The Lingering Patriots

An Ethnography of Chinese Nationalists in Post-Authoritarian Taiwan

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between the Chinese Nationalist party Kuomintang (KMT), Taiwan's former autocratic ruling party, and its supporters in post-authoritarian Taiwan in the form of an anthropological project. Based upon three months of ethnographic fieldwork and archival research, this study explores the imaginings of Chinese Nationalism supporters in Taiwan. Often identified by their upbringing and clientelist relation with the KMT regime and the Chinese framework of the nation, the Chinese Nationalists find themselves in a new context when Taiwanese nationalism seems to have gained the upper hand. Throughout the presidential election in 2020, this characteristic of the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists in modern Taiwan intensifies through their support of the populist politician and the KMT's presidential nominee Han Kuo-yu. Following Han's failed presidential bid, however, the emotional shift and changing perspectives documented through my research in the community after electoral defeat demonstrates a sense of postponed realization of an uncertain future as a now apparently marginalized minority. The continuing presence of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan, along with their continual ties with the Nationalist Party, poses an intriguing case-study on the subject of citizen-shaping when analyzed as a feature of post-authoritarian societies. The objective of this thesis is to illustrate and understand how imagined communities, through the concept of 'political subjectivity' on the basis of a collective national as well as an ethnic identity, are sustained as well as transformed through proceeding trends of "democratic developments" in newly reformed societies, with Taiwan representing one of the many.

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Acronyms

CCP: Chinese Communist Party

DPP: Democratic Progressive Party

NPP: New Power Party

KMT: Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)

PRC: People's Republic of China

ROC: Republic of China

All romanization of local languages and the order of words used in this thesis for names and locations follow the official translation that is used most commonly in Taiwan. Exceptions will be made for the politicians that go by their nicknames in English, such as James Soong and Eric Chu.

All direct quotes used in the thesis have been translated into English from its original languages (Taiwanese Mandarin or Hoklo).

Introduction

The relationship between the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) and the Taiwanese people is a curious one. Following the retreat from Mainland China due to its defeat from the Communists in 1949, the KMT reigned Taiwan under martial law for thirty-eight years. Through prohibitions on freedom of speech and publication, the regime imposed a cultural hierarchy and ideology built upon the Han-Chinese civilization, establishing its version of a "Free China" social order (Tseng 2016). In the 1980s, the KMT-led government of the Republic of China (ROC), facing pressuring demands for democratization from the press and civil protests alike, supervised a series of reforms to satisfy the rising political consciousness among the local population. The reforms eventually led to the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 and allowed Taiwan to finally move towards its form of democracy (Tien and Shiau 1992). This transition was considered relatively smooth by most studies on contemporary politics. Soon with direct national elections initiated in the 1990s, Taiwanese people believed that the authoritarian regime was now far behind them.

Nevertheless, the peaceful transition implied that most KMT-constructed institutions such as local factions and patronage-relations (Bosco 1992; Wu 2003) remained intact despite the shift in political power. Since the democratic reforms, debates on the future of many KMT-designed structures in the economy and overall social mobilization began to surface (Lee 1986). After the KMT lost the ROC's presidency for the first time in 2000, the local population appeared to be divided by their preferred nationalist imagination, based on either a Chinese or Taiwanese perspective. Indeed, many assumed the rising Taiwanese Nationalism and populated local identity would eventually replace the Sino-centric framework (Wong 2001, 199). However, the KMT as a political party has since transformed its inherited "Chinese legitimacy" into election slogans and self-promotions to sustain its authority in Taiwan (Wu 2003, 101-105). In recent decades, the KMT appears to have shifted from its former authoritarian position to become a modern electoral party. Through the process, the KMT has partially apologized for its past

misconduct while affirming its governing experience for the benefit of the people, democracy, and Taiwan's economic development. At the same time, the KMT continues to claim rights to the ROC government — still the operating government in Taiwan — and declares other political parties that advocate for a united Taiwanese consciousness as separatists and traitors to the nation. Now nearly thirty years after losing its authoritarian status, the KMT has successfully altered its political character while keeping its Chinese Nationalist ideology. The nationalist party's role as a major player in contemporary Taiwanese politics remains paradoxical yet secured.

A significant number of Taiwanese people still support the KMT today. This strong base of supporters is best demonstrated through the electoral system, where the KMT held a majority in the national congress (Legislative Yuan) up until 2016 (Central Election Commission 2020b). While some scholars attribute such affiliation to voting patterns rationalized through local factionalism or patronage-clientelist relations established during its authoritarian rule (Bosco 1992; Wu 2003), the voters' perspectives appear to be primarily understudied. The supporter base of the KMT is diverse in its composition, ranging over the four major ethnic groups in Taiwan established by the authoritarian regime. The cultural and ethnic variety, however, is unified by the members' faith in Chinese Nationalism. In the election off-season, this support is restrained and often remains a subtext of the conversation. Nonetheless, during election cycles, discussion of the parties and their diverging nationalist imaginations become central to everyday life. Prompted by this cycle of political engagement, I conducted my fieldwork in Taiwan throughout a nation-wide election on January 11th, 2020. As an anthropological study of citizen-shaping in the age of democracy, the objective of my fieldwork is to understand how humans — even as citizens under a democratic electoral system — and their opinions are shaped by political rhetoric and the sense of cultural prestige disguised as ideological disparities. Through this case study of the nationalist KMT party and its supporters in post-authoritarian Taiwan, my central question is: How do contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan — guided by nationalist slogans and labels created by the KMT — continue to form themselves and be formed as political subjects? In essence, this thesis

explores how the Chinese Nationalism supporters in Taiwan, as a form of 'imagined communities', have persisted into their post-authoritarian context.

In my view, this process of citizen-shaping could be understood through the concept of 'political subjectivity' and ongoing 'political socialization.' Mainly, I am interested in the maintenance and transformation of the Chinese Nationalism supporters that parallel changes in the electoral system and political structure. Through the conversations actively circulating during the election cycle and everyday political engagement, my fieldwork examined the KMT supporters with a focus on their attachment with the nationalist party and its central doctrine of Chinese Nationalism. While often viewed by their political opponents as lingering remains of a former regime that was reformed but never entirely removed, the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan continues to be a significant part of the political scene. As a local anthropologist, I attempt to understand how supporters of Chinese Nationalism engage with the KMT politicians' behaviours and speeches. Additionally, I will explore their reactions and discussions and identify ways in which the foundation of this support is expressed through political engagements in approval for specific candidates. My core materials are how the KMT party and their political stance were being discussed, supported, and defended by the politicians and voters at rallies and through other media, as well as interviews and discussions with grassroots supporters. Through a participant-observation approach, I hope to understand how the local voters rationalized their support for the KMT party by revisiting memories, active discussions, attending rallies, and media sources. Ultimately, I wish to examine how Chinese Nationalism supporters in Taiwan still relate themselves to a past political regime as an outline of modern democracy and elections in a post-authoritarian context.

Underlying political discussions as well as subjectivity in contemporary Taiwan, and therefore this research, are the elements of imagined communities, transformative democratization, citizenship, national narratives, clientelism, and the question of ethnic identity. In addition to tracing pertinent aspects of these concepts, my literature review on regional society and politics situates my problem-space as the paradoxical support of Chinese Nationalism among the local population. Through my fieldwork, I detail this topical focus into the political posture of the KMT party in contemporary Taiwan, the rationale of

KMT supporters in rejection of rising local consciousness, and their regularly under-defined ideas of nation and democracy in a post-authoritarian context. Given the specific narrative of KMT, as a political party and government closely intertwined with the authoritarian rule as well as the democratization of Taiwan, I will also examine its post-authoritarian transformation in response to trends of 'localization' and, relatedly, the continual impact of its nationalist rhetoric on the local population. The case of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan, in my opinion, is especially worth studying as a marginalized yet surviving collective that has prevailed over the existence of its once-dominant patron. At last, I hope this study on the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan helps to understand the idea of humans as political subjects who form and sustain themselves through their conceptualization of political power. I expect this project to fit well into the broader discourse of Asia-Pacific politics, related anthropological works of democracy and politics, and studies on the post-authoritarian transformation of power-relations between citizens, the state, and society.

Conceptual Framework

To understand how humans are continuously formed and sustained as citizens by political rhetoric and ideological disparities in the case of the Chinese Nationalist party — the Kuomintang (KMT) — and its supporters in post-authoritarian Taiwan, I draw on the concepts of imagined community, political socialization, and political subjectivity as my principal theoretical framework. To approach this understanding of citizen-shaping in the age of democracy, I will study the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan as a lens to understand a collective that finds itself struggling for survival — politically, culturally, and ethnically — amid ideological change and institutional reforms. Other notions, including nationalism, national imaginations, political socialization, clientelism, and temporality, will also be employed as modes of action and forms of power that have shaped the KMT supporters.

As theorized by Benedict Anderson (1983), the idea of an "imagined community" is often applied as a way to analyze existing political groups that are socially constructed, with its members continually "imagining" themselves as part of the community. A concept used primarily to analyze modern

nation-states and nationalism (1983, 6), "imagined community" explains how a collective understanding among its members allows an "imagined" self-inclusion and self-identification as part of a mass group who, realistically, would never meet in person. Thus, the feasibility of forming such communities lies in the technology, cultural productions, and mass media resources that have only become available in modern times, which Anderson explores through newspapers, museums, censuses, etc. Through a sense of belonging created through consumption of these media, members of the imagined community are united upon a form of consciousness through an objective of association.

While Anderson's approach mainly focuses on the forming and continuance of nation-states, I choose to apply the concept in this study for the specific characteristics of contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. As the local Taiwanese consciousness grows to coincide with the state's actual jurisdiction (Wong 2001, 190), the Chinese Nationalists have also become a distinct form of imagined communities. Per Anderson's definition, I recognize the limited yet inclusive ethnic Chinese identity and patriotism to the ROC nation as "boundaries" (1983, 7) and the sense of "fraternity" (1983, 7) that provide the membership needed to unite the community. Furthermore, I theorize the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan as an imagined one for its ability to sustain itself well into the era of democracy. That is, through remaining institutions from the authoritarian regime such as public museums endorsing the nation's Chinese heritage to media productions originally founded as propaganda outlets, the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan continued to view themselves as part of the Chinese Republic.[1] Through these principles of imagined communities, the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan and their motive in supporting the nationalist KMT party as the sole legitimate successor of governmental power could be better understood.

On the other hand, I also argue that the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan represent a pattern of imagined communities often neglected by contemporary political anthropologists when studying the modern states. As societies advanced towards an idealized framework following institutional reforms,

[1] There is however a disagreement among pan-blue supporters in the reality of Chinese Republic; some (deep blue) supporters wish to eventually see a united ROC with the lost territories of China, while others (light blue) identity more with Taiwan and believe Taiwan's autonomy through a local ROC government is more practical.

many who are unwilling to proceed with political and social adjustments have continued to live among their imagined community through an ongoing sense of association that is intensified and restored by the constant 'political socialization.' A concept mainly studied by political scientists, I draw on the definition of 'political socialization' from the ways that "citizens learn about political leaders...and acquire their political beliefs and practices" (Pearson-Merkowitz and Gimpel 2009) through executions of individual freedom under the "democratic" system. In the case of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan, most members' political stance and opinions were directly conditioned by the authoritarian government's thirty-eight year-long nationalist curriculum and Sino-centric cultural hierarchy placed by the KMT regime. Therefore, recent discoveries of the local majority's changing national imagination had brought a belated realization to the contemporary Chinese Nationalists about their shifted position. Perhaps as a result of the long-term fabrication as an imagined community (Anderson 1983) — united through homogeneous beliefs centered around language use, cultural roots, and historical narratives provided by the Sino-centric framework of the nation — the members have found themselves facing an existential crisis.[2] The previous advocates of the dominant nationalist narrative have become a marginalized minority among new political trends. For these reasons, I developed my ethnographic study through the notion of imagined communities to understand the existing Chinese Nationalists observed in Taiwan ― along with the fundamental beliefs that have sustained their relationship with the nation, the party, and their national identity as citizens ― who now share their living space with those that thought otherwise.

Under the theme of citizen-shaping and the general framework of imagined communities, I will further approach the study of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan through the concept of 'political subjectivity.' To understand the justification and rationale of local voters who continue to support the former regime in its post-authoritarian setting, I draw on the concept explored through Michel Foucault's work, "Subject and Power" (1982). According to Foucault, these forms of power are exercised in multiple ways, through public institutions and private ventures (1982, 784) to affect the actions, beliefs, and

[2] In Taiwan, the opposition to this train of thought often labeled it as the 'party-state mentality' (**黨國思維**) that was inherited from the authoritarian regime.

behaviours of others. The Foucauldian notion states that it is the forms of power that assemble individuals into subjects, which "categorizes the individual....imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him." Moreover, Foucault explains the two kinds of meaning to the word "subjects": One being "subject to someone else by control and dependence" and the other "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (1982, 781). Through this process, political subjects are formed as part of a collective that rationalizes opinions and judgments — as their subjectivities — according to their understanding of others and self.

I have come to find the analytical concept of political subjectivity extremely productive when explaining the opinions and decisions of contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. While Foucault initially wrote about the nation-states emerging from dominant religious institutions, I see the people of Taiwan facing a similar struggle due to the shifts of political power that have occurred to the local population. Instead of the Christian pastoral power, recent works (Krausea and Schramm 2011; Ong et al. 1996) have emphasized the significance of political subjectivity when understanding a citizenship that is both self-making and being made. Through this process, the individual subjects come to associate with the authorities with their own stance. Relatedly, this framework is used in a number of studies about Taiwan. One such example is Ching's analysis of the sociocultural policy imposed in Taiwan under the Japanese colonization. Through the "bodily practice of everyday life" (Ching 2001, 90-91), the local population was shaped into colonial subjects in correspondence with the imperial imagination. As a result, the landscape of local Taiwanese identity was forever changed under the discourse of assimilation and imperialization. Derek Sheridan uses a similar approach in his case study on Taiwanese independence activists and their understanding of conspiracy theories (2016). Through the secondary notion of 'geopolitical cosmology,' Sheridan explains how citizens imagined and reproduced themselves as subjects of another preferred political power while rejecting the existing government (2016, 119). In turn, my research focuses on the ways that the community of Chinese Nationalists has sustained and transformed itself in the age of democracy. As a result of the nationalist imagination and identity once implemented upon the local population, my fieldwork seeks to demonstrate how supporters of the

previous regime have prevailed even decades after the end of the authoritarian order. Accordingly, I will also explore how ideas and imagination of the nation remain the principal reinforcement in the shaping of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan, despite a perpetual presence of contesting others (Simon 2010, 110-112).

Additionally, this thesis will explore how and which social factors shape the nature of subjectivity of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Through my fieldwork findings at separate stages of the election campaign, I have examined the discrete ways that such subjectivity is interpreted, expressed, and reconstructed among the members of the imagined community. This has resulted in the existing form of both the political community and its claimed ideology of Chinese Nationalism in Taiwan, however reshaped by individual accounts and contemporary political trends.

In postwar Taiwan, the local population was categorized into the four ethnic groups of Indigenous Taiwanese, Hoklo, Hakka, and Mainlander. Today, each ethnic group takes up approximately 2 percent, 70 percent, 15 percent, and 10 percent of the local population, respectively (Yang and Chang 2010, 110). Namely, the "Mainlanders" — also known as "1949 immigrants" or "Waishengren" — were the Chinese refugees who followed the retreat of the government of the Republic of China (ROC) to Taiwan. Mostly regarded as the former "bourgeois" class in China, the category was created by the nationalist leader and ROC president Chiang Kai-shek for the convenience of population control and administration (Simon 2010, 87-88). Through their shared exile story, the Mainlanders and the central government of ROC were able to imagine a Chinese community that was rebuilt in Taiwan, which is now a vision shared among their members.

In addition to the ethnic categories as a deciding factor, the Chinese Nationalists in modern Taiwan appear to value their relationship with the Nationalist Party for reasons entrenched in its political history and influence to the envisioned future. The practicality of the Chinese Nationalist ideology and pro-China economic policies, for instance, is promised through what Ong called "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999) and, similar to dynamics in Bosnia (Brković 2017), on political clientelism based on an ethnic bond of "being Chinese." Through the support of these contemporary rationales, the Chinese Nationalists re-imagine themselves as citizens of the Chinese Republic even long after the end of the Sino-centric

policies in Taiwan. Such imagination was then only disturbed through opposing proposals from "Separatists" that promoted an alternative Taiwanese Nationalism. Through this process, the different groups of people resulted in their opposing national identities despite being citizens of the same state.

Finally, as the very definition of 'subjectivity' emphasizes that "power is exercised only over free subjects," the nature of subjectivity can only be observed when there exist other possibilities of behaviours and without the imposition of physical restraints (Foucault 1982, 790). This identification of the concept fits well with my research framework on citizen-shaping under a democratic system. Certainly, Foucault's interpretation of 'political subjectivity' and power is constrained to his understanding of Western society and state. Yet related works by Ching and Sheridan on Taiwan in both colonial and contemporary contexts serve as sociocultural connections as well as preliminary understandings to my fieldwork research. In the end, I hope my work presents an ethnographic example of how the process of citizen-shaping occurs under the framework of modern societies and nation-states as shaped by "local democratic features." Through this case study on the Chinese Nationalists in contemporary Taiwan, I seek to address ongoing theoretical debates in political anthropology about the conceptual understandings of national imagination and ethnic identity while also connecting with broader literature concerning democracy and post-authoritarian reforms in the age of modern politics.

Research Design and Methods

My research design centered around the day of the national-wide Taiwanese presidential and legislative election on January 11th, 2020, with the fieldwork divided into three stages based on their proximity to election day. During the preliminary phase of my project and based on my literature review as detailed in the first chapter, I conducted naturalistic observations of my field site while exploring local networks in preparation for on-site interviews. I mostly operated observation online by reading different news media sources covering the upcoming election and documenting the general public's growing ideological debates. At this stage, I also identified and recruited potential interlocutors regarding their

perception of Taiwanese politics, elections and their relation with the KMT — be it merely a supporting one or an actual member of the party.

In the second and central part of my fieldwork, I was present in my field sites to conduct interviews and participant-observation research for a "person-centered approach" (Hollan 2005). As explored in the second chapter, I focused on Chinese Nationalists in urban Kaohsiung as my main focus of participant-observation research. The reasons to select Kaohsiung as my main field site were multiple. Firstly, Kaohsiung was a city that I had the most familiarity with due to my upbringing and living experience, which facilitated local networking and situating myself in the field as an in-circle member of Chinese Nationalism supporters. Secondly, political activities were the most prominent in urban areas in Taiwan. Thus, a major city such as Kaohsiung provided an immense schedule of rallies, meetups, and assemblies for my participant-observation research. Thirdly, certain cities in Taiwan were often known for their signature allegiance to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Still, voters of Kaohsiung had diverted from their traditional preference recently — converting to an unconventional KMT candidate, Han Kuo-yu in 2018 after a twenty-year interval — thus proving the valuable depth and complexity in studying its voters. As the Kaohsiung mayor and the incumbent presidential candidate for the KMT, Han was one of my research's targeted research focuses. As the centre of ongoing political attention — dubbed "Han-wave" — even before his victory as the Kaohsiung mayor in 2018, Han was depicted as an unprecedentedly popular KMT politician. Praised as a saviour of Chinese Nationalism among his supporters, Han was portrayed as a proletariat-politician despite his possession of assets pointing to the contrary. In competition with the incumbent president Tsai Ing-wen of DPP and veteran politician James Soong, Han's reputation as a politician — as well as the local factions involved in his provisional victory — circulated throughout the election season was an important source of material for my fieldwork. During this stage, I completed interviews with around ten individuals (three individual interviews and two group interviews) for a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of the local Chinese Nationalists and their ways of associating with Chinese Nationalism and the KMT party. The primary documentation during my fieldwork was ethnographic notes, with voice recordings as supporting

materials. As I understood the prospective risks where my interlocutors could question my motive or personal opinion on politicized issues, I framed my interviews as a platform for their expression of self and reasoning of political affiliations instead of an intervention or interrogation.

The third and final part of my fieldwork took place on the day and the aftermath of the election, during which I observed the quick shift in local society and conducted open-ended interviews with selected interlocutors. At this stage, my fieldwork was supplemented with access to available archives such as the Central Elections Commission regarding the past and present political discourses of KMT as well as media reports of the events taking place in real-time. The concluding section of the thesis documents my continuous observations of the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists, with its ongoing transformation, explained through the concept of political subjectivity. As the result of the election was to be unknown until this stage, I also studied the shift of emotions and changing perspectives on the future concerning the voters' political preference as further demonstrations of their ongoing detachment as citizens of a past regime, who now found themselves divided between their membership of the community and their understandings of democracy as shaped by contemporary politics.

The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned from Crete had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their places, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same.

(Plutarch, Life of Theseus)

Chapter One: Colonization Without a Homeland

I was always aware that my family history intertwined with the fate of the nation. As told repeatedly to me as a child, our story first began when my four grandparents fled to Taiwan as refugees following the retreat of the government of the Republic of China (ROC) in 1949 as the outcome of the lost Civil War against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This means that my four grandparents were all Mainlanders, in the current classifications of ethnic groups. For the decades after, the millions of Mainlanders in Taiwan were a significant component of Chiang Kai-shek's vision of reconstructing as well as maintaining his imaginary rule over regions of "Greater China."

In many ways, the authoritarian government ruled by the autocracy of Chiang Kai-shek and the nationalist party, the Kuomintang (KMT), was able to fabricate a new community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan through its implemented cultural policies and long-term political socialization.[3] The effects of these political decisions proved to have lasted longer than the authoritarian regime itself. Through the ROC's drastic decision to relocate its central government, an abnormal development of national imagination and ethnic identity among the citizens was perhaps inevitable given the political disorder in the region. After 1949, the official history of "China" as a nation subsequently diverged into two, with Beijing and Taipei governments both claiming to be the sole legitimate ruler of "China." In Taipei, the government of ROC proceeded with its curriculum to Sinicize Taiwan aggressively in support of its political legacy. The Mainlanders, in turn, were reassured the move to Taiwan was merely a temporary

[3] The continuation of political socialization as a technique for community association is discussed in Chapter Two.

relocation — and that they would be reunited with their families and properties back in China once the government retook control of the whole country. While the promise was never fulfilled, this political ambition of Chiang Kai-shek significantly impacted identity formation among people of Taiwan in the following decades. Such sense of belonging was then further complicated as many Mainlanders ended up marrying into local families. With an overwhelming number of Mainlanders soldiers and civil servants taking local wives after leaving their first family back in China, this identity was integrated into the local consciousness as the new dominant. To many Native Taiwanese of Indigenous, Hoklo, and Hakka descent, the arriving "Chineseness" in both cultural and political sense was thus not too different from the colonial policies once imposed by imperial Japan (Chun 1996).

Most of the first and second-generation Mainlanders willingly sustained their Chinese identity and embraced the nationalist narrative promoted by the ROC government, who they believed had ensured their safety and survival against Communist China. This historical and political sentiment was commonly shared among all Chinese Nationalism supporters in Taiwan. Today, more than thirty years after the official end of the dictatorial regime in 1987, many in modern Taiwan continue to pledge allegiance to the formerly dominant KMT party and its nationalist ideals. While such a reaction was not uncommon to post-authoritarian societies where citizens reminisced about their past client-patron relationship with the former regime, the particular case of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan was fascinating due to the collective abiding attachment to the Nationalist Party and its Sino-centric ideologies for reasons beyond their ethnic origin.[4] Nevertheless, as Taiwan entered a period of political transition and identity change like the tale of the ship told in *Life of Theseus*, the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan discovered that their familiarity with the nation had been slipping through their fingers. They now found themselves as a diaspora population in a foreign land with a new national imagination and historical narrative (Simon 2009). Upon this revelation, many members of the community felt that they had been deceived by modern politics, which had cost them the legitimacy and morale of their nation, the Republic of China (ROC).

[4] As shown in local election results, the ethnic composition of KMT supporters are quite diverse and not limited to Mainlander descent, with some of the party's strongest support seen among the indigenous community.

As both a researcher and a Taiwanese of Mainlander descent, I found the mere existence and persistent belief in Chinese Nationalism among the local community a compelling subject-matter. In addition to personal incentive, I was also intrigued by the questions it potentially raised concerning the reconstruction of national identities and imaginations in the context of post-authoritarian societies. In truth, while many rationalized the community of Chinese Nationalists to be an inexorable product of the nationalist policies and Sino-centric ideals propagated throughout the KMT authoritarian regime, I was interested in the relationship between the KMT and its supporters — both of which continue to be active political actors in the young electoral system of Taiwan — and how such pattern originated in an imposed nationalist imagination could endure in a democratic setting. This first chapter of my thesis will thus serve as a preliminary examination of my field to contextualize the case study of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. By understanding the local historical and political contexts, I seek to analyze how the nationalist imagination once implemented upon the population as part of the nation-building agenda accounted for the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists in modern Taiwan. Building on this, I hope this detailed examination of the studied region, as the foundation of my research, will supplement and further scrutinize the common narrative regarding discussions of national belonging, conditioned patriotism, and the exploitation of identity politics in the age of democracy.

Formosa: Island of Conquerors

The Taiwanese people had gone through various political struggles and cultural influences long before Chiang Kai-shek claimed the island and its surrounding region in 1945. Having been ruled by the Dutch, the Spanish and a "Chinese Pirate King" throughout the 17th century (Sheridan 2016, 117-119), Taiwan was seized by the Qing Dynasty of China for the two centuries thereafter[5]. This period saw waves of Chinese immigrants arriving from across the strait. By the end of the 19th century, Taiwan was ceded again to Japan to fulfill the latter's imperial ambition following the Sino-Japanese War in 1894.

[5]Founded by Ming dynasty loyalist Koxinga (Zheng Cheng-gong), the Kingdom of Tungning was a government located in Taiwan from 1661 to 1683. Zheng had accumulated his capital and political power through business with Chinese merchants and his father, Zheng Zhi-long, a known international pirate and military leader.

Accordingly, a Taiwanese consciousness first emerged following the defeat of Qing China in the Sino-Japanese war as people in Taiwan rejected the negotiated decision by establishing the "Formosa Republic" (Manthorpe 2005, 157). Nevertheless, the resistance was soon dissolved due to the advance of Japanese troops and the lack of support from Qing China. As residents of a newly established colony, the people of Taiwan went through immense transformations concerning political identity, language, and culture for the next fifty years. Between imperial Japan's attempts to integrate the Taiwanese people as political subjects while also alienating them as citizens, the colonization began to shape a collective identity among the people of Taiwan that was both local and national (Simon 2003, 113; Tseng 2016; Wong 2001, 181). With rapid modernization as well as industrialization due to the economic and political demand of the Japanese empire, these early stages of modernization as colonial structures resulted in a growing local identity as Taiwan was imagined as a social space independent from China (Hall 2003; Simon 2003, 113). During the final years of the colonization and the height of wartime Japanese imperialism, the people of Taiwan had to compromise between their allegiance to the empire and regional ties to Taiwan. While the ancestry of most Taiwanese people could be traced back to Austronesian and Han Chinese origins, the half-century of Japanese imperial rule — in forms of language and cultural policy — greatly nourished and framed the local society to become distinctly and exclusively Taiwanese (Ching 2001; Hall 2003; Wong 2001). In a way, such a discursive identity production process implied that a common understanding of being Taiwanese was perpetually in construction, contributed by often-disputed historical perspectives and political narratives. After colonization ended in 1945, Taiwanese identity manufacturing was further complicated due to imperial Japan's surrender and the arrival of the Republic of China (ROC) government (Hall 2003).

The years after 1945 marked a consequential period of transition for Taiwan in multiple respects. Firstly, the island and its surrounding regions were no longer under the Japanese Empire's control due to the latter's defeat in World War II. Instead, as postwar peace treaties required Japan to renounce all right, title and claim to its colonial possessions, the administration of Taiwan was granted to the ROC government in 1952 (Tien and Shiau 1992). Following this, the people of Taiwan were faced with several

cultural and linguistic challenges upon the regime change. Many who initially admired and anticipated the ROC government's arrival as their "ancestral nation" (Ching 2001, 62) were later disappointed by the postwar corruption and strict postcolonial policies inflicted by the new administration. The Taiwanese were trapped in between their identities as colonial subjects of the old empire and alienated nationals of the new republic, especially as the incoming Mainlander rulers saw them as Japanized subjects that required re-education (Simon 2003, 116). Protests against the ill-treatment of Taiwanese people continued to occur following the end of World War II and eventually led to the Martial Law orders in 1947 (Simon 2003, 117-118; Wong 2001, 186). Back in China, the ROC's government had fallen into conflict with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after its war victory. As the Communists' full control of China became imminent in the final stages of the Civil War, Chiang Kai-Shek — President of ROC as well as chairman of the Chinese Nationalist party "Kuomintang" (KMT) — announced the "temporary retreat" of the KMT-ruled government of ROC to Taiwan in 1949. The retreat notably not only relocated the central government of ROC but also brought over millions of government officers, troops, and middle-class civilians fleeing the communist rule to find refuge in Taiwan — most of whom were not aware that the "temporary retreat" would last longer than just a couple of months.

A New Form of Colonization

While the Japanese Colonial Government in Taiwan was never a proper form of representative politics (Rigger 2002, 37-38; Tsai 2009, 156-157), many Taiwanese received higher education about civil rights and ideas of self-determination that were prominent in contemporary times.[6] These highly educated intellectuals were, therefore, the most elated upon learning of the defeat of imperial Japan and Taiwan's eventual transition to the ROC. The "return" to the Republic of China (ROC) was thus seen as an opportunity for Taiwan to join a "proper democracy" and its "ancestral land" (Ching 2001, 57-58). The authoritarian rule of Chiang Kai-shek and the corrupt administration of ROC nevertheless deeply disappointed the intellectuals. Many described the upsetting encounter through the expression "the dogs

[6] Local elections were held but to a limited extent, and all were ceased prior to the start of WWII.

left, and then the pigs came" (Simon 2003, 116) to recount the postwar chaos brought by the new government. Under the Martial Law order and "Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion," Chiang Kai-shek's government established a state of autocracy in Taiwan endorsed by the KMT in spite of the democratic framework of ROC. To cement the "national unity" needed during the perpetual state of war against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Chiang Kai-shek and his advisors initiated a series of policies that suppressed the development of local culture and identity in Taiwan (Simon 2010, 90; Tseng 2016, 231). Instead, the "Chinese race" was promoted as a universal identity manifested in the nationalist propaganda found in education, social policies, and cultural activities (Simon 2003, 116; Wong 2001, 187). In particular, the narratives of "Free China" (Chang 2015, 37) and the "Great Chinese Nation" (Wang 2013) were imposed by official agencies in forms of legends and idolization of national heroes, many of whom contributed to the establishment of ROC in 1911 and the victory in World War II against Japan. As the ROC government promoted the sensational account of the "Chinese glory," the people of Taiwan were divided by the different collective memories of the war and previous life under the colonization. In addition to learning the Chinese language (Wong 2001, 184) and cultural customs reintroduced by the new government (Simon 2010, 90; Tseng 2016, 231),[7] those who lived through the Japanese rule were obliged to learn of a new national imagination that conflicted with their memories (Heylen 2001, 39-40). That is, during the final years of colonization, young Taiwanese men had been drafted to the Pacific theatre of World War II to fulfill imperial Japan's plan to conquer Asia, and many families lost their sons and brothers as a result. Commemorating those who were sacrificed in war as "colonial subjects" was, however, seen as pro-Japan acts in the eyes of the new ROC government. The ROC government and its relocated citizens had, in fact, recently developed anti-Japanese sentiment due to their experience with the Japanese invasion of China throughout World War II (Heylen 2001, 40; Simon 2003, 116). On top of all, Chiang Kai-shek had become paranoid about losing Taiwan, his last resort, to any anti-ROC operations after ceding his Chinese territories to the

[7] In addition to the Indigenous, Hoklo, and Hakka Taiwanese who had to relearn the Chinese language after the Japanese colonization, many Mainlanders also had to educate themselves with "proper Mandarin" instead of their provincial/local language or accent.

Communist regime. This led to a homogenized official narrative that was extremely nationalist and patriotic to the ROC, while ignoring the existence of those who experienced a different political past. Subsequently, the democratic orders of the ROC were suspended and replaced with an authoritarian dictatorship in Taiwan for the nearly four decades.

Certain traits of the early ROC rule in Taiwan indicated the central government's intentional alienation of its original residents and their collective memories of past social and political life. Prompted by his ambition to re-conquer China, Chiang Kai-shek projected his memories and imagination of the "Chinese Republic" onto Taiwan through a process of Sinicization that imposed the Chinese nationalist imagination on all citizens. Despite having lost all political control to China, Chiang Kai-shek persistently addressed Taiwan as only the temporary base of ROC, where the remaining "Free Chinese" resided (Chang 2015, 37). The exclusive Taiwanese identity that was once developed under Japanese colonization was now overshadowed by the emphasis of a shared "Chinese" citizenship (Manthorpe 2005, 204; Simon 2009, 727-728; Tseng 2016, 231). As the relocated central government maintained the illusion of a still-functioning Chinese Republic, the millions of Mainlander troops, officials, and civilians continued in their undying support of the exiled nationalist government. To a certain extent, the Mainlanders were the most crucial element that sustained ROC's ongoing existence. While many Taiwanese who experienced the Japanese colonization felt alienated by the Sino-centric policies of the new government (Manthorpe 2005, 204), the Mainlanders had lived under the rule of ROC since its 1911 revolution and witnessed its extensive war efforts during their battles against Japan and the communists. Additionally, most Mainlanders fled China as refugees knowing they would be targeted in the upcoming communist revolution as the bourgeois, the landowners, and high officials of the nationalist regime, thus further rationalizing the exiled government as the guardian of their right and freedom as lawful citizens. State official narratives focused exclusively on the collective memories of Mainlanders about wartime China and relocation to Taiwan, essentially setting an informal context of citizen-shaping for the next generation. Under the continuous rule of ROC, the Mainlanders therefore survived not only as refugees but also in the form of a diasporic population without a homeland (Simon 2009) as the protected minority

and political assets of the new government. The political subjectivity of Mainlanders was then further formed through their prolonged attachment to China, which was now practiced through the administrative as well as their own continual identification of distinct "home provinces" (sheng-ji).

Under the newly created ethnic category that labelled their origins from outside of Taiwan, the "Mainlanders" retained the national imagination and identity that was pivotal to the legitimacy of the ROC government. As the preliminary form of the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan, the connection between the Mainlander community and the ROC government was unique. It was not only based on political support but also a 'clientelist' relationship between the people and the state (Wu 2003, 91). As studied by political anthropologists (Brković 2017), 'clientelism' describes the relationship between the local population (the client) and their patron based on an exchange of services for political support. Through social networks and knowledge of surrounding circles in a struggling state, the concept was often observed through the creation of personal connections in expectation of a patronage system. In the context of Taiwan under the authoritarian rule of KMT, the majority of the Mainlanders took up or continued occupations in government offices or military bases and resided in the urban and rural areas of Taiwan in subsidized neighborhoods known as "Military dependents' villages."[8] There was therefore little doubt that the community was tended by the ROC government in both cultural and bureaucratic ways. For one, the diverse provincial origins of the Mainlander community were emphasized in demonstration of Chiang Kai-shek's continuous rule of the "Chinese nation" and the fair distribution of political resources among the citizens (Gates 1979, 388). An excessive number of governmental positions were, as a result, reserved for applicants from Mainlander families to display the proper allocation of spots between "ancestral provinces," — Taiwan being one of the many (Luo 2003). From this patron-client relationship, the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists in modern Taiwan eventually developed.

[8] Many if not most of the Mainlanders in Taiwan lived a provisional lifestyle due to the belief that their return to China was imminent.

On the other hand, under the umbrella ethnic term as expressed through their political identity, the Mainlanders were able to establish an immediate sense of unity among their members from different parts of China through their "lingua franca" in the official national language of Mandarin (He 2008), even when they also spoke regional dialects that were mutually incomprehensible. The use of common language, according to Anderson (1983, 197), was a pivotal component to the construction of national imaginations. For these reasons, while the Mainlander community only took up about 10% of the post-war population in Taiwan (Wang 2005), their presence was laid as the groundwork for citizen-shaping that dominated the local politics for the decades to come. As Mandarin was imposed on the entire population, it even became the language of social distinction.

While the fraternizing relationship between the ROC government and the Mainlander community was rationalized foremost through their shared loss — the former of its main territory and the latter of their stability in life — it was the subsequent Sino-centric hierarchy that established their long-lasting ties that transcended generations. As the individual accounts of fleeing China, losing all contact with family and friends, and building their new home on an unknown land became incorporated into the collective memories of the Mainlander community (Wang 2013), the refugee experience of the Mainlanders in Taiwan was peculiar in its own way. That is, in spite of the exile journey, they were welcomed with another sense of familiarity upon arrival in Taiwan. In reality, the ROC government had recreated itself to its best ability after the relocation (Chang 2015; Simon 2003, 116; Wong 2001, 187), emphasizing its prolonged connection with the ancestral land of China.[9] As a result, major universities, research institutions, and government departments were re-established or re-founded in Taiwan as replicas based on their equivalents in China; streets in major Taiwanese cities were renamed after Chinese provinces or famed nationalist mottos; last but not least, Japanese and other locally-spoken languages were banned in public spaces, and Mandarin Chinese was regarded as the only official language (Chang 2015; He 2008; Wong 2001, 184). In many ways, these measures reinforced the idea of a "Chinese" identity that directly

[9] This can be analyzed as another feature of imagined communities with an attachment to a distanced land and parallel people (Anderson 1983, 188).

fed into the shared consciousness of not only the Mainlander community (Corcuff 2004; Simon 2009; Wang 2013) but all citizens of the ROC. At the same time, however, social interactions between Mainlanders and the Native Taiwanese were kept to a minimum due to language and culture barriers and as people chose to avoid unnecessary confrontations (Wilson 1970, 123). While remaining in prolonged exile and rarely financially affluent, the Mainlander community was portrayed as the true inheritors of the Chinese culture, uncontaminated like their relatives left behind in communist China or their rural Japanized-Taiwanese neighbors (Gates 1979, 387-388). In the end, the narrative of the "Great Chinese Nation" implemented by the ROC government as part of its nation-building design not only implied the culturally superior stance of the Mainlanders compared to their fellow citizens but also introduced the idea of an ethnic-based hierarchy that would affect the people of Taiwan to this day.

Displaced Nationals and the Question of Belonging

Raised in Taiwan as a third-generation Mainlander, I grew up with stories and legends intertwined with Chinese culture and the official account of national history. At the time, I was not mindful of the political significance and implied historic inconsistency behind my upbringing. By the time my generation was born, the narrative of fleeing China had become an important identity marker and shared family history for all Mainlander community members. Without any known connection to China, we were brought up by our grandparents' stories about the Chinese Civil war and their early life in Taiwan. Our parents, the second-generation Mainlanders, would agree with their accounts about wartime and the government's best attempt to care for its citizens. At times, the first-generation would reminisce about life before the communists, and we would listen admiringly. Stories about China were limited to their childhood memories and how they lived under the attacks, first from Japan and later from the CCP's People's Liberation Army. Even years after their relocation, many still identified themselves by their home province in China instead of merely "Taiwanese" (Wang 2005; Wilson 1970, 123).

Most Mainlanders did not see their relocation to Taiwan as a form of immigration but as a necessary but temporary relocation along with the government. For decades, members of the Mainlander

community believed that their life in Taiwan was merely a short-term arrangement (Corcuff 2004; Simon 2009). As the much-anticipated return to China was repeatedly postponed, the eventual realization of the reality resulted in generational trauma that was integrated into the collective identity of the Mainlanders. Firstly, as the first-generation Mainlanders had to build their life from scratch in Taiwan without the help traditionally acquired from family, it led to many first-generation Mainlanders to be presented as the "founders" of their new family in Taiwan: one that was reborn through the lost connections to extended families in China. Hence, the first-generation was often idolized as well as sympathized for their pain and sacrifices in exchange for a better life for their descendants. Secondly, many first-generation Mainlanders left their parents, spouses, and children in China, thinking the relocation to Taiwan was only a temporary sanctuary. The forty-year-long political animosity between ROC in Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Mainland China after 1949 meant that many died before seeing their loved ones again. The experience of having one's life altered so abruptly and then without any hope of change indefinitely proved to be another source of grief that was passed down in the Mainlander families. The shared trauma of the first-generation mainlander was witnessed and inherited by their children, most of whom were born and raised in Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek's ROC government.

Without many personal memories of pre-1949 China, second-generation Mainlanders' identity in Taiwan was often a direct outcome of their parents' storytelling and the government's Sino-centric curriculum. Building on the parents' — or more often, the father's (Wang 2005, 64) — Chinese identity, second-generation Mainlanders found themselves an easy but puzzling pattern to follow.[10] While more familiar with the island of Taiwan than with the lost territory of China, the second-generation Mainlanders still comfortably retained the identity-based connection with the great "Chinese nation." Such outcome could be attributed to not only the family legacy but also being the immediate recipients of ROC's administered nationalist narrative in the form of educational modules and in-school 'political socialization' (Wilson 1970). The taught nationalist story was especially apparent in subjects such as

[10] Many members of the nationalist army that relocated to Taiwan eventually took local wives since women of Mainlander descent were scarce.

history and geography, and particularly the latter through which the "spatial reality" was mapped. Anderson regards the mapping of spatial reality a critical institution of power for constructing the imagined community for its ability to "shape[d] the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion...the legitimacy of its ancestry" (1983, 163-164). To illustrate, for lessons in geography, maps of ROC that included Taiwan and the lost territories of China — as well as Mongolia and parts of Russia — were distributed to schools to young students to depict the entirety of the republic before "the communist attack" (Wang 2013; Wilson 1970, 115-116). For the course on national history, students were schooled about the 5,000 years of Chinese civilization (Heylen 2001, 42-43) that preceded the ROC and educated about the Japanese invasion of Eastern China in the early 20th century — a period when the island of Taiwan was still under Japanese rule. These examples, among others, were ways employed by the political institution to establish the historical roots of the new imagined community as an ancient one (Anderson 1983, 109). Overall, young students were surrounded continuously by in-class examples, regardless of subject, that focused on the animosity between the Nationalists and the Communists in the encouragement of the in-group identity that vowed to avenge the nation (Wilson 1970, 113-115). These instances that neglected the presence of Taiwanese prospects and the political reality of ROC resonated well with the Mainlanders for its consistency with the family narrative, thus facilitating the shaping of future citizens on a non-discriminating level. Ultimately, this deceiving portrayal of the nation operated by the authoritarian government sustained the Chinese identity as well as fabricated a sense of national belonging that was common to all citizens. Nonetheless, as the Mainlander community settled in Taiwan permanently, a debate of identity and the sense of belonging was forthcoming as the age of post-authoritarian society approached.

Under Martial Law, ROC citizens were instructed about their pledge to the nation and repeatedly reminded that Taiwan, while taking up the majority of the national territory, was no more than a province (Heylen 2001, 40). The effects of this nationalist narrative in the educational curriculum and other social policies were long-lasting and multiple. Under this framework, the Native Taiwanese who had lived on the island for centuries were able to validate their identity as both Taiwanese and citizens of ROC: the

former as a connection to their homeland and the latter as a label given by the government. On the other hand, the Mainlanders had more difficulty coming to terms with the Taiwanese identity, as their outland origin was persistently highlighted by the government (Corcuff 2004) and their family narrative. In reality, while most second-generation Mainlanders born and raised in Taiwan still claimed to be of "out-of-province (Taiwan) descent," the identity markers of Mainlanders had become diminished to family stories and collective memories built upon the official narrative of the ROC government. Most members of the Mainlander community subsequently aligned themselves with the Nationalist Party for their shared interpretation of the national sovereignty and the political status of Taiwan. Concurrently, the government's Sino-centric policy had been extremely productive in the way that the majority of the local population had come to form a new collective life under the premise of a common official language and ethnonational culture. As a result, the construction of a new imagined community became possible (Anderson 1983, 196-197). With the Mainlander community and the Native Taiwanese beginning to share their living space, culture, and language through prolonged social relationships, the line between the nation of ROC and the region of Taiwan became further blurred. As the basis of the imagined community, this collective identity of Chinese Nationalists was closely intertwined with the nation's Chinese framework and was thought to be secure. However, the sense of assurance came to an end when the Martial Law order was lifted in 1987 and the age of democracy followed thereafter (Tien and Shiau 1992). After decades of the unique clientelist relationship with the authoritarian government, the Mainlander community — and by extension, all those who identified as Chinese Nationalists — suddenly found themselves in a foreign land that was fast-changing and unrecognizable right in front of their own eyes (Corcuff 2004, 67-68; Heylen 2001, 44-45; Simon 2009, 94-97).

Green and Blue: The Colors of Democracy

Following the lift of Martial Law in 1987 and the reluctant "Taiwanization" (Wong 2001, 196) — also known as "localization" or "nativization" — of the Chinese Nationalist Party KMT, people of Taiwan saw a series of democratization that paralleled the awakening of Taiwanese consciousness in the

1990s (Simon 2009, 93-94; Tien and Shiau 1992, 59; Wong 2001, 192-193). Attempts to reinvent the KMT as a party were evident as its administrative center advanced to employ more Taiwanese of "Native descent" instead of entrusting its powers exclusively to the Mainlander community (Lee 1986, 16; Tien and Shiau 1992, 61). The first democratic presidential election took place in 1996 when the nation saw the incumbent KMT chairman Lee Teng-hui elected as the first president of ROC to be born in Taiwan. While many considered this election as an example of a successful transition from a one-party dictatorship to democracy, Lee served as the Vice President to Chiang Ching-kuo — the son of Chiang Kai-shek and the President of ROC since 1978. Lee, as a result, had taken over the presidential seat when Chiang Ching-kuo died in 1988. In other words, the first direct-popular presidential election in 1996, while democratic, was perhaps a mere formality required for KMT to extend its legitimate political power in Taiwan (Bosco 1992; Paley 2002, 476-477; Wu 2003). Nevertheless, native-born Lee Teng-hui's rise to power not only assisted the KMT to be normalized as a democratic political party but also confirmed that politics in Taiwan was now fair game for all — the safety net that had existed for Mainlanders and, to an extent, the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists was no more.

The 1990s were a turbulent time for the party of KMT and the loyal supporters of Chinese Nationalism. During the final years of the Martial Law era in Taiwan, anti-KMT activists initiated a series of movements that would later establish the "Democratic Progressive Party" (DPP) to compete with the KMT in subsequent elections. With the KMT emblem featuring the colour blue and DPP waving a flag that showed a map of Taiwan in colour green, the parties became easily recognized for their difference in colour. The representatives were consequently referred to as "pan-blue" or "pan-green" candidates, respectively. While the KMT saw victory in the first couple of direct-democratic elections, the DPP attracted the support and attention of many Native Taiwanese in protest of the decades of Sino-centric KMT authoritarian rule that favoured the Mainlander community. On the other hand, the pro-Taiwan DPP was seen as separatists and a threat to their nationalist values in the eyes of the Chinese Nationalists, including other Native Taiwanese that preferred ROC's Chinese framework. The newly elected Lee Teng-Hui, however, continued to promote local Taiwanese culture within the KMT and advocated for a

reformed cross-strait relation with PRC on equal state-to-state grounds. Long-term Chinese Nationalism supporters gradually began to doubt Lee's capacity to lead the nation of ROC as well as the Nationalist Party of KMT. Most supporters I encountered in my field noted that in hindsight, Lee was a spy from the DPP who "had blue skin but green bones" (藍皮綠骨).[11] The party supporters nonetheless expected that KMT, as the ruling party, would return to its core nationalist values when Lee ended his presidential term in the year 2000.

The people of Taiwan experienced an unprecedented election in the year 2000. The DPP had nominated its own presidential candidate and the KMT was split into two due to internal disputes. The split in KMT meant that two candidates of similar political background were running for president: the official candidate Lien Chan and the break-away independent candidate, former Taiwan provincial governor James Soong. The DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian, on the other hand, was a former lawyer and the center of the election-craze, attracting equal amounts of support from Taiwanese Nationalists and hatred from the community of Chinese Nationalism supporters. The Mainlanders were particularly repelled by his speeches given in his native Hoklo, instead of the official national language of Mandarin. Many thought that Chen was manipulating his supporters through identity politics and personal charisma with his skills as a trained lawyer, and undoubtedly lacked the competence to run the nation. More importantly, Chen symbolized the local Taiwanese consciousness that was a breakaway from the nationalist unity (Wong 2001, 190-193). The disgust with Chen was almost universal among the community of Chinese Nationalists, who thought he was no match for the orthodox politicians trained and produced by the KMT party. Certainly, the supporters of KMT still had to choose between the remaining two options of Lien and Soong due to the temporary intra-party split. Yet, deep down, they knowingly would have been happy with either winning the election.

I was eight years old during the presidential election in 2000 and vividly remembered the streets being taken over by campaign flags in different colours representing the political parties. Family dinners

[11] While a popular term circulated among KMT supporters, the real source of this insult remains unknown to me throughout my research.

and reunions were exclusively occupied by political talks and debate. There was still so much to be said and argued about even though everyone was voting for the same side. In almost unanimous accordance, the Mainlander community made up of my close relatives and family friends expressed their disapproval of the DPP and its candidate. Instead, they focused on deciding between Lien Chan and James Soong — the two candidates that conformed to the official nationalist narrative.[12] After the KMT officially endorsed Lien, Soong left the party in protest to run as an independent candidate, bringing a significant number of supporters with him. Throughout the election, the Mainlander community was torn between their choices but most decided to support Soong, disregarding the KMT under Lee's leadership. Yet on election night — to the horror of all Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan — DPP's Chen Shui-bian rose to victory as a result of the three-ways tie by winning by less than a 3 percent margin of the casted vote (Central Election Commission 2017). The shock among the Chinese Nationalists concerning the election result was long-lasting. It marked the first time that the KMT had lost the presidential seat in the history of ROC, ending its fifty years of dominant rule in Taiwan. Outcries about imminent cross-strait wars and the end of Chinese civilization spread across the country in the following weeks (Wong 2001, 190-193). And even after nearly twenty years, the collective distress about Chen's victory was still apparent in the present when I conducted my fieldwork in Taiwan. When asked to comment on the presidential election in 2000, many of my interlocutors expressed a great sense of remorse, stating that the community should never have split the votes to allow Chen to be elected and that "he was not supposed to win."

The effects of the presidential election in 2000 were profound in many ways for KMT and the supporters of Chinese Nationalism. Politically, the election symbolized the first peaceful transition of political power under the democratic framework of ROC and the first time that the KMT lost the presidential seat as its founding party. This revealed the belated hard truth of democracy to the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan: that the Nationalist Party could not hold power forever. The election also fundamentally changed the political scene in Taiwan and gave rise to the new age of party politics.

[12] Both Lien and Soong were born in ROC China before the government's relocation to Taiwan; Lien however was considered a Native Taiwanese by the government as his paternal grandfather had only moved the family to China in 1933.

Moreover, James Soong announced his own party's formation after losing to Chen by such a close margin in second place, and would be known as the perpetual presidential candidate in the next twenty years. The KMT, on the other hand — to the delight of its supporters — expelled Lee as chairman and party member as his nomination of Lien over Soong was seen in retrospect as a calculated move that led to DPP's victory. Under Lien's leadership, the KMT returned to its former platform that embraced its Chinese Nationalist roots. While the Nationalist Party's supporters welcomed the restoration of their core values, the divergence between Chinese and Taiwanese Nationalism was further crystallized through party politics and their respective nationalist imaginations. In contemporary Taiwan, many still considered the 2000 presidential election to have set the premise of the ongoing political division between supporters of "green" and "blue" during later elections — or in the words of some Chinese Nationalists, "the start of the end of democracy" in Taiwan.

Post-Authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) in Transformation

In the following twenty years, supporters of the KMT and its nationalist doctrine continued to sustain their faith through rounds of nation-wide elections (see Table 1). Two decades had passed since the unfitting Chen Shui-bian of DPP had become president, who after his term was tried and jailed due to corruption charges. In 2008, supporters saw the victory of KMT's presidential candidate Ma Ying-Jeou, a Harvard graduate of Mainlander descent — in other words, a KMT "golden boy." Following the KMT ideologies, the party loyalists were overjoyed with Ma's series of policies that would return to the roots of Chinese Nationalism and a more collaborative relationship with the PRC. As the economy took priority before the competition between nationalisms under the Ma Ying-Jeou administration, economic and political cooperation between Taiwan and China became ordinary. Such a phenomenon was a contrast to KMT's traditional anti-communist stance as well as DPP's anti-China sentiments. Still, the people of Taiwan were pleased with the hard-earned stability.

Table 1: List of past elected presidents in Taiwan (Central Election Commission 2020c).

Name of elected President	Political party	Election date	Winning votes
Lee Tung-hui	KMT	March 23, 1996	5,813,699 (58%)
Chen Shui-bian	DPP	March 18, 2000	4,977,697 (39.30%)
Chen Shui-bian	DPP	March 20, 2004	6,471,970 (50.11%)[13]
Ma Ying-jeou	KMT	March 22, 2008	7,659,014 (58.44%)
Ma Ying-jeou	KMT	January 14, 2012[14]	6,891,139 (51.60%)
Tsai Ing-wen	DPP	January 16, 2016	6,894,744 (56.12%)

In March 2014, the Sunflower Student Movement broke out in Taipei, Taiwan, as a protest against the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) with the PRC (Hsu 2014). The Sunflower Movement proved to be a watershed moment for Taiwanese democracy that unveiled the many fundamental differences in political beliefs and national imaginations among the local population. As many Chinese Nationalism supporters, along with the nationalist KMT party, condemned the movement as violent and orchestrated, the DPP praised the students for their acts of bravery and democracy. Two years later in 2016, when DPP's Tsai Ing-wen was elected as the first female president of ROC with promises of same-sex marriage and better labour policies, the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan were once more disheartened to find the new government turning away again from its nationalist ethics. Yet following the lost presidential seat in 2016, with members of the KMT central committee proposing that the party go through further reformations to attract younger voters, the supporters seemed to have concluded otherwise.

The platform of KMT as a political party took an interesting turn after the DPP electoral victory in 2016. A few KMT supporters saw the defeat as a lesson that the party must now enforce further

[13] The presidential election in 2004 was one full of controversies in the eyes of the Chinese Nationalists; they believed the attempted assassination of Chen the day before (Known as the "3-19 shooting incident") was a staged strategy used to mobilize the sympathetic voters. In the end, the collaborated KMT candidacy between Lien and Soong failed to secure their victory, losing to Chen by less than 0.3% of the cast votes.

[14] This election notably also saw the first presidential nomination of Tsai Ing-wen, who ended up losing the election in 2012 against Ma with 45.63% of the cast votes.

"Taiwanization" and thus abandon its nationalist narratives altogether. The majority of Chinese Nationalists, however, considered it evidence of doomed political modernization. Furthermore, many traditional Chinese Nationalists concluded that Ma was too compromising when it comes to political powers — that he was "too nice and honest" to be dealing with the manipulative DPP politicians. Instead, they became nostalgic about when the party had a robust strongman leadership such as Chiang Kai-shek. In any case, the majority of Chinese Nationalists were satisfied with the policies of Ma's government — especially those that reverted the trends of Taiwanese Nationalism proposed by DPP — and continued to assert that the nation was named the Republic of China, not the Republic of Taiwan as "imagined by the separatists." To the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan, it was not the values or the nationalist ideologies of the party that needed to be reformed but the person who led them.

Supporters of Chinese Nationalism soon found an unexpected political star in the regional election for mayors and city councilors. Throughout the year and leading to November 2018, the nation was swept away by the popularity of former KMT outsider Han Kuo-yu. In reality, Han was not expected to win the mayoralty of the traditionally pro-DPP Kaohsiung city even by his party, the KMT. Han's charisma, anti-elite platform, and traditionalist social views nonetheless helped him gain popularity not only among KMT's base of supporters but also many conservative, working-class voters who customarily supported the DPP. Most importantly and to the Chinese Nationalists' delight, Han (unlike Ma) was extremely unapologetic about ROC's nationalist narrative. While Han's image was almost an unconventional one for KMT politicians — grass-rooted, academically average, and passionately outspoken — he was still very much recognized as a politician of true KMT origins, having been born and raised in a military dependents' village in Taiwan as a second-generation Mainlander.[15] In many ways, Han's victory as the mayor of Kaohsiung solidified trends for the KMT to become a hard-core Chinese Nationalist Party and bid goodbye to the "moderate" Ma era. The KMT as a political party was now

[15] The image of traditional KMT politicians in Taiwan was often decorated with a post-secondary degree (predominantly PhD degrees) from well-known, often international, institutions. Han however was almost educated exclusively in Taiwan, with his highest known degree from NCCU.

riding on the popularity of Han and its train of traditionalist Chinese Nationalism — the "Han-wave" — into their next election in 2020, whether party stalwarts liked it or not.

The collective identity of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan developed abruptly throughout Ma's presidency until Han's victory in the local elections of 2018. While his administration roughly followed the nationalist account and the Sino-centric ideology of the KMT, Ma was later portrayed as a centrist who strived to appease both pro-China and pro-Taiwan movements. After Han's rise to prominence, his indifference to pro-Taiwan opinions and insistence on a return to nationalist indoctrination won him the hearts of many Chinese Nationalism supporters. Many who had concealed themselves for years in the face of rising Taiwanese consciousness now rushed to Han's rallies in the hundreds of thousands. Incredible crowds would gather to hear Han speak and sing along traditional war chants from the Martial Law eras; pro-KMT media and political commentators began to portray Han in an idolizing light that was unprecedented since the authoritarian reign of Chiang Kai-shek; merchandise involving Han and the KMT emblem was produced and immediately sold out to devoted supporters. Through further observation, it seemed that Han was admired by his supporters — dubbed "Han fans" — for conflicting reasons. That is, Han supporters appeared to have characterized Han as both a "peasant politician" as well as "CEO Han."[16] Despite the perplexity, Han's popularity reached a record high at the start of 2019 when incumbent president Tsai Ing-wen was deemed a lost cause. Due to the DPP's defeat in the regional election and the unsuccessful referendum result for same-sex marriage, Tsai was struggling to even win the party nomination for her second term. On the other hand, Han won the KMT primary by a landslide only six months into his mayoralty and was set to run in the presidential election in January 2020 in competition with Tsai. The mania of the Han-wave was unstoppable. After years of humiliation caused by DPP's president Chen and time wasted by the indecisive president Ma, Chinese Nationalism seemed to have finally returned to Taiwan in the form of personal incarnation. To supporters of the KMT and its

[16] The former referred to his difference from the orthodox, elitist KMT politicians while the latter as a description of his former position as the general manager at Taipei Agricultural Products Marketing Corporation (TAPMC) — a post that his supporters believed he was stripped of due to DPP's interference.

nationalist doctrine, the long-waited triumph over Taiwanese Nationalism — without political compromise or bargains — was to be witnessed as a moment of history.

Chapter Two: My Parents' Nation Against Mine

As a third-generation Mainlander-Taiwanese, my resolution as an anthropologist and ethnographer to study the community of Chinese Nationalists mainly lies in the paradoxical national belonging and conflicting narratives that I had encountered throughout my experience of growing up in Taiwan. While many Taiwanese of Mainlander descent had grown to object to the Sino-centric ideology of the KMT, most still saw the nationalist party as an extension of their collective identity as both citizens of ROC and lawful inheritors of the Chinese culture.[17] On the other hand, the nationalist party undertook thorough reforms after its nearly four-decades of authoritarian rule to be considered a democratic participant (Tien and Shiau 1992, 59). The administrative government under both President Lee and Ma of the KMT party had significantly downplayed its nationalist values to satisfy the growing Taiwanese awareness, much to the dismay of loyalist supporters. Such attempts to find a middle way had produced a further separation between followers of different nationalisms that was mostly transparent during election seasons. Now more than thirty years since the lift of the Martial Law, many Chinese Nationalism supporters found the familiarity of nationalist ideals slowly deteriorating even within the party of KMT. During this desperate hour, the unconventional Han Kuo-yu was discovered as a nation's destined leader with a unique sense of charisma that transcended political parties.[18] Han's reputation among the people of Taiwan was extremely divided throughout his campaign and his victory to Kaohsiung mayoralty. Close friendships, core families, and professional relations were overwhelmed due to their stance regarding Han, and the episode had only continued following Han's confirmation as the presidential nominee for the KMT. While I expected such division to be deep-rooted in the conflicting nationalist imaginations between communities that identified with the different political parties, it was the collective disagreement on virtually every aspect of social life that intrigued my interest. To document how these behaviours

[17] As observed through my fieldwork, I found that most Mainlander-Taiwanese, especially the first and second generation, continue to vote for the KMT in the subsequent elections following the lift of the Martial Law.
[18] During his campaign for the mayor of Kaohsiung, many local voters who normally supported the DPP were convinced to cast their vote for Han due to his convincing image as a proletariat-politician. This phenomenon was strongly advertised by the Han campaign to prove he was a universally preferred choice for the position.

could be understood through the concept of 'political subjectivity,' this chapter will address the forms of political engagements among the community of Chinese Nationalists ordinarily suppressed throughout the election off-season. Additionally, I will analyze how the bond that unified the community with the nationalist party and its political agenda was intensified through the voters' emotional attachment and internal discussions. Through further examinations, I argue that the continued clientelist relationship between the KMT party and the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan was constantly revitalized and reinforced through this prolonged series of political socialization.

As I flew back to Taiwan and started my research fieldwork in early December 2019, the nation was about to enter its extreme election craze. Before arriving in Taiwan, I had been closely following the upcoming election news. However, most sources had focused on younger voters' perspectives. The main reason behind this phenomenon was that interactive media in Taiwan had entered a state of explosion in the last decade, and was mostly dominated by younger users. The majority of Han Kuo-yu supporters were alternatively in their 50s or older, with an emotional attachment to the ideology of Chinese Nationalism advocated heavily throughout their formative years. Such preparatory findings prompted me to limit my potential interlocutors' age group to fixate on the background of their narratives. Additionally, despite my initial interest to draw emphasis on the Mainlander community and their relation with the KMT party as the focus of my research, I soon realized that the faith in Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had transcended the limits of ethnic origins. Due to the nationalist curriculum as well as the state-administered Sino-centric cultural movement that was universally inflicted to all citizens, the community of Chinese Nationalists was now joined by Hoklo, Hakka, and Indigenous Taiwanese. The recruitment for my interview participants was then opened up to all supporters of Chinese Nationalism who were willing to share their thoughts and perspectives on recent Taiwanese politics. In reality, many potential interlocutors expressed interest in participating in my interviews as they protested that the mainstream news had always omitted KMT voters' perspective as the real patriots of the ROC. As displayed throughout my fieldwork, this shared stance concerning political parties had correspondingly induced the split between imagined communities that surpassed ethnic origins, culture, and languages. As

a result, the members' beliefs in social policies and national identity appeared to match the political agenda of the KMT almost precisely. Based on these preliminary examinations, my objective was to understand the reasoning behind the community's narratives concerning the nation and the Sino-centric beliefs that continued to echo the policies once implemented by the KMT regime. Through the participant-observation approach, my research took place within a limited framework of time and space to specifically study how the past authoritarian regime persisted in shaping the political decision as well as the rationale of the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. All-inclusive and Extremely Lively: Features of the "Oba-san" Democracy in Taiwan.

All-inclusive and Extremely Lively: Features of the "Oba-san" Democracy in Taiwan

As the newly reformed first-past-the-post electoral system was emphasized as a realization of political equality and universal civil rights, the local population would quickly mobilize into a form of "oba-san democracy" (Templeman 2020) during election seasons. The term borrowed the Japanese word of "oba-san," which referred to "aunt" or women in their middle age and up. While originally an honorary title for older women in Japan, the term "oba-san" had been widely adopted into Taiwanese culture to describe the everyday middle-aged women who have learned their unapologetic attitude towards life through humour and struggles. Used in both endearing and demeaning contexts, the underlying meaning of the descriptive term "oba-san" indicated the non-discriminatory nature and omnipresent participation found in Taiwanese democracy. This sense of "oba-san democracy" was perceptible immediately upon my physical arrival in Taiwan. As soon as I boarded the plane back home, discussions of the upcoming election promptly filled the seats around me. Due to the timing of my return, I was not the only Taiwanese who was travelling for the election. Floods of voters who had immigrated and lived abroad for decades were now eager to return to Taiwan to fulfill their civic duty. While complaints about the lack of absentee voting were always prominent, many still gladly purchased their ticket back home and took pride in their dedication to the local democracy. Upon arriving in Taiwan, I was swamped with the hit of tropical warmth and the full-on election mania. My fieldwork was off to a quick start.

In December 2019, politics was visible in every corner of Taiwan. The streets were full of campaign flags, the city buses and buildings were covered in massive posters, and the news of the hour was always about a running candidate. The competition between political parties was elaborative through the vibrant use of colours. Conflicts concerning ideological beliefs and nationalism were implied in the everyday dialogue and interactions among the local population. There was always news about the election available on the television and talks about the candidates could be heard in every conversation. Many food vendors and restaurants even publicly displayed their political affiliation to attract customers of the same stance. This division was particularly striking in the city of Kaohsiung, my hometown and the main scene of my fieldwork where KMT's presidential candidate Han Kuo-yu was the sitting mayor. After his first six months in office, Han had requested a three-month leave of absence from his mayoral duties in preparation for his run in the presidential election. While many "Han fans" supporters accepted his reasoning, other residents of Kaohsiung city became irritated about his quick ways of eluding political responsibilities. As a result, just as Han ran his campaigns to win the presidency, a movement to recall him as Kaohsiung mayor was also in action. Thus, in this dramatic and lively political scene, I began my fieldwork, starting with my participant-observation of the city dwellers.

As I adjusted to my daily life as a researcher in Taiwan, I soon realized that rich ethnographic materials would come and be gone in a matter of minutes.[19] I mostly learned this lesson during one of my routine yoga classes, when students ranging from age 40 to 60 were caught up in a heated discussion regarding the upcoming election. The class was exclusively female — who would often self-identify as "oba-san" — and was referred to as a middle-aged woman support group by the students. Most of the students had been enrolled in these classes for years and would share jokes and updates about their daily lives instead of listening to the instructor throughout the class. The instructor, who owned the studio, did not seem to mind the interruptions and often took part in the banter. A woman in her sixties like her students, the instructor declined to participate in my interviews despite her enthusiasm for sharing my

[19] For a comprehensive illustration, I kept a notepad of the conversations and interconnections that were happening around me even when I was not actively conducting research.

project with others.[20] One day during class, the instructor again mentioned my research project while we were all in our stretching poses. One student then protested that I should not have studied the KMT, as the party had shown they did not care about Taiwan's future with Han as a running candidate. This student then further commented on her hatred for Han by calling him a compulsive liar. The other students who supported KMT instantaneously disagreed by crying out in objection. These exchanges of opinions were then followed by the rest of the class discussing politics in excitement. At first, I suspected that the mere mention of the upcoming election had damaged the long-term friendship and professional relationship between the students. Yet as soon as stretching time was over, the students fell silent again to resume their yoga posture. As it turned out, these arguments about politics were just as common as any of their gossip sessions.[21] The yoga instructor later laughed about it as she expressed her pride in her students' "political diversity," calling it "the true form of democracy."

Similar encounters to my yoga class discovery came up more frequently as we advanced towards election day. The discord between political parties appeared to have led to a case of functional social disparity. During some of my visits to the local Christian church as a companion to my mother, many local churchgoers passionately approached me to share their thoughts about the election after hearing of my ongoing research. Despite their seemingly unified belief in religion, the political affiliation among Christians in Taiwan was divided in nature.[22] While I focused on recruiting Chinese Nationalists to understand their particular narratives, the anti-KMT individuals at the church fussed over my "discrimination." After I assured a man that my research subject did not in any way indicate my political stance, his face lit up and requested that I come to him if I ever needed to interview anti-KMT activists. Proudly stating that the authoritarian government once blacklisted him, he then pointed to all those present KMT supporters as perfect examples of the "brain-washing curriculum" imposed by the regime.

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[20] I later found out she had been sharing my project with her students even in the classes that I did not attend.
[21] This observation prompted me to further apply the term of "oba-san" when describing the political participation in local democracy.
[22] Traditionally, the division between political preference in Christian churches in Taiwan relied on local factionalism and the specific church administration. There was not much consensus observed throughout my fieldwork other than their collective stance that opposed same-sex marriage.

As harsh as these accusations were, politics was reduced to a typical gag between the churchgoers. That is, confrontational arguments about the election — if any — were always drawn to an amicable conclusion. Such a conclusion was often reached when someone proclaimed that they must not fight each other as "all those who attended church are God's children." In reality, similar conversations like these took place in all public spaces in Taiwan during the election season, and disagreement between political stances was emphasized under the condition that no feelings and friendships were harmed. This hidden aspect about the practice of democracy in Taiwan was perhaps best embodied through the common interactions observed in communities of local oba-san.[23] These oba-san conversations highlighted that personal opinions, while intense, were always restrained and reduced in the face of established social relationships. Another occasion concerning this peculiarity of the "oba-san democracy" in Taiwan came up when I visited a local beauty salon. As the salon beautician carried out her professional procedures, she offhandedly asked about my preferred presidential candidate without knowing much about my purpose of stay in Taiwan. After contemplating my awkward position with no easy way out, I politely explained that I did not share the same political stance as my parents, hoping that would be enough implication. The beautician then sighed lightly and stated that her children also disagreed with her views. "I do not understand what the younger generation is thinking anymore," she commented, "But I guess this is what happens in a democracy."

The salon beautician's words about generational clash and democracy rang true the further I was into my fieldwork about the forthcoming election. While it was encouraging to see the freedom of political expressions exercised without the destruction of social relationships, I became aware that the "democratic" facade in no way withered the conflicting views on political parties and nationalist imaginations. In reality, the people of Taiwan were still relatively new to the concept of democracy. By arguing about politics without overt acts of aggressiveness, they were doing their best to conserve its values. However, out of public sight, discussions about the opposite party or its candidate would quickly

[23] It should be noted here that the term "oba-san" in Taiwan can be describing a series of behaviors ranging from money-savvy to chatty, and to being overly friendly.

turn ugly.[24] Politics and the running candidates were discussed in shared assemblies as well as personal sectors, the latter which locals referred to as "tong-wen-ceng" (同溫層) — a political "echo chamber" or "comfort zone." Consequently, as much information as I had gathered in the "shared" environment — about their unapologetic attitude towards the Martial Law era and the Sino-centric framework of the nationalist party — I recognized that an understanding of the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan would only be thorough with private interviews behind closed doors and without the presence of the opposite side. In addition to observing the stereotypical reputation of Chinese Nationalists being pro-China, pro-KMT, and socially conservative, I planned to also examine what the supporters of KMT had to say in person about the nation, the party, and the political scene in general as voters in a post-authoritarian context.

Han Fans Assemble!

As I entered the interview sessions with my interlocutors, I discovered an existing sense of familiarity between us despite our political differences. Through my background as a third-generation Mainlander-Taiwanese, I saw myself as a local anthropologist who understood many of the narratives regarding the nation and ethnic pride to which they held dear. On the other hand, I also had to retain much knowledge about the movement of Taiwanese Nationalism and the nationalist government's violation of human rights to prevent any confrontation. The objective of my research was therefore not to persuade or accuse the supporters of Chinese Nationalism in any way but to focus on the documentation of their thought process, political rationale, and emotional shift during this election hype. Additionally, as the distinction between Taiwan and ROC as a collective term for national belonging gradually became muddy for the general public, most locals had believed that the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan was but an outdated community in the disappearance. However, as they were, very much alive in front of my eyes, my ethnographic approach to the community sought to study the existing gap in knowledge between others' perceptions of them and their self-understanding. As much ridicule and resentment that the

[24] I had learned much about this being a person in her 20s surrounded by predominantly anti-KMT peers who were raised in pro-KMT families.

Chinese Nationalists had received from their ideological opponents and the younger voters, they were also the unintentional byproduct of the country's nationalist past. Now with the current government — regardless of political party — attempting to embrace a Taiwan-centric framework, I found that their fear of losing one's country and national identity was perhaps not unrealistic after all.

The truth is that the full portrayal of Taiwanese democracy would not be complete without these Chinese nationalism advocates. Now blossoming upon the popularity of Han Kuo-yu, the Han supporters had emerged from the ashes of the failed modernization under the leadership of Ma Ying-jeou, who was himself a reinvention of the traditional KMT party. For decades, the community of Chinese Nationalists believed in the nationalist party and its central doctrine. Together, they incorporated part of the ongoing competition between nationalist imaginations, ethnic identities, and ideological ideals in Taiwan. To my understanding, the relationship between the supporters and the party was so established that it had become an innate connection that was repeatedly strengthened through the former's political participation — through circulation of discourses as well as actions of support — in the newly developed democracy. I detected this innate connection specifically throughout the interview sessions when my interlocutors showed their emotional attachment to the party through political discussions. What I found the most compelling was, however, the almost unanimous open statement from these supporters of Chinese Nationalism that minimized their connection to the KMT.[25] On this note, I perceived this understated attachment that the Chinese Nationalists had with the KMT as one that had transcended the standardized relationship between a political party and its supporters. To those unfamiliar with Taiwan's political scene, this affiliation might at first seem like a simple political preference in the form of party support. Yet as discussions advanced, it became clear that such support was constructed upon the underlying and unconditional confidence that most Chinese Nationalists had in the nationalist party. As a researcher, I saw this as an outcome of their long-term political socialization centered upon the ideals of the former regime, which inherently intertwined with the national imagination and collective memories that were

[25] The most common narrative would be along the lines of "I am not really a KMT supporter, I am just a common voter," before recounting their history of affiliation with the KMT.

exerted to construct the imagined community in existence. Ultimately, I believed that this downplayed attachment anchored the supporters and continued their stances as political subjects.

For one of my first-stage interviews, I met up with an interlocutor named Jhu at her apartment, where a photo taken with former president Ma Ying-jeo was framed as decoration (see Figure 1).[26] On the day of our scheduled interview, Jhu welcomed me with coffee and afternoon snacks and reminded me that we should not disturb her 94-year-old mother — a first-generation Mainlander born in Beijing (formerly Beiping), China — who was napping in the bedroom. Before we proceeded with any specific topic, Jhu wanted to clarify if she could swear in the interview. After I affirmed that I did not mind, Jhu burst out yelling, "Then I am going to say it — the DPP is nothing but a bunch of assholes and shitheads (下三濫的民進黨)!" She then moved on to compliment the change in KMT that had occurred since the emergence of the "Han-wave." Despite Ma's framed photo at her apartment, Jhu, like many fellow KMT supporters, did not agree with Ma's character as the party chairman. She clarified that while Ma was undoubtedly a good person, his honesty and kindness had prevented him from being a good leader. On this note, Jhu stated her belief in strong-man leadership where the commander had to be strong-willed and "knows when to tell the others to shut up." Consequently, Han appeared to have won her heart and mind by being an unconventional KMT politician. As Jhu listed Han's individual qualities, she seemed to be condemning the standardized structure of the KMT as a political party with the same argument.

[26] All names of individuals I interviewed and met throughout my fieldwork used in this paper are pseudonyms to protect anonymity to the best of my ability.

Fig 1: The framed photo with President Ma displayed in Jhu's apartment.

Regarding Han as a revolutionary figure for the KMT, Jhu emphasized Han's attraction to younger voters and his modesty compared to the rest of the conventional politicians. The topic of the moment then shifted to further criticisms of the DPP party as Jhu complained that the DPP supporters often thought they were the only ones who were pro-Taiwan. "And I am sure no one would doubt that," she scoffed, "But what about us? Don't they think we, the pan-blue supporters, love Taiwan too in our own way?" This debate of "loving Taiwan" (愛台灣) that Jhu referred to was a common debate in all elections in Taiwan when comparisons were drawn between KMT and DPP supporters. As opposed to the DPP's stance on Taiwanese Nationalism, many KMT supporters firmly believed that such separatist doctrine would only bring regional conflict and destruction to the present-day social order established under ROC's democratic framework. Jhu then noted that, as young people nowadays did not know about the horror of war like our grandparents, we had become too reckless with the idea of Taiwanese independence. Taiwanese Independence, in her opinion, was just a never-ending scheme and empty promise made by the DPP administration to secure supporting votes for the party. As perplexing as it was, Jhu, as the first of my many interlocutors, excitedly ridiculed the status-quo policy that the DPP

government had decided to retain from its KMT predecessor.[27] My understanding of Chinese Nationalism supporters was then further complicated as Jhu moved on to discussions of present-day China. Dismissing the accused stereotype of Chinese Nationalists in general, Jhu affirmed that no one even in the community of KMT supporters today would be up for instant reunification with the "Mainland."[28] According to Jhu, Taiwan and Mainland China had become entirely different entities due to the long-term separation. And we, as the people of Taiwan, had been rightly ruling ourselves with no obligation to join them. Unaware that her statements essentially supported the argument for Taiwanese independence, Jhu then remarked that Taiwan was indeed a liberal country, with freedom of speech and democratic elections — all of which, she concluded, had now been messed up by the DPP.

My interview session with Jhu lasted around two hours and left me thinking even long after our meeting. Mainly, I noted that the paradoxical understanding found in Jhu's ideological belief and national belonging — while expressed as her own deductions — was the collective reasoning among most Chinese Nationalists. Moreover, I contemplated the fuzzy line between Jhu's recognition of Taiwan as a self-sufficient entity and her resentment towards the thought of an independent Taiwan. Could it have resulted from her inherited Mainlander identity or was it a rationale conveniently produced to align with the political reality of the ROC? Building upon these reflections, I scheduled my next interview session with a group of interlocutors of non-Mainlander backgrounds. To gain a different perspective, the following interview was conducted in a group setting due to the similar political stance and the existing relationship between the interlocutors. These three interlocutors were retired police officer Gu and retired working women Miao and Syu. Unlike Jhu, they were of Native Taiwanese (Hoklo and Hakka) descent whose families were once governed by the Japanese Empire. Through this focus on Chinese Nationalism supporters of non-Mainlander background, I expected to examine different understandings of the ROC as

[27] As such decisions had aligned well with the modern narrative of the KMT, I was unsure whether Jhu's mocking tone was spawned from disappointment or a sense of vindication.

[28] The term "Mainland" or "Mainland China" was a once widely used name for China in Taiwan as the nationalist government's term for its lost territory. It opposes the "Mainland" to Taiwan as an island, thus framing both sides as part of China. In recent years, supporters of Taiwanese Nationalism have opposed this terminology and advocated for using "China" and "Taiwan" instead. Jhu's choice of the term implied her upbringing as a Mainlander and recipient of a nationalist education

a nation among its most dedicated citizens — despite the lack of incentive as ethnic unity or political patronage.

The group met up with me at the yoga studio, a private location where they were all familiar due to their intertwined social relationships. As soon as I pronounced that the interview had started, Gu — the only male participant in this session — acted upon himself to be the group's assigned speaker. Gu started by requesting to stay anonymous for this interview, stating that he had the experience of being blackmailed and cyber-stalked due to his political insights. After I ensured him that his identity would be protected, Gu declared he had come to this group interview well-prepared. He had brought piles of notes with him and began to read them aloud without much ceremony. As I found out, these self-proclaimed notes were nothing but semi-propaganda in print that had been broadcasted by the pro-KMT media. Protesting against incumbent DPP's president Tsai, Gu complained that he had never heard Tsai addressed our country in its full name as the "Republic of China." Meanwhile, Mayor Han was willing to go extravagant ways to support the Chinese roots of the country. For this reason, Gu believed that young people nowadays had been brainwashed by the DPP's Taiwanese Nationalism and were no longer interested in singing the national anthem or waving the national flag to fulfill their civic obligation. Gu then moved on to call for nation-wide respect for Chinese culture as the "ancestral roots" of Taiwan. Finally, he concluded his speech with an emotional plea. "If the KMT loses this election," Gu cried, "The nation of ROC will be lost forever!"[29]

At the end of Gu's short speech, the women in attendance applauded him in awe as I struggled to find an appropriate response. Contrary to what I had deduced about the patron-client factor among the Mainlander community in support of the nationalist party, Gu's devotion to the nationalist party and its ideology proved that the collective identity of Chinese Nationalist had transcended personal narratives as well as ethnic categories. In the case of Gu, he appeared to have believed the accounts of the KMT party as a "native" Taiwanese even more so than any other Mainlander supporters. Mounting on Gu's previous

[29]I believed Gu's behavior and remarks could very well qualify him as a campaign manager for Han. However, I was not told of his real motive behind this support during our interview.

statement about Han, Miao decidedly followed up with her praise of the KMT candidate for his extraordinary character. She was able to tour the KMT headquarters office in Kaohsiung and was extremely surprised when she saw Han's humble "living quarter" where he stayed when working late on campaign activities. As Miao stated, she was in disbelief that "someone of such high status" could live with only a bed and working desk. She then concluded that Han would sure do his best to govern the city. Like the others, Miao was also convinced that Han was the reformist saviour of the KMT as a political party which, in her words, was traditionally dominated by corrupted party members. Yet as disappointed as she seemed with the conventional KMT party, Miao swiftly moved on to accuse the DPP of continually lying to the public. Specifically, Miao expressed her anger concerning the lack of national economic development under the DPP administration when compared to the "Mainland" and other countries. Miao particularly blamed the DPP government for the stagnated average wage for the last twenty years. In reality, the topic of the national economy was a regular argument among conservative Chinese Nationalists when objecting to the DPP administration. Although minimum wage was largely stagnated under Ma's government and later adjusted by the Tsai administration, many KMT loyalists firmly believed that Taiwan's economy had been in relapse ever since the DPP's first presidential election in 2000. These circumstances were in stark contrast with the "Taiwan Economic Miracle" that took place under KMT's authoritarian rule as well as when compared to our economic superpower neighbor, China (PRC). Regarding the upcoming election, Miao complained about the media being overwhelmingly "anti-KMT" and expressed her frustration with all the attacks targeted towards Han and his family. "They are surely taking advantage of the naïveté," she cried, "But how could anyone believe the stuff they are feeding us?" Nevertheless, as I asked about the different political positions in her family, Miao grunted in frustration and stated that her children always lied to her about whom they supported. Once again, Miao blamed this undesirable outcome on the DPP for creating a society that built generational conflicts. Finally, she argued that such conflict was even worsened through the DPP's insistence on promoting polarizing issues — the same-sex marriage bill being one of the many.

As always, the mere mention of same-sex marriage appeared to unite the conservative voice with an assurance that they were on the right side of human history. In this specific interview session, the logic seemed to indirectly convince the Chinese Nationalists of the rightfulness of their narratives regarding the nation and social development. Following up with her opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage, Miao inferred that the DPP rarely consulted the people before making any significant decisions. Instead, according to the group, the DPP had manipulated the population by restraining freedom of speech and only permitting news that painted them in a positive light. When I asked the group what channel they preferred for political discussions, they unanimously recommended only to watch CTi TV — short for "Chung Tien Television." A notoriously pro-KMT channel funded by the anti-Taiwanese Nationalism and pro-China Want Want China Times Media Group, CTi was dubbed by the group as "the best news report." The discussed topic then shifted to their idea of historicity when even the relatively quiet Syu, a retired self-made hairdresser, professed that the KMT did take good care of Taiwan. Gu and Miao then quickly endorsed Syu's statement by commenting on the historical necessity of KMT's authoritarian rule of Taiwan following its relocation. In particular, Gu asserted that Chiang Kai-shek did his best for Taiwan in the worst condition. That is, while Chiang could have executed more people, he had shown mercy by choosing not to. In agreement with her peers, Miao further stated that the KMT's authoritarian regime was the most efficient way to prevent a potential infiltration from Japan or Communist China. Seeing the DPP had been exploiting the incidents of political oppression during the Martial Law years, Miao explained that it was very possible the DPP had planted those conflicts with the help of the Japanese government. Afterall, according to Miao, President Lee Teng-Hui had turned out to be a Japanese spy.[30] On this note, Gu and Miao came to an offbeat conclusion by proclaiming that while the DPP politicians talked a lot about the suffering of Native Taiwanese, they had failed to recognize the real victims of Taiwanese politics — who, they declared, should be the Mainlanders in Taiwan.

[30] Due to Lee's birth and upbringing as a Japanese colonial subject and his later achievement on improving the Taiwan-Japan relationship, this specific narrative about Lee is very common among KMT supporters.

The shared opinions and perspectives from this group interview were compelling and valuable to my research for multiple reasons. To start, the interlocutors' statements were an honest demonstration of the unbalanced representation between Mainlanders and non-Mainlanders among the community of Chinese Nationalists. The Mainlanders' collective trauma was exclusively reinforced by official narratives of the ROC for its close ties with its national history, while other past political imaginations were ignored. In other words, as the KMT party — driven by its nationalist doctrine and rationale for political legitimacy — constantly reminded its loyalists of the suffering experienced by the Mainlander community, the historical viewpoint of those of Native Taiwanese background was noticeably muted (Heylen 2001, 42-43). Additionally, while the native language of this focus group was exclusively Hoklo due to their background, I observed that they would use Hoklo for offhanded comments but speak in Mandarin when they gave an "official account" as the group representative. Such behaviours suggested the Sino-centric hierarchy once operated under the nationalist framework was still very much incorporated in the minds of contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. As opposed to the DPP's policies that advocated for the normalization of native languages in public spaces, most KMT supporters still regarded Mandarin as the only justifiable official language and the "lingua franca" among the Chinese-speaking world. Lastly, the group interview's closing remarks prompted my special attention to the complex identity development among Chinese Nationalists of non-Mainlander origins. That is to say, if the Mainlander community's support of the KMT could be rationalized through their ethnic-based clientelist relationship and shared collective memories, the non-Mainlander's dedication to an alienating doctrine posed more questions about the formation of political subjectivity. Above all, this group interview displayed the great extent of allegiance that non-Mainlander Chinese Nationalists had reserved for the nationalist ideology and historical narratives that were effectively impartial to them. While such characteristic was possibly developed to prevent a mental marginalization among the community dominated by the Mainlander narrative, it was also employed to prove that despite their non-Mainlander background, they too, could be "naturalized" as loyal supporters of the nation as members of the imagined community. While political opponents might attribute the behaviours of my interlocutors to the KMT's

decades-long nationalist curriculum, Sino-centric cultural policies, and political socialization, the interview in many ways refined my understanding of the appeal of the KMT as a political party and the mindset of its loyal supporters. In the end, I acquired an additional degree of insight through this peculiar bond between the patron and its once secondary client-citizens, who now made up the majority of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan.

As an afterthought, I also noted the power relation between genders at play throughout this interview, given the age-group of my interlocutors. Throughout the group session, I noticed that the two women had little choice but to listen to Gu, who executed his masculinity comfortably with a female audience as a passionate patriot. Notably, I observed that Syu, despite some agreeing mumbles now and then, remained mostly isolated in the discussions. While Miao often echoed the "leading man," Syu at times seemed almost overwhelmed by Gu's endless statements. At some point, Syu even protested against Gu's excessive praise for the KMT and Mayor Han as a politician. Yet as I discovered from features of our oba-san democracy, political opinions in Taiwan tended to filter themselves when expressed through a group setting and habitually gave in to existing power relations such as gender or social relationships. For this reason, I feared that more future interlocutors would suffer the same unpleasant fate as Syu, with their perspectives and opinions diminished through a group interview. As a resolution, while Gu was undoubtedly an interesting and distinctive interlocutor in the presence of the opposite sex, I decided not to mix genders for an interview again for the remaining components of my research. This particular decision would be reflected in my later interview sessions, where the participants were predominantly female.

We are the Real Republic of China

As the dispute between supporters of the "Han-wave" and anti-KMT — thus anti-Han — sentiments continued to intensity throughout December, campaigns on both sides announced that they were each holding a rally on December 21st, 2019, in the city of Kaohsiung. At first glance, the competition between the campaigns appeared to be a proxy war between the pan-blue supporters of Chinese Nationalism and the pan-green advocates who preferred Taiwanese Nationalism. With the Han

fans claiming that they had united not only the KMT party but also attracted many commonly apolitical voters, the anti-Han movement also initiated the recall action of Han as mayor, boasting the allegiance of many former Han supporters who became disappointed by his swift pursuit of the presidential nomination. Subsequently, as both campaigns rejoiced in their intricate composition of followers, elaborative demonization of the opposite side became prominent at both ends. Yet while the clash in political choice was indeed omnipresent, it also remained mostly hidden under established social relationships and the camouflage of democracy. Frequently, I found my interlocutors converting between their bold statements as KMT supporters and reserved comments as fraternizing voters. To some extent, I intended to probe into their thoughts to associate the generally unfavourable reputation and online persona of Chinese Nationalists with my understanding of those in real life. Certainly, we had breathed the same air and shared living space as neighbors, friends, and families. Yet in terms of political preferences and personal narratives, we had appeared to live with very different ideas about the nation and society circulated among our respective communities.

After the first couple of interview sessions, I had learned that contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan would not shy away from political discussions — but the reason behind their dedication to balance one's behaviour as both civilized voters and committed supporters of Chinese Nationalism continued to be a mystery. Furthermore, while the community's devoted allegiance to the nationalist party can be attributed mainly to a shared Chinese identity, the specific details and formation of this identity remained vague despite it being addressed frequently by my interlocutors. As an extension to the national imagination of the Chinese Republic, the narrative of "being Chinese" seemed to work well as an inclusive ethnic as well as a cultural identity to unify the community. Nevertheless, this identification's conceptual definition remained concealed under the KMT's political agenda — despite its abstract being heavily circulated and repeatedly emphasized through the long-term political socialization. This bond between the supporters of Chinese Nationalism and the KMT party thus seemed to have constructed on their mutual recognition of the legitimacy of the Chinese Republic — the "ROC" — and a collective yet under defined identity as self-proclaimed inheritors of the Chinese civilization. With such underlying

consensus, many Chinese Nationalists believed that the party's survival was vital to salvage their vanishing nation against the separatist DPP and authoritarian Communist China. In fact, many KMT supporters claimed that the correct strategy was to fight the former through election campaigns and evade the latter's aggressions through a series of cross-strait "collaborative" projects. In many ways, the presidential campaign of Han Kuo-yu proficiently played into this pattern by highlighting the strong connection between the KMT party, the ROC, and the "great Chinese community." Through a clear opposition to the trending Taiwanese Nationalism platform, Han succeeded more than any previous KMT candidate in exposing this "overarching scheme" of the DPP to dismantle the Chinese civilization. According to most Chinese Nationalists, the 2020 presidential election would therefore be their last stand of battle to safeguard the Chinese nation of ROC and its democratic foundation from further separatist erosion.

My next group interview took place merely days before the scheduled pro-Han rally as a timely record of the advancing enthusiasm among the community of Chinese Nationalists. The group was made up of four middle-aged female participants who requested to be interviewed together. Almost as soon as we sat down, the interview session kick-started without much formality as all were remarkably excited to share their opinions. Yet as the discussions progressed, the group soon discovered that traits of individuality still existed even among their own "echo chamber." Ye, a housewife and mother of two whose husband worked in China, was the first to clarify that she had decided not to follow up with her usual pro-KMT vote in this specific election. Mainly, she disagreed with the party's decision to nominate Han as the candidate. The group then fell silent until another participant, Sia, followed up with a different opinion. An avid supporter of Han, Sia stated that the DPP had been in charge of Kaohsiung for too long and further emphasized that the point of a democratic election was to change things if the ruling power failed at their job.[31] The rest of the group then quickly nodded in agreement as Sia carried on with her comments. According to Sia, she did not think of herself as a KMT supporter as she believed in the value

[31] While I understand the logic of this argument for democracy, many KMT supporters seemed to conveniently confuse the difference between an autocracy and a political party that was repeatedly voted into office.

of voting for different parties. Indeed, Sia was quick to criticize the traditionally elitist KMT politicians for holding control of the party for so long. Moreover, when asked to comment on the political division among family members, Sia explained that while she could not understand the DPP supporters, they would not have arguments over politics at home. However, Sia noted that she had noticed many online forums having seized control over the younger generation and raised the question of whether this should be seen as a form of brainwashing. Sia also reflected on how the DPP government had devastated her economically through cancelled pensions and decreased ties with China (PRC). As the spouse of retired military personnel, Sia recounted how she had to single-handedly raise their children when her husband was deployed at sea with the promise of a substantial pension. The DPP government's plan to reduce the pension for military personnel, therefore, seriously worried Sia. Furthermore, as China significantly limited the number of Chinese tourists coming to Taiwan after 2016, Sia found her children's income — who worked in tourism targeting Chinese visitors — reduced to half compared to that under President Ma's government.[32] "Perhaps it is just politics for some voters, but my family is suffering because of the DPP," she concluded, "I did not care about voting before, but this time it is personal."

Following Sia's testimony, the other two participants were also quick to share their reasoning as supporters of the KMT. Wei, a second-generation Mainlander and avid admirer of Chinese culture, took the first opportunity to speak up. Like many of her fellow KMT voters, Wei seemed to be more disappointed in the practical execution of the KMT instead of its central doctrine and was no exception with her passionate resentment of the DPP. Like her peers, Wei did not identify as a KMT supporter but preferred to be seen as a "pan-blue" voter who was tired of traditional KMT politicians. She then jokingly stated it was only human nature to favour younger-looking men over the older veteran politicians. As a second-generation Mainlander, Wei expressed her disappointment in the social division featured in Taiwanese politics. In her opinion, such division only began after the "troublemaker" DPP came to power and planted seeds of ethnic conflict to alienate the community of Mainlanders. Furthermore, Wei argued that while the Hoklo Taiwanese liked to imagine themselves as the owners of Taiwan, they were also

[32] This is in fact one of the material reasons why some Taiwanese prefer closer relations with the PRC.

immigrants from China that once exploited Taiwan's indigenous population. In reality, the indigenous people in Taiwan had historically been more supportive of the KMT — perhaps in an attempt to balance out the overwhelming number of the Hoklo community that dominated the DPP. At the same time, however, the KMT's inclusion of the indigenous community often appeared to be a convenient illustration of its umbrella use of nationality among the imagined community. That is to say, if the indigenous community had no problem embracing a "Chinese" identity, why should the other immigrants even question it? Wei's statement about the ethnic division, the alienation of the Mainlander minority, and the status of the indigenous people of Taiwan were common arguments circulated during heated political discussions. To the Chinese Nationalists who supported the KMT, the DPP was not prepared to undertake these tasks that had long been settled under the framework of the ROC government, even if the system was outdated and deeply flawed. Like many others, Wei then moved on to her criticisms of contemporary political trends such as same-sex marriage and the Taiwanese independence movement. According to Wei, the DPP had the young people who yearned for Taiwanese independence believed that the solution would be possible without war. But such a rosy vision, she insisted, was nothing but a delusion. Instead, Wei pointed out that the DPP had done nothing but pushed the Taiwanese economy into recession and legalizing pointless policies such as same-sex marriage.[33] As a result, Wei concluded that the country was now stuck with an empty pretense of liberal values and human right honours instead of a prosperous economy. A common argument among the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan, this narrative of bread versus freedom mentality was often used to support their shared belief that economic progress should take priority before the development of a civic society.

As the rest of the group seemed entertained by Wei's opinion, it was evident that she was not the only one who had learned to convey her political reasoning through an unapologetically conservative view on social development. While a significant number of younger KMT supporters identified themselves as "progressive," the majority of the party continued to follow the traditionalist principle when it comes to gender rights and grass-roots movements. This decision was seen as a consistent way to keep

[33] As stated by Wei, she would happily admit being discriminating against gay people.

its loyalists, most of whom belonged to an older age group. The traditionalist approach also licensed many Chinese Nationalists to establish themselves as "Conservatives" when defending their cultural values and ethnic identities as a Chinese-descent population. According to many pan-blue supporters, the sustainability of our social stability was tied with the continuation of the Chinese tradition. In this regard, Communist China Party (CCP) had lost their legitimacy to inherit the ancient culture when they pushed for the Cultural Revolution that "destroyed" the Chinese civilization — after which the Chinese Nationalists viewed the communist regime as no more than a poorly manufactured forgery. The Chinese Nationalists' stance towards the CPP however was limited to a sense of sympathy and sneering upon a shared Chinese identity. On the contrary, the DPP was seen as the real threat to the ROC's survival through their separatist promotion of Taiwan Nationalism. In reality, both sides of the Taiwan Strait had always recognized a possible CCP military invasion of Taiwan. However, as time went on, the pan-blue voters had begun to either view it as an empty threat or Pandora's box that was best kept untouched. To most Chinese Nationalists, the conflict between the PRC and the ROC was purely political. It could thus be resolved easily through a shared ancestry and mutual understanding as part of the same "Chinese" community. The DPP and its advocates, on the other hand, had planned to sabotage this harmony by encouraging Taiwanese independence. Wei further clarified that she did not fear a potential rule of the CCP in Taiwan. Instead, she believed that her life as a commoner would not see much change given that all political regimes were inherently identical — so long as she remained obedient and submissive to the government and its orders.

Wei was not alone in her faith in functional authoritarianism and political clientelism among the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. From their own experience of living under authoritarian rule, most Chinese Nationalists believed that any government would leave them alone as long as one was respectful of the law and the imposed social order. Despite her accordance with the majority, Wei also shared some unique insights when addressing conversations with her relatives. Wei claimed that she was always annoyed when her China-based father — a first-generation Mainlander — commented that Taiwan was doomed with its so-called democracy and always said his opinions did not matter as he no longer

lived in Taiwan. In the end, Wei's defence, as well as mockery of the Taiwanese democracy, was in many ways a typical trait among the contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Like the many interlocutors before her, Wei seemed to detest the idea of Taiwanese Nationalism without realizing the very idea of an independent Taiwan had been incorporated into her national imagination. Finally, to my surprise, Wei announced her decision to refrain from voting according to a self-concluded superstition. It appeared that Wei believed whomever she supported would end up losing the election. As it turned out, Wei's final decision to outsmart the electoral odds did not sit well with her fellow voters. Jin, a housewife and close friend of Wei, swiftly objected to Wei's decision as she believed the right to vote was a civic duty of all citizens. And especially this time, Jin declared, with the KMT having such an exceptional candidate. When asked to further comment on the incumbent DPP government, Jin stated that she thought the DPP had great potential — not as the ruling party but as the opposition. Jin then clarified that while she had never voted for the DPP, she thought the party was always an excellent source of stimulation for the ruling KMT politicians. Without the DPP, Jin believed, the KMT politicians would achieve very little. In a way, Jin's statement about the DPP indicated the contrasting reputations that the two major parties had among Chinese Nationalists. In the eyes of KMT supporters such as Jin and Wei, the DPP excelled in provoking arguments and rallying up anti-government protests — characteristics that could be traced back to its anti-KMT origins. Yet the party was deemed unsuitable to govern for the same reasons. As concluded by Jin, she considered a significant loss that the DPP — as a political party founded on idealistic values — had become corrupted with power. Instead, the DPP had become a political party without knowing much about proper government administration or ways to unify the population without manipulating identity politics. Finally, Jin emphasized that the DPP party had shown they only cared about the people and important issues when the election season was approaching — a vicious cycle that she expected to be fixed once the KMT was back in office.

As our group interview session arrived at its closing point, each participant was invited to make a final summary about the upcoming election and the general political scene in Taiwan. Sia and Wei promptly chose to recall the forty years of Martial Law rule under the KMT government — a time "when

the society was in order, and the economy was booming." Such nostalgic sentiments were quite frequently found among Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan when drawing comparisons to the present-day government under the DPP. According to most, the DPP had brought unsurmountable destruction to the democratic framework and economic miracle nurtured by the KMT party. Furthermore, the Chinese Nationalists saw the DPP's decision to penalize institutions established under the Martial Law order as a form of political vindication and direct threat to their collective memories. As the DPP reimbursed victims that were once jailed and persecuted by the authorities under principles of 'transitional justice' (Curry 2007, 71), Chinese Nationalists also felt the once secured relationship between the party supporters, the KMT, and the nation was now intimidated. Similarly, Jin used this opportunity to criticize the DPP with specifications on the party's skillful ways to win elections. Utilizing the recent mass protests in Hong Kong as an example, Jin saw the DPP's explicit support of Hong Kong protesters as opportunistic exploitation to provoke anti-CCP — or anti-China — opinions that would lead to another round of victory. While the DPP supporters urged for a collective awareness of the Hong Kong situation as a lesson for apolitical Taiwanese voters, Jin along with most Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan saw it as no more than a strategic threat that would ensure pan-green winning votes in the coming election — through the implication that "a vote for the DPP is a vote for Taiwan." Once again surfaced here was the paradox concerning Taiwan and ROC that fundamentally intertwined with the conflicting nationalist imaginations among the different communities in Taiwan. For the community of Chinese Nationalists, the KMT party remained the only hope to safeguard their Chinese Republic's lifeline, whose spirits and central creed had been weakened by separatist interference. Nevertheless, as DPP presidents-elects Chen Shui-Bien and Tsai Ing-wen continued to be sworn in as the "President of the Republic of China" without official declarations of Taiwanese independence, the KMT voters ridiculed the supporters of Taiwan Nationalism for voting for the DPP due to "false hope." Therefore, politics and elections in Taiwan proved to be a continual imaginative tug of war between the different nationalisms. The line between recognizing Taiwan as a self-rule sovereign and retaining ROC's citizenship was so blurred that questions of national identity, ethnic belonging, and political affiliation often became self-made contradictions that were imperceptible

to those caught within. This irony was perhaps best pronounced when, after listening to her peers listing all the reasons to support the KMT and Han for the past hour, the relatively quiet Ye finally decided to speak up for her stance. “I indeed used to support the KMT,” Ye stated, “But that is exactly the reason why I do not like Han — he talks and acts like someone from the DPP!”

Ye’s interpretation of Han as a politician stayed with me as a constant reminder of the overshadowed presence of Chinese Nationalists who disliked Han for the very reason others supported him. In truth, the KMT party was consumed by Han’s popularity and his passionate fans driven by their claimed loyalty to Chinese Nationalism with very little space for negotiation. As I went through interview sessions one after another, it became apparent that the Han-wave — perhaps inadvertently but effortlessly — had alienated disapproving opinions among the community of Chinese Nationalists through their united and invigorated idolization of Han Kuo-yu. For this very reason, the anti-Han voices among the community of Chinese Nationalists were effectively suppressed. Instead, the party chose to focus on the revitalized nationalism that was personified as Han to attract the apolitical, the anti-separatists, and the radical loyalists who had become disappointed with the KMT’s post-authoritarian reforms. In essence, the presidential campaign of Han and the KMT operated on an all-inclusive platform that covered political, ethnic, as well as cultural aspects to resonate with any citizen who identified with the ROC nation. Therefore, those who chose to oppose the KMT’s presidential nominee would be regarded as a separatist and traitor to the existing democratic republic. As a result, many saw Han’s rise to fame as the comeback of the nostalgic Chinese Nationalism that had been in decline since Chiang Kai-shek’s rule. However, this time around, it appeared that the once enforced and orchestrated patriotism had been reborn in the form of an imagined community. Through nationalist imagination and collective memories, the Chinese Nationalism had survived the downfall of the authoritarian regime and was now learning its ways back to power through means of democracy.

Patriotism Reborn

The much-anticipated pro-Han rally took place on December 21st, 2019, at "Aozihdi" (凹子底)[34] metro station in northern Kaohsiung. The official account had planned for the rally to start at 1 pm, but all Han fans in my social circle — including my parents — reminded me to arrive early as the crowd would amass quickly. As I rode the metro heading towards Aozihdi around noon that day, the train slowly picked up identifiable Han fans and Chinese Nationalism supporters along the way. The Chinese Nationalists were easily recognized among ordinary commuters with their merchandise featuring the ROC national flag and props showing the *chibi* drawing of Han Kuo-yu.[35] While most rally participants seemed to be in their fifties or sixties, they were as thrilled as children on a school trip. In many ways, the rally was an occasion for meet-ups between like-minded friends and families. However, as the Chinese Nationalists chatted, I observed the other metro riders to be exceptionally quiet — perhaps to prevent any provocation. I analyzed the awkward composure as an indication that the transportation space was shared by riders of different political affiliations: one clear as day, and the other hidden in plain sight. Moreover, since the Chinese Nationalism supporters had patently marked their stance through their colourful merchandise and outfits, the others chose to remain unstated without disrupting the social order expected of a "democratic community." This lurking hostility — while found all over Taiwan throughout the election season — was the tensest on this particular day in the city of Kaohsiung. The anti-Han rally that initiated his recall action as Kaohsiung mayor was to take place on the same day less than four kilometres away. To many, the day was seen as a test to both campaigns' union power and the general public's democratic credentials as a society. In other words, all voters of Kaohsiung — regardless of party affiliation — were required to put on their best behaviour to elude potential accusations from the opposite side, all the while being a passionate and committed advocate for one's preferred party and candidate.

[34]All terms for location, including city names, used in this thesis follow the official phonetic translation of its original name, unless usually translated literally such as the case of "Smile park."
[35] Derived from Japanese for "small" or "short' and is known as an art style that is cartoon-like. Chibi drawing is a popular way for local politicians in Taiwan to rebrand and represent themselves to the public.

Without question, the idea of patriotism was the backbone of the pro-Han rally on December 21st. Almost exclusively, the pro-Han rally prominently featured only three colours — the colour red, blue, and white as representative of the national flag (see Figures 2 and 3). Rally participants dressed in extravagant outfits that highlighted the three colours while waging self-crafted Chinese-style military flags, on which the Chinese character of "Han" was written.[36] These featured banners indicated that as the label of "Han fans" had gradually become a target of mockery from the opposite side, many Han supporters had since claimed the new title of "Han troops" to demonstrate their dedication and solidarity to the presidential candidate. As I found my way between the crowds, the announcer on the centre stage declared the number of rally participants as a way to boost morale. Starting from around ten thousand, the stage moderator steadily topped up the number as time went on. Finally, the number of participants was estimated to be reaching half a million at its height. Along the parade route, many vendors set up their carts selling merchandise of Han Kuo-yu. Interestingly, the merchandise emphasized the connection between Han and the ROC nation instead of with the KMT, the party that nominated him. There was very little attention called to the presence of the KMT party compared to the stress on Han as a candidate and saviour of the ROC. Instead, while the implication that Han was the last hope of reclaiming the collective Chinese identity and the nation of ROC was transparent throughout the rally, it appeared that the KMT party had merely provided him with a stage — quite literally.

[36] Traditionally, these styles of military flags were used in wartime China to pinpoint the identity of military leaders during an imminent battle, usually recognized by their family or clan name on the flag. In this context, however, the usage of these flags appeared to serve as more of a mobilization of internal morale than practical identification.

Fig 2: Han's rally on December 21st, 2019

Fig 3: National flags used at Han's rally on December 21st, 2019.

Notwithstanding the implicit patriotism expressed in the pro-Han rally, the paradoxical sense of belonging about Taiwan as an entity and ROC as national identity was apparent throughout. As planned, the rally-parade ended at "Smile Park" (微笑公園) — a location four kilometres away from the starting point — where Han Kuo-yu would join his supporters and share the stage with other politicians. Due to

the number of participants, it took around two hours for the crowd to walk over to the park. Most in their fifties or older, the supporters were visibly thrilled to be surrounded by their own community. Whenever the crowd caught itself walking in silence, some participants would yell out Han Kuo-yu's name, and the others would follow up by shouting "tòng-suán"(to be elected) in unison, a Hoklo expression widely used in Taiwan to support a preferred candidate.[37] Eventually, as most participants arrived at Smile Park, the rally crowd was welcomed with the stage prepared for Han. Beside the stage set, the park was filled with food vendors known as "Kuo-yu market" (國瑜夜市).[38] The set quickly became surrounded by a passionate audience, many of whom brought their camping chairs to enjoy an afternoon snack purchased from the food vendors. To the Han supporters, the existence of the "Kuo-yu market" was another demonstration of how the Han-wave had helped improve the local economy: by attracting a large number of potential consumers for the vendors.[39] As I sat down along the crowd, I realized those who awaited Mayor Han's appearance and speech had been disappointed by the order of events on the program as created by the party. Evidently, the KMT had arranged for other politicians to warm up the stage before Han's arrival. The Han supporters were then presented with notable KMT politicians such as Eric Chu, Hau Lung-Pin, and Hsieh Lung-Chieh. In particular, Chu and Hau belonged to the branch of elite and well-educated Mainlander-descent politicians that was once the standard for KMT candidates. Han's rise to power nevertheless had transformed the KMT party in ways that no longer favoured the soft-spoken and the sophisticated, indirectly forcing conventional KMT members such as Chu and Hau to adapt. Such an awkward transition could be seen exemplified through the choice of language at the rally. During Chu's time on stage, he gave his speech in Mandarin but had intentionally weaved in expressions in Hoklo, much to the crowd's delight. Formerly a despised "dialect" that was deemed uncultured and vulgar by the KMT high officials, Hoklo had since become a tool for elite politicians to approach the local community in Taiwan despite their foreign-sounding accents. After Chu, the moderator welcomed local

[37] Throughout the election season, this term can be heard in every political rally in Taiwan regardless of the hosting party.
[38] Nicknamed by the Han supporters and pro-Han media.
[39] The food vendors in turn were always prompted to decorate the food carts with pro-KMT slogans and signs to appeal to the specific rally as reinforcement of the mutually beneficial relationship.

legislator Hsieh Lung-Chieh as another representative of the KMT party. Unlike Chu and Hau, Hsieh was a KMT politician of Native Taiwanese descent and spoke Hoklo as a native language. As praised by the stage moderator, Hsieh was introduced as "a fluent Hoklo speaker," and his all-Hoklo speech was well-received by the audience.[40] As Hsieh passionately advocated, in Hoklo, for Han's presidency and cheered for ROC's democracy — it was perhaps ironic that this speech would be shunned and considered publicity for Taiwanese Nationalism by the KMT merely twenty years ago. From Chiang Kai-shek's Sino-centric and anti-Communist nationalist doctrine to Ma's pacifist reforms, the KMT had now arrived at a stance that was extremely localized and yet overwhelmingly anti-Taiwanese independence. From this process, it seemed like the Nationalist Party had been redrawing the definitive line between pro-Taiwan and pro-ROC to its advantage. Through the tweaks of democracy, the KMT as a political organization appeared to have organically and successfully transformed itself into a "pro-Taiwan" Chinese Nationalist party to appeal to its supporters. I thus analyzed that such contradictory development was only so quickly embraced by its supporters due to the enduring bond between the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan and the nationalist institution in the form of a political party: one that was constructed upon their common imagination of the nation and fond memories of the authoritarian regime, ensuring the legitimacy of the republic itself.

The rally finally reached its emotional height when Han Kuo-yu was called on stage to address his supporters. As the moderator announced Han's arrival, the crowd began to sing along with several theme songs selected by Han's campaign team to demonstrate the supporters' enthusiasm.[41] On the stage, Han and the other politicians were provided with a prompter that showed the song's lyrics. However, the audience struggled to follow the sing-along, and many appeared to be distraught about the campaign's decision to select "the latest hits." After the collective performance, the stage moderator greeted "Hello Mr. President" to Han, followed by the audience chanting the same phrase. The crowd went into a craze

[40] This label did not sit well with me as it implied a sense of fetishism of the Taiwanese language. By embracing Hoklo, the KMT was able to take away the political attraction of the powerful ethnic component of Taiwanese nationalism of the pan-green campaign.

[41] To my amusement, most of the theme songs were contemporary pop songs that were not commonly known to those in their fifties or sixties.

when Han walked onto the center of the stage. There were several rounds of applause and cheering before he could start speaking. As usual, Han began his speech with a sentimental opening praising his supporters for their passion and dedication. As announced by Han, all hotels in Kaohsiung and trains coming into the city had been booked out by his supporters, proving that this rally and campaign had made Kaohsiung city "the center of the greater Chinese community."

According to Han, millions of devotees of ROC had entered Kaohsiung for this occasion and that as president, he would not allow the DPP to further corrupt this beloved city again. "Darkness, like the past three years and a half under the DPP, shall always pass." Han passionately preached to the crowd, "And the future of hope will always arrive — a future where our country is well-protected, and the people are rich!"[42] As Han advocated for the Chinese Republic that was once much admired, but whose democratic tradition and cultural roots had been dimmed under the DPP administration, I began to see the supporters as parallels to followers of a spiritual leader rather than an ideology. While the unified support of Han among the Chinese Nationalists would be considered a form of engagement in democratic politics on the surface, the rally's emotional core was perhaps closer to a religion born of patriotism and characteristic idolization. Through this new observation, I analyzed that the Han supporters, built upon the outline of supporters of Chinese Nationalism, were in many ways associated by an emotional tone rather than an actual belief in the near-extinct regime and its doctrine. This recognition of their emotional dependence on the collective could then be further rationalized through the supporters' sense of despair disguised as the patronage of a disappearing nation — one that was now outrightly challenged by overwhelming reforms that favoured Taiwanese Nationalism. As shown in my fieldwork thus far, the Chinese Nationalists saw Taiwanese Nationalism as a "poisonous movement" that would transform the ROC into a foreign land beyond recognition — a process which had triggered a series of emotional responses in the disguise of a simple opposition to new ideologies and political stances. However, through further examination, I discovered that such claimed insistence in ideological beliefs was, in reality, mere

[42] The slogan "our country well-protected and the people are rich" (國家安全人民有錢) was the election slogan of Han's campaign for the presidential election. His previous slogan for the mayor election was, "Make Kaohsiung rich" (高雄發大財).

expressions of reluctance through which the community's persistence as political subjects was displayed. On this note, it appeared that the exact details of the opposing ideologies never really mattered to the supporters of Chinese Nationalism in Taiwan. In the end, I concluded that it was the members' disinclination to discard the collective that underlay their emotional attachment as well as the prolonged political socialization, which in turn had sustained the very framework of their imagined community.

The Ineluctable Chinese Dream

Several days after the pro-Han rally in Kaohsiung, I sat down for another scheduled interview session. Wu, who self-identified as a reformist and former social activist, had agreed to meet up with me to share her resolve to "return" to the community of Chinese Nationalists after decades of being apolitical and anti-establishment. Ethnically, Wu belonged to a generation of baby-boomers in Taiwan born to a first-generation Mainlander father and a Native Taiwanese mother. As a part of the national troops, Wu's father had left his first wife and children in China when he followed the nationalist government's relocation to Taiwan in 1949. After his return was deemed impossible due to the lack of cross-strait communication in the early years following the Chinese Civil War, Wu's father remarried a Taiwanese woman of Hakka descent and together they produced Wu and her sister. As the family identity and bloodline were often patrilineal inheritances, Wu — and many others like her — referred to herself as a second-generation Mainlander "with a Taiwanese twist." Despite her family roots closely intertwined with the KMT party, Wu seemed to take pride in being the rebellious, anti-KMT reformist during her younger years. According to Wu, she identified as an "apolitical activist" for a long time even after universal voting rights were implemented, and did not take an interest in voting until the KMT's Ma Ying-Jeou ran for presidency. As recounted by Wu, it was almost trendy for intellectuals of the time to be anti-KMT, but she had since realized that her incentive was rooted in nothing but the urge of being disobedient and contrarian. Wu further clarified that, this time around, she could no longer stand aside to watch the DPP manipulate the election again. Like my other interlocutors, Wu was baffled by the DPP's self-proclaimed label as the pioneer of Taiwanese democracy and protested that no truly democratic party

should allow its power to dominate an office for thirty years.[43] Based on this view, Wu posed the rhetorical question asking if there was, in reality, any difference between the DPP and Communist China. When commenting on the Martial Law decades that she grew up in, Wu disagreed with the contemporary views that the order was socially and politically oppressive for Taiwan's people. Instead, she looked back to her father as an exemplar of conventional KMT military personnel who were well-disciplined by the regime compared to politicians today. As a self-identified activist, Wu claimed to have high expectations of the DPP as they worked together to protest against the KMT government. Yet she was left disappointed after the DPP came into office and neglected their past ideals and promises. On the surface, Wu's narrative about her gradual political epiphany could be rationalized through the pendulum effect that triggered her switch in party alliance; her self-portrayal as an apolitical activist nevertheless gave away her minimized yet prevailing relationship with the KMT party. In essence, while Wu decided for years that she would not blindly vote for the KMT politicians, her deep-rooted nationalist upbringing seemed to have prevented her from voting for any other party altogether. That is, Wu's identity as a cooperative activist and reformist appeared to be very much built upon the prerequisite that the KMT remained the governing power as opposed to the DPP politicians whom she dubbed "nothing but cunning opportunists." Finally, Wu reasoned her support for the KMT administration today as they had always treated her nicely as an activist and was not nearly as corrupted.[44]

As we continued to discuss the ongoing election craze in Taiwan, it became apparent that Wu — like my other interlocutors — saw Han's campaign as a long-awaited resurgence of classic Chinese Nationalism after years of unwanted negotiation with Taiwanese Nationalists. In spite of her activist history, Wu appeared to have reconnected with her instinctive loyalty to the nation and the Nationalist Party as the KMT transformed into its post-authoritarian self. As recited by Wu, she had gone to every

[43] According to Wu and many other KMT supporters, the DPP's continuous government of Kaohsiung for the past thirty years should be identified as an "authoritarian rule" despite it being elected through democratic means. In reality, it was only the county of Kaohsiung that had been governed by the DPP for thirty-three years since 1985, after forty years of KMT rule. The mayoralty of Kaohsiung city on the other hand had been under the DPP for twenty years since 1998, after more than fifty years of KMT government.

[44] Wu's narrative seemed to interpret the politicians' mannerism as a form of corruption and concluded that since the KMT politicians were always cooperative with the activist groups, they were not corrupted.

rally to support Han when he was running for mayor. She cried happy tears as soon as she arrived when witnessing the number of ROC flags waving by the crowd. As someone born and raised in a military dependents' village, Wu recounted that she felt the ROC had almost been lost under the DPP government. But thanks to Han's popularity, the nation was now discovered again. To Wu, Han's popularity was an indication that the KMT had finally learned to run an appealing campaign. And even if it was a form of idolization and personal worship as criticized by the DPP, she did not mind in the slightest.[45] Additionally, Wu redirected her political rationale towards our responsibility to conserve Chinese civilization as a whole. As Wu accused the DPP of sabotaging and uprooting the Chinese heritage to mould its historical narrative, she proudly announced that we, as ROC's nation, was the unquestionable "original China" and should not give way to the DPP's agenda for Taiwanese Nationalism.

From a self-proclaimed social activist to the ultimate defender of the KMT's Sino-centric ideology, Wu's transformation was fascinating. In a way, Wu rationalized the once clientelist relationship between the KMT regime and the Chinese Nationalists to be a regular pattern for a united nation — which had only been distraught due to the rise of other political ideologies. When commenting on the existing "democratic" society and indigenous rights in Taiwan, Wu attributed much of the social conflicts to the agitating DPP politicians. According to Wu, democracy was not suitable for people of Chinese descent due to our "emotional nature."[46] As a result, the Taiwanese society had been heavily divided since the dawn of democratic elections. Furthermore, Wu — much in her activist persona — stated her sympathy for the indigenous population that had been manipulated by the DPP's proposed policies concerning indigenous culture. Commenting on the DPP's advocacy for the education of native languages, Wu expressed her sympathy for the indigenous children who now had more subjects to learn in school.[47] Despite her professed friendship and respect for the indigenous community, it was impossible to disregard

[45] As a regular rally participant, Wu nonetheless clarified that she did not think it was brainwashing but a genuine force of union.
[46] This ethnic-based essentialist argument is very common among KMT supporters as a supporting point for many of their proposed policies.
[47] Wu attributed these statements to conversations with her Taiwanese indigenous friends and concluded that tribal categories were often added unnecessarily for better resource allocation, among other political reasons.

Wu's mocking tone when describing the indigenous individuals.[48] This trait of racial discrimination, in my opinion, was telling of the Chinese Nationalists' collective stance when it comes to their idea of a universal national identity that incorporated other ethnic minorities. In many ways, such emphasized yet "affectionate" differentiation between citizens of Han Chinese descent and "the others" of indigenous Austronesian ancestry was perhaps a necessity to uphold the "imperial imagining" of the Sino-centric doctrine. In the end, Wu's dedication and enthusiasm as a self-identified activist had not prevented her from the supplied nationalist imagination and political rationale that was shared among Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. As Wu proclaimed that her interests and accumulated knowledge of the "others" essentially qualified her as a self-made anthropologist, I did not doubt that she would be right if the contexts had differed. That is, if placed under a regime built upon Chinese Nationalism, Wu would indeed have been regarded as a well-groomed ethnographer employable to the authorities without much concern. Nevertheless, Wu — representing so many others like her — was still a supporter of a once imposed ethnic-based hierarchy. That is, now understood through the concept of political subjectivity, I observed that Wu was utterly unaware of how her inveterate bond with the KMT and its ideals had directed her thoughts that she had mistaken as her own. In the end, as Wu excitedly concluded that the upcoming election would be an assessment of the development of Taiwanese democracy and how far we had come as a self-reliant state, I found myself in silent agreement.

After my interview with Wu, I began to reflect on my understanding of the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Thus far, I had attempted to identify the community as a result of citizen-shaping that had taken place along the long-term political socialization. Analyzed through the concept of political subjectivity, this process of citizen-shaping had started from their most formative years under the KMT rule and now persisted into contemporary Taiwan sustained by the political rhetoric and interactions within their community. As suggested by the data I had collected, it appeared that the local voters of Taiwan would continue to be divided by their difference in nationalist imagination and political identity for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, however, I also came to an alternative understanding of the

[48]Wu habitually took on a stereotypical and ridiculed accent when she was portraying her "indigenous friends."

Chinese Nationalists from the immersed conversations with my interlocutors. Namely, certain statements had displayed how the rationale of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had been shaped by the formerly imposed nationalist narrative as much as the current political reality between China and Taiwan. The community now found itself in a convoluted position that advocated for an autonomous ROC located only in Taiwan while simultaneously condemning the idea of Taiwanese independence. As a result, the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists — now overlapping with the KMT supporters — at times appeared to endorse statements that not only alienated themselves from other Taiwanese but also reinforced their competition for the lineage of Chinese dynasties against Communist China. On this note, the existing community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan was perhaps remnants of the past regime just much as it was a product of contemporary geopolitics. And the Chinese Nationalist imagination in Taiwan had persisted in such strong form precisely due to the continuously unusual relation between Taiwan and China. In this regard, I began to understand that the Chinese Nationalists — through their support of the changing KMT party — had to rebuild themselves upon memories of the past and selected understanding of contemporary politics. This necessity had since led to the imagined community in its present form as "pro-ROC Taiwanese" — a stance that was as patriotic as it was pragmatic, and most importantly distinctive from "the Others" as "Taiwanese Separatists" and "Chinese Communists." This reexamination of the political affiliation between the imagined community and the Nationalist Party allowed me to see the collective identity of Chinese Nationalists in a new light. That is, as a rationalized tactical disposition that ensured the survival of both the nation of ROC and the community in attempts to persevere through the threats of Taiwanese Nationalism and the PRC in both ideological and geopolitical ways. Nonetheless, despite growing awareness of the complex rationales behind the community's forming and continuation, I also recognized that the KMT party had encouraged such development to its advantage. In the end, the KMT had continued to cry out for the union of its supporters to overcome the perils of "separatists" to salvage the fate of all contemporary Chinese. The justification behind the deep-rooted loyalty of Chinese Nationalists — be it survivor mentality, patriotism, or an emotional attachment with its Chinese identity — was thus almost irrelevant. Instead, as Taiwan proceeded toward election day as a divided society

without a conclusive national belonging, I found the most apparent trait of the bond between the KMT and its supporters — regardless of the incentive — was that it was not one to be easily dismantled, even when faced with an era of change.

Chapter Three: Dynasty in Crumbles

As we entered into January 2020, even celebrations of the New Year were seemingly overshadowed by the final leg of the presidential campaign and the great anticipation of the election result. Through the discourse circulated by media reports and the campaign teams, the three candidates had each become the centre of political discussions among the local voters in their own way. Incumbent president Tsai Ing-wen, supported by the DPP party and other minor parties that preferred Taiwanese Nationalism, remained vocal about the human right issues in China and emphasized the liberal platform of her cabinet; Mayor Han Kuo-yu and the KMT party, having successfully portrayed the presidential election of 2020 to be the most consequential campaign in defence of the last existence of ROC nationalism, continued to win the hearts and minds of Chinese Nationalists across the nation; last but not least, the previous hopeful James Soong had decided to continue his sixteen-year-and-counting battle for a presidential bid, to the concern of many former supporters.

Daily conversations in Taiwan now seemed to be focused on nothing but the upcoming election, with almost every casual chit-chat leading to further discussions and predictions of the outcome. As I continued to attend my yoga sessions and accompany my mother to her local church, I was often the chosen audience to political dialogues due to my stance as an "outsider" — a non-regular participant in their spontaneous hypothesis and offhand conclusions.[49] In one such occasion of religious gatherings, the political division between church-goers was so heated that a KMT supporter confronted her pro-DDP fellow Christian about the latter's questionable ethnic identity. As noted by the KMT supporter, it was incomprehensible that Taiwanese Nationalism supporters would prefer to become a part of America instead of reunifying with China, where "our ancestors actually came from."[50] Nevertheless, the overly political dispute was always hushed abruptly before it could develop into a public contention. The serious

[49] I saw this perplexing position as a common dilemma to "local anthropologists" who return to study their own community, as both an insider and outsider during the course of the fieldwork.
[50] This discussion about Taiwanese Nationalism supporters preferring to become a part of America refers to a fringe group among Taiwanese Independence supporters. See Sheridan (2016).

topic concerning ethnic belonging was then quickly diminished to nothing but a harmless gag. However, an exchange of complaints was later heard between the KMT supporter and her like-minded companions, where they cried out in confusion that their fellow citizens would choose foreign America over "homeland China." The KMT supporters then rationalized that such logic must have resulted from the colonial brainwashing done by imperial Japan on the Native Taiwanese.[51] Another similar scenario arose days later at yoga class, where political discussions had become an inseparable part of the practice itself. During an occasion when no known anti-KMT voter was present, the instructor and her like-minded students shared laughs about Han's "amusing remarks" during the live presidential debate that had taken place earlier in the week.[52] Despite identifying themselves as "conservatives" regarding social issues and other traditional values, the oba-sans were more than charmed by Han's vulgar pronouncements towards his opponents and hostile media representatives. Restating Han's humiliation of a pro-DPP media involving a genital innuendo, one student excitedly proclaimed that she admired Han's courage to speak out the universal truth. Meanwhile, the same group of people persisted in their resentment at the DPP and their display of "liberal" values, suggesting the lack of moral code and fundamental virtue among its supporters. Their sense of selective prudishness was especially apparent when they shifted to question the necessity of Pride participants dressing up in revealing outfits. Many subsequently concluded that such moral decay of human society must be protested by the majority, appearing to have forgone their delight inspired by human genitals jokes merely minutes ago.

Through ongoing observations of the local political scene on and after election day, this last chapter will explore how the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists survived and transformed itself throughout the aftermath of the presidential election. In detail, my second-stage interviews and further data collection will highlight the post-election phenomenon of which the understanding of "democratic values" was employed as an instrument that vindicated the established way of life for the remaining Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Based on these examinations, the community of Chinese Nationalists had

[51] The ethnic slur "wo-nu" (倭奴), roughly meaning "slave of Japan", was often used by the pan-blue supporters to label those pro-Japan Taiwanese.
[52] More analysis about the debate will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

seemingly equated the idea of universal truth as well as the limit of individual freedom — be it ideology, ethnic belonging, or social behaviours — with its ability to win the approval of the majority. Based on their newly established understanding of the electoral system, I attempted to explore these findings as regional features of populism that had lately been the central debates in contemporary anthropological studies of democracy (Mazzarella 2019). Through the shared perspectives of my interlocutors, the current structures of democracy in Taiwan had in many ways facilitated — albeit unintentionally — the continual existence of the imagined community. The local democracy nonetheless had also reshaped the members' interpretation of their political rationale. On this matter, I argued that a transformation of the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan was underway through subtle alterations enabled by the very social and political factors that had ensured its survival — perhaps much to the disbelief of its contemporary opponents as to the unawareness of its members.

Han: Populist or Simply Popular?

As Han's explosive and exhaustive presence on the media persisted throughout the election, his unorthodox demeanours became heavily circulated by his supporters and opponents alike in the forms of internet memes, parody videos, and personal propaganda. An unordinary KMT politician to begin with, Han fully embraced the collective obsession among the Taiwanese population concerning elections and the idea of democracy. His behaviour as an elected politician continued to perplex those who did not support the KMT party. Nevertheless, as his opponents ridiculed him through the label of a populist politician, Han remained extremely popular among Chinese Nationalism supporters.

Throughout his campaign for the mayor of Kaohsiung and the President of the ROC, Han had been widely admired by the Chinese Nationalists who saw him as the saviour of Chinese Nationalism in Taiwan. As Han assumed this role to his best ability, many of his behaviours and articulations became accepted by the community without much questioning. For the most part, this unquestioned support operated on the bond between the KMT party and their followers. Nonetheless, it was still unusual in ways that it undermined the conventional authority of the Nationalist Party. Firstly, as Han's qualities and

demeanours as a politician drastically differed from those classically trained and promoted by the KMT party, the supporters seemed to be attracted to him regardless. Many attributed much of this popularity to his charisma.[53]Through further examination, however, Han's popularity should not come as a surprise when explained through the concept of political subjectivity. As most Chinese Nationalists in modern Taiwan retained their political preference and rationale shaped by the Sino-centric nationalist curriculum implemented by the KMT regime, the party followers would perhaps have supported anyone nominated by the KMT. The attractive leadership of Han had only made the decision easier. Additionally, as citizens of the ROC and supporters of the KMT party, most members of the imagined community saw the upcoming election as an opportunity to see the overdue victory of the KMT as well as the idea of Chinese Nationalism. The official purpose of appointing a suitable government official was largely ignored. For this reason, Han as the most likely winner ended up on the ballot despite other running candidates during the KMT primary. On the other hand, however, opposition to the KMT party had regarded Han as the personification of the latest trend of conservative Chinese Nationalism in Taiwan.[54] Han as a presidential nominee thus not only distressed the expectations of the reformists in the KMT but also jeopardized the KMT's future as a salable political actor for a Taiwanese audience. In other words, with the majority of Han supporters falling into the elder age group of the population, many questioned how the party would survive under and beyond the "Han-wave." That being said, most KMT party supporters appeared to have adopted their preference in policies and worldviews to align with what Han said and did as their presidential nominee, even if such conduct and reactions would potentially lead to adverse effects for the party and their odds in the election.

The discussion of Han as a populist or simply popular politician was best demonstrated through the bipolar reaction to his behaviours at the televised presidential debate on December 29, 2019 (Taiwan Public Television Service Foundation 2019). As the only official debate, the candidates were provided with a live studio audience and broadcast. During the media question session, however, Han elaborately

[53] This created a mental gap between the Han supporters and the anti-Han presence in Taiwan, each claiming to have made their decision according to "common sense."
[54] As opposed to the KMT's traditional approach of "well-educated and well-mannered" politicians.

accused the participating reporters of contributing to the moral decade of Taiwanese society. Such accusations were the direct response to questions about his hidden financial arrangements and evasion of his responsibilities as mayor. Furthermore, Han stated that the media was unnecessarily targeting the details of his personal life — which he exemplified through mentions of his romantic as well as sexual relationships — due to the lack of conscience and recognition of personal privacy in the industry. He then named this phenomenon a conspired agenda to aggravate the existing social division in Taiwan. Following the Sino-centric ideology of most KMT loyalists, Han also declared that it was the destined bond for the people of Taiwan to adhere to our ancestral roots and the Chinese diaspora worldwide. Moreover, he harshly condemned incumbent president Tsai Ing-wen — who was in attendance of the live debate for her re-election bid — for her aloofness concerning patriotism and personal charisma.[55] And while those who opposed the KMT party expected Han's performances to take a toll on his public approval, these remarks in fact prompted a further escalation of his popularity among supporters of Chinese Nationalism and the conservative doctrine. As Han questioned both Tsai and Soong of their religious faith as evidence of their moral standard as well as employed colourful metaphors to evade the direct questions from his opponents, the Chinese Nationalists appeared entertained by his "quirks" and obscene remarks as a "humorous" common man. The voters, it seemed, had preferred this common man to an elitist politician as their president. Based on these observations, the live broadcast presidential debate had failed its primary purpose: to provide the locals with an accessible platform that exhibited the candidates' qualities as politicians. Instead, between Han's presentation as the populist personification of traditionalist Chinese Nationalism and Soong's stalled attempts to reconnect with younger voters as a political veteran, the debate reflected a trend of thought that was heavily circulated among Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. [56] That is, an ideological drive of nostalgic politics supplemented by ethnic-based nationalism and selective understandings of democracy. Upon this realization, many saw the upcoming

[55] In the words of Han, Tsai was no more than an "emotionless teleprompter" and "puppet toy with a pretty law degree."
[56] Soong reportedly quoted both Martin Luther King Jr. and the Disney film *Frozen* (2013) before proclaiming his identity as Taiwanese-Chinese while expressing a nostalgic reminiscence of the Martial Law era.

election in 2020 as more than just a contest for the presidential seat and political power — it had become a battle for social values, collective identity, and the future of our ethnic belonging through the means of democracy.

The last days leading up to election day proved to be emotionally compressing and mentally straining for everyone across the nation. All were waiting for the election-mania and prolonged social tension to be over. The political rival was so rigid and extensive that I had avoided wearing any shade of the colour green to my interviews with the Chinese Nationalists, so that I did not provoke my interlocutors unnecessarily. One confrontation nonetheless took place when I attended a social gathering in lime green with my mother, dressed in bright orange: the representative colour of James Soong's People First Party. As a result, the other attendees who were predominantly pro-KMT teased us endlessly about our outfits with almost too much sincerity.

During the final days preceding the election, the idolization of Han as a political star had also extended to his immediate family.[57] In particular, Han's Canadian-educated daughter Han Bing had become the focus of such fetishization among Han supporters as an idealized daughter, girlfriend, and daughter-in-law who complied with the moral standards of the Chinese Nationalists. From her father's campaign for the mayor of Kaohsiung in 2018 to now the President of ROC, Han Bing became a household name and celebrity to the community of Chinese Nationalism supporters with pro-KMT media dubbing her "Taiwan's Ivanka" (Huang 2018).[58] As a researcher, I was during many occasions treated nicely by Chinese Nationalists for merely receiving education in the same country as Han's daughter. These incidents were notably arbitrary since my attendance at the University of Ottawa was thousands of kilometres away from her institution in Vancouver.[59] In the end, while I attempted to downplay my Western education throughout my fieldwork to emphasize my local upbringing, many interlocutors would

[57] This paralleled the past when the public idolized Chiang Kai-shek's wife, Madame Soong Mei-Ling as the embodiment of a modern yet elegant Chinese lady

[58] Interestingly, the KMT supporters I had encountered during my fieldwork had always unanimously disliked Donald Trump, the incumbent president of the United States. The same however could not be said about supporters of DPP, who had taken a liking to Trump due to his willingness to criticize China.

[59] Relatedly, the Mandarin translation for Ottawa (wo-tai-hua) and Vancouver (wen-ge-hua) in Taiwan do share the similar character of "hua" (華) which could have caused some confusion among the local community.

not hesitate to point out that I was, in fact, a returning intellectual from the West. This label was then further highlighted when they discovered that Ottawa was as if coincidentally, located in the same country as Vancouver. Upon this realization, the Han supporters excitedly shared the news among themselves before reverting the question to me, asking, "So, have you ever run into Han Bing there?"

Between the Party and the Politician

During the final stretch of election excitement, I became curious about the collective reasoning that shaped the repeating narratives of the nation as well as the Nationalist Party among my interlocutors. In truth, while I found little representation of those who had escaped the charismatic Han and yet persisted in their support of the KMT party, my previous encounters with notable exceptions such as Syu and Ye had proved that these anomalies could be as composed as they were assertive. Nonetheless, Han as a political superstar dominated the KMT party and its supporters. His popularity had appeared to unite the KMT politicians and its massive base of followers in an unprecedented manner. Additionally, most local voters had assumed that any contemporary Chinese Nationalist would be a passionate admirer of Han — a factor which only further marginalized the anti-Han members. For these reasons, I imagined that much of the internal dissent or disapproval of the Han-wave was purposely hidden — by both noted KMT politicians and the critics themselves. In fear of being labelled as a renegade, many were unwilling to actively object to Han's now uncontrollable popularity before the anticipated victory of the Nationalist Party. Such commanding power of Han supporters was most memorably depicted when, during a campaign rally in September 2019, former president Ma Ying-jeo — the once "KMT golden boy" — was booed mid-speech by the crowd in preference to Han's arrival on stage (Chiu and Lin 2019).[60] This incident indicated the common rejection of the traditional image of KMT politicians among the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan and their newly found admiration for the "charming and informal persona." Such development of Taiwanese elections indeed paralleled features of populist politics, as seen elsewhere in

[60] Han's campaign office later released a statement clarifying that the crowd was solely expressing their disappointment at the delayed rally schedule and that Han had personally phoned President Ma in appreciation of the latter's guest appearance at the rally. But Ma had evidently missed the call.

the contemporary world (Mazzarella 2019, 54). Similarly, my fieldwork findings suggested that most KMT loyalists who were once avid supporters of Ma now believed that Ma, along with other KMT veteran politicians, should avoid the public eye to the advantage of Han's "civilian" image and his presidential bid. Among the Chinese Nationalists, many people thought that the KMT party had been the one desperately grasping on to the abrupt marketability of Han. At the same time, Han supporters had been devouring the party resources and overruling many of the party's most prized characteristics. On this matter, I drew attention to the quick shift of interest of most Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan when they, as a collective, resolved to pursue a promising candidate that was once an outcast among the Nationalist Party. This had effectively created a division between the community of supporters and the existing hierarchical structure within the Nationalist Party. Ultimately, while Han and his popularity were inherently founded upon the Chinese nationalist imagination formerly advocated by the KMT, his implied detachment from the other party members and peculiar characteristics as a politician were in many ways alienating to the Nationalist Party. In truth, this shift of affiliation — from allegiance to the political party to claimed devotion to the ideology of Chinese Nationalism and its defender, Han Kuo-yu — was mostly undetected among the majority of Han supporters and Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Instead, they saw the rise of Han simply as the restoration of the classic KMT that would return the party to the basics of Chinese Nationalism. Nonetheless, I was hoping to find those that thought otherwise.

One such opportunity was presented when Tien, a regular attendee at my mother's local church, contacted me with a strong interest in my interviews. Unlike my other interlocutors, many of whom saw the DPP as their sworn enemy when it comes to nationalist imagination and ethnic identities, Tien was relatively relaxed on the subject matter. To begin, Tien professed to identify as a Taiwanese and saw China (PRC) as a different country. Furthermore, she appeared to be annoyed with the international community that was never willing to recognize "us" formally as a nation. Tien's account of Taiwan's ambiguous political status was, in reality, intriguing as such a topic was rarely discussed among Chinese Nationalists. That is, the issue of Taiwanese sovereignty was conventionally a more popular debate among advocates of Taiwanese Nationalism who traditionally affiliated with the DPP. Nonetheless, Tien

was still an adamant supporter of the KMT. Unapologetically, she rationalized this as an outcome of her upbringing as a former member of the Anti-Communist National Salvation Corps (later the China Youth Corps, or CYC), a youth organization established in 1952 under the supervision of the KMT regime (Lin 2017). As someone born and raised during the economic miracle in Taiwan, Tien then explained that the KMT played a vital role in developing our collective history, a past which she feared had become lost to younger people today. According to Tien, the authoritarian regime under the KMT government was no more than a chapter in history destined to occur after the nationalists' loss of mainland territory. That is, Chiang Kai-shek had no choice but to rule Taiwan with an iron fist. The recognition of Chiang Kai-shek as the "necessary evil," as recounted by Tien, was seemingly justified by the later reforms initiated by his son Chiang Ching-kuo. As premier and president, Chiang Ching-kuo was known to be "extremely liberal and popular with the people." On this note, Tien's portrayal of Taiwan's political history aligned with the official narrative recognized by most Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. In other words, Tien appeared to share the KMT's account regarding the economic contribution and political authority of the party in modern Taiwan. She also agreed with the non-dictatorial and humble reputation of Chiang Ching-kuo, even though contemporary documents had proven the truth to be otherwise. Alternatively, Tien presented herself as an independent critic who defied many of the provided accounts that common Chinese Nationalists had readily accepted. To a certain extent, Tien's undying affiliation with the KMT was the most fascinating form of political rationale I had observed during my fieldwork. As an individual who was part of the generation once nurtured and groomed as the future backbone by the nationalist government, Tien had seemingly developed a unique sense of justification and nationalist imagination through her own interpretations.

Tien's most significant trait as an unusual Chinese Nationalist was best demonstrated through her judgment of the Nationalist Party's many recent developments — specifically, the party's irrevocable decision to nominate Han as presidential candidate. In Tien's opinion, the KMT first faced its most consequential downfall when Lee Tung-hui came into power as the party chairman following the death of Chiang Ching-kuo. Up until Lee's rise to power, Tien believed that not much ideological dissent or

corruption existed among the Nationalist Party, after which "the KMT became a mess." In truth, contrary to the typical Chinese Nationalists who understated their criticisms of the Nationalist Party, Tien's account of the misconducts was one full of details.[61] And while I was no stranger to the defence of old-fashioned yet functional clientelism among those nostalgic for a simpler time, I found Tien and her perspective on contemporary politics to be unique due to her strong distaste for Han and his campaign. Unlike most supporters that had embraced Han's escalated popularity and his traditionalist approach to Chinese Nationalism, Tien viewed the development to be no more than a continuation of the everlasting power-related corruption within the KMT party. When asked to comment on the Han-wave effects on the mindset of established KMT politicians, Tien noted that they had been practically impotent. Criticizing the pretense of union among the KMT party members behind Han's campaign, Tien theorized that the incumbent members had no sense of how the party should sustain or improve itself, which saddened her deeply. As for Han as a person, Tien labelled him as a KMT politician who was "neither loyal nor intellectual, not to mention incapable." Despite admitting that Han's leadership could be what the KMT needed at the moment, Tien detested the supporters of Han, whom she thought were nothing but an unreasonable crowd. Tien was also critical of most pro-KMT media — namely the CTi — which she accused of propagating fake news and worsening Taiwan's political division. Interestingly, Tien showed no considerable resentment towards DPP politicians such as Tsai Ing-wen and Chen Shui-bien. In fact, notwithstanding some unpleasant personal experiences with the former mayor of Kaohsiung of DPP background, Tien was overall immune to the demonic connotation widely associated with the DPP party among the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Instead, Tien repeatedly emphasized that former president and KMT chairman Lee Tung-hui was the worst offender in the political history of Taiwan. As claimed by Tien, she bore no personal feelings towards the DPP politicians. She simply loathed Lee for ruining the KMT as its party leader as he secretly supported the opposition party, leaving

[61] According to Tien, the KMT was no stranger to bribery and corruption before Lee but at that time the politicians at least "did their job." It was after Lee became the party leader that Tien claimed the party turned into the "centre of corruption and autocracy."

nothing but scraps to his successors. “That’s when I became politically disillusioned as a pan-blue voter,” Tien concluded.

My interview session with Tien took another unexpected turn when, after a series of complaints and protests against both DPP and KMT, she revealed her much-contemplated decision for the upcoming election. As it turned out, Tien had decided to protest both major parties by voting for neither of their candidates. Instead, she would be casting her vote for James Soong. In her defence, Tien explained that this choice resulted from self-compromise between her disappointment with the KMT and indifference towards the DPP, without wasting away her voting rights as a citizen under democratic functions. While still self-identified as a KMT loyalist, saying “my heart is still blue,” Tien rationalized her resolve through her unwillingness to be lumped in with the Han fans whom she declared, “had lost their minds.”

As both a researcher on Taiwanese politics and a local voter who had been accustomed to the binary opinions on the blue-green spectrum, I found Tien’s political rationale and her self-designated conclusion not only refreshing but also perplexing. Indeed, Tien appeared to have evaded an established mindset of the collective while retaining her subjectivity as a Chinese Nationalist. Upon further examination, however, I analyzed that Tien as an individual was still very much under the subjectification of similar power. My understanding of Chinese Nationalists was especially challenged when Tien announced her party ballot for the legislative election — the Taiwanese congress — would be cast for the New Power Party (NPP), an emerging political party that advocated for Taiwanese Nationalism. While regarded as a “third party choice,” NPP had been widely recognized by local voters as a party with strong collaborations and political ties with the DPP (Horwitz 2016). Tien nevertheless appeared to be more than conscious of her unusual party preference. Noting that while she was aware the NPP leaned towards the DPP, Tien found the NPP politicians professional and not obsessed with identity politics. Therefore, she felt comfortable voting for them as a “balancing power.” Through her one-time choice in the presidential candidate and political party, Tien seemed to have proven herself to be the exception to her fellow Chinese Nationalists. As someone who did not yield their resolution for the betterment of the party even when faced with the temptation of a favourable trend, Tien had taken the unpopular path and departed

from those who pursued the "Han-wave" for its populist ideals and charismatic leadership. In any case, Tien stood out from my other interlocutors for her peculiar resilience to the standard narrative and political rationale that had dominated the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists. In the end, while I was unsure how Tien came to evade the convenient decision to follow the crowd, I anticipated that Tien's mindset embodied an active dissent among Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Following the upcoming election on January 11th, I expected this conflict could dictate the future of the KMT party and the community of Chinese Nationalists — the possibility of their survival — with or without the continuation of Han's political marketability.

January 11th, 2020

Two days before election day, I travelled from Kaohsiung to Taipei in preparation for the designated voting date of January 11th, 2020. Unlike foreign systems where voters were required to register or request their ballots before the election, the electoral system in Taiwan very much relied on the efficiency of the local household registration system established by the Japanese government (Department of Household Registration 2020). Through this system, a notice of the designated voting location and flyers about the candidates was distributed to each household addressed to all members above the age of twenty 20 weeks before election day.[62] Subsequently on election day, all eligible voters were required to show their national identity card upon entrance to the designated voting location to receive and cast their ballot (Ministry of the Interior 2020). Therefore, Taiwan's electoral system was an actively maintained structure that played an essential role in universal political participation and required its voters' physical engagement. Without a system of absentee voting, each voter needed to be present at their local voting booth on election day — habitually a Saturday — between 8 am and 4 pm. For this reason, many students or workers who resided outside their family home were obliged to return to their registered household address days before election day. As a result, public transportations and inter-city highways were often jeopardized — a phenomenon commonly known as the "Homecoming traffic" (返鄉潮) (Lien, Huang and

[62] The voting age limit in Taiwan is 20 years old.

Lee 2020). In particular, Taipei metropolis would see most of its young residents leaving the city for the weekend to return to their home cities to cast their votes. As I left for Taipei via the High-Speed Rail train (THSR), it was evident that political participation this time around was extraordinary. In addition to the stations filled with rushing crowds with extra shifts of inter-city trains and buses, many younger voters who lived in Taipei or abroad for employment or educational obligations had become anxious about not securing their tickets home. Regardless of political preferences, those who were usually apolitical or unwilling to travel were now eager to make a day trip across the country. As both a researcher and local voter, I found myself witnessing an unparalleled sensation that was born out of collective anxiety — no one knew what our society and country would become in a matter of days. Still, we were doing our best to keep it intact.

As many anticipated a long wait at the voting booth, I made plans to meet up with a local relative, Hua, to keep each other company on election day. A woman in her eighties, Hua was one of the surviving first-generation Mainlanders in my family that I knew growing up. From family stories, I knew Hua had not had an easy life. After coming to Taiwan following the Chinese Civil War, Hua was raised by a single mother. Later as a young woman, she was married to an older man of Mainlander descent, who was on the blacklist of the KMT during the era of White Terror. Her husband later died young from liver cancer in the 1970s, leaving her a young widow with two children. Despite her life traumas and experiences, however, Hua remained an optimistic and humorous individual. After casting our votes, Hua and I began talking about Taiwan's current political scene as she drew comparisons between her memories of the past and the present reality. As a first-generation Mainlander who had experienced the Civil War as well as White Terror first-hand — the latter primarily through her spouse — Hua stood out as an interesting contrast to my regular interlocutors. Contrary to those raised under the authoritarian regime, Hua was already in her late teens when she left China following the government's relocation. For this reason, she represented a community that existed before the ROC arrived in Taiwan with a national imagination independent of that provided by the post-war KMT regime. Despite her continued affiliation with the KMT, Hua appeared to disagree with many popular stances among the contemporary community of

Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan — especially opinions that were overly optimistic regarding the Martial Law order and peaceful cross-strait relations. At times, our conversations shifted from informal chats about the election to Hua's recollection of the Martial Law era. As once an adult witness to the authoritarian KMT regime, Hua mentioned when law enforcement would knock on their doors late at night and that they had to register their new address with the police every time they moved.[63] Hua also shared her honeymoon stories at the resort Sun Moon Lake in central Taiwan, when the first thing they had to do as a newly married couple was to report their stay to the local police as the government wanted to know where her husband was at all times. In addition, unlike my regular interlocutors who had habitually downplayed the social impacts of the authoritarian rule, Hua was able to detail many misconducts of the KMT government that happened to her late husband's friends and colleagues.[64] Finally, after her numerous comments and stories, Hua pulled me close and, in a lowered voice, reasoned her undisclosed support for the idea of Taiwanese independence. "The first thing that the communists will do if they get here is to throw you and me both into concentration camps," she noted, "I know them too well."

My conversations with Hua led me to a new way of understanding the contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Perhaps to their own community's disbelief and those opposing them, the fundamental ideology and nationalist narrative that shaped the Chinese Nationalists as political subjects very much depended on conceptual restrictions such as "temporality" (Eisenlohr 2004). While Hua remained a traditionalist KMT supporter at heart, her political rationale appeared to be a peculiarity when placed next to the contemporary community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Thus, my encounter with Hua emerged as an incident that indicated the significance of the age group I had been interviewing throughout my fieldwork. That is, the process of citizen-shaping seemed to have been the strongest among the Chinese Nationalists who were born and raised in post-war authoritarian Taiwan — who proved to be

[63] This was the way that the government carried out undocumented arrests known to many locals as "water-meter check" (查水表).
[64] Hua recollected how young students and intellectuals were hurled into sealed sacks and dumped into the sea by governmental authorities late at night due to their dissent with the KMT regime.

the most defensive of their political affiliation when confronted with a new form of nationalist imagination and identity.

After parting with Hua later that day, I attended an election watching party with friends in Taipei — that is, my own "echo chamber." As a local voter, I was aware that emotions were at their height at all political rallies that night. Any clash with incompatible crowds could turn intense given records of election nights in Taiwan. The decision turned out to be a correct one, as even early reports of the cast votes proved to be favourable to Tsai. As the common feature of election nights, television channels had prepared bustling graphics and animations to show live predictions of winning votes and provisional victory. The vote count for each legislative and presidential candidate was then updated every minute with the latest reports from the voting booths. As attendants at my watch party began to realize Tsai's victory was imminent, someone proposed that we tune in to the CTi News channel to see how they would process Han's prospective defeat. Due to its renowned characteristic of being pro-China, pro-KMT, and pro-Han, CTi was regarded by supporters and opponents alike to be the ground zero of the explosive Han-wave throughout the campaign. In recent years, the CTi news reports often took up a completely different narrative when compared to other published information on the same incident. In fact, the CTi newsgroup had become so notorious that many locals anti-KMT voters referred to its media reports as products of a "parallel universe" (平時行空). Occasionally, accounts of events that would paint the KMT or China negatively would be omitted altogether. For this reason, it was believed that CTi news — as practically the spokesperson and representative of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan — would provide a unique insight into KMT supporters' minds during the reveal of election results. That is, after all the hype about Han as saviour and guardian of the nation of ROC, the thought of the once-dominant Nationalist party failing to win the battle of nationalism and identity in a democratic election was perhaps almost unthinkable to its followers. Indeed, the anchorperson of CTi News appeared to be stunned on live television by the overwhelming votes cast for Tsai instead of Han; yet they asserted that Han's ballots would surely catch up later. As explained by the anchorperson, older voters had cast their votes earlier in the day and their ballots were still at the bottom of the box waiting to be counted. In truth, while many

found such remarks to be telling of the Chinese Nationalists' offbeat posture in support of the disappearing nation of ROC, I saw them as another exhibition to be understood through the concept of political subjectivity. In many ways, the denial of possible defeat was an expression of both their persistent faith in the nationalist narrative and the bond among fellow contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. Such was the result when one's collective identity was so closely intertwined with the fate of one specific nominee and the represented doctrine. Under the premise of their political identity as citizens and voters of the democratic ROC, the devotion of the Chinese Nationalists to the official narrative of either the Nationalist Party or the Chinese nation was perhaps as emotional as it was irrational. By the end of election night, official sources announced that incumbent president Tsai Ing-wen had been re-elected with a record-breaking 8.17 million votes, representing 57.1% of the popular vote with a turnout of 74.9% (Central Election Commission 2020a). The Chinese Nationalists saw their hopes of a revived Chinese nation shattered with Han coming in second at 5.5 million votes — and Soong at last place with 0.6 million.

The result of the 2020 presidential election proved to be stunning to the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan as well as those who voted for Tsai. Never in the history of democratic Taiwan had an incumbent president seeking re-election won more votes in their second election than their first run. Immediately after the final announcement that sealed the fate of the candidates, the nation was divided in two by their contrasting emotions and perspectives of the future. As my watching party celebrated in ecstasy, I attempted to imagine what was going through the minds of my interlocutors. Mostly, I wondered how they would process the defeat after months or even years of hopeful support and emotional hype. With only a secondary understanding of the most prominent eras of Chinese Nationalism in Taiwan, I could only envision so much as someone who was as old as the local democracy. For those who were born and raised under the nationalist curriculum of the KMT regime, however, it was a much-delayed realization that their beloved nation of the ROC — despite it remaining the official name of the country — was now no more than a subtitle of the commonly recognized entity of Taiwan. At the same time, the community of Chinese Nationalists were faced with the hard reality that Taiwanese Nationalism was no

longer the dogma of a "radical separatist" organization as they had portrayed it. Instead, with Tsai winning the majority by such a margin, the election result in 2020 had inherently marked the idea of Taiwanese Nationalism as the dominant trend. By understanding the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan up until this point, I became concerned about how election outcomes would affect the collective identity and overall well-being of the community. And as the latest updates from CTi news concluded its evening report titled, "Five Million Han Fans Cry Tonight," I thought of my interlocutors and family members who belonged to the referred group in devastation. Yet as I searched for updates through social media that was often used by Chinese Nationalism supporters in Taiwan for communication and announcements related to local politics, I found no significant activity or remark concerning the election result coming from their end.

All was quiet on the Western front.

Frozen Memories, Frozen Identities

Analysis regarding the election result eventually started to emerge in the days following January 11, 2020, on different sides of the presidential campaign. In a way, I observed that features of the imagined community had shielded the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan from a complete meltdown. Through the selected understandings of democracy, the community members perceived themselves as "responsible" voters of a democratic society. Many sought solace in the thought that such a result — losing an election — was inevitable for a functional electoral system. Additionally, through their reaction as the graceful loser, the Chinese Nationalists indicated that the KMT politicians and their supporters had always been willing to admit defeat in a timely matter — unlike the DPP voters. Meanwhile, contemporary interpretations of democracy were used to justify individual opinions and stances among the community. Such understatement of the collective distress over the election result thus prevented the collapse of the structure essential to the Chinese Nationalists' political views. By recognizing their loss as a common casualty of any existing democracy, the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan avoided a forced self-examination of their association with the Chinese national framework. In this way, they successfully

eluded a confrontation with contemporary trends of Taiwanese Nationalism on the subjects of national imagination and subjectivity as citizens of the ROC.

Reflecting his supporters' odd reactions, Han, as the hopeful-turned-defeated presidential candidate appeared to have also swiftly accepted his failed campaign while continuing with his signature actions as a "popular politician." Following his concession speech on election night — where he thanked his supporters as well as the people of Taiwan for realizing yet another round of democratic election— Han left his crowd of supporters at his campaign headquarters and called off a scheduled international press conference at the last minute (Apple Online 2020; Hong, Hsu and Chuang 2020).[65] Hours later, Han and his family were spotted at a local restaurant enjoying a meal of hotpot. When later questioned on his reasoning, Han explained that all he had to say to the public was included in his concession speech and did not think a press conference was still needed. According to later news sources, Han commented on his supporters' emotional distress and stated that he did not wish to provoke them further through the press conference (Apple Online 2020). Instead, he claimed that he thought it was more important to treat his team to a good meal for all their work. Once again, Han's behaviour as an unorthodox politician drew criticism from his opponents as well as praise from his supporters. As the re-elected Tsai proceeded with her press conference, receiving questions and congratulations from international reporters who had been stationed specifically for the presidential election, Han appeared to have conceded any opportunity to represent himself to the general public. Alternatively, by excusing his failure to adhere to proper etiquette expected of an adequate politician through the approachable justification of "taking his staff to dinner," Han chose to play along with his role as the proletariat leader of all Chinese Nationalists. In the end, much to his credit, Han had remained the same candidate throughout his campaign: one who was advertised and promoted upon the basis of classic patriotism of the Chinese nation.

Yet as most supporters attributed Han's success and popularity to his personal charisma, all seemed to have neglected the importance of the existing subjectivity among the community of Chinese Nationalists — now further shaped by their understandings of democracy — that had played into the

[65] Han however reportedly failed to mention the KMT in his speech.

grouping of his predestined supporters. Building on this, I reasoned that the particular case of Han Kuo-yu and his popularity among the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan would not have been possible without the premise of the long-term nationalist narrative once implemented by the KMT regime and the continuous political socialization among its members. However, I believed that the ongoing phenomenon through which the imagined community was repeatedly shaped, transformed, and even revitalized through characteristics of the oba-san democracy should be addressed by further examining the community in the post-election context.

As it turned out, the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan were not to be left in peace with their selective interpretations of democracy in the election aftermath. That is, the KMT supporters — especially those who saw Han as the only hope of reviving the Chinese Nationalism in modern Taiwan — had little time to process their disappointment in the shifted national imagination and the changing identity of their fellow citizens. Mere days after the presidential election, those who had vehemently opposed Han throughout his campaign saw his defeat as a propelling force that would facilitate the request of recalling him as mayor. As a result, the movement advanced into the process of clearing petitions during the same week Han resumed his mayoral duties (Central News Agency 2020). Most Han supporters had taken comfort in knowing that while Han's failure to win the presidency was always a probable outcome, he would in any case return to be the mayor of Kaohsiung. The rapid recall action in the process, however, had made them realize otherwise. Upon such a discovery, many KMT supporters quickly transformed their disappointment in the presidential election into anger at both the presidential loss and prospective deprivation of Han's mayor position.

On this note, the claimed respect for "democratic values" that was formerly prominent among the community was reduced to a minimum, with the members now normalizing a critical perspective of local democracy. Certainly, no functional democracy would allow a once-elected individual to be annulled through another round of the election. In this respect, I observed that the political opinions found among the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan were concurrently conditioned through their understanding and thus interpretation of a democratic society. That is to say, while my fieldwork findings

had suggested that the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists had developed through continuous socio-political policies and communal structures administered upon the local population, this newly observed change in narratives had provided new insights into my understanding. Through the instrument of "temporality" (Eisenlohr 2004), I perceived that a transformation of the community was underway in attempts to reshape and repurpose itself to ensure its endurance under the circumstances of contemporary politics. In this regard, I continued the last stage of my fieldwork as a comprehensive report on the different ways that the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had altered itself for survival in a post-authoritarian society.

After around a month of silence, I was finally able to set up a second meeting with Jhu as a follow-up interview about her thoughts on the election result as well as the future of Taiwan. As planned, the interview was conducted in an open-ended format to allow flexibility in the interlocutor's chosen expressions when reflecting on the events throughout the election. Understanding the process of citizen-shaping now as restricted by its historical context and specific period of the KMT regime where the related political socialization occurred, I became interested in how the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had transformed from its past to present form. While ongoing and ever-changing, I expected this process to be the most detectable following a lost election due to the quick shift from an emotional height to a subsequent disillusion. Furthermore, I was intrigued by how the community of Chinese Nationalists had continuously employed contemporary politics to justify their political stance and faith in a nationalist imagination that was now in deterioration. However, back in my fieldwork, I was aware that Jhu was not pleased with the election result even before our second meeting. This speculation was confirmed when I received internet links via social media messages from Jhu days before our scheduled interview. These links led to pro-KMT blog posts and essays that were heavily circulated among the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan throughout the election, often through private messaging, chatrooms, and online closed forums. Jhu had sent them as a prerequisite for our follow-up interview as she eventually figured out that I was not a supporter of the KMT or its Chinese Nationalist doctrine in spite of what my ethnic background would have suggested. Surely, I was dubious about her motive behind providing information

concerning the political legitimacy and administrative rationale of the KMT party in defiance of its defeat. To a certain extent, I analyzed that it was an attempt from Jhu to convert my political preference as well as to justify that her choice was lawfully endorsed by published documents. Regardless, such a gesture seemed to imply that the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had found a way to sustain itself through the existing functions of democracy.

Upon entering Jhu's apartment, I was aware that it would be a different encounter from our last meeting. During our previous interview, Jhu was a hopeful voter that believed Han's victory was a coming reality. At that time, she was willing to show a sense of sympathy for the DPP voters who appeared to be deceived by the separatist politicians and their misleading advocacy for Taiwanese Nationalism. However, this time around, the subtext of our discussions focused excessively on the unfair reputation of the KMT in modern Taiwan. Unlike our previous exchange, where she incidentally criticized the former misconduct of the KMT regime and praised our existing freedom under a "democratic framework," Jhu appeared to have grown more protective of the community of Chinese Nationalists following the lost election. Now relieved from the obligation to relate herself to the general public, Jhu turned to list the political as well as economic achievements of the Nationalist Party. She complained that the Taiwanese people had become ungrateful of the regime due to the DPP government's media control and their mastery in manipulating identity politics. As stated by Jhu, the years of DPP rule in Taiwan had worsened the already troubled ethnic relations in the country which "marginalized Mainlanders unnecessarily as a minority." Subsequently, the younger generation of Taiwan had been groomed to hold anti-China grudges when it comes to political as well as cultural discussions.[66]

Jhu furthermore protested the accusation of the DPP party and its supporters that had held the pan-blue community accountable for bureaucratic corruption and indoctrination under the authoritarian regime. Defending herself, Jhu claimed that she had never earned any money for supporting the KMT party. On this account, Jhu and fellow KMT supporters were rightly baffled by the many condemnations

[66] Many supporters of Chinese Nationalism remained critical of the changed school curriculum under the DPP government, in which an emphasis was placed on the local history and geography of Taiwan, thus alienating the history of China as "foreign."

of their political allegiance proposed by their opponents. In truth, they were not part of the administration that gained direct profit from the authoritarian regime under the KMT rule. Instead, most of the Chinese Nationalists regarded themselves as "obedient citizens" who had always followed the law and orders of the government. However, the irony lay in the reality that most of my interlocutors — Jhu included — had all to an extent benefited from the KMT regime either economically or politically through their clientelist relationship. Such privilege was nonetheless seldom addressed by the KMT supporters regardless of their ethnic background. Rather, the experience was employed as proof of the social stability and harmonic relations between government and the people — notwithstanding the implemented Martial Law order and other enforcements used to prosecute the noncompliant. In particular, Jhu was the most defensive of the economic policies under the KMT regime.[67] She rationalized that Taiwan had only come to our current prosperity due to the previous restraints in individual freedom and political rights. Finally, Jhu stated that the DPP was running on nothing but the drive for self-promotion and profit as opposed to the KMT regime, which had functioned with the people's best interest in economic development and security in mind.

Through my attempts to understand her perspective as a voter, I found Jhu's faith in the Nationalist Party and its political doctrine to be inconsistent with her asserted desire for Taiwan's betterment. I analyzed this to be a result of the implied inflexibility of the imagined future that had been continuously shaped by both the KMT regime and selective conceptualizations of democracy circulated among the Chinese Nationalists. As my interview with Jhu advanced, I felt it outlined a confrontation that the community of Chinese Nationalists wished to deliver on the Taiwanese society as a whole. As Jhu recounted the troubles that the DPP had provoked — in both domestic and international aspects — before moving onto the anti-separatist reasoning common among pan-blue supporters, there was hardly any claim that I had never heard before. From ideals of the real Chinese Republic, the unceasing praises of the two President Chiangs, to the essentialist comments on the political incompetence of the Chinese race, I

[67] Known as Ten Major Construction Projects (十大建設), a series of state-planned national infrastructure projects titled that was initiated and supervised by the government in Taiwan during the 1970s.

observed how repeated accounts strengthened the shaping of one's subjectivity. Yet despite my familiarity with the narrative, I found that this process of citizen-shaping had only been intensified through newly found understandings of the democratic system. To a certain extent, Jhu was speaking as a representative of the whole community that shared her mindset — that is, a narrative concerning Chinese national pride, ethnic belonging, and the sense of nostalgia of the KMT authoritarian regime. As illustrated by Jhu, the nation of ROC had Taiwan's best interests at heart and that, as citizens, the people should not allow it to fall into the hands of the DPP and its "radical separatism."[68] Jhu's emphasis on her Mandarin-Taiwanese disposition and her affections for Taiwan that, in her opinion, was often neglected by the DPP supporters nonetheless should be examined as an indication of the dilemma that was often faced by Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. That is, while the recognition of Taiwan as their "homeland" was no longer uncommon among contemporary Chinese Nationalists, their struggle with Taiwanese Nationalism and the local society's growing yearning for a further established ethnic character — away from its Sino-centric roots — remained a principle identity marker for the imagined community. With such a sense of association based on a perpetual struggle, the community was now maintained by the Chinese Nationalists themselves through ongoing negotiations with their collective memories of the past as well as the political framework of the present.

My conversations with Jhu promptly turned hostile towards the end of the interview when I was asked about my reasoning for not supporting the KMT or its Chinese Nationalist doctrine as a third-generation Mainlander. It was a long and awkward silence before Jhu spoke again, noting that my rationale — much to her expectation — only verified her belief that the younger generation today had been manipulated by the DPP. According to Jhu, young voters in Taiwan had failed to see the vision of an advanced nation with a prosperous economy and lacked the general knowledge of how a proper politician should behave or lead their government. Furthermore, Jhu criticized the vibrant cyber-interactions that many younger voters in Taiwan depended on when determining the eligibility of the candidates. As

[68] This was a further indication of the complex relationship between local identity and national belonging among the community of Chinese Nationalists.

concluded by Jhu, the DPP as the ruling party had tightly controlled the media and their online supporters to falsely portray itself as a young and liberal party to appeal to the naive voters such as myself, thus winning the election. [69] While an unexpected antagonism, these remarks of Jhu revealed a fleeting glimpse of the desperation that was felt collectively by the Chinese Nationalists in modern Taiwan. In hindsight, my interview session with Jhu was in many ways exerted as a platform for her search of supplementary justifications that supported her political stance. And while I analyzed Jhu's current posture as both a citizen of ROC and resident of Taiwan to fit well with trends of contemporary politics, she was still very much representative of the studied imagined community — one that continued to seek surviving possibilities in a context they envisioned to be perpetually marginalizing and antagonistic, without the support of their former institutional patron.

The Possible Future of Chinese Nationalism Without China

During the final stage of my fieldwork, I met up with Tien once again for a follow-up and concluding interview as the indicative opinion on internal disputes among the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. As we settled down for the interview, Tien appeared to be relatively cheerful about the election result compared to the mainstream KMT supporters. According to Tien, she had long predicted that Han would lose the election despite his supporters' excessive optimism. However, Tien expressed her disappointment at the outcome of the legislative election for the New Power Party (NPP), which she had decided to support uncharacteristically due to her discontent with the recent decisions of the KMT. Rationalizing her political choice as still a self-identified supporter of the KMT, Tien clarified that while she saw herself as Taiwanese, she also recognized that her nation is the Republic of China (ROC) — which, she explained, should not be seen as "China." Such a conflicting narrative between one's national identity and ethnic belonging further verified that Tien, while seeing a distinct development of political

[69] These online supporters of the DPP are commonly known to KMT supporters as"1450 cyber army" (1450網軍), a play on words of the alleged payment they received for advocating for the DPP online.

choice in the last election, was still profoundly influenced by the same doctrinal foundation that had shaped the ordinary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan.

Building on our previous interview, Tien did not shy away from acknowledging her former connection with the KMT, nor did she see it necessary to conceal her insights for the betterment of the party. Instead, Tien's position as a determined KMT supporter led to a disparate route from those who had embraced a fraternal cross-strait relationship with China (PRC). In many ways, I analyzed that Tien's paradoxical yet functional notion of her national identity followed the concept of 'flexible citizenship' (Ong 1999). Yet unlike Ong's definition that drew from the impact of globalization and transnationality on overseas Chinese, I saw Tien's opinion representing an instance of flexible citizenship that was moulded by both her subjectivity as a Chinese Nationalist and the ongoing trend of Taiwanese Nationalism — with her solidarity expressed to more than one community. That is to say, instead of shifting her allegiance to Chinese Nationalism to modern China — another form of the "Chinese Republic" that most KMT supporters had normalized as their foreordained nation — Tien had converted her interpretation of the ideology to better suit the local political scene in Taiwan. While in the minority among the community of Chinese Nationalists, this adaptation process was another probability of how imagined communities could survive amid drastic social changes. Presently, the influence of the constructive institution that had once facilitated its production was in decline. By justifying her stance as both Taiwanese and a citizen of the ROC, Tien effectively consented to remove the nation's Chinese elements — in defiance of the literal wording in the name of ROC. In Tien's opinion, even the KMT should no longer refer to itself as the Chinese National Party as to bid goodbye to its questionable roots. "The longer they have this baggage, the less likely the party is ever going to reform," she concluded.

Notwithstanding her complaints as well as disapproval of the current form of the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan and the outdated ideologies of the Nationalist Party, Tien still very much remained an avid supporter of the KMT. As a prominent example of this contradiction, Tien believed that Han should be allowed to keep his position of city mayor instead of being recalled through another round of election, despite her protest against his presidential candidacy. Additionally, Tien clarified that she had

taken delight in the election defeat of the KMT party, for it was the only way that the party members would reflect on their failed campaign strategies and incompetent organization. Instead of waiting and riding on the popularity of charismatic individuals such as Han and his "impetuous followers," Tien saw it necessary that the KMT go through a process of reinvention to discard its questionable doctrines as well as senior members with roots from the authoritarian regime. In this respect, Tien's membership as a part of the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan — both as a ROC citizen and as a supporter of the KMT party — appeared to raise many questions about the constructed identity of the collective and its relationship with its political patron. Despite the implied desertion of the party's ideologies, such as classic Chinese Nationalism and its Sino-centric doctrine, Tien continued to see herself as a genuine supporter of the KMT party and wished for the urgent recovery of the latter's political power. This bond between the political party and the supporters — in the case of the KMT and Tien — had persevered through redefinition and reinterpretation of the imagined community's central ideology. Tien's approach to a plausible future of the KMT party was hence one that differed from the ongoing prepositions of reforms that were common to the other Chinese Nationalists. Between her identities as a supporter of the Chinese nation and the Nationalist Party — once inseparable entities that had jointly constructed the community of Chinese Nationalists — Tien prioritized the latter's survival. As a result, Tien had enabled a swift acceptance of suggested changes in the national imagination and the rejection of an ethnic-based covenant with modern China, all of which indicated the possibility of an independent Taiwan.

Even at the last moment of our interview, Tien highlighted her loyalty to the KMT as she showcased her unique analysis and future strategy for the party. In many ways, Tien's narrative about the future of the KMT demonstrated a common understanding of the contemporary political trends in Taiwan. Such understanding implied that, even from the perspective of a loyalist supporter, the contemporary political trends should be incorporated into the future development of the Nationalist Party. In other words, the party must go through "a heavy refinement" to transform into a localized establishment without elements of its traditional Chinese Nationalism if it wished to survive the local political sceney. In the end, Tien and her unique stance concerning the present and possible future of the KMT proved to have

not only disclosed a probable prospect of the prolonged attachment between the former regime and its supporters but also demonstrated an often-overlooked outcome of fast-changing institutions. In the form of party allegiance rather than one built upon national and ethnic identity, I saw Tien as an example of the continuous citizen-shaping process by concepts of the social infrastructure that overlapped past and the present experiences. As part of a community that outlived its central doctrine and the very institution that formed and defined the collective, Tien was not alone in her reconstruction of the shared identity. In reality, the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan would continue to be recreated and redefined through ongoing circumstances of local politics, be it shifts of localization or an intentional alienation of modern China. At last, while the collective belief in Chinese Nationalism provided by narratives of both the KMT party and the Chinese framework of the nation persisted in the aftermath of the national election, I observed that the particulars of this central doctrine had become extremely fluid in response to the growing popularity of Taiwanese Nationalism and awareness of a now localized identity.

Following the end of the national election, the underlying competition between Chinese and Taiwanese Nationalism among local citizens in Taiwan — while most crystallized throughout the election campaign — had in no way disappeared. After the unthinkable setback in the form of a lost election, many Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan resumed their pessimism concerning the nation's future outlook both politically and economically. In the minds of many, it was not only the Nationalist Party that was defeated in the election but also the orthodoxy that represented the ROC nation. The DPP, which they perceived as fraudulent, had won and would continue to exploit the established national framework to advocate its ideals of Taiwanese independence. Such ambivalence about nationalist imagination was especially pervasive among Chinese Nationalists regarding the use of national symbols under the DPP government. While infuriated at the absence of the national flag spotted at DPP's electoral campaigns, many Chinese Nationalists subsequently expressed their discomfort when politicians of DPP grounding employed the same banner on official missions. Most protested that, since the DPP politicians were determined to construct an independent Taiwan, they should have no right to wave a symbol representing the Chinese Republic. In addition, supporters of Chinese Nationalism in Taiwan believed that the DPP

had planned to infiltrate the nation by repeatedly associating national symbols of the ROC with the name of Taiwan, thus indoctrinating the younger generation about Taiwanese independence as an innate notion that was inextricable from the existing outline of the ROC. In many ways, these responses implied a collective apprehension among the Chinese Nationalists that existed beyond the election result. That is, notwithstanding the sustainability of the KMT party in local politics, the nation of ROC was, in their opinion, in dissolution through the everyday behaviours and identity performances of its citizens.

Interestingly, it appeared that the contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan only recently came to recognize the consequences of the subtle alterations concerning national imagination and ethnic identity that had gradually chipped away at their normality. Many Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had since embraced the potential of a harmonious relationship with China based on ethnic attachment through the common Han Chinese ancestry claimed by both the ROC and the PRC. Even though many still shunned the CCP due to a prolonged sense of cultural superiority, as demonstrated through my interviews in the last chapter, the consensus among Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had shifted to highlight the communist country's economic development in recent decades as a new point of attraction. Such judgment could be rationalized in the way that current circumstances in China very much mirrored the projects of planned economy implemented by the KMT's authoritarian government. Moreover, as most Chinese Nationalists saw newly established social policies in Taiwan — the legalization of same-sex marriage as well as the decriminalization of adultery, among others — as signs of regression concerning state power and distraction from economic growth, the imagined community had turned to pursue a familiar polity compared to the one in which they were fundamentally shaped as citizens. In the end, as the future of the Nationalist Party KMT, as well as their envisioned nation, remained uncertain, the reactions of my interlocutors could be interpreted as indications that they had become disoriented about how to proceed with their fixed national identity. Upon realization of their position in unrecognizable surroundings with ideals and identities remnant from the previous regime, this sense of uncertainty had induced further reflections on the unspoken bond between the Nationalist Party, the supporters, and the

nation. Through its members' materializing debates, a transformation of the Chinese Nationalists' community in Taiwan seemed to have emerged.

In the months after the national election, the KMT party's future was unclear to its supporters and party members. Upon the party's defeat in the presidential election, the incumbent KMT chairman Wu Den-yih — a veteran politician and former Vice President of the nation — stepped down from his position and called for an intra-party election for a new chairman to symbolize the party's determination for reform. As Han Kuo-yu declined to run for the party chairman, the party and its supporters had to look elsewhere. This was an opportunity to represent the organization to a loyal fan-base consisting of Han supporters as well as a general public that had freshly rejected its advocated classic patriotism. The bid for party chairman soon saw an unprecedented competition between Johnny Chiang — a relatively young legislator of Native Taiwanese descent — and Hau Lung-pin, a regular at KMT councils and second-generation Mainlander, with a political background directly descended from the KMT authoritarian regime.[70] The chairman election was seen as a contest between the different schools of thought found in the Nationalist Party. However, the majority of Chinese Nationalists I had encountered in my field expressed their annoyance at Hau, whom they thought had outstayed his welcome as an elitist politician of the party. Such a reaction was parallel to the repeated account found in most of my interviews, with the interlocutors stating the KMT indeed needed reform to remove its mass of traditional and elitist politicians.[71]

The supporters' protest nonetheless was limited in their objection to the party personnel without much dissent about the Sinocentric ideology and nationalist doctrine on which the party operated. That is, most Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan seemed to presume that an alteration of the party leader would effectively steer the organization into a systematic reform — a direction that, according to most, had long been initiated by the emergence of Han Kuo-yu and his popularity among the "proletariat voters." An

[70] It should be noted that Johnny Chiang is not unrelated to the two President Chiangs despite their shared last name in phonetic translation.
[71] While a very common statement found during my fieldwork, the specifics of such a "reform" were never discussed in depth among my interlocutors.

astonishing development regarding the chairman election then took place when Johnny Chiang filed complaints that unknown sources had accused him of separatism and advocacy for Taiwanese independence through his campaign slogan "Taiwan First." As Chiang dedicated his campaign to clarify his political position as a defender of the ROC nation and opponent to Taiwanese Nationalism, the dilemma for the KMT as a party seemed to have persisted in the aftermath of the lost election. Between its commitment to a Chinese nationalist imagination and struggle for survival as an electable party to the Taiwanese public, the KMT struggled to stay relevant in its post-Han-wave context. In a way, Chiang's explanation consolidated many Chinese Nationalists' faith that, despite the necessary modification in human resources, the party was not turning its back on its most fundamental responsibilities as the "founding party" of the nation. The "mandatory reform" often advocated and advised by party members and its supporters after an undesirable election result thus continued to be a play on formality employed to recast those responsible. In the end, there was not much reflection on the contested national narratives and questions of ethnic belonging that were heavily circulated among its community of supporters. This persistent pattern was perhaps best expressed through Johnny Chiang's statement days after becoming the new chairman of KMT. On March 17th, 2020, Chiang reportedly emphasized his connection with the doctrine of Chinese Nationalism during an interview by stating:

> The KMT is the founding party of the nation. To the KMT party, there is no difference between China and the ROC. I was born and raised in Taiwan; therefore, I am Taiwanese. However, through my ancestry, culturally and historically speaking, I am also Chinese. According to our constitution, I am a citizen of the ROC (Yu 2020).

The remarks of Johnny Chiang as the new chairman of the KMT party reaffirmed much speculation that its supporters and opponents had held throughout the presidential campaign of 2020. Firstly, the nationalist KMT party and its Sinocentric doctrine seemed to have survived mostly unscathed from the lost election, sustaining its strong base of community patronage as per usual. While it remained unsure how the KMT party was to proceed concerning its survival under the current popularity of Taiwanese Nationalism, its decision to carry on with its Chinese Nationalist ideology only solidified the alliance between the party and its supporters, who continued to see the KMT as the only legitimate

gatekeeper of the ROC. Secondly, as discussions about the KMT party's dilemma were circulated among its supporters and opponents alike, reform actions at the centre of the KMT party were reduced to only a matter of scheduled routine. That is, despite some KMT supporters voicing their concern that the ethnic attachment long claimed by KMT politicians such as former President Ma Ying-jeo (Ko 2008) between the ROC and China should be considered an outdated platform, such dissent remained mostly concealed within the community as it would potentially address the complex issue related to the very roots of the KMT party (Drun 2020; Smith 2020). This observed silence among the Chinese Nationalists also implied that, if the fraternal relation the KMT attested they had with China were to be further scrutinized, it would lead to confrontations regarding the long-neglected "historical baggage" of the Nationalist Party. Namely, the ROC's political legitimacy as the "Chinese Republic" would be questioned — be it in China, in Taiwan, or as a member of the international community. Finally, as any detailed examination of the claimed ethnic attachment based on the Chinese identity might startle the authorities in China as suspicious activities that implied the possibility of an independent Taiwan, the amiable cross-strait relations that the KMT affirmed as their most prized achievement would be at risk. For these reasons, while opponents of the KMT expected the party to alter its central doctrine somewhat after the party failed to attract new supporters through its continual approach to Chinese Nationalism, it was perhaps still pragmatic for the benefit of the party to retain its position concerning the nationalist imagination and Sinocentric characteristic propagated among its community of supporters.

On the other hand, the transformation brought upon the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan was in many ways in development. Based on my fieldwork findings, the community appeared to be sustained by the very social elements that facilitated its reconstruction. As a result of the institutional — be it the Nationalist Party of KMT or the constitution that asserted the Chinese framework of the nation — negligence of an appropriate discourse on these issues, the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had retained their collective identity, while at the same time embarked on a process that reshaped their perspectives on contemporary issues through the existing political structure. Through these new perspectives, the Chinese Nationalists searched for a better future that was to be

achieved neither through reunification with China nor Taiwanese independence. Meanwhile, the KMT party was content to remain in a state of full suspense, delaying any constructive reform that would clarify the political ambiguity of their principle identity marker. The community of Chinese Nationalists were thus on their own to reassert their political rationale and reinterpretation of the democratic functions that surrounded them. Accordingly, with the continually undefined status of the nation and the resolidified legitimacy of the Nationalist Party, data collected throughout my fieldwork suggested that most Chinese Nationalists in post-authoritarian Taiwan had undergone a process of reconfiguration concerning their national imagination and collective identity that differed drastically from its former self. Such a transformation undetected by those caught within proved to be a fascinating characteristic for studies on citizen-shaping. Ultimately, it manifested the complexity involved with the long-term effects on subjectivity built upon principles of nation-building that were repeatedly reinforced on the community. As the Chinese Nationalists persisted in their collective identity, memories of the past, as well as political opinions conditioned to sustain the power structure of the authoritarian regime, my research findings had indicated that they were no exception to the influence of trends of contemporary politics.

On this note, my fieldwork concluded on an ending analysis that perhaps in many ways refuted criticisms of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan that often portrayed the members as compliant residues of the former regime. That is, through extensive efforts to survive the contemporary political structure upon a newly founded democracy and electoral system, I reasoned that the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists that had persevered in Taiwan — however recreated and refigured — will carry on to be an active component of the present and uncertain future of post-authoritarian Taiwan, just as much as they were of its past.

Conclusion

Approaching the end of my fieldwork, I continued to notice exhibitions of conflicting national imaginations, collective memories, and a changing narrative of citizenship as well as ethnic identity among local voters in Taiwan. I came to the inevitable realization that this case study on the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan — like all others — was a work in progress and should be an ongoing project that would develop beyond my short-term fieldwork. Nevertheless, through the support of my findings, I concluded that a speculative transformation of the community — however gradual — involving the conservation and amendment of existing political subjects in a post-authoritarian society had seen an unusual process of intensification. Through the regular election season in the form of political campaigns and discussions of the candidates and their respective supporting nationalisms, I was fortunate to present this unique citizen-shaping process in detail as my core materials.

Throughout this thesis, I had attempted to contextualize the study of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983) through the case of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. As an exemplification of human citizens shaped as political subjects, I studied how local voters were caught in between a classical trend of populist patriotism — reinforced through the scheduled campaigns and political slogans from the KMT party — and the disappearance of their patron — the nationalist curriculum and Sino-centric framework. As detailed in chapter one, the constructive process of the imagined community was first introduced by examining the local political history with a focus on the development of Chinese identity under the KMT authoritarian regime. Throughout chapter two, I analyzed the community as a result of a prolonged client-patron or 'clientelist' relationship (Brković 2017) between the state and the people, and ongoing acts of 'political socialization' (Pearson-Merkowitz and Gimpel 2009; Wilson 1970). The rationale behind their political opinions and support of preferred politicians could be further understood through the concept of 'political subjectivity' (Foucault 1982). In particular, I examined the extent of this attachment with the Nationalist Party through participant-observation and interviews in record of the verbal and

emotional expressions of the Chinese Nationalists in modern Taiwan. In chapter two, I also investigated proceeding questions concerning the future of the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan and the endurance of the bond between the supporters and the Nationalist Party, as constructed upon the nationalist imagination circulated among the community. Meanwhile, as the local political scene became further framed by contemporary trends of Taiwanese Nationalism that rejected its formerly emphasized Chinese heritage, I began chapter three with the challenged Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan now facing unknown prospects. Entering into a process of notional reconstruction, the studied community found itself in a slow but steady series of abandonment of their former comprehension regarding the Chinese Republic of ROC, the Nationalist Party of KMT, and their ethnic-based citizenship. In this regard, while the once imposed narrative and curriculum of Chinese Nationalism no longer held dominance over the local population, I argued that the imagined community had persisted due to ongoing instances of political socialization that was limited among the circle of the Nationalist Party supporters. Following the lost election as detailed in the same chapter, however, the post-election component of my fieldwork indicated that the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had seen a process of reconstruction through ways to survive the contemporary trends in identity politics through principles of 'flexible citizenship' (Ong 1999). Such underlying perseverance had in my view only been possible through active self-reinvention and reinterpretation of the community — be it a direction without the nation of ROC, the codependent relationship with the KMT, or an altogether desertion of the concept of being Chinese.

As the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan modified itself in conformity or against contemporary trends of the local political scene, I alluded in the ending remarks of this research back to the opening fable from *Life of Theseus*. That is, the ROC nation had become overridden by the growing local consciousness through ideals of Taiwanese Nationalism and came to be a different country in all respects. At the same time, the community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan appeared to be proceeding towards a similar direction. As the Chinese Nationalists continued to sustain itself into a new age of post-authoritarian society under influences of local democracy, the particular interpretations of the collective identity had prompted a subtle transformation of the community to its core. Between the

disappearing fabricators such as the political influence of the KMT party as well as the official narratives concerning national imagination, identity, and ethnic belonging, many expected that the contemporary Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan — through reevaluation and self-interference in compliance with recent changes — will linger on as a perpetual component of the local political scene. However, I reasoned that the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists — along with its timely responses to current politics — should be studied as a crucial element to the development of a collective Taiwanese consciousness for the very reasons that they conflicted with one another. Furthermore, I envisioned that the work I conducted would add to the discussion on studies of political communities seemingly detached from their surroundings. Mainly, I hoped to provide a much-needed examination of a once-dominant social order that had since been marginalized in contemporary contexts to shed light on possibilities beyond its alienation.

From attestations of political engagement expressed through the local citizens' everyday behaviours to the observed characteristic of a changing relationship between the political institution and the people, I believed that much uncertainty remained for the future regarding shifts in national imagination and ethnic identity for the people of Taiwan. Such a speculation was deep-rooted in the absence of common opinion on the subject matters of nationalism, ethnic culture, and collective political identity among the local population. While the Chinese Nationalists in contemporary Taiwan appeared to be in the minority and under the process of a constructive adjustment, it was also likely that the Chinese nationalist imagination and the related ethnic-based hierarchy would return under current functions of democracy. As the dispute concerning national belonging and collective memories continued in the form of competing ideologies that surfaced regularly during election seasons, the additional substance I proposed of this research was its value as a review of living among those who appeared to be fundamentally different from ourselves. In a way, I expected it was this shared complex emotion — be it an antagonistic relationship or a fraternal bond based on existing social relationships — that ultimately proved the valuable sense of humanity shared among citizens despite ourselves as political subjects. Through my ethnographic findings, I wished to present my understanding of the Chinese Nationalists in

Taiwan as a case study of "the others" as well as a comprehensive examination of the existing local society and the human relationships that run through its most fundamental functions.

Through the unique context provided by the current form of local democracy, my study on the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan had in many aspects examined the prevailing yet often overlooked development of humans as citizens when faced with a process of political transition towards unfamiliar circumstances. On this note, I regarded the features of the imagined community observed and documented throughout my fieldwork as powerful expressions that were not only in demonstration of their political affiliation but also their idea of citizenship constructed upon an ethnic-based nation that no longer reigned its lawful territories. Particularly, I attempted to study contemporary trends of regional politics and culture by presenting an ethnographic-based analysis through the lens of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan. While still a research project that required further investigation, I expected my fieldwork findings would contribute to both the discourse on democracy and post-authoritarian societies in the field of anthropology. Additionally, I hoped that my research would supply ongoing discussions of the reconstructive process of identity — be it political, cultural, and ethnic — in a practical matter, which in my opinion was never as linear and determined as portrayed by official accounts of the powerful. Meanwhile, I also anticipated that the theoretical framework explored in my thesis — both primary and secondary concepts such as imagined communities, political subjectivity, and political socialization, among others — could be further addressed by later studies. As more ethnographers and anthropologists might return to reexamine the subsistence of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan, I wished to see studies that would reflect on an identity that was once widely accepted by academic researchers as the collective identification of the local majority (Heylen 2001).[72] In the end, I intended to present my research not only as a study on the particular community that had transcended institutional shifts through survival and transformation but also as a bridging project that connected the past, present, and future of the Taiwanese society that continued to shape its citizens as political subjects.

[72] Early ethnographic and anthropological studies conducted in Taiwan had almost predominantly studied the local population under the ethnic and cultural grouping of "Chinese people." See Murray and Hong (1991).

At last, as I concluded my research, I was constantly reminded of the enduring effects of the authoritarian past concerning the conflicting nationalist imaginations and collective memories that co-existed among the local people of Taiwan. In truth, while surrounded by the numerous historic establishments across the nation that persisted in supporting the Chinese Nationalist narrative rationalized as forms of art and cultural preservation, I had to come to terms with the understanding that the data collected throughout my fieldwork were merely a limited portion of the overall impressions of the competing nationalisms observed in everyday life. [73] Nonetheless, as I marked the end of my fieldwork by the aftermath of the national election, I was more than aware of my research topic's significance as still a member of the local community. That is, with my ethnographic findings slowly degenerating into daily life experiences that were often overlooked by locals and outside observers alike, my positionality throughout this research project was a privilege as much as a responsibility. As a local anthropologist who was able to contextualize the studied community through underlying political and socio-cultural comprehensions, I had the liberty to emphasize a subject matter that was neither the central issue of the local political scene nor the regional focus studies of contemporary times. On this reflection, I believed that the understudied relationship between the nationalist KMT party and its supporters was not only a critical factor that continued to impact the collective narrative of the Chinese Nationalists but also the development of democracy in Taiwan as a whole. Ultimately, between the recent reorganizations of the political system as well as the nationalist framework, it was my hope that this ethnographic study was not only completed as a work that registered the process of transfiguration upon the imagined community of Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan shaped as political subjects but, fundamentally, also as one that documented the society and state that they will continue to live in for the foreseeable period of time.

[73] With the National Palace Museum, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, and Shilin Official Residence as prominent examples in Taipei, among others.

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