

Chen Shui-bian: On Independence DRAFT

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Abstract Chen Shui-bian achieved an international reputation for his promotion of Taiwan independence. Whilst that reputation may have been well earned, the analyses on which this conclusion was based were frequently flawed in two ways. First, by using an ill-defined and undifferentiated notion of independence, such analyses tend to be highly reductionist. Second, by failing to take into account the impact of immediate strategic context, analysts ignore a fundamental element of democratic political communication. In our empirical analysis of more than two thousand of Chen's speeches, we avoid both flaws by unpacking the concept of independence and taking into account Chen's strategic relationship with his primary audiences. Our distinct and robust findings challenge popular portrayals of Chen, but more importantly they have strong implications for policymakers and students of political rhetoric with regard to current and future ROC presidents.

During his time as President of the Republic of China (ROC), Chen Shui-bian achieved international notoriety for his promotion of "Taiwan independence."¹ With the taut strategic conditions prevailing in the Taiwan Strait, Chen was routinely depicted in international media as being provocative and quixotic.² Neither was the portrayal of Chen as an irresponsible adventurer bent on independence limited to popular literature. A classic example of the "reckless adventurer" narrative can be found in Robert Ross's article on "Taiwanese revisionism."³ Writing in 2006, Ross declared that "Taiwan has taken incremental steps that signal its intention to declare independence" and left no doubt that it was Chen, a "risk acceptant leader" with a "personal commitment to independence" who was instrumental in this process. Ross concludes that "the level of the individual is the most persuasive explanation for Taiwan's revisionism."⁴

The purpose of this article is not to dispute such characterizations of Chen's presidency. Instead the objective is to develop an operational understanding of Chen's presidential discourse and to explicitly measure the content of his rhetoric. In doing so we will try to demonstrate that the idea that Chen expressed a constant level of undifferentiated independence rhetoric is not supported by systematic large scale analysis of his speeches. Cross-Strait relations, under any ROC president, involve a multi-layered set of issues and interrelated discourses that should not be reduced to some ill defined notion of "Taiwan independence." We argue that a minimum requirement for analysing Chen's discourse is to distinguish between language relating to Taiwan sovereignty from less threatening expressions of Taiwanese identity and pro-democracy rhetoric. Furthermore, the majority of commentators

¹ As an indication of this fame, a Lexis-Nexis search of English language news sources between 2003 and 2008 returns 1390 articles with *three or more* mentions of Chen in connection with "Taiwan independence." International journalists were clearly undaunted by China's "failure to make clear exactly what 'declaring independence' means." Kenneth Lieberthal, "Preventing a War Over Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 84 No. 2 (2005), p. 53.

² A similar Lexis-Nexis search returns 464 articles in which Chen is associated *three or more* times with "recklessness" or "danger."

³ Robert Ross, "Explaining Taiwan's revisionist diplomacy," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 15, No. 48 (2006), pp. 443-58. For an alternative opinion see Edward Friedman, "Taiwan's independence plot," *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2006), pp. 67-95.

⁴ Ross, "Explaining Taiwan's revisionist diplomacy," pp. 443-458.

disturbed by Chen's seemingly erratic discursive behaviour fail to recognize a fundamental logic of democratic political communication. Democratically elected leaders are obliged to garner support from multiple constituencies to achieve their policy goals. Chen was no exception and since the numerous dimensions of Taiwan's national status involve a complex of issues and multiple stakeholders with whom Chen had to engage, the content of his statements naturally contained substantial variation. Simply put, different constituencies vary in their concerns and politicians have to make strategic decisions about which issues to emphasize and what kinds of language to generate in order to appeal to that constituency. By recognizing that audiences provide the immediate strategic context within which Chen operated and exploring the variation in the content of his rhetoric over a large number of speeches, this article attempts to give a more balanced picture of Chen's presidential discourse.

Disaggregating cross-Strait discourse.

As testified by the excitement that Chen and his predecessor's "provocative statements" generated in Beijing and Washington, the public assertions of the ROC president are a matter of major importance. Under Li Denghui and Chen alike, the ROC president was the most volatile actor in cross-Strait relations and for better or worse, rhetoric emanating from the Presidential Palace has come to be interpreted as an indicator of Taiwan's underlying preferences and policy positions.⁵ In the absence of unforeseen developments the attention and importance attached to Li and Chen's statements holds true for Ma Yingjiu, indeed any future president. A systematic investigation of Chen Shui-bian's public statements is thus an important undertaking not solely for its historical interest, but as an exercise that is relevant for the study of any ROC president's rhetoric.

Our point of departure is the contention that, just as "national identity" measured at the individual level requires separation into its conceptual parts,⁶ so it is necessary to unpack what is meant by "independence" discourse. Drawing on the large body of Taiwan studies literature that has dealt with this issue, we provide a framework for analyzing Chen's statements by identifying three salient dimensions; sovereignty, Taiwanese identity and pro-democracy.

Formal Independence and Taiwan sovereignty

One thing that stands out when surveying the literature on cross-Strait relations, is that Taiwan scholars seldom appear pre-occupied by the prospect of independence; at least when independence is defined as the formal declaration of an independent Taiwanese state. Indicative is Shelley Rigger's observation that "the idea has become so marginalized that overt promotion of independence within the political arena has all but disappeared."⁷ Whether a result of China's explicit equation of independence with war or a positive preference for the status quo, the configuration of Taiwanese public opinion is stable and unequivocally against an immediate declaration of formal independence.⁸ The marginalization of support for independence has effectively

⁵ In reality Chen faced heavy constraints in turning rhetoric into policy outcomes. As Alan Romberg pointed out, "the proposals Chen can carry out would not take him across PRC 'redlines;' those that would, he lacks to the wherewithal to carry out." "Recent Developments in Taiwan: Politics in Command-But at What Cost?" *PacNet* No. 6, (2006) p. 1

⁶ Shelley Rigger, "Social science and national identity: A critique," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1999), pp. 537-552.

⁷ Shelley Rigger, "Maintaining the status quo: What it means and why Taiwanese prefer it," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2001), p. 104.

⁸ Emerson Niou, "Understanding Taiwan independence and its policy implications," *Asian Survey*,

rendered the issue “electoral poison.”⁹ Given the PRC’s intractable opposition and the ROC’s diplomatic isolation, Taiwan would gain nothing and risk losing its existing autonomy and more, just to make “a futile gesture ignored by the international community.”¹⁰ As Edward Friedman puts it, “even if the Taiwan president, after a popular referendum, announced to the world ‘I now declare the existence of a sovereign Republic of Taiwan and ask the world community to establish full diplomatic relations,’ so what?”¹¹ It is inconceivable that any nation would turn away from the PRC in order to recognize and support a Republic of Taiwan.¹² Apart from a small minority, elites and voters in Taiwan are well aware of this and as Friedman concludes, “de jure independence is going nowhere.”¹³

Nonetheless, the sovereignty question constitutes an important dimension of discourse on cross-strait relations. Alan Wachman observes how the contest to exercise sovereignty over Taiwan has been “displaced to the rhetorical arena where the disputants tangle over slogans, concepts and labels.”¹⁴ In this sense, a crucial development within the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the mid-1990’s was the ideational and rhetorical shift from the pursuit of a chimerical Republic of Taiwan to Taiwanese self determination within the status quo framework of the ROC.¹⁵ The basic position is virtually identical to Li Deng-hui’s statement that “the ROC has been a sovereign state since it was founded in 1912 [and] *consequently there is no need to declare independence*”.¹⁶ This “repackaging of independence” made the DPP more credible at the polls,¹⁷ and freed the party to pursue its localization program once in power without escalating tensions in the Strait to the point of military conflict.¹⁸ Chao notes that the DPP was able to “redefine the terms of independence by stressing preservation of the status quo over reconstruction of a new entity.”¹⁹ This version of “independence” was apparently less threatening to the PRC. How else, asks Kenneth Lieberthal, can we explain the fact that “for more than a decade Taiwan’s leaders have declared Taiwan to be an ‘independent sovereign country’ without dramatic consequences”?²⁰ There is also a much stronger basis, though strongly contested by

Vol. 44, No. 4 (2004), pp. 555-67.

⁹ Dafydd Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*. (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 122.

¹⁰ Shelley Rigger, “Party Politics and Taiwan’s External Relations,” *Orbis* Vol. 49, No. 3 (2005), p. 428.

¹¹ Friedman, “Taiwan’s independence plot,” p. 78.

¹² For a more detailed vision of the “worst case scenario” see Yu-shan Wu (2004) “Taiwanese nationalism and its implications: Testing the worst-case scenario,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44 No. 4 (2004), pp. 614-25

¹³ Friedman, “Taiwan’s independence plot,” p.76.

¹⁴ Alan Wachman “The China-Taiwan relationship: A cold war of words,” *Orbis* Vol. 45, No. 4 (2000), p. 699.

¹⁵ The salient document in this regard is the “Resolution on Taiwan’s Future”, adopted at the DPP party congress in 1999. It states among other things that “Taiwan is a sovereign independent country [and] although named the ROC under its current constitution is not subject to the jurisdiction of the PRC.”

¹⁶ Italics added. Extracted from Li’s “state to state” interview with Deutsche Welle in 1999.

¹⁷ Fell, *Party Politics in Taiwan*, p. 98.

¹⁸ The DPP’s “discovery” of ROC sovereignty was a significant development, not least because the main thrust of its earlier position was precisely independence *from the ROC*, which many supporters perceived to be inherited from the mainland and inconsistent with Taiwan’s historical and political reality. See Stephane Corcuff, “The supporters of unification and the Taiwanisation movement.” *China Perspectives*, Vol. 53 (2005), p. 50.

¹⁹ Chien-min Chao, “One step forward, one step backward: Chen Shui-bian’s mainland policy,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 12, No. 34 (2003), p. 141.

²⁰ Lieberthal, “Preventing a war over Taiwan,” p. 54.

the PRC, for the ROC's sovereignty claim. Stephane Corcuff argues that "while Taiwan is definitely independent, it is so, in law, only as the ROC, not as Taiwan."²¹

The evolution of the DPP's position was consistent with Lowell Dittmer's observation that "the overall pattern of political movement, whether public opinion or macro political narratives, is from one China to a two sovereign states position."²² The central feature of this position, which Gunther Schubert calls an "overarching consensus" shared by both major parties²³ is that the ROC on Taiwan is an independent sovereign entity and that the ROC state must be maintained. To this end, Taiwan should try to bolster the ROC's sovereignty claim by maintaining its small number of diplomatic allies and expanding its role in international society by applying for membership of international organizations and maintaining substantive links with any country willing to do so. Taiwan should also "avoid picking fights with China, by not directly challenging China's sovereignty claim over Taiwan" (Clark, 2004; 79).²⁴ Like his predecessor, Chen managed to avoid picking the ultimate fight, but his proclamations on sovereignty and explicit rejection of "one China" hardened the PRC's position on Taiwan's participation in the international arena and won him few friends in the US. Sovereignty was doubtless an important part of Chen's ideology, but international conditions and public opinion were such that the range of potential actions open to him on this front was limited. On the domestic stage however, in spite of fierce opposition and institutional constraints, Chen enjoyed greater freedom to pursue a nation building project rooted in a particular conception of national identity.

Taiwan identity

If sovereignty is the external dimension of Chen's "independence discourse," national identity, specifically Taiwanese identity, is the internal dimension. It is well known that national identity has long been "the dominant cleavage underpinning Taiwan's party situation,"²⁵ and though Chen did not create this situation, his tenure certainly exacerbated it. What distinguished Chen from more moderate elements in the DPP and the domestic opposition was his "insistence on a specific Taiwanese national identity."²⁶ Though the DPP wriggled free from earlier commitments to Taiwan independence, it retained a preference for advancing an explicitly Taiwanese, as opposed to Chinese, identity for Taiwan. Taiwan identity has an element of ethnic distinction within the domestic context, but more pertinent to the focus of this article, is that it also forms the basis of attempts to establish or concretize, depending on one's viewpoint, Taiwan's distinctiveness from China. Amongst other things this distinctiveness is based on the community of diverse ethnic groups that live in Taiwan and a historical and cultural specificity that makes it quite distinct from the PRC. The degree of separation is maintained by Taiwan's experience as a democracy and by PRC hostility, particularly its refusal to renounce the use of force and its aggressive efforts to limit Taiwan's activities in the international realm, which many Taiwanese

²¹ Corcuff, "The supporters of unification," p. 50.

²² Lowell Dittmer, "Taiwan's aim-inhibited quest for identity and the China factor," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 1/2 (2005), p. 86.

²³ Gunther Schubert, "Taiwan's political parties and national identity: The rise of an overarching consensus," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2004), pp. 534-54.

²⁴ Cal Clark, "The paradox of the national identity issue in Chen Shui-Bian's 2004 Presidential campaign: Base constituencies vs. the moderate middle," *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2004), p. 79.

²⁵ Hsieh, John Fuh-Sheng Hsieh, "National identity and Taiwan's mainland China policy," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 13, No. 40 (2004), p. 479.

²⁶ Schubert, "Taiwan's political parties and national identity," p. 548.

believe should be concomitant with the island's level of economic development and status as a liberal democracy.²⁷

However Chen's project went further than merely emphasizing differences with the PRC. As Daniel Lynch observed in 2004, Chen oversaw an attempt to "imagine a completely new and genuinely autonomous Taiwan," noting that "Taiwan already has territory, a government and a people: the challenge remaining is to construct a strong collective identity."²⁸ Though the project dominated most of Chen's tenure, particularly after re-election, it was "inhibited domestically by split sub-ethnic identities."²⁹ Construction of an exclusively Taiwanese national identity at the expense of any residue of Chinese-ness was controversial with Taiwanese who identified politically with Taiwan, but did not necessarily want to deny their Chinese cultural heritage. Nonetheless, and with ever fewer options open to him, Chen pursued his "deliberate nation building effort,"³⁰ enacting aggressive programs of symbolic Taiwanization and de-Sinification. Without question China feared in this project the potential to consolidate and routinize Taiwan's *de facto* separation from the mainland.³¹ Trends in national identity at the individual level support this view, with a majority of Taiwanese claiming Taiwan-centred identities by 2004.³² However the rise in Taiwan-centred identifiers did not translate into a preference for formal independence (Wu, 2004), another indication that national identity and sovereignty should be treated as distinct, albeit linked, concepts. Indeed Cabestan argues persuasively that "Taiwanese nationalism" was fed by the competing identities of domestic sub-ethnic groups, rather than a desire to separate from the Chinese nation.³³ Certainly Chen made a concerted effort, particularly during his re-election campaign, to combat his domestic opponents by tying sub-ethnic identity to a 'Taiwan or China' dialectic. Chen made a major effort in both of his presidential campaigns to frame himself as the embodiment of an essential Taiwan, and in his re-election campaign as a democratic champion, juxtaposed with opponents who, rightly or wrongly, sought to deny the people direct democracy.

Democracy

The ideas of democracy, ethnic justice and self determination have been intertwined since the first stirrings of democratization in the 1970's. Many opposition activists, who joined in 1986 to form the DPP, explicitly linked the goal of democratization "to the issue of Taiwanese identity and the principle of self-determination."³⁴ In this way the *Dangwai* and later the DPP were able to instrumentalize support for "ethnic justice internally and independence from China externally"³⁵ whilst simultaneously countering the KMT's successful socio-economic programs and uniting activists with

²⁷ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "Specificities and limits of Taiwanese nationalism," *China Perspectives*, Vol. 62 (2005), p. 37.

²⁸ Daniel Lynch, "Taiwan's self-conscious nation-building project," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2004), p. 514.

²⁹ Ditmer, "Taiwan's aim-inhibited quest for identity and the China factor," p. 72.

³⁰ Lowell Ditmer, "Taiwan and the issue of national identity," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2004), p. 475.

³¹ Wachman "The China-Taiwan relationship."

³² T. Y. Wang and I. C. Liu, "Contending identities in Taiwan: Implications for cross-Strait relations," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2004), pp. 568-590.

³³ Cabestan, "Specificities and limits of Taiwanese nationalism," p. 34.

³⁴ Tse-Min Lin, Yun-Han Chu and Melvin J. Hinich, "conflict displacement and regime transition in Taiwan: A spatial analysis," *World Politics*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (1996), pp. 453-81.

³⁵ Clark, "The paradox of the national identity issue," p. 74.

disparate agendas. In the 1970's and 1980's the ruling KMT too, saw democratization not only as "pressure valve" to release growing discontent, but as a crucial means of legitimating their rule both domestically and abroad. Thus there has always been a "symbolic dimension to democratization" in Taiwan.³⁶ Naturally, Taiwan's democracy is also a source of pride and identification for Taiwanese; another practical and psychological element in their estrangement from the PRC.

Given this background, and the context of Chen's initiation into politics as a defence attorney for the *Meilidao* activists, it is no surprise to observe that, as a presidential candidate and president, Chen campaigned vigorously for democratic and institutional reforms. Part of this was purely practical; Taiwan's experience of divided government, particularly during the early part of Chen's first term, was a complete and debilitating breakdown of executive-legislative relations. The remainder was perhaps part genuine commitment to democratic reform combined with the transparent instrumentalization of supposed democratic reforms for political ends, both domestically and with respect to China. Accusations of heavy-handedness and financial corruption during Chen's second term did not help the perception of the balance of these two motivations.

Two of Chen's "democratic" initiatives, referenda and constitution reform, were the cause of much controversy. The "defensive referendum" held in 2004, was decried as a ploy to build momentum for Chen's re-election bid and to increase the feeling of danger from China's missile build up across the Strait rather than promoting the stated goal of "direct democracy."³⁷ Whilst Chen was assiduous in framing referenda as a democratic reform giving "power to the people," given the content of the defensive referenda held in 2004 and 2008 concurrent with presidential elections, from which the DPP would theoretically gain advantage by ensuring the salience of the accompanying democracy and national identity discourses on which the DPP relied for electoral success, one cannot ignore the probability that referenda were used as election tools.³⁸ Another suspicion, albeit one we find less convincing than the instrumental view, was that referenda were "a ploy to take Taiwan one step further towards outright independence by introducing a procedure through which constitutional changes could be sanctioned."³⁹ Constitution reform was similarly framed as a crucial institutional reform, which was undeniably needed.⁴⁰ Yet when Chen made writing a *new constitution* the goal for his last two years in office, it raised considerable anxiety that he was "gearing up to formally cement the achievements of

³⁶ Stephane Corcuff, "The symbolic dimension of democratization and the transition of national identity under Lee Teng-hui," in Stephane Corcuff (ed.) *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan*, ed. S. Corcuff. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002). In light of Chen's troubled, volatile tenure and a legacy further tarnished by post-presidency corruption charges, it is easy to forget the symbolic magnitude of Chen's surprise victory in 2000. For a stirring account of those momentous times see Shelley Rigger, *From Opposition to Power; Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

³⁷ Mily Kao, "The referendum phenomenon in Taiwan," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2004), pp. 591-613; Mikael Mattlin, "Referendum as a form of Zaoshi," *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2004), pp. 155-85. We should also remember that provision for referenda was written in the ROC Constitution and the legislation that activated Article 136 was a KMT sponsored bill passed in a legislature controlled by the KMT and its allies.

³⁸ Mattlin, "Referendum as a form of zaoshi."

³⁹ Mikael Mattlin, "Same content, different wrapping: Cross-Strait policy under DPP rule," *China Perspectives*, Vol. 56 (2004), p. 29.

⁴⁰ Rigger, "Party politics and Taiwan's external relations," p. 422; Flemming Christiansen, "Putting Taiwan's constitution on the agenda," in *European Association of Taiwan Studies* (University of London: April, 2004), p. 1.

the localization movement,” perhaps by touching on the taboo constitutional issues of sovereignty and territory.⁴¹

Audiences as an indicator of strategic context

Taiwan under Chen Shui-bian was the most dynamic actor in cross-Strait relations. Like his predecessor Li Deng-hui, Chen apparently employed “creeping independence and provocative brinkmanship [to] redefine the direction and purpose of change.”⁴² In this sense Taiwan played a clear role in setting the cross-Straits political agenda and was largely responsible for the cyclical trend in relations that veered between acceptable stalemate and periodic spikes in tension.⁴³ After displaying moderation and flexibility in the first two years of his tenure,⁴⁴ beginning in the summer of 2002 Chen “reprised Li’s pattern of provocative statements.”⁴⁵ A second element to Chen’s discourse was that it was highly erratic, veering between opposing positions, sometimes from one speech to the next. As Lieberthal observed, “Chen has created a record that seems to support almost any position on the spectrum.”⁴⁶ Though it is hard to argue with Sheng’s depiction of Chen’s eclectic statements as “ambiguous, evasive and contradictory,”⁴⁷ the concept of “strategic ambiguity” is perhaps more useful. Cal Clark notes two discrete facets of Chen’s strategically ambiguous statements; elucidating different positions at different times and making different appeals on the same issue to disparate constituencies.⁴⁸ Whilst this inconsistency might sound damning, these two patterns are consistent with democratic politics in almost any context. Issues and policy stances evolve, problems and new actors emerge and politicians have no choice but to engage with and appeal to a wide range of stakeholders with varied agendas.

Given this fundamental feature of bureaucratic and electoral politics we hypothesize that the content of Chen’s speeches on sovereignty, Taiwan identity and democracy, should show variation according to the particular strategic relationship that Chen has with his immediate audience. Specifically, Chen will modify the content of any speech *towards the perceived preference of his primary audience*. Of course we (the authors and Chen himself) are aware that the content of any speech will quickly reach a much wider audience,⁴⁹ perhaps one that does not share the same preferences as the primary audience. There is a risk therefore that any advantages gained by ‘playing to one crowd’ might be cancelled out, or worse if the second audience is a more important constituency, when the same message reaches another audience. In this scenario, the safest option for our speaker would be to pitch his or

⁴¹ Mattlin, “Same Content, Different Wrapping,” p. 33.

⁴² Dittmer, “Taiwan’s Aim-Inhibited Quest,” p. 87.

⁴³ Steven Goldstein, “The Taiwan Strait: A continuing *status quo* of deadlock?” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 15 No. 1 (2002), p. 85.

⁴⁴ Joseph Wu, “Political Earthquake and Aftershocks: the DPP after the 2000 presidential election,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 11, No. 33 (2002), p. 638.

⁴⁵ Dittmer, “Taiwan and the issue of national identity,” p. 478.

⁴⁶ Lieberthal, “Preventing a war over Taiwan,” p. 54.

⁴⁷ Lijun Sheng, *China and Taiwan: Cross-Straits Relations Under Chen Shui-bian*, (New York: Zed Books, 2002), p. 123.

⁴⁸ Clark, “The Paradox of the National Identity Issue,” p. 80.

⁴⁹ Indeed there is tentative evidence to suggest that Chen, and Li before him, purposefully used a parochial stage to project a message to a much wider audience. Lin finds that of 40 “key speeches” delivered between 1992 and 2005, the majority of the ones that emphasized “Taiwan’s independent sovereignty or protested PRC aggression” used informal occasions to do so. Jih-wen Lin, “Uncovering the informal dimensions of Taiwan’s cross-Strait policy-making,” *34th Sino-American Conference*, (University of Virginia, 2005), p. 9.

her speech in a way that neither enthused nor enraged both audiences. We do not deny the likelihood of Chen's speeches reaching audiences other than the primary one he was addressing. However we do argue that the probability of this happening falls short of inevitability, freeing Chen *to some extent*, to adjust the content of his speeches in accordance with his primary audience. We make this claim based on the observation that the majority of Chen's speeches received little television or print coverage. Speeches were made available online, but we feel confident that the information costs required to find, access and process the transcripts, would deter all but the most dedicated. Indeed the advantage of the method we introduce below is that if this argument and these assumptions are fundamentally misguided, the data will unequivocally reveal our mistake.

The significant variation in the kinds of relationships Chen "enjoyed" with business interests, the military, with his own party, indeed factions within the DPP, the foreign media, pro-independence groups overseas, diplomatic allies and so on,⁵⁰ reinforces our decision to treat the primary audience as a strategic contextual indicator. Unavoidably, as president in a democratic society, Chen was obliged to appeal to, mobilize and persuade a wide range of actors whose positions on, for example cross-Strait relations, vary. It would be sensible, indeed rational, if Chen decided to modify the content of his speeches *to some extent*, to account for this strategic context. Our argument leads us to believe that it was not a coincidence that Chen's 'one country on each side' speech was delivered to a pro-independence support group overseas. Nor was it a matter of chance that Chen's inauguration speeches, where we can perhaps assume that the US was the de facto audience, were noted for their comparatively moderate content. If valid, i.e. if our empirical observations support our hypotheses, the argument here has implications not just for the study of ex-president Chen, but current and future ROC presidents as well. For instance if the degree of language related to Taiwan's sovereignty, the theme most closely associated with "independence" as most people understand it, increases in speeches that any ROC president delivers to pro-independence Diaspora groups, then any estimate of his or her emphasis on this dimension is likely to be overdrawn if our measures are based solely on one such speech.

Methods and data

In this study we use computer-assisted content analysis (CCA)⁵¹ to identify the presence and estimate the amount of presidential language that reflects our three discursive categories; sovereignty, identity and democracy. CCA assumes that theoretically relevant categories of content are not directly observed, but that particular words and phrases reflect them in a systematic way. Specifically, the speaker's *choice* of words and the *frequency* with which they are used provide multiple indicators of latent content. Any particular word or phrase may be an unreliable indicator of a complex concept, but when such indicators are combined into a theoretically-informed category structure to form a content analysis dictionary, this

⁵⁰ Saša Istenič, "Taiwan's business communities in mainland China: Contesting influence over cross-Strait economic policy," *Leeds East Asia Papers* 65 (2004); Elizabeth Freund Larus, "Taiwan's quest for international recognition," *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2006), pp. 23-52; Catherine Lin, "Taiwan's overseas opposition movement and grassroots diplomacy in the United States: The case of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 15, No. 46 (2006), pp. 133-59; Lin, "Uncovering the informal dimensions of Taiwan's cross-Strait policy-making."

⁵¹ Roel Poppinga, *Computer-Assisted Text Analysis*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000).

can generate a reliable mechanism for tapping content.⁵² Political speeches are well suited to CCA because the speaker cannot make strong assumptions about the extent to which an audience shares the nuances of their vocabulary choices, so they must rely on relatively unambiguous keywords and simple imagery that is likely to be shared. CCA has been successfully applied to political party manifestos, parliamentary speeches, and even legal briefs.⁵³

Naturally CCA cannot replicate the nuances of an in-depth discourse analysis, but it does have two important advantages. First a CCA dictionary is transparent and replicable. Second, it is possible to apply CCA on a much larger scale. This was an important consideration for us; in the period under investigation Chen gave 2236 speeches over the course of 2255 days.

Measures of Sovereignty, Identity and Democracy

Our three categories were determined by literature review, as outlined above. The sovereignty category is intended to cover references to Taiwan’s existing independent status, its claim to sovereignty, boundary distinctions between Taiwan and China and advocacy of actions that reinforce these ideas, for example strengthening the sovereignty claim by expanding Taiwan’s international role and writing a *new constitution*. The national identity category covers signifiers of a distinct collective identity based on common points of identification, references to a distinctive and predominantly hostile ‘other’, and endorsements of or duties to the identifying collectivity. The democracy category covers references to democratic achievements and the existence of rights and freedoms. We privilege Chen’s own framing of the referendum and constitution reform issues by including them in the democracy category along with other proposed democratic reforms. We selected indicators of these three categories inductively through a manual analysis of a sample of 200 of Chen’s speeches. Table 1 shows our framework with example indicators. The dictionary contains 120 patterns; 45 each in the sovereignty and identity categories and 30 in the democracy category.⁵⁴ Purely for the purpose of comparison, we also constructed an economics category. The economics dictionary is made up of 20 generic economic terms such as “banking” and “stock market” and in this paper we attach no theoretical or substantive importance to them.⁵⁵

Table 1: organization of dictionaries

Category	Example patterns in English	Selected search entries
Sovereignty	Taiwan sovereignty, Taiwan is independent, normal country, complete country, equality with China, not China, two states, national borders, new Taiwan constitution, go our own way, name rectification, apply to UN/WHO, diplomatic/international space, ...	主權獨立, 獨立的國家, 台灣主權, 完整的國家, 正常的國家, , 台灣是一個國家, 一臺一中, 一邊一國, 特殊國與國關係, 台灣不是中國, 國家 疆域, 台灣自己的路, 走我們台灣的路, 全新憲法, 台灣新憲法, 以台灣名義申請, 外交空間, 國際空間, 尊嚴平

⁵² Kimberley Neuendorf, 2002. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2002).

⁵³ Michael Laver, Ken Benoit and John Garry, “Extracting policy positions from political texts using words as data,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (2003), pp. 311-331.

⁵⁴ To some extent the construction of any content dictionary necessarily requires subjective decisions about the connotations of word and phrase content in a complex discourse. Our dictionary is thus not intended to be the final word on textual indicators of the three categories.

⁵⁵ Subsequent work however, will explore the economic integration aspect of cross-Straits discourse.

等...

National identity	23 million citizens, the Taiwan nation, our land, our future, our history, our country, new Taiwanese, Gemeinschaft; China's weapons, united front, military threats, diminish Taiwan, eat up Taiwan, the other side; protect Taiwan, Taiwan stand up, Taiwan first, love Taiwan, God bless Taiwan, ...	兩千三百萬人民, 台灣人民, 台灣民族, 台灣這塊土地, 台灣的前途, 我們的國家, 台灣主體, 台灣意識, 新台灣人, 共同體, 和諧, 中共武力, 中國的武器, 中國的統戰, 武力的恐嚇, 矮化, 吃掉台灣, 對岸, 顧台灣, 台灣站起來, 台灣優先, 台灣第一, 愛台灣, 守護台灣, 天佑台灣...
Democracy	Democratization, democratic reforms, shake off authoritarianism, liberal constitutional system, human rights, citizen rights/freedoms, referendum, amend/reform the constitution, ...	民主改革, 民主化, 民主自由, 戒嚴, 獨裁, 威權, 人權, 言論自由, 政治權利, 出版自由, 公民自由, 人民的權利, 憲政體制, 公投, 公民投票, 修憲, 憲改...

Data

We use 2236 speeches given by Chen Shui-bian between the 7th of June 2000 and the 18th of October 2006 to construct content analytic measures of our three categories. The speeches were downloaded from Office of the President website, verbatim and in Chinese, using computer scripts. The texts were then converted into machine-readable form for subsequent analysis. To construct the content dictionary we use the Yoshikoder,⁵⁶ a free open-source software package developed by the second author.⁵⁷ The Yoshikoder is a desktop application that runs on any operating system and can deal with text documents in any natural language.

In addition to the content of the speeches, we are also interested in a strategic dimension, i.e. Chen's decision to emphasize or de-emphasize language related to a certain category in accordance with his relationship to a particular audience. We have again drawn on the literature as a guide to the type of groups Chen has to engage and who may or may not have different interests and agendas relating to cross-Strait relations. We identified 34 different groups which we aggregate into ten broad categories. These are shown in Table 2, with examples of finer grained audience distinctions. With audience categories established, we assigned an audience to each speech using information attached to the speeches provided by the Office of the President.⁵⁸

Table 2: Audience categories

<i>Broad audiences</i>	<i>Example narrow audiences</i>	<i>Code</i>
National Day, New Year	Includes January 1 st and Chinese New Year speeches	<i>ndny</i>

⁵⁶ <http://www.yoshikoder.org>

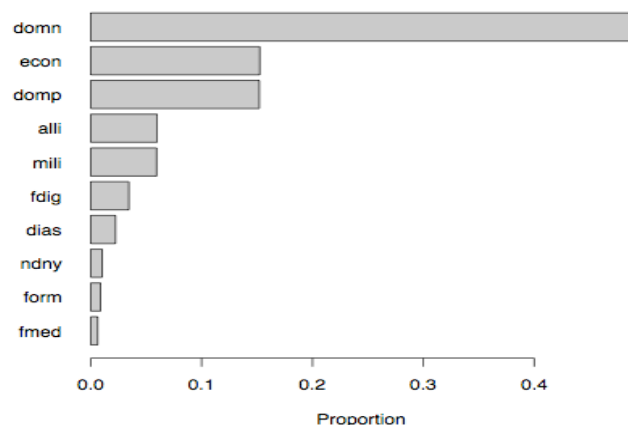
⁵⁷ Will Lowe, "Yoshikoder: An open source multilingual content analysis tool for social scientists," *APSA Annual Meeting* (Philadelphia: 2006).

⁵⁸ Exceptionally, in the case of "New Years and National Day" and other formal speeches, such as inauguration, we coded the form of the speech rather than the audience.

Allies	Diplomatic allies heads of state and other political leaders...	<i>alli</i>
Diaspora	Taiwan independence groups overseas, Diaspora groups ...	<i>dias</i>
Domestic non-political	School children and students, sports men and women, cultural groups, scientists, women's groups, environmentalists...	<i>domn</i>
Domestic political	DPP party, policy makers, foundations, campaign supporters, local media interviews...	<i>domp</i>
Economic	Regional economic organizations, <i>Taishang</i> , Taiwanese business people, chambers of commerce...	<i>econ</i>
Foreign Dignitaries	Politicians of non-diplomatic allies, scholars, cultural leaders from non-allied countries Taiwan/overseas ...	<i>fdig</i>
Foreign media	Interviews with international publications..	<i>fmed</i>
Military	All branches of armed forces and coastguard...	<i>mili</i>
Other formal speeches	Inauguration speeches, addresses to the nation...	<i>form</i>

Figure 2 shows the proportion of speeches that Chen gave to different audiences. Domestic non-political audiences constituted approximately half of his speaking engagements, with the smallest amount of attention paid to foreign media (*fmed*). The number of speeches to overseas support groups (*dias*) is also very small. This distribution forms the background to understanding the importance of strategic factors in Chen's discourse, because it is partly on the basis of Chen's engagements with foreign media and pro-independence groups that analysts formed their perceptions of Chen's positions. If Chen's discourse on sovereignty, Taiwan identity and democracy are different when faced with a less rare audience then we may reasonably conclude that it is his opinions to pro-independence groups that need to be discounted in favour of those to local audience with whom he more frequently engaged.

Figure 1: Proportion of speeches to different audiences



Although it is not the central focus of the article, we also suspect that Chen may have altered the content of his speeches in reaction to important external events. To test this supplementary hypothesis we analyzed speech content relative to a set of international political events that we considered might affect Chen's emphasis on our three discursive categories. Initially we used 21 external events, including those on the mainland and various political events in Taiwan, including presidential and legislative elections. Of these, we find that only three events had a discernable (and statistically

significant) impact on the levels of our categories; Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao’s accession to the PRC leadership, the passing of the Anti-Secession Law and Chen’s re-election. These three events are thus included in the following analysis.

Results and Discussion

The first question we are interested in is the *frequency* with which Chen makes reference to sovereignty, Taiwan identity or democracy. To see how often each of the three categories is covered in a speech it is sufficient to code whether at least one pattern from a category is matched by any sentence in a speech – a ‘mention.’ If a speech has mentions of a category then we can infer that the topic was addressed, although we cannot yet say how much coverage it was subsequently given. Figure 2 shows the results of a logistic regression model of mentions over time for each category. Each line in the figure is a fitted probability of mentioning one of our three categories, plus general economic themes. Although we are ultimately interested in the effects of individual audiences, we first aggregate all audiences to show the general category trends over time. The three external events that served to raise or lower the probability of Chen mentioning each category are shown as labelled vertical lines at the appropriate point in time. The vertical axis indicates the probability of any speech containing any one of the search terms in our content dictionaries.

Figure 2: Probability of mentioning any one category

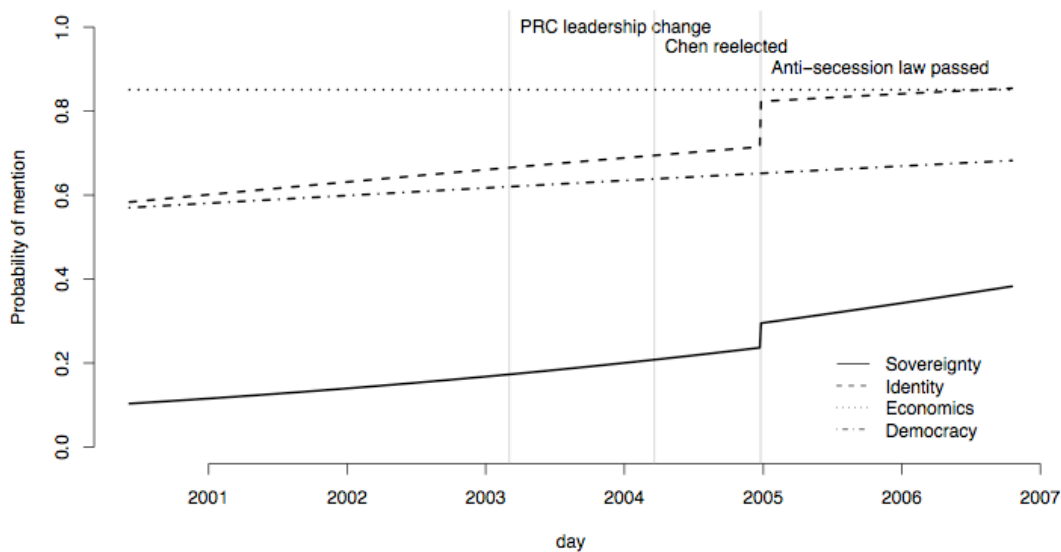
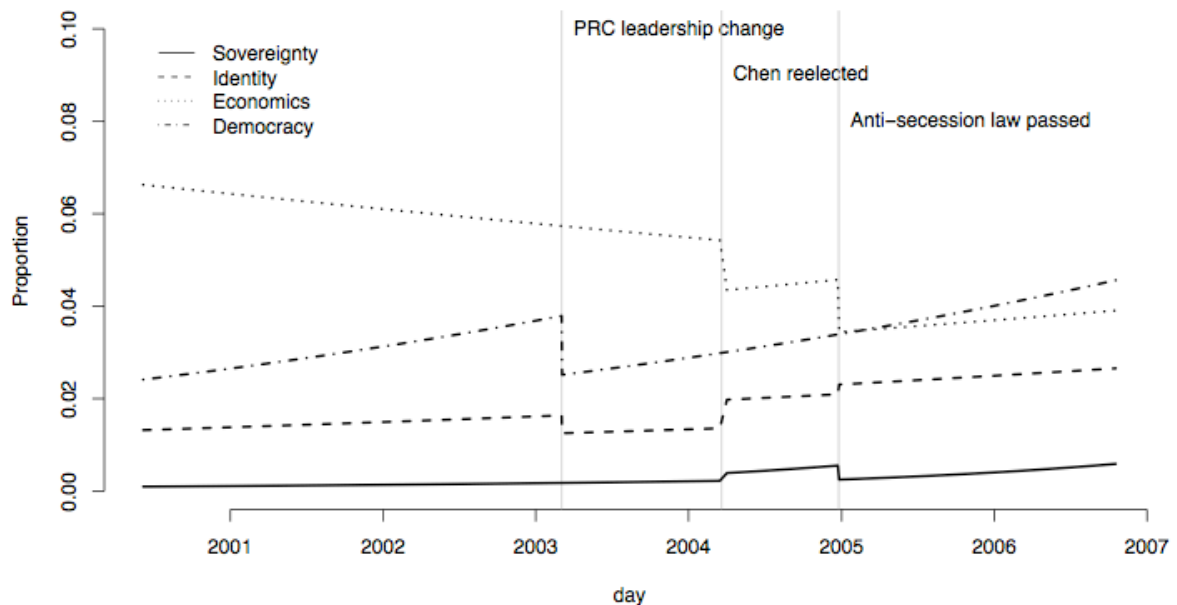


Figure 2 shows that the probability of Chen mentioning three of the four categories is high and increasing over time. Chen’s speeches are least likely to contain references to the sovereignty issue, but the probability of a mention does increase with time. At the beginning of his term about ten per cent of speeches mention the topic, but by the time he is re-elected this has more than doubled. There is also a discernable bump in sovereignty talk after the Anti-Secession Law passed, although we can’t be sure that this is uniquely attributable to this event. By the end of our time period the proportion of speeches touching on sovereignty is approaching 40 per cent. In contrast, democracy and Taiwan identity are mentioned in approximately 60 per cent of speeches when Chen takes office and this proportion rises slowly at a similar rate until the anti-secession law is passed when identity issues jump to being mentioned in 80

per cent of speeches. There is a constant 80 per cent chance of any of Chen’s speeches *mentioning* economics, although we show below that this belies a decreasing *emphasis* on the topic. Including the economics category here is intended to show that increases in our three main categories are not a result of Chen simply talking more.⁵⁹

Examining mentions is a measure of how *often* Chen covers one of our categories, but we are more interested in *how much* emphasis he subsequently provides. To see this we examine the proportion of each speech devoted to each of our categories. Figure 3 shows the results of a similar logistic regression model fitted to the amount of sentences in each speech attributable to each of our categories. Again we measure this over time, include external events and aggregate the audiences. The vertical axis shows the proportion of sentences in any speech that contain words or phrases in our content dictionary.

Figure 3: Proportion of matched patterns in each category



First, it is clear that the proportions involved are small. At its highest point, words and phrases in the democracy category make up just five per cent of any speech by Chen, nearly doubling from just under three per cent at the beginning of the period. However, given that not all speeches can be solely about the virtues of democratic governance, these proportions may actually be quite high. Nevertheless it is clear that sovereignty issues take up the smallest proportion of any of Chen’s speeches, on average less than one per cent. Interestingly, external events have more effect on the emphasis Chen places on each category than on whether or not he decides to mention them. For example, we see all of the accumulated increase in the proportion of each speech concerning democracy removed after the change of leadership in China. Chen’s re-election generates a brief increase in both Taiwan identity and sovereignty, but the subsequent anti-secession law has the opposite effect, leading him to de-emphasize sovereignty topics and slightly increase the proportion of Taiwanese

⁵⁹ In fact Chen’s speeches do get longer over the period, so to take account for this and avoid biasing the results, all of our models are normalized by the length of each speech.

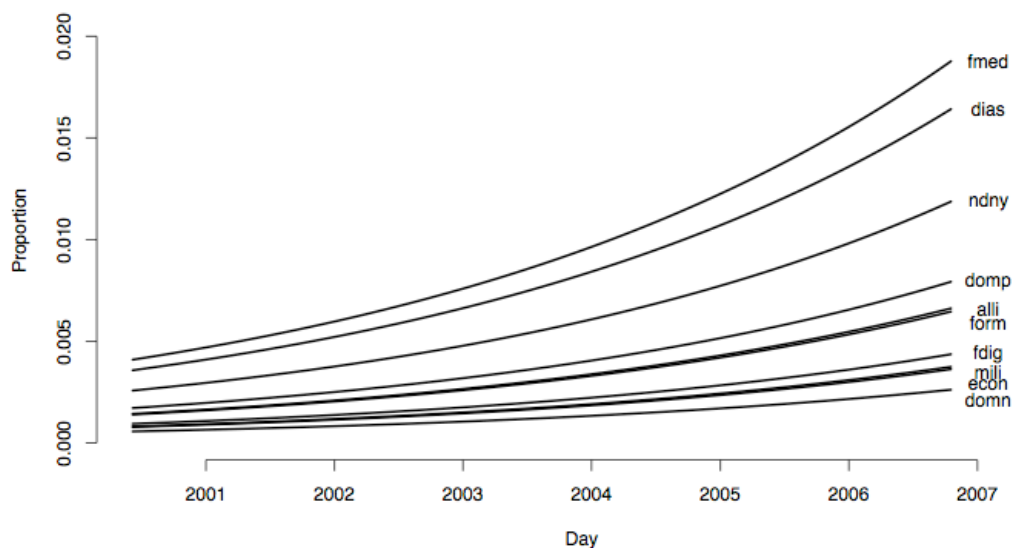
identity rhetoric. Finally, although Figure 2 showed a constant high probability of *mentioning* economic themes, here we see a steady decrease in the *proportion* of each speech devoted to economics. This decrease is hastened in Chen's second term, and again on the passing of the anti-secession law.

Audience Effects

The previous analyses aggregated all audience types in order to show large scale variation in our categories. However we are also interested in the effects of individual audiences on the content of Chen's speeches. In the subsequent analysis, we concentrate on the proportion of each speech devoted to each category over time, separated by different audiences. If Chen's message is consistent, regardless of the audience he is addressing, then there should be, at most, random variation in the proportion of each speech he devotes to each category. Over more than 2000 speeches such as we analyse here, random variation would average out, recreating in the figures below, the same shape as the aggregated lines shown in Figure 3. If that were the case, our argument about Chen adjusting the content of speeches to different audiences would fall down.

The next three figures show the results of fitting logistic regression models to the proportion of each category. This is done over time and disaggregates audiences. The vertical axis indicates the proportion of sentences in a speech with indicators in our content dictionaries. Contrary to the previous two figures, for clarity of interpretation we do not include external events, but this does not affect our argument.⁶⁰

Figure 4: Proportion of sovereignty by audience

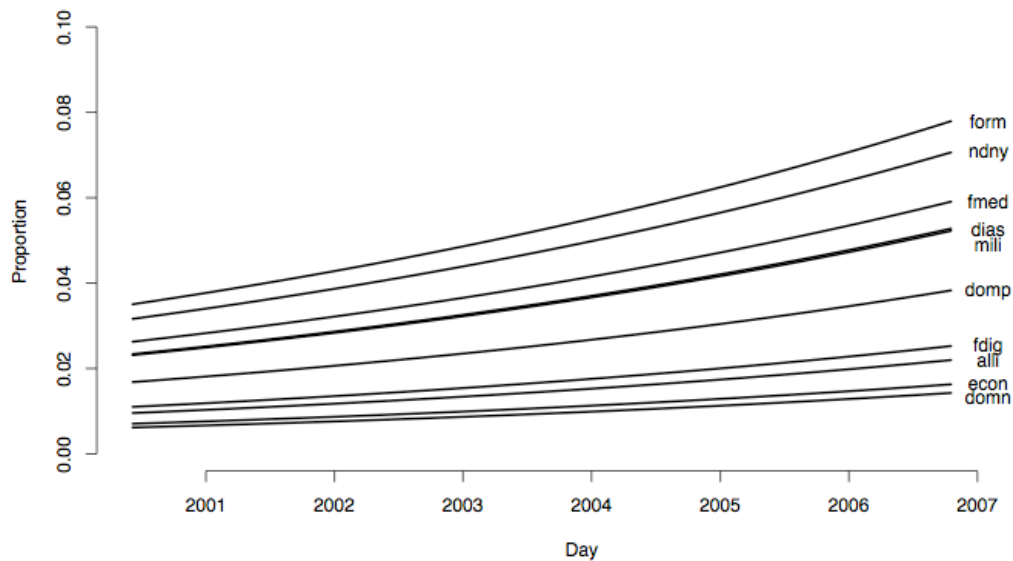


Far from averaging out to replicate the aggregate proportion, each audience has a visible effect. Moreover this effect is highly robust: Audience effects are

⁶⁰ This is because external events enter each model additively and raise or lower all audiences' fitted proportions together. By contrast, our argument depends only on the relative proportions of each category per audience which all remain the same, rather than their absolute values.

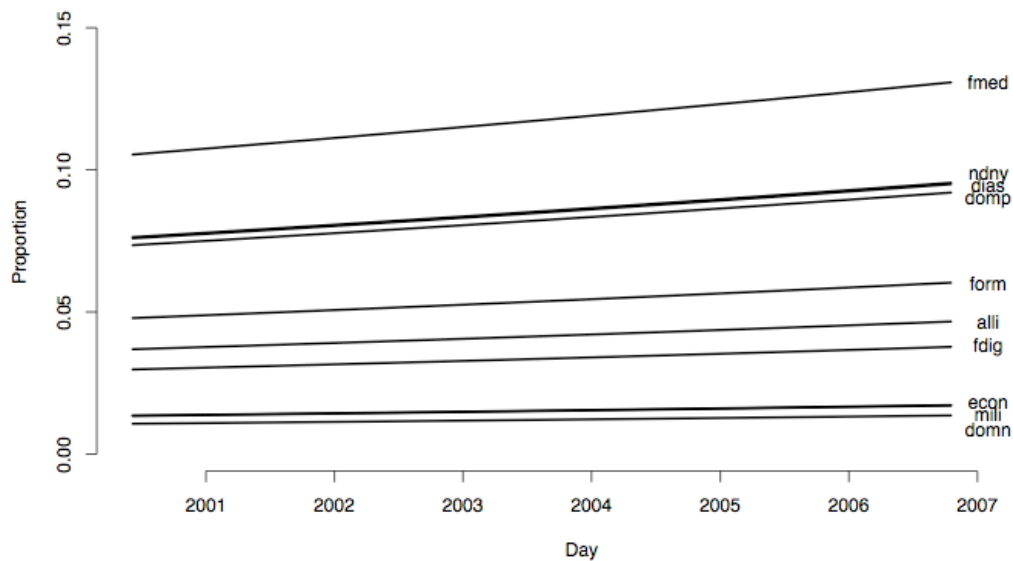
statistically significant in all of the underlying models presented in this section, a strong indication that we are looking at systematic rather than random variation. Overall, the proportion of each speech devoted to sovereignty increases visibly over time, from a uniformly low level when he took office. This suggests that Chen did indeed become more preoccupied with sovereignty over time. In addition to this general increase however, Chen’s audiences have a strong effect in determining the extent of the increase. From highest to lowest proportion, we see that speeches to foreign media and Diaspora groups contain the largest amount of sovereignty discourse. Domestic non-political and economic audiences receive the least. Since around two thirds of Chen’s speeches were addressed to these latter two audiences, it is clear that the aggregated proportion line in Figure 3 has been strongly dampened by the block of speeches given to domestic non-political and economic audiences. Consider that the average proportion of sovereignty language for all audiences together was around one per cent, whereas foreign media and Diaspora groups hear between 17 and 19 per cent. In short, and as we predicted, there are extreme differences in emphasis in Chen’s speeches to different audiences. Specifically, foreign media and Diaspora groups, which constitute a relatively small proportion of Chen’s primary audiences, receive much more sovereignty language. We now examine whether the same degree of audience effect holds for Taiwan identity content.

Figure 5: Proportion of Taiwan identity by audience



Audience effects again have a demonstrable (and again, in statistical terms, robustly significant) effect on the proportion of Taiwan identity language in Chen’s speeches. Again we can infer that the large number of economic and domestic non-political audiences, who get the least amount of identity discourse in their speeches, dampened the aggregated proportion line in Figure 3. Interestingly, Chen reserved for New Year’s, National Day and other formal speeches, the greatest proportion of Taiwan identity language. This is not surprising, in that these occasions afforded Chen the highest profile opportunity to promote the “Taiwanization” agenda at the forefront of his administration. We now turn our attention to democracy.

Figure 6: Proportion of democracy by audience



As with the previous two examples, individual audiences have an equally strong effect on the proportion of democracy content. Once again, domestic non-political and economic audiences, along with the military, receive the lowest proportion. By contrast, democracy is an almost constant theme in foreign media appointments, accounting for between 11 and 13 per cent of any engagements throughout the period. This finding is in keeping with Chen’s motivation to project Taiwan’s democratic successes to the world, in contradistinction to the PRC. Democracy is a strong theme in New Year’s speeches and to pro-Taiwan support groups overseas and domestic political audiences.

Conclusions

We began this paper by pointing out that Chen Shui-bian earned an international reputation as a dedicated promoter of “Taiwan independence.” Critiquing the tendency, of the international media and some scholars, to reduce everything Chen said to some ill-defined “independence,” we argued that a more useful approach *for Taiwan studies in general* is to decompose cross-Strait discourse into its rhetorical component parts. Whilst we reserve judgment on the extent to which Chen was or was not a “pro-independence president,” we present empirical estimates of the comparative frequency and amount that Chen talks about sovereignty, national identity and democracy that challenges analyses such as those conducted by Robert Ross.⁶¹ Over the two thousand speeches we analyse here, Chen addressed sovereignty, the category that contains the discursive markers most likely to connote independence, much less often and much less proportionally than Taiwan identity, democracy or the economy. Naturally, the sensitive nature of the political situation in the Taiwan Strait means that *any* reference to sovereignty, *made by any ROC president*, has the potential to raise tensions vis-a-vis China. For this reason it is important that scholars

⁶¹ Ross, “Explaining Taiwan’s revisionist diplomacy; Robert Ross, “Taiwan’s fading independence movement,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85 No. (2) (2006), pp. 141-48.

and policy makers to keep in mind the distinct and robust finding that primary audiences can have a big impact on the content of presidential rhetoric.