ERCCT Online Paper Series:

Political Ideology, Psychological Traits, and International Relations Attitudes

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July 2019

– Young Scholars Workshop 2019 selected collections –

Political Ideology, Psychological Traits, and International Relations Attitudes

in Taiwan

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Abstract

A robust empirical literature suggests that the development of one's political ideology

is the product of an "elective affinity" between the discursive, socially constructed

elements of ideological belief systems and the psychological constraints, motives, and

interests of those who are drawn to those belief systems. However, most studies which

support this elective affinity theory have been conducted in the West. In the present

study, I tested the theory in Taiwan to see whether elective affinities between

psychological traits and political ideology are a feature of universal human

psychology. Across a national sample, I found initial support for the characterization

of the Left-Right divide in Taiwan. Additionally, epistemic motive was most reliably

related to political ideology. Interestingly, most Taiwanese (approximately 60%) self-

identified as being in the Center, while results pointed to a slight tendency of Center-

to-Right ideological landscape in contemporary Taiwan. A majority of Taiwanese had

a good understanding of what Left-Right means, commonly associating the Left with

liberty and the Right, conservatism. Importantly, stance on reunification vs.

independence mediated the relationship between ideology and Taiwanese attitudes

toward international relations. Implications of the results were also discussed in the

cross-cultural psychological context. Overall, the present findings shed light on the

empirical structure of ideology as it relates to psychological traits, which offers

meaningful theoretical contributions to the literature and facilitates practical decision

making for researchers endeavoring to capture the ideological landscape of a new

democracy like Taiwan.

Keywords: cross-cultural, elective affinities, ideology, psychological traits, Taiwan

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This research seeks to address a major gap in the political psychology literature: whether one of the most popular and amply evidenced theories of political psychology in the West—proposing that we all have "elective affinities" caused by basic psychological predispositions—is applicable in East Asia, particularly Taiwan. The theory of elective affinities (Jost, 2017) proposes that inherent in human psychology are traits or tendencies that make it more likely that some ideologies will be adopted over others. That is, we all have elective affinities caused by basic psychological predispositions toward stasis and hierarchy (with an affinity for rightwing ideology) or change and equality (with an affinity for leftwing ideology). As such, one's choice of ideology is not made on a blank slate; rather, we are more likely to develop an ideology attuned to our psychological dispositions.

Notwithstanding, since most studies have been done in Europe and the U.S., is the theory universal? If so, *how*? Given the fact that Taiwan has been democratized for 30 years, what is the content of political ideology in contemporary Taiwan? Do levels of political, economic and social development influence the effects of psychological traits on ideology? More importantly, how does political ideology predict attitudes and policy preferences in the realm of international relations,

including cross-strait relations, in Taiwan? Those are the central questions this

research intends to address.

Literature Review

We display "elective affinities" toward some ideas and aversions to others, just

as some chemical compounds mix and some repel each other. In this view, the

development of one's political ideology "is the product of an 'elective affinity'

between the discursive, socially constructed elements of ideological belief systems

and the psychological constraints, motives, and interests of those who are drawn to

those belief systems" (Jost, Nam, Amodio & Van Bavel, 2014, p. 29). One's history of

exposure to such discursive elements plays a commanding role, determining to which

ideas one's psychological traits may provide an inclination. Also, different social

environments offer different discursive elements from which one's ideology or

political worldview can be built.

The psychological influences affecting the selection of ideas within one's

information ecology have been divided into *epistemic*, *existential*, and *relational*

motives – that is, psychological traits that affect one's attitudes toward understanding

the world, responses to threats affecting life's meaning, and relations to others,

respectively. Among epistemic traits, dogmatism, personal need for structure, need for

cognitive closure, intolerance of ambiguity, and conscientiousness have been found to

correlate with rightwing ideology, while openness, cognitive reflection, and need for

cognition have been found to correlate with leftwing ideology; among existential

traits, fear of death, threat and disgust sensitivity, authoritarianism, and system

justification tendency have been associated with rightwing ideology; among relational

traits, attachment anxiety and avoidance and social dominance orientation have been

found to correlate with rightwing ideology (Fatke, 2017; Jost, 2017; Jost, van der

Linden, Panagopoulos, & Hardin, 2018; Jost, Stern, Rule, & Sterling, 2017; Weber &

Federico, 2007).

Despite its Western origin, the left-right ideological divide organized around

equality and change vs. hierarchy and tradition is a fair approximation of ideological

spectra around the world, including among capitalist democracies in East Asia

(Caprara et al., 2017; Caprara & Vecchione, 2018; Jou, 2010; Noël & Thérien, 2008;

cf. Ashton et al., 2005). Conceived according to this ideal type of the left-right divide,

then "left psychology" would comprise epistemic, existential, and relational traits

inclining one toward embracing social change and desiring greater equality, and "right

psychology" would comprise traits inclining one toward fearing change and desiring

stasis, stability, and hierarchical order (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003).

If ideological asymmetries in left and right psychology were found throughout

the world, it would provide powerful evidence for the theory that these differences

form an evolutionarily stable strategy directing social evolution along a middle

ground between stasis and rapid change (Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2014; Petersen &

Aarøe, 2014). However, there is suggestive evidence from global survey data that the

content of left and right psychology may be better characterized as contrasting sets of

traits inclining toward desires for protection vs. freedom (Malka, Lelkes, & Soto,

2017). These contrasting traits inclining toward different desires have effects that vary

according to information ecology: for instance, in countries where ideological

"bundles" combine social welfare policies with conservative sexual mores (or where

levels of political debate/discourse are particularly low), those inclined toward

desiring protection over freedom would tend to prefer leftwing economic, and

rightwing social, policies. Further research is needed on how to best characterize the

inclinations comprising left and right psychology, whether desires for freedom vs.

protection, or change and equality vs. tradition and hierarchy.

Evidentiary support for elective affinity theory (or ideology as motivated social

cognition) is considerable. Perhaps the strongest evidence comes from the fact that

while decades of public opinion research in the U.S. have revealed persistent

ignorance about politics and a widespread inability to define liberalism and

conservatism (e.g., Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017), nonetheless people in the U.S. clearly

evince a latent form of ideology linked to their psychological characteristics

(Azevedo, Jost, Rothmund, & Sterling, 2019). Meta-analyses of hundreds of studies

on the relationships between ideology and a dozen psychological variables have

revealed robust relationships, even after testing for publication bias (Jost et al., 2017;

Jost, Sterling, & Stern, 2018). However, while these studies have been carried out in

over a dozen countries, these countries have been predominately Western.

If this political-psychological theory is accurate, cross-culturally shared

psychological traits should evince elective affinities with the different ideas in varying

information ecologies, each with their own ideological menus. To determine the

extent to which psychological traits are shared cross-culturally, Stankov (2017)

administered a large number of psychological scales to participants from over 30

countries. The results revealed that cross-cultural differences on measures of

personality, morality, and values are comparatively small; individual differences were

found to be more pronounced than cross-cultural differences.

Asymmetries in psychological traits should be expected within different

populations, but those between liberals and conservatives in the U.S. might not be

expected in populations with vastly different ideological belief systems – particularly

if ideological belief systems influence the development of correlated psychological

traits, rather than the other way around. (Determining the direction of causality has

been called the "chicken-and-egg" problem in political psychology [Jost et al., 2014].)

Opposing groups in political-economic and ideological environments other than those

of the West might evince asymmetries in different psychological traits; or, none at all.

Yet there is some reason to expect that the same psychological traits may influence

the development of ideology in vastly different contexts. After all, few of the

measurements for traits asymmetrically distributed between U.S. conservatives and

liberals, or European rightists and leftists – e.g., needs for cognition, structure, closure

– were originally designed with any expectation of ideological asymmetries, which

were only discovered later (Jost, 2017).

Beyond Euro-American Ideology

Research on elective affinities in countries other than Western capitalist

democracies has been relatively rare, limiting the scope and further development of

this theory. On the one hand, it seems that cross-cultural psychologists have shown

little interest in political science; on the other hand, political psychologists who study

ideology seldom explore beyond the Western context.

To begin a broader investigation, Beattie, Chen, and Bettache (under review)

conducted a survey in mainland China, where past research has found that the left-

right ideological schema is recognized and applicable (Pan & Xu, 2018). Results

provide initial support for elective affinity theory in a very different political context.

They also suggest that across cultures, psychological traits incline people toward

certain of the ideological options available in their environments.

Further research is needed. Additional tests in East Asia, especially in a new democracy like Taiwan, is essential for supporting its universality. In a study which examined data from over 30 countries, Stankov and Lee (2016) classified Taiwan as a country *In-Between* conservatism and liberalism. Specifically, they indicated the existence of a Conservative Syndrome—which entails three social attitudes of Religiosity, Nastiness, and Morality. Their findings suggest that countries can be divided into Conservative, In-Between and Liberal psychological continents. Interestingly, GDP per capita, cognitive test performance, and governance indicators were found to be low in the most conservative group and high in the most liberal group.

In contrast to those in Western societies, political parties and factions in Taiwan are not mainly divided along the left-right line, but the disagreement over whether Taiwan should reunify with mainland China or become a de jure independent state. Indeed, this dispute has shaped not only political parties' platforms but also public discourses on social issues, including those unrelated to the reunification/independence dispute. Given that liberal and conservative concepts originated in the West and are not used widely in everyday language in Taiwan, the question arises as whether the liberal-conservative schema could be used to interpret

local political phenomena, or is it a hidden dimension underlying the reunification/independence dispute in Taiwan?

Wu (2013) argued that although the two major political parties in Taiwan, KMT and DPP, are both "bourgeois party" representing capitalist interests in the economic domain, they could potentially transform into Center-Right and Center-Left parties in a normalized political fashion as evidenced in Western societies, driven by economic slowdown, public exhaustion from identity mobilization and cross-strait relations. Accordingly, it could be inferred that there might be a hidden liberal-conservative divide not only between DPP and KMT, but also the supporters of independence and reunification.

In sum, past research has found that the left-right ideological schema is recognized and applicable in Taiwan (Jou, 2010). Notwithstanding, local politics centers on the debate over independence or reunification; since the beginning of the democratization process 30 years ago, identity politics has become a dominant axis in Taiwan society (Wu, 2013). As such, does the traditional liberal-conservative divide play a role or is it hidden under identity politics? More important, this research explores the crucial question of the *content* of ideology and meaning of ideological labels beyond the West. Does Left-Right carry the same connotations in a new democracy like Taiwan as in advanced Western democracies?

Furthermore, given the preeminent threat posed by mainland China and Taiwan's unique international standing, how does political ideology predict attitudes and policy preferences regarding international relations, including cross-strait relations, in the Taiwanese context? This is of particular importance because the state of Taiwan's external relations has implications beyond the immediate region. In fact, along with the Korean peninsula, Taiwan represents the only other potential flashpoint that could trigger a major conflict between the U.S. and China (Fell, 2018). Is ideology a decisive variable in this realm?

Overview of Present Research

The aims of this research were threefold: (a) to fill an important gap in research on political psychology on links between psychological traits and political ideology; (b) to explore the content of ideological Left-Right beyond the West; (c) to investigate how political ideology predicts international relations attitudes in the Taiwanese context.

I first examined applicability of the left-right spectrum in the Taiwanese context. I then investigated elective affinities between psychological traits and political ideology. Next, I explored the content of political ideology in Taiwan. Lastly, I tested how political ideology predicts Taiwanese attitudes and policy preferences in the realm of international and cross-strait relations.

Five psychological constructs and the scales used to measure them were selected,

in which previous research in Western contexts had found ideological symmetries.

For instance, dogmatism had relatively large effect sizes; personal need for structure

had been tested repeatedly. Where available, I used previously validated Chinese

translations of scales, and where unavailable, the scales were translated and back-

translated to ensure accuracy.

Hypotheses

Epistemic motives. Jost et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis found dogmatism, a

relatively unshakeable but unjustified certainty in one's beliefs, to have the strongest

correlation (among several other traits) with rightwing ideology in Western countries.

I expected dogmatism to be higher among those further to the Right in Taiwan (H1).

People vary in the complexity with which they structure information, with some

preferring simple structures and more likely to apply stereotypes to new situations

(Neuberg & Newsom, 1993). Jost et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis found personal need

for structure to correlate positively with rightwing ideology. I expected need for

structure to be higher among those further to the Right in Taiwan (H2).

Existential motives. System justification theory proposes that people are

motivated (to avoid negative affect and cognitive dissonance), to varying extents, to

justify the existing social system, even when such rationalization conflicts with other

affect-based motives to protect self-esteem and in-group standing (Jost et al., 2003;

Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost et al., 2011). People higher in system justification

tendency tend to be on the Right in Western countries, as elements of rightwing

ideology provide more support for the status quo, reducing negative affect, than

leftwing ideology. I expected a similar pattern in Taiwan: those further to the Right

would exhibit a higher system justification tendency (H3).

One of the oldest areas of elective affinity research focused on the relationship

between rightwing ideology and authoritarianism (Jost et al., 2003). I expected

authoritarianism to be higher among those further to the Right in Taiwan (H4).

Relational motives. Social dominance orientation (SDO), a generalized

preference for group hierarchies and inequality, correlates with rightwing ideology in

Western countries, and has been found to mediate conservatives' relatively lower

acuity in the moral senses of care and fairness (Kugler, Jost, & Noorbaloochi, 2014). I

expected SDO to be higher among those further to the Right in Taiwan (H5).

Given the dominance of the issue on reunification/independence in Taiwanese

politics, I further hypothesized that stance on reunification/independence would

mediate the relationship between ideology and attitudes toward international relations

(H6).

Method

Participants

I employed a polling company to administer an online survey to a national

sample of Taiwanese adults ($N = 106$). Participants' average age fell in the 30-39 age

group (47.2%, $n = 50$); men comprised a bare majority (58.5%, $n = 62$) and women

the minority (41.5%, $n = 44$). Levels of education ranged from high school (16%, $n =$

17), bachelor's degree (65.1%, $n = 69$), master's degree (11.3%, $n = 12$), doctoral

degree (4.7%, $n = 5$), and other (2.8%, $n = 3$). The median and mean level of reported

monthly income was between NTD\$30,001-50,000. A plurality were employed by

private enterprises (28.3%, $n = 30$), while about half of the participants were

registered voters in the north (50%, $n = 53$).

Measures

Ideology. Because survey length and comparability with prior studies were

primary concerns, I selected and adapted the top half of political, economic, and

cultural questions from Pan and Xu's (2015) Chinese Political Compass (CPC) survey

by factor loading on the left-right dimension. A sample item is "The government

should set a minimum wage," (reverse coded) and level of agreements was measured

from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The higher the score, the more

conservative the tendency. Participants were then asked to classify their ideology on a

1-5 Left-Right scale for comparison.

Meaning of Left/Right. Participants were asked to answer an open-ended

question, "What does 'Left' and 'Right' mean to you?"

System justification. I adapted Tan, Liu, Huang, Zheng, and Liang's (2016) 8-

item (α = .86) general system justification scale. A sample item reads, "Taiwan serves

the greatest good for its citizens," and level of agreement was measured from 1

(*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Dogmatism. I used Altemeyer's (2002) DOG dogmatism scale. To minimize

survey length, I selected the top half of items (α = .64) by factor loading (Crowson,

2009). A sample item is "My opinions are right and will stand the test of time," and

agreement was measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Personal need for structure. I used Wu's (2011) 11-item (α = .75) Chinese

version of the Personal Need for Structure (PNS) scale. A sample item is "I don't like

situations that are uncertain," and agreement was measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*)

to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Social dominance orientation. I adapted nine items from Tan, Liu, Zheng, and

Huang's (2016) Chinese version of the SDO scale. A sample item is "If certain groups

of people stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems," and agreement was

measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Authoritarianism. I adopted Im's (2014) authoritarianism scale using items from the Asian Barometer Survey. A sample item reads, "A person should not insist on his own opinion if his coworkers disagree with him." Level of agreement was measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Attitudes toward international relations. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) on a series of policy issues concerning cross-strait and international relations in the domains of formal relations, attempts to join international organizations, unofficial international relations, and public diplomacy efforts. Sample items are "Taiwan should adopt a tougher stand toward China" (reverse coded) and "Taiwan should strive to participate in international organizations in order to increase visibility." Lower scores indicate a harder stance on international and cross-strait policies. Participants were then asked to indicate their political party affiliation from 1 (*deep blue*) to 10 (*deep green*) and their stance on reunification/independence from 1 (*total reunification*) to 10 (*total independence*).

Procedure

All participants completed an online questionnaire including the measures described above. After giving their consent, participants were directed to follow the instructions on screen in answering the questions. An attention check question was

included about half way through the survey. In the end, all participants were asked to

provide basic demographic data before signing off the webpage.

Results

Correlation Analysis

The Taiwanese national sample in this study revealed an ideological tendency of

Center-to-Right ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .36$) with most respondents self-classified as in the

Center (61.3%, $n = 65$; $M = 2.82$, $SD = .77$), while overall still clustering around the

Left-Right split on political, economic, and social/cultural issues (please see Figure 1
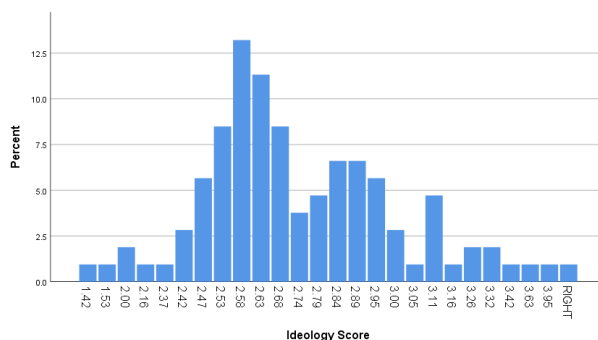
below).

Figure 1. Overall ideological landscape based on ideological item scores, on a scale

from 1 (Left) to 4 (Right). ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .36$)

The results revealed a moderate positive correlation between ideology and

psychological traits in Taiwan, supporting H1 to H5. As shown in Table 1, epistemic

motive (i.e., personal need for structure, $r = .45$, $p < .01$, and dogmatism, $r = .33$, p

$< .01$) demonstrated the highest correlation with political ideology, followed by

relational motive (i.e., SDO, $r = .36$, $p < .01$) and existential motive (i.e., system

justification, $r = .32$, $p < .01$ and authoritarianism, $r = .23$, $p < .05$). In short, this

finding supports H1-5 and indicates that the liberal-conservative schema can still be

used to explain individual differences in Taiwan society, although it may not be as

popular a categorization as in Western societies.

Table 1

Correlations: psychological traits and political ideology

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Ideology	1					
2 Dogmatism	.33**	1				
3 Need for structure	.45**	.58**	1			
4 System justification	.32**	.30**	.27**	1		
5 Authoritarianism	.23*	.31**	.33**	.35**	1	
6 SDO	.36**	.54**	.66**	.14	.25*	1

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

In order to further validate the applicability of the Left-Right political spectrum

in Taiwan, I conducted a cluster analysis on the ideology scores. A two-step strategy

was employed using means of the ideological items as input variables. The hierarchy

clustering with Ward's method showed that respondents should be clustered into two

groups. Next, I used the K-means clustering to identify the two clusters. The first

cluster contained 62 respondents and the second, 44.

There were no significant differences in ideology between men and women.

Likewise, there were no significant differences in ideology by age, income level, and

occupation. The only significant difference in ideology observed was by level of

education ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.36$), where there was a negative correlation, i.e., more

educated respondents tended to be more liberal ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$).

Perhaps most intriguing was the significant positive correlation between political

ideology and party affiliation ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), namely, people who self-identified as

blue (i.e., pro-KMT) tended to be on the Left, while people who self-identified as

green (i.e., pro-DPP) tended to be on the Right.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Following a directed approach to qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon,

2005), keywords were identified in answers to the open-ended question, "What does

'Right' and 'Left' mean to you?" They were then coded into four different categories:

"don't know" (e.g., no response or the respondent simply stated "I don't know"),

"invalid" (e.g., "like apple and orange" or the respondent just copied the question),

"acceptable" (e.g., "they're opposing views" or "KMT vs. DPP"), and "good" (e.g.,

"liberal vs. conservative" or "reform vs. tradition").

Overall, about 31% ($n = 33$) of the respondents had a vague idea of what Left-

Right means, while 36% ($n = 38$) seemed to have a good grasp of the concepts. About

one-third (33%) either did not know what the terms mean (18%, $n = 19$) or did not

provide a valid answer (15%, $n = 16$). Most respondents equated Left with liberty and

reform, Right, conservatism and tradition.

This tells us that although the terms Left-Right might not be used commonly in

everyday language in Taiwan, in general, the public showed a good understanding of

what they entail. Moreover, their understanding mostly reflected the common

conceptions evidenced in the West; namely, the Left was associated with change and

reform, while the Right was associated with conservatism and tradition.

Regression Analysis

In order to validate H6, I conducted mediation analysis using Model 4

PROCESS and a bootstrapping procedure (Hayes, 2018). I also generated 95% bias-

corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) for the indirect effects using 5,000

bootstrap samples. As hypothesized, stance on reunification/independence

significantly mediated the relationship between ideology and international relations

attitudes (β = -.18, SE = .09, $p < .001$). The full model accounted for close to a third

of the variance in attitudes toward international and cross-strait relations ($R^2 = .23$),

$F(2, 103) = 15.61$, $p < .001$ (please refer to Figure 2).

Hence, H6 was supported. Two people who differ by one unit in their ideological

orientation are estimated to differ by 0.18 units in their attitudes toward international

and cross-strait relations as a result of the tendency for those on the Right to support

Taiwanese independence, which in turn translates into favoring more hardline foreign

policy attitudes. This indirect effect is statistically different from zero, as revealed by

a 95% bootstrap confidence interval that is entirely below zero (-0.38 to -0.02).
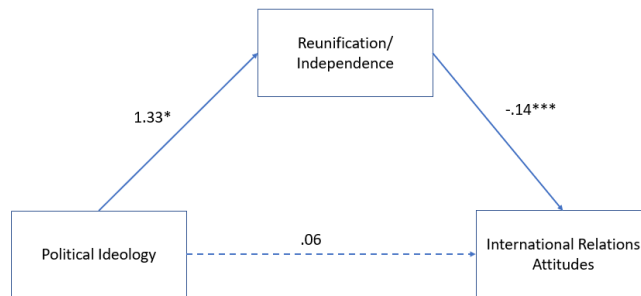

Figure 2. Stance on reunification/independence as mediator of the effect of political

ideology on attitudes toward international relations.

* *p* < .05. *** *p* < .001.

Discussion

Findings from this research seem to confirm Stankov and Lee's (2016)

contention that Taiwan appears to be a country in-between Left and Right in terms of

ideological schema. The Taiwanese national sample in this study demonstrated less

ideological constraint while still clustering around the Left-Right split on political,

economic, and social/cultural issues. Elective affinity theory receives support from the

results – that is, it also seems to apply in Taiwan. The hypotheses replicating previous

research in Western countries were supported within the Taiwanese sample.

Epistemic traits most clearly evinced this pattern: personal need for structure and

dogmatism were associated with the Right. Existential traits mostly displayed the

same pattern, with system justification tendency and authoritarianism higher on the

Right. That is, those with a greater tendency to avoid discomfort by justifying the

status quo and approving of hierarchy are attracted to the conservative right.

Relational traits evinced similar results, with those high on SDO more attracted to the

conservative right.

Overall, the characterization of the Left-Right divide as consisting of traits

inclining people toward desiring change and equality versus tradition and hierarchy

looks relevant in Taiwan. That is, the liberal Left in Taiwan mostly evinces traits of

the Left in Western countries, inclining them toward desiring change leading to

greater social equality. The conservative Right mostly evinces traits of the Right in

Western countries, inclining them toward desiring tradition and endorsing the social

hierarchy this entails.

Perhaps most intriguing is the finding that the Left is now pan-blue and the

Right, pan-green. This attest to the power transition in Taiwan that democratization

has brought about over the past 30 years. What was traditionally considered the

opposition political party (i.e., DPP) has now enjoyed the status quo as a result of

democratization and the power transition process; on the other hand, what was

traditionally considered the ruling political party (i.e., KMT) has over the years

transitioned into a more opposition status.

In terms of the content of ideology, the majority of Taiwanese seems to have at

least a vague comprehension of what Left-Right means, commonly associating the

Left with liberty, reform, and openness, while associating the Right with

conservatism, tradition, and capitalism. Furthermore, as expected, ideology predicts

attitudes toward international relations through stance on reunification/independence,

with those supporting reunification favoring more pragmatic policies in the realm of

international and cross-strait relations. Perhaps after all, identity politics still reign

large in Taiwan.

Limitations

As Bond (2019) describes the development of cross-cultural psychology, the first

stage was simply testing theories originating from Western cultural contexts in

different cultures. As such, this research has not progressed beyond the first stage. The

next stage would involve continued attempts to map the world using psychologically

based social scientific constructs to locate other East Asian nations, and to examine

the differences revealed in the current research to explain them in terms of

psychological constructs distinguishing East Asians from Westerners. In short, the

present research is only a first step toward exploring whether elective affinities

between psychological traits and political ideology are a feature of universal human

psychology.

Meta-analyses of elective affinity research in the West have found relatively

weak correlations, on the order of .1 to .3, for most psychological relationships with

ideology. This can be taken as evidence that psychological traits are a weak force,

among many others, inclining one toward some rather than other ideological elements

in the ecology of information one inhabits. It may also be the result of different

ideological groups within the broad Left-Right divide, for whom a variety of

ideological elements meet their psychological needs relatively strongly, but in

different, sometimes contradictory ways. Further research is needed across cultural

contexts to see whether psychological traits are more strongly related to ideology, but

in a variety of ways within the broad Left-Right spectrum.

Although in the current study I extended previous studies by employing a

national sample (as opposed to a college student sample), the current sample size

remains relatively small. Future research should employ a larger sample size in an

attempt to replicate present findings. Last but not least, the current research examined

the relationship between ideology and foreign policy attitudes, future research could

investigate how ideology predicts attitudes toward various social issues in

contemporary Taiwan, including same-sex marriage and capital punishment, etc.

Conclusion

This research contributes to the political psychology literature by attempting to

offer a glimpse into the *what* and *how* of ideology developments in the new

democracy of Taiwan. The findings provide substantial evidentiary backing for

Western theory, better elucidating the psychological "elective affinities" with political

ideologies. Beyond its importance for theory development, this study helps to provide

an understanding of the psychological factors underpinning ideological conflict in

East Asia, forming the basis of efforts to reduce ideology-driven conflict. With

knowledge of the different psychological needs to which various ideologies are

attuned, political partisans and civil society actors can devise messaging campaigns

that more effectively bridge ideological divides. Exploring the content of Left-Right

in the new democracy of Taiwan also provides opportunity to compare it with

cleavages in both established and new democracies in other regions of the world for

future research.

In short, research on public ideological orientations in developing nations is much

less extensive; this exploratory analysis helps chart this territory and increases

understanding of the nature of political cleavages in new democracies. Overall, with its

acclaimed universality and absorptive capacity, the Left-Right schema serves the

purposes of orientation and communication, offering the public shortcuts to

understanding complex political discourses and parties tools to shape discussion and

attract support. Utilization of Left-Right heuristics for voting may encourage party-

system stabilization, particularly in countries where parties, and democracy itself, are

relatively new phenomena.

In conclusion, elective affinity theory looks to be on an incrementally sounder footing. The fact that several relationships between psychological traits and political ideology were found in a different cultural context from those of the West indicates that such elective affinities may be universal. This is of intrinsic interest, but it may have practical applications as well: political messaging that takes into account psychological traits of opposed ideological groups may prove more effective than traditional approaches (e.g., Lammers & Baldwin, 2018; Wolsko, Ariceaga, & Seiden, 2016). Further research, particularly in diverse contexts, is due.

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