of Taiwanese feel that the United States would step in no matter what. So when it comes to the idea of saying, we should spend more money, and we should be more attentive of domestic emergency preparedness, you often hear responses of why, the United States is gonna help us pretty much, no matter why. And that's not true. I think the United States regularly tries to make it very well known that Taiwan does not have a blank check from the United States military. And I think a big reason and the DPP government is fully well aware of this. I think a lot of the reason why Tsai has been pushing for more of civil society to have support for the military is to try to push away from this idea that Taiwan can simply rely on the United States intervention in the event of a military conflict.

- I might just make a note that the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation just did a survey maybe two or three days ago on the likelihood of American intervention to assist Taiwan and Japanese intervention to assist Taiwan. And they found that the people who they surveyed were more optimistic that there would be a Japanese intervention than an American intervention.

- Yeah, I think that's a really interesting. Japan is increasing is less so these days, but has historically really been left out of these conversations about what happens during some sort of military incursion in the Taiwan-Strait. And I think, just days ago, Tsai met with former Prime Minister Abe, and I think you really see the Japanese/Taiwan's relationship growing even stronger ever since kind of the increase in jets flying into Taiwan's air identification zone. And I think Taiwanese are aware of that Japanese friendship, and I think public opinion is really reflecting that.

- Another question, two part question. Do you by specify what you mean by culture. One for ethnic, artistic, political, national, family, respect for education, et cetera. Secondly, does Beijing care at all about the sort of findings you and others have found? Does Putin care

what the Ukrainians think about reunification?

- So in our survey, we don't specify what we mean by culture. And from a survey design perspective, if we were to do a really, excuse me, a really deep dive into the understanding of culture, we would spend an entire separate survey just on these kind of measurements of family relationship to each other, government. And there's surveys that do that. We used, we simply said Wanhua in our survey. And if there was a critique to be made against our understanding of our results, it's I think that's a very valid critique is to say that we don't specify what we mean by culture. And we leave it up to the respondent to specify, unfortunately, when it comes to understanding something like culture, which I think plenty of social scientists would agree is a really big concept. Surveys are not always perfect at telling us what exactly culture means. And when you do use a culture in a survey question or response like this, you're kind of having to accept some amount of imperfect measurement because culture can be interpreted so many different ways depending on who's responding. But that's why we were at the very least specific about saying, Jong-Gu Wang Hua and as opposed to Jong-Hua Wang Hua to make it very specific that we're talking about Jong-Gu as the PRC. As for the second part of your question about whether or not she cares about these results. I didn't get to it, but in our COVID research, we talk about how Taiwan is thoroughly unimpressed by the PRC's COVID response. And this is interesting because China has really been on the offensive with its PR campaign to say, look at how good China has been about handling COVID of course, up until kinda these recent outbreaks. And China argue that China has found a new form of Chinese democracy that other states around the world should be modeling, and Taiwan hasn't bought that at all. Our surveys show that Taiwanese largely blame China for the pandemic and are not in favor of seeing them any more favorably because of their response. Now, that tells us that attempts to try to improve China's image globally are not working in Taiwan. And what Xi really is trying to do arguably, is to try to make unification more appealing to Taiwan, whether or not he's paying attention, I don't know. But if there was something for him to pay attention to it's that a lot of the PRC's attempts to make unification appealing to Taiwan are not working. And the more that military threats occur, the less likely that's going to happen, which is all to say that we know that event, that unification is the goal for the PRC and that the PRC is hoping to do so without having to actually go to war. But their attempts at navigating that path are becoming increasingly fraught, the more that they make kind of the steps that they have.

- Another question. Has enough time passed for real independent Taiwanese culture to develop distinctly from the PRC?

- Oh, that's a hard question to say how much time has to pass for a culture to develop. I feel like is a really fraught question that really is contextualized based off what you're talking about. Taiwan's

culture and culture on Taiwan has existed long before there was ever such an entity known as the PRC or the ROC. I mean, indigenous Taiwanese culture dates back centuries, and you have different versions of Taiwanese culture developing as each era of Taiwan has progressed the idea of contemporary Taiwanese culture. Taiwanese culture as it exists in 2022 really is this sort of hybrid of hints of different colonialism cultures and of Taiwan's own unique indigenous cultures is kind of coming together, whether or not it is separate enough or fully separate from any other state, I think is something that could be debated, but that's not really something I feel like I can say with any sort of certainty.

- I guess we should note that as far as the mainland is concerned, Taiwan is abandoning Chinese culture. In the promotion of Taiwan history, Taiwan language, museum exhibitions, et cetera. They do perceive that as part of the package of EDPP independence orientation.

- Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's a central talking point of PRC propaganda. And if there was one report that I wish Xi would read is that our findings that Taiwanese don't reject the idea of Chinese culture, or at the very least, I wish that there was more understanding of this kind of idea that rejection of Chinese culture is not this signed of kind of binary Taiwanese or Chinese cultural divide that I think a lot of the PRC propaganda presents for its own domestic audience.

- But, Lev, does it really make any difference whether they accept Chinese culture or not? They identify with Taiwan.

- From different perspectives. I think of something like civil society relations I think it's important for maintaining good ties between Chinese Civil Society and Taiwan Civil Society, to be able to show and push back against this kind of PRC perspective that Taiwan is a rejecting anti-Chinese culture, this kind of anti-Chinese cultural message that I think you touched on. I think that in terms of Taiwan's soft power, it's really important and does make a difference, whether or not it matters for Xi probably not. But I think there are trickle down effects to making it explicit that Taiwan is not anti-Chinese culture and that Taiwan is not anti-Chineseness. It's just it's relationship with Chineseness is different than how people in the PRC relate to it, but it's not a rejection. It's just a different understanding and interpretation of it.

- Okay, another question from the audience, any hypothesis in regard to the least favorable impression of the PRC and identity with Taiwan culture for the 30 to 39-year-olds?

- Yeah, I would say that's, so that's the Sunflower generation essentially. So the 2014 Sunflower Movement was a watershed political protest in Taiwan that really kind of shaped a generation's

understanding of what it means to be Taiwanese and their revelation and perspective on China, and that 30 to 39-year-old generation, that's kind of the cohort of folks who grew up and participated in the Sunflower Movement. A lot of people might think that the 20 to 29-year-old age group is also part of the Sunflower generation, but Shelley Rigger actually has some really cool research that she did when conducting a Fulbright a year or so ago, that shows that there really a sort of a generational divide, essentially between Taiwanese Millennials and Taiwanese Gen Z. Taiwanese Millennials kind of being of the Sunflower generation and Taiwanese Gen Z kind of being a Post-Sunflower generation that actually doesn't have the same kind of Sunflower experience in politics that the 30 to 39-year-old cohort does. So because of that kind generational effect, that's at least how I understand the 30-39-year-old generational cohort being slightly lower and why the 20-29 generational cohort being slightly higher.

- Okay, one of the audience writes, "In the poll data, it appears that Taiwan respondents have a rather low view of mainland people along with the PRC government." Can you speak on this?

- Yeah, so we actually did a bigger questionnaire about people's perceptions of different national groups across East Asia and Southeast Asia, and perception of Chinese people is still relatively low. And this is most certainly something to keep an eye on and something that's somewhat concerning a common theme that I know we talk about when it comes to studying Chinese politics or critiquing the Chinese government is that the people are separate from the government. And I think that's something that it's a message that I think perhaps could be echoed a bit more in Taiwan, but seeing these kind of low perceptions of Chinese people along with the government is not completely surprising only because perceptions of Chinese people being supportive of the PRC's politics towards Taiwan, I think really kind of drives Taiwan's perceptions of Chinese citizens. The idea being that Chinese citizens support the PRC's attitude of wanting to invade and unify Taiwan or that Chinese citizens don't take Taiwanese, do not see Taiwanese as equal citizens of the world, or just kind of other negative understandings of how Chinese people see Taiwanese people, I think really kind of drives this negative perception of Chinese people in Taiwan. And I think the biggest solution to that is civil society ties and meaningful interactions between Taiwanese and Chinese people. But of course, that's incredibly difficult when first and foremost 'cause of the pandemic, but also because Xi Jinping won't have any sort of civil society ties with Taiwan while there's a DPP president. Despite size, many attempts at reaching out to Xi to try to open up ties.

- Well, but, Lev, during the period when there was relatively a lot of Chinese tourism to Taiwan, my impression is that it didn't build a lot of self-respect or mutual respect rather.

- Yeah, I think it really has to do with kind of the quality of the interaction and the type of interaction. So there's kind of like the stereotype of Chinese tour buses being loud and rambunctious, but those Chinese people weren't really interacting with Taiwanese full society. There's a great book forthcoming by Ian Rowen who talks kind of about the Taiwan that Chinese tourists actually experience and how it's very separate from Taiwan, at least the Taiwan that Taiwanese experience and live in. And I think that really kind of points to this idea that just because there were Chinese people in Taiwan before doesn't mean that people were actually interacting in a meaningful way and that those interactions perhaps were not nearly as productive as they perhaps could have been. For example, I hear stories of Taiwanese and Chinese. Chinese solo travelers in Taiwan, having very positive experiences in Taiwan with Taiwanese people, and people who are not on these big tour buses, but of course Chinese people's ability to solo travel in Taiwan varies on their domestic Hukou, and that's a whole nother complicated issue. So whether or not we can actually see these kinds of interactions in the future, I think it's just gonna be really tough to know.

- A question from the audience. Could you talk about the Taiwanese hesitancy with regard to Hong Kong refugees and refugee policy generally, is it to avoid antagonize CPRC?

- So it's interesting. The official reason that Tsai Ing-wen gives about why they can't accept too many Hong Kongers, or they can't be too loud about helping Hong Kongers is 'cause they don't want to upset China. And that's interesting because on some issues, the DPP and Tsai will be very loud about kind of pushing the boundaries. For example, I think like Mike Pompeo visit is a good example of them kinda of really pushing the boundaries, but when it comes to something like helping Hong Kong refugees, that's definitely too far in terms of pushing the boundaries. And that can be very frustrating, especially for civil society groups in Taiwan that are really pushing for more pathways to uh for Hong Kongers. There was a great piece in the Taiwanese news outlet, about the reporter that actually did a deep dive on a Hong Kong Civil Society group in Taiwan that pushed for a simplification of the pathways to residency in Taiwan for Hong Kongers. So currently there's like 15 steps for Hong Kongers to get residency in Taiwan. It's really complicated. And the civil society group designed this whole plan to simplify that process and it was flat out rejected, at least hasn't gone anywhere. And any sort of attempt this was back at kind of the earlier on in the Anti-Extradition protests, a number of smaller political parties really pushed the DPP to create some sort of institutional pathway through a refugee law to help Hong Kongers, and the DPP made it explicitly clear multiple times that it would not, not only would it not write a refugee law, but that the existing pathways for Hong Kongers, they said was sufficient. Now, I think there's a lot of worry about if Taiwan was to open a sort of refugee law pathway, what the influx of people, especially people from China that would try

to flee to Taiwan, what that would potentially do, and the kind of political, how that might kind of hurt Taiwan's Cross-Strait status and kind of regional status. And you kind of hear horror stories of, for example, there were Chinese dissidents that tried to flee to Taiwan that just refused to get back on the plane and Taiwan still ended up sending them back to China anyway. So you know why exactly Taiwan doesn't want a refugee law, I think is kind of a complicated issue that really revolves around not wanting to create too many pathways for people to come into Taiwan because I think it's just a really politically fraught thing to have a lot of refugees in a place that is still contested, but I can recommend Maggie Lewis has written quite a bit about Taiwan's refugee law and the lack thereof and kind of how refugees are able to navigate Taiwan.

- We have a four-part question test your memory, Lev. Do you have data on the following? What is the Taiwanese people's common perception of Hong Kongers? Two, is that perception based on personal relationships or experience with Hong Kongers? Three, what are those perceptions? Are they mostly positive or negative? And four, to what extent do those perceptions affect the lack of support for Hong Kongers to move to Taiwan?

- Can you read the last one again real quick, please?

- Yep, you remember the first three?

- [Lev] Yeah.

- To what extent do these perceptions affect their lack of support for Hong Kongers to move to Taiwan?

- So they have very, so again, we asked a whole battery of different nationalities and Taiwan's support for them. Hong Kongers are very high. So Taiwanese see Hong Kongers in a relatively good light, but that still doesn't mean that they're willing to kind of allow Hong Kongers to move into Taiwan. Now why exactly they have good opinions of Hong Kongers, we can't really say our survey doesn't kinda have data for that. So whether or not it's personal ties or some sort of other perception of Hong Kongers, isn't something I can answer. Really what we find with regards to how Taiwanese feel about Hong Kong and Hong Kongers is Taiwan really saw the complete kind of degrading of Hong Kong Civil Society throughout the 2019 expedition protests. And with the introduction of the national security law, kind of really the autocratization of Hong Kong. And I think for a lot of Taiwanese, they saw that and they all thought that's bad and we definitely don't want that. We don't want one country, two systems. We don't want what's happening in Hong Kong to happen in Taiwan, but we don't necessarily know that we need to be the ones to help Hong Kong at least more than our capacity really allows us to. And the reasons why there's the, we don't find that Taiwanese don't want to help Hong Kongers. Our

findings is that it varies. You have plenty of Taiwanese that do, and I would actually be particularly interested. I'm really looking forward to getting our next wave of these questions done. For anyone who's been following this in Taiwan, the documentary on the Hong Kong protests has become the new box office breaker in Taiwan. It's set records in Taiwan for being the most. I think the most seen movie, I'm gonna get the fact wrong, but anyway, it's become extremely widely watched all around Taiwan. And I'm very curious to see if our numbers for support for actions for Hong Kongers will change one year later, especially now that this documentary has really become so prevalent in Taiwan. There's a really interesting social movement studies paper that finds that screening documentaries can actually increase support for different for political causes. And I think I'd curious to see how kind of perceptions of whether or not Taiwan should help Hong Kongers has changed in light of just these last couple of months.

- Okay. Well, there's one request regarding the Sunflower Movement. What book would you recommend for understanding the Sunflower Movement?

- I would say Ming-Xiu Ho's, Ho Ming-Xiu is book titled "Challenging Beijing's Mandate of Heaven." That's definitely so far the best Sunflower book. I would also recommend a new edited volume that came out of University of California press last year, "Sunflowers and Umbrellas," that was co-edited by Sebastian Veg and Tom Gold. That's a collection of scholarship on the Sunflower Movement and the Umbrella Movement. And then I would recommend, Ian Rowen has an article in the journal of Asian studies of his actual experience participating in the Sunflower Movement. And then, finally I would recommend, there's a website called Daybreak that's made by a organization organization in Taiwan called New Bloom that has a extremely detailed timeline and description of the Sunflower Movement along with hundreds of interviews from activists and organizers from the Sunflower Movement, that's a really valuable resource for learning more.

- Not everybody knows what the Sunflower Movement was. So could you say a couple words about that, and how it relates to the underlying assumptions of your survey?

- Sure. So in 2014, and this bill called the Cross-Strait Service trade agreement was passed in Taiwan, and this bill was largely controversial for two reasons. First, it was negotiated behind closed doors in Shanghai, between representatives of Taiwan and the PRC. And a lot of perceptions in Taiwan was that this bill was not good for Taiwan, that it disproportionately advantaged China, that China was going to be able to really take advantage of Taiwan's economic growth. And that Taiwan would be economically put into this kind of black box in which it would be unable to escape from China's kind of course, of economic grasp. So that's controversial reason number one. Controversial reason number two is that the bill was passed without

proper review. So the incident was infamously known as the 32nd incident in which the KMT passed this trade bill without actually going through the proper democratic means to passing such a large bill. And this combination really kind of set off what was a growing powder cake of social activism in Taiwan at the time, kind of ever since Wang Jiao came into power in 2008, you see an increase in social movement activity in Taiwan. And the Sunflower Movement is really kind of this culmination of a lot of anxieties towards China and towards kind of this growing coercive of approach between Taiwan and China. And so after this bill passes, you have this very large protest that takes place all around Taiwan, but mainly in Taipei. For three weeks, you had activists occupying Taiwan's legislative UN, and the movement eventually stopped the bill. So the bill was shelved and activists withdrew, and it's in terms of just kind of the movement's immediate outcomes, it was seen as somewhat of a success because it was able to stop the bill. But this really kind of brought a lot of important cultural and political culture moments to the forefront in Taiwan, specifically Taiwan's identity, fears of China, and what Taiwan's kind of role is going to be going forward. It was really a watershed moment for Taiwanese politics after the Sunflower Movement, something that my dissertation looks at, you see a whole new cohort of political parties that form out of the Sunflower Movement, and you start to see the DPP becoming much more electorally successful than it was before the Sunflower Movement. And arguably a lot of the trends and directions that we see in Taiwan today, and it's kind of pushed for pro-Taiwan politics and pro-Taiwanese sovereignty really begin with the Sunflower Movement in 2014. In order to understand why Taiwan is in the place that it is today, it's one of those fundamental events that you really have to understand.

- Thanks.

- I apologize again, for my voice. I know I probably sound much more hoarse and dark, I didn't mean to.

- But logical. Question, to what extent do you believe that the reunification by force is inevitable given the stance of the Xi administration towards Taiwan?

- Definitely not inevitable. And I think anyone who thinks that a big conflict over Taiwan is inevitable is perhaps being a bit too glass, half empty. If the PRC can tolerate Taiwan's defacto independence as it exists today. So Taiwan is not formally independent. It's defacto independent, meaning that it exists separately from the PRC, but it is not considered to be a separate country by international order. And this very kind of uncomfortable gray zone that Taiwan exists in is not perfect for the PRC, and it's not perfect for Taiwan, but it's something that Xi can accept. And so long as this kind of ambiguous status is maintained, there's no need for Xi or the PRC to go to war over Taiwan. It really serves as a fundamental driver for legitimacy



and authority within the PRC. It's a rally around the flag, excuse me, issue that Xi regularly utilizes. And there's plenty of good reasons to suspect that war is not likely to happen in the short term. Now, of course, this is not to say that war might not happen. There's plenty of good reasons to suspect that war might happen in the future. And I think those are very valid reasons, especially I think given the geopolitical context we live in today, whether or not the likelihood of war over Taiwan has increased or decreased, I think is up for debate. But the idea that being inevitable, I would definitely disagree with.

- But the pessimist would say that Xi has tied reunification with Taiwan to his legacy, and to his vision of a future China.

- Yeah, but we don't really know what that necessarily means or looks like. I know, I think a lot of people are looking for the next people's Congress when Xi is apparently going to outline his new direction for Taiwan or towards Taiwan. I think we have a better understanding of what exactly his intentions are. But thinking back to a double 10-day, this last year, when the PRC did a whole event for double 10-day and was speaking specifically about Taiwan, I know that a lot of us were really worried about what exactly Xi Jinping was going to say about Taiwan and whether or not this would be the moment that Xi would really up his rhetoric, and really become much more aggressive in how he presents his goals for Taiwan, but that's not what happened. And instead we heard Xi used a lot of the same peaceful unification peaceful integration. We need both sides of the Strait need future cooperation. We didn't see an increase in kind of the harshness of his rhetoric. And until we kind of see a change in how he talks about Taiwan to his domestic audience, I don't think that he is necessarily planning on invasion in kind of the short near term. Of course there are situations that might lead to that, that are external to that. But I think from the very least looking at Xi's old words, it does not seem like that is necessarily a major priority for him right now, the idea of his legacy, maybe, but I would dare not predict anything more than six months to two years out of where we are right now.

- Okay, what's happening with the Taiwan-based chip industry?

- Semiconductor industry. I mean, it's certainly become a major talking point for why unification is unlikely because of China knows its reliance on the Taiwanese chip market or at the very least other countries have reliance on Taiwan's chip market, and that this might be some sort of deterrent. I've heard arguments, both that that is a good argument for deterrent and that that necessarily doesn't really have as much deterrence as we might anticipate. At the very least, I think it's well known that TSMC is one of the most important companies in Taiwan and that Morris Chang is most certainly aware of kind of the geopolitical circumstances that his company exists in today. And TSMC

is not, I think it often gets reputation of being more pan-Green because he's been Tsai's representative than a number of international organizational economic meetings, but TSMC has factories in China. They have a factory in Shanghai for certain. And TSMC is very much one of these businesses that is tied on both sides of the Strait. And I think it most certainly from that perspective, I think helps deter conflict just because I think it's helping make sure that both sides see the war would inevitably be very bad for everyone.

- Another question, is this really a cultural discussion or more a dispute of a government and ruling style and system, after all, most of the Taiwanese people are of pure Chinese origins and are not indigenous to the island and have gone there because they did not want to be communist in 1949. And how is it being affected now that China is probably more capitalistic than the US albeit without the freedom and individuality?

- I would push back on that premise a little bit because the majority of Han Chinese, Han ethnicity people in Taiwan are not actually post '49. The vast majority of Han people in Taiwan were there before the Chinese Civil War, and the exact amount of integration identifying a nationality purely based off of your ethnic background, I think is not really something that dictates directly a cultural identity that people can have cultural identities regardless of their ethnic makeup. And there's a lot of very good social science research that shows that support for different governances or support for how your politics work is a question of culture, and that you can't really separate the idea of support for different types of governances or support for democratic values from cultural values. And that these are very much interlinked. So rather than kind of see these as kind of separate issues, I would say that it's a much more linked between politics and culture than we might anticipate.

- Reflecting on the relative lack of significant differences in attitude towards the PRC across generational cohorts, did your survey ask about personal experiences in China travel, employment, study, et cetera? Could you comment on how generational differences regarding the extent and quality of direct contact might influence these attitudes?

- Great question. We did ask if they had any experience traveling to China, and I'm gonna very quickly. No, of course, I can't find one though. We did ask because we were curious if that had any effect. I can't tell you at this moment, if how that kind of influences the other kind of responses that they have, but it is something that we are interested in about whether or not kind of experiences in China change people's perceptions of China. In the future, it's definitely something that I think people would be interested in knowing more about the idea of if Taiwanese have experience in China, whether or not that influences their own domestic politics. I think there's

actually a bit of a common misunderstanding that Taiwanese who do business in China or Taiwanese that go to China, must inevitably be more pro-China or pan-Blue, or identify with the KMT. And I would argue that's probably not very necessarily true that there's plenty of DPP politicians who are not pro-China who still go to China to do business, not because of any sort of tie to the PRC, a personal tie to the PRC, but because they see it as just a lucrative business opportunity, separate from their own political identity.

- Do you see any lasting impact of the months when Clubhouse was open as a platform to allow Cross-Strait communication?

- No, but that was a great moment. I think for those unfamiliar Clubhouse was a cell phone application in which it was like a chat room, but audio only, and there was this very cool moment where you had people from the PRC in direct conversation with people from Taiwan and you could listen to people from Taiwan and people from China talking through Cross-Strait politics and their own perceptions of Cross-Strait politics in real time. And it was a very cool moment that I think led to more understanding of each other. And those are the kinds of interactions that I think are very valuable. And whether or not that had any sort of lasting effect, I don't know, but it definitely was a nice moment thinking back on.

- Okay. Lev, I think we're gonna let you rest your voice, and thank you very much for your participation, and thank you very much for the time that you're spending at the Fairbank Center.

- Thank you, Steve. It's really been wonderful.

- And thank you to the audience. We will next month have a presentation by another Hou fellow, and I hope you'll be able to join us. Until then, let's hope for peace in the Taiwan-Strait.

- Thanks, Lev.

- Thank you so much, Mark. I'll see you in the office.

- [Mark] Absolutely.