



The Volatility of National Identification: A Mix-Method Pilot Study of Taiwanese Young Adults

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Abstract

One important critique of deliberative democracy and the practice of public forum is the extent to which controversial, moral, or symbolic issues can be well deliberated through oral discussion. This study attempted to apply multiple methods to study the dynamics of discussion about determining the name of Taiwan. Six young adults, selected from a telephone survey, were invited to attend a forum to discuss a series of political issues, including this most sensitive and controversial issues in Taiwan. The choices of each participant (preferring a new name for Republic of China or continuing to use the old one) in the telephone survey and the group discussion were recorded. Three participants who changed their choices during the deliberation process were interviewed.

Keywords: National identification, Deliberation, Focus group, Public forum, Mixed methods, Taiwan studies

1. Introduction

Current studies of national and ethnic identification in Taiwan politics mostly focus on the percentage change in identifying being “Chinese” or “Taiwanese,” which looks at the trend and the meaning of Taiwan national and ethnic identification changes from a more macro perspective. This study is about national identification, however from a more micro point of view, with an attempt to complement the forming or changing process of citizens’ national identification with the concepts of individually preferred volatility and inconsistency.

One of the reasons why Taiwan people’s national identification is an issue comes from the distrust (or even hostility) toward the political party Kuomintang (KMT) which was originally from China and later came to rule Taiwan (Gold, 1987). After years of democratization, Taiwanese society has gradually developed a different historical and geographical identity than that of the KMT’s. This further progressed into two competing identification systems, one treating China as a guest (a different country), one treating China as a host (we are free Chinese in Taiwan). Although Gold (1987) points out that from the perspective of the “one China,” identification issue in Taiwan is one of the issues having to do with China, if we take a closer look at conflicting identification (Taiwan versus ROC) or dual identification (Taiwanese and Chinese), we will see that this issue is not completely influenced by the relationship with People’s Republic of China (PRC), or the identification pressure from other countries. In order to deal with the uncertainty of Taiwan’s international position, and to win democratic elections in Taiwan, the stance on national identification has to be taken seriously. In competing for votes in elections for Taiwan society and political parties, namely between the KMT and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), this is especially true.

At the moment, scholars are still unsure whether there is high relevancy or consistency between party identification and national identification in Taiwan. That is, whether people who support Taiwan to be clearly separate from China are DPP supporters, or whether people who support the legitimacy of ROC are pro KMT. The relevance of consistency needs further verification. Even so, the perceived connection between party image and national identification, that is, DPP being the party that “proactively creates and arouses the consciousness of Taiwanese identity” and KMT as the party that “proactively seeks ties with China,” is a very unique phenomenon in the world democracy.

The main reason why this unique phenomenon draws particular attention from political scientists is because it is generally believed that party identification plays a key role in the formation of voters’ preferences. That is to say, a political party, its image and the ideology it represents are highly related to voters’ judgments on their public policies and candidates. If this logic is correct, the current distribution of Taiwan national identification will be very similar to that of their party preferences, that is, a certain percentage of people are very clear concerning their own national identification while at the same time, there are still many others who are not sure about which party to support and who are ambivalent about national identification.

This issue of the fluidity of national identification is of both empirical and theoretical importance. Empirically, this issue of ambivalent national identification is associated with partisan conflicts, confrontational movements caused by partisan conflicts, and other aspects of negative impacts on the political stability and the policy consistency of the nation. Taiwan is a unique case where political conflict is not only about policy choice and ideology but also about national identification.

National identification is hardly an issue for scholarly discussion in most nations, such as the United States and Canada; therefore, the development of theories or the observation of cases regarding the volatility of national identification will test the limits of the current literature concerning nationality and the malleability of belief systems. Party identification is supposed to be stable and not subject to change due to one’s belief system (Converse, 1964), which is composed of one’s ideology and values. The mid-1960s, however, saw a rise in political independence that suggested a rise in macro-partisan volatility (Dennis, 1988). Previous studies have identified short-term fluctuations in political independence linked to issue preferences, economic conditions, socialization, and periodic political events such as campaigns and elections (Clarke and Suzuki, 1994; Clarke and Stewart, 1998; Greene, 2002; MacKuen et al., 1989; Niemi et al., 1991; Sears and Valentino, 1997). Weakening party ties leads to an increase in the instability of voter preferences over time (MacKuen et al., 1989; MacKuen et al., 1992), a trend that corresponds to an increase in the number of swing voters and swing states and perhaps indicates the decline of partisanship in the U.S. and Britain (Clarke and Stewart, 1998; Clarke and Suzuki, 1994; Fiorina et al., 2005; Mayer, 2007). These studies taken together suggest that, one’s national identification can be as stable as party identification. Ideally, people of different national identification will eventually find a largest common divisor so the society is balanced. This balance, however, depends on how the ambivalent group forms their identification. This further implies that, national identification, which is constructed through the socialization process, may change when there are more than one way of socialization. In other words, citizens within a country like Taiwan, where there is more than one way of socialization, may experience ambivalence in their national identification.

This study will focus on how Taiwanese people choose between two options for the nation’s future—citizens of Taiwan Republic or citizens of ROC—through a deliberative process, in which the ideology of political parties plays a minimum role. Indeed, Taiwan is not yet at the stage of a referendum concerning national name or an amendment of its constitution. However, when the majority of Taiwan people has no problem with the statement “I am Taiwanese” but has diverse opinions on “My nation is...,” it is enough for us to believe that this research topic is a significant indicator of what decision people will make when the time comes for them to choose their nation’s destiny.

This research will be presented in the next four sections. The next section explains the design and the initial findings of the research; the third section demonstrates the interactive process of the focus group; and the fourth section is further interviews with the three members who showed unstable identifications during the telephone interview and the focus group, in an effort to find out the real reasons behind their instability. The conclusion section discusses about the limitations of this research and the worthwhile topics for further research.

2. Research design

To provide interviewees with information to make informed choices, there are currently three methods used. The first is split ballots (Schuman & Bobo, 1988), which has been adopted in America since 1930. As the name suggests, it splits samples into two halves, asks the randomly selected half the adjusted question and then compares the differences of the two sample groups. The second method is choice questionnaire. It also lets interviewees read information before they answer. However, more than information giving, it further offers the predictable results and the chances of those given choices to the interviewees (Neijens, 2004). The third one is Fishkin’s (1995) deliberative polling. It selects the most representative sample of the population in demography and gives them the questionnaire. After first questionnaire, the

representative sample of people is put together to further discuss and deliberate for days and then another test is run on them.

Because the entire process of Fishkin's deliberative polling requires a huge budget, I designed the study by combining this with the concept of Neijens' choice questionnaire and then integrating it with survey research and focus group methodologies. To be detailed below, my first step was looking for individuals of different preferences. To obtain the list, I inserted the prepared questions into a national telephone interview questionnaire (the details of the questions are illustrated later in this section). Those who have different answers to the prepared questions are selected and then among them, only those who are willing to be interviewed were contacted. Next, I adopted Fishkin's deliberative idea and made the process of the focus group's discussion like that of public forum as much as possible, while also reserving the effect of the selected questionnaires. Before face-to-face discussing the issues, the interviewees were asked to finish the same questionnaire. During the discussion, the host then brought the stimulating factors to the deliberation and discussion. After group discussion, they were asked again to answer the same questionnaire provided earlier in the telephone survey. The last phase was one on one interviews arranged with those who gave inconsistent answers in telephone interviews and focus group, to find out reasons of their change of choices.

Focus groups have been drawing lots of scholarly attention since 1980's and it is now seen as one of the quantitative research methodologies complementary to survey research methodology (Knodel, Chamrathirong & Debavalya, 1987; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1996). The way focus group works is that through group discussion on topics given by the researcher, the group members form their point of views via active interpersonal interaction. Users of this method particularly weigh on the process of discussion itself and see group discussion as an important source of information. What distinguishes it from survey research method is that in focus groups, the researcher plays a more active role in the process of data and information collection (Morgan, 1996). Survey researchers have started using focus groups as complementary to statistical data of survey research (e.g., Cheng, 2004; 2005). Nevertheless, because the sample of this method is not randomly selected, there is little room for making inference or generalization. Also, it is widely acknowledged that this method does not necessarily produce a "focus," instead, it studies the uncontrollable reaction to the stimulus. "It uses the stimulus to reveal the unknown issues behind the stimulus so that the normally hidden problems have a way to respond to the stimulus; therefore digging out the potentially critical knowledge...to explain the instability of truth" (Shi, 2003, p. 67; translated by the author). Hence, a researcher by using this method can explore participants' reaction to certain given stimulus during group discussion. Thus, this research will use the focus group as an experimentally small-scale public forum to observe and find out the possibilities of the "choosing nation name" issue from the participants. Below are details about how the three phases of studies were conducted.

2.1 Phase 1: Questionnaire and telephone interview

The purpose of using questionnaire and telephone interviews in this research is to find voters with different preferences and then further invite those who are willing to participate in the focus group discussion in the second phase. The sample data of telephone interview is used by a nationwide telephone interview of a research university's poll survey research center done on January 12th 2008, after the legislative election. (Note 1) There are a total of 32 questions in the telephone interview, including two questions of choosing nation name and one question of whether willing to have further interviews. The choices of answers of the second question are the same as the first one. The only difference is that the second question adds statements which are meant to stimulate the participants to think further. The first question was inserted into the questionnaire as the 7th question so that the interviewees can answer it easily and quickly without thinking like they answer the first six questions. Interviewers were requested to read only the first two options so the participants are somehow directed to pick one out of the two choices. However if the participants' answer is "I don't know" or "no comments" the interviewers will truthfully record their answers. This question has some theoretical expectations: participants who prefer status quo would, according to their preferred political party, choose "option 2: Current name ROC," while those who prefer Taiwan to be a virtually independent country would, according to their political party, choose "options 1: New nation name."

If you could decide, will you use (1) own nation name such as Taiwan, Taiwan Nation, Formosa, or Taiwan Republic for Taiwan (including Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu)? Or, (2) current name ROC?

1. New nation name
2. Current name ROC
3. I don't know
4. No comments

The second question was inserted to the questionnaire as the 17th question. Interviewers are instructed to read this question particularly slowly and give participants about 5 seconds to think. Because more information is provided for this question, participants might feel ambivalent, find it hard to judge, or even change their choices.

This question is a bit long and not so easy to answer. Therefore please listen carefully and tell me what you think. As far as nation name is concerned, many people believe that using a new country name will help us get out of the mire of ambiguous identity in the world and therefore get more international support. However, it will also incur military conflicts in cross-strait relationship so we run the risk of destruction of our economy and even the lives of our friends and relatives because of war. On the other hand, some people believe that by keeping the name ROC, we have more room to negotiate with the cross strait so that our economy and constitution get to last and also peace will remain. However in this case, the cross strait will keep using its one China foreign policy to stop our next generations from participating in international affairs with our nation name and even force us to abandon our own nation identity in international occasions. Therefore, if you could decide Taiwan's future, will you support (1) own nation name for Taiwan (including Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu)? Or, (2) current name ROC?

1. New nation name
2. Current name ROC
3. I don't know
4. No comments

A good number of people (856 out of 1,120) answered the first question with 71.3% choosing "current name ROC" and 28.7% "new nation name." 853 people answered the second question with 58.4% choosing "current name ROC," 20% "new nation name," and 22% "I don't know" or "no comments." Among those who picked "new nation name" in the first question, 61.4% keep their answer; for those who chose "current name ROC," 74% remain the same answer. Although this research is not about finding the correlation of the two questions, or the basic qualities of the participants, the results of first phase data collection shown in Table 1 suggest: (1) Telephone interview of providing more information from the idea of "deliberate polling" does have impacts on the participants. (2) The change of voters' choices of identification may not occur in a binary fashion or like taking sides on an issue. Those who changed their answers did not reveal that they made a completely different answer; rather they chose an ambivalent option such as I don't know or no comments.

(Table 1 is about here)

2.2 Phase 2: Discussion of the focus group

Interviewees who changed their choices in the inserted two questions were contacted two weeks after the telephone survey. Among them, those who were willing to and able to participate in a focus group discussion were filtered out and invited to the campus. Due to budget limit and the fact that some interviewees of interest changed mind about participating the public forum, it became very difficult to host a diverse group at this stage as planned in the first place. It turned out that I have to compose a homogeneous network composed of those with similar age and education level (university or graduate degrees), as well as ethnicity (southern Fukien Province or min-nan). The similarity of background is expected to facilitate deliberative conversation instead of arousing conflicts. The focus group was arranged one and half months after the telephone interview (March 1st, 2008, 2pm to 5pm) at the common room of a research institute at a university in southern Taiwan. Six targeted individuals attended.

The topics designed for focus group discussion were not restricted to national identification or nation names; rather, it was only one of the many topics. The reason of doing so was to warm up and lead the participants to the core issue step by step. In the beginning, interviewees' attention was diverted to the topics such as the media usage before the presidential election and the observation of its influences on the society by the host (also the author). It was half an hour before the break time when the more serious topic like nation names was brought into the discussion. The interviewees were first to define the concept of "independence" when using the "Taiwan independence" in their daily life. Later they were handed the first answer sheet (see Attachment 1) and asked to quickly pick or circle an answer and turn it over, then handed it back. (Note 2)

After the short opening, there was about 15 minutes given to the participants for open discussion. Then a second answer sheet was handed to each of them (see Attachment 2). Again the interviewees were asked to pick or circle an answer and then returned it back. Note that during the discussion participants were asked not to sign on the sheets and that they did not know these sheets would be analyzed for their consistency until the third phase. Table 2 summarizes the pattern of changes in national identification.

(Table 2 is about here)

Table 2 shows that No. 1, No.2, and No.6 changed their mind while No.3, No.4 and No.5 were stable in their identification. It is interesting to see that the instability of No.1 and No.2 has been detected as early as in the telephone interview phase; they continued to reveal unstable identification in focus group discussion. We also noticed that No.6 was obviously influenced by the group interaction and changed her identification. Therefore, I chose No. 1, No. 2, and No.6 for in-depth interviews. (Note 3)

2.3 Phase 3: In depth trace interviews

No.1, No.2 and No.6 were interviewed separately on March 23rd 2008. Via one on one interview, I expected to find out and understand the influences they had on them and then the reasons why they changed their attitudes or identification. The next two sections will present the interactions in the second and the talks in the third sections, respectively.

3. The summary of focus group discussion

This section presents how the flow of discussion influenced No.1, No.2 and No.6, the three participants most apparently influenced by the atmosphere of the discussion.

The discussion about national identification after the first answer sheets were collected was initiated by No. 6's comments on the answer sheet:

No. 6: "I think this [list of options] is problematic. This is a question with only two possible answers given. I believe in five years there might be a third choice. Since the situation [of Taiwan's international status] is painful and difficult, how is it possible that the government would allow this [status quo] to continue? That's why I think this [issue] is debatable. The government might create a third or fourth option depending on its diplomatic skills and negotiation status at the time. ...At the very least, we shall keep the current situation."

After I made a brief explanation of the research design for No. 6, No.2 made a statement that influenced almost everyone. It is worthwhile mentioning that No.2 circled "choose a new nation name" in the first answer sheet; however, after my restatement of the consequences for the two options, she changed her mind, which was later shown in her choice in the second answer sheet.

No. 2: "I can't image my friends and relatives going to war and never coming back. Wars are very brutal. Take the recent Kosovo's independence war for example, it is very painful. Regardless you are a soldier or not, they take anyone as hostage, even elderly, women and children. Another example is Israel, it is independent for a long time now but the war still never ceases. Should there be a war between Taiwan and Mainland China, it might last for such a long time too. It won't be like that we all get killed in one day, with Mainland China's military being successful, and then the cross strait relationship becomes peaceful hereafter. No I don't think so. I still believe we will be more like the example of Israel."

No.5, who voted for keeping the ROC name, expressed her opinions, which seemed to set the tone for the following discussion.

No. 5: "I am in favor of the second option, keeping the ROC name, based on the principle of choosing the lesser of two evils. If we opt for Taiwan Republic, the consequence is dangerous and immediate.... I think even the example of Hong Kong is not bad at all. The question is, is Taiwan capable of fighting in the war? It is something we have to evaluate. The position Taiwan has in the world is very difficult. ...With all these, how does one identify his own life and role? How could we completely cut off and separate [from "China"]? It was mentioned that war is very terrifying. If we keep talking about independence and war stuff, as far as People's Republic of China is concerned, their strong military force is more than easy to take Taiwan anytime. They don't even need military force actually. If they block Taiwan economically, will Taiwan be even able to fight? Therefore I agree with the second option more."

In order to balance viewpoints, I joined the discussion and re-profiled the negative effects of both options:

"Let me recap. The first option is to choose a new nation name, with all other things remain unchanged, just a new name. The possible result is conflicts. However if not changing name and keeping the current situation, time is not necessarily on our side. By the time when the whole world recognizes only one China, our identifications will be forced to change too. It will be more than just an issue of national power and fighting abilities. Even our ID cards have to be changed too, and that is something we will be forced to accept. The issue of national power and fighting abilities can be solved by the government or the new leader. However, that ID cards are forced to change implies the sovereignty of the country has disappeared. ...The worst is our identifications will be completely changed. Both outcomes are not certain, but both are the worst possible. We just haven't had time to really think about them. We are not discussing if any of them is going to happen today, but we are discussing the current situation when they are both possible. It is why we are here and also the hardest thing to do."

No. 2: "I'd rather change my ID card than losing my family."

No. 3: "Just like every coin has two sides, everything has a good side and a bad side. For option 1, since people nowadays are very used to comfortable and settled life, no one would like war or to be haunted with fear, or even an unstable life without food. If I can keep my life, I'd rather change an identification name. It doesn't make any big difference to me; it's only a change of name."

No. 1: "When I first heard the question, I thought both options led to Taiwan's independence. Just one is independence immediate, and the other one is quiet and smooth independence, without changing current nation name to a new one. It turned out that the second option is us being smoothly and quietly unified."

No. 2: "Honestly I feel that the two options are KMT and DPP's assertions, individually."

The host: "You may say that these are some parties' declarations. But to a citizen, we are discussing their influences on us, rather than arguing over symbols. We only put forth the results in advance to discuss. As your question was not included in the telephone interview, we are unable to further discuss it."

No. 2: "I am willing to change our nation name since after my children are born, they won't know what Taiwan is anyway."

No. 1: "No matter what, I want to say one more thing about the possible war mentioned before. Everyone of them (in Mainland China), once they know you are from Taiwan, would say to you: 'As long as you declare independence, we will attack you.' So it is not just Chinese government that threatens us like that, even civilians do. ...Don't you feel terrible? It's like anyone would attack you anytime when you are on holidays there. Therefore whether we can be independent successfully or get unified gradually, I simply don't want the feeling that once I change names I will be attacked."

During the fifteen minute discussion No.4 didn't take any initiative to speak. He went quiet with no further discussion after No.1's comment. It is noticed that No.1's choice was very much affected by No.2's earlier remark. No.1, who originally voted for "choose a new nation name," after changing her choice, further attempted to convince No.5, who originally voted for "keep current name ROC," but got a bit hesitant after the discussion. Interestingly, No.6, who had been sticking with the option of "keep current name ROC" through the entire discussion, picked the other answer "choose a new nation name" on the second answer sheet after discussion.

4. The summary of in-depth interviews

On March 23rd, 2008, right after the presidential Election Day on March 20th, I arranged three time slots to meet again with interviewees No.1, No.2 and No.6 individually. The purpose is to further explore reasons behind their inconsistencies revealed in the telephone survey and the focus group. The venue is a coffee shop around the Taipei Main Station. Given familiarity developed in the focus group, the three ladies accepted the invitation.

4.1 Interview with No. 1 (Ms. Huang from Taipei County)

No.1 didn't answer the first question on the telephone survey and when asked the second question she picked the answer of "keep current name ROC." In the focus group, she changed her answer to "choose a new nation name," while at the end of the discussion she changed back to "keep current name ROC." That she changed its identification choice was due to the various concerns at the time of answering.

"When I was replying (to the first question) in the telephone survey, I was concerned that if choosing using the name Taiwan, I would be hurt [by somebody around me]. Therefore I thought it was better not to reveal what I truly think first...For the second question, the thought I had was using Taiwan, however, again I was afraid of being hurt. Then I thought that using ROC or keeping the status quo is safer. I felt that to avoid saying Taiwanese I would avoid being hurt. As far as I am concerned, to maintain what we are now, naming doesn't matter much, as long as we can continue to survive. Therefore I finally chose to maintain the current name."

"...I answered Taiwan (on the first answer sheet) in the focus group because I thought that no one would see the answer anyway.(Note 4) ...However, when the instructor reminded me of the possible outcomes, I thought no one [in the government] could really do everything that they wanted to due to reality concerns. Therefore, what we really want and the decisions we make based on reality concerns aren't always consistent."

I observed that No.1's judgment was not based on her personal political preferences or decisions she made before, rather it was based on the external given conditions (such as political party or politicians' image) and some stereotypes.

"My (truthful) answer is: no matter what nation name we will use, I just want to be equally treated as all others in other countries when I travel. ...If this wish can be achieved, I don't really care what nation name we have. Honestly I don't feel name is such an important issue to me. ...Therefore, my choice will change when the conditions change."

I further found that No.1's volatility in national identification was associated with the heterogeneity of her political communication network.

"...Yesterday [the Election Day] I was the first one in the family finishing voting. My father asked me which party I voted for (he is a green camp supporter) and said to me 'You voted for KMT, didn't you?' I told him I casted an invalid ballot by stamping on both KMP and DPP. I lied because I wanted to avoid conflicts. My father was angry and said to me 'OK. If you did cast an invalid vote, then there is no need for your mother to go to vote' This is because if I had

said I voted for KMT, then both my parents would have to go vote so that [to them] DPP will win over KMT [in my family].”

4.2 Interview with No. 2 (Ms. Chang from Taichung City)

Unlike No.1 who consciously felt constraints, No.2 made her choices mostly based on the inertia derived from the political or social education she had received. No.2 chose “keep current name ROC” in the first question of telephone interview, but changed her choice to “choose a new nation name” in the second question. As No. 2 explained, in the telephone interview she didn’t pay much attention to the interviewer since she was watching television and responding to her relatives talking to her at the same time. Hence, she wasn’t very concentrated when answering the first question.

During the group discussion she said she was better able to process information during the focus group discussion “because the question and options was written on paper, and because there was someone in front of me talking, I was more able to process information and think. ...Particularly, when the question became longer with three or more sentences I could not follow the interviewer well.” However, her answers remain inconsistent: She circled “choose a new nation name” on her first answer sheet but picked “keep current name ROC” in the second answer sheet.

No. 2 recalled, “I circled Taiwan on the first answer sheet. I thought it has something to do with that fact that what DPP has been promoting. That is, changing many symbols used in Taiwan and associated with China to Taiwan, such as changing the name of a state-owned company ‘China Petrolic Corporation (CPC)’ to ‘CPC Corporation, Taiwan,’ ... I think I was a bit influenced by that.”

“...I didn’t think too much when answering the first question in the focus group. I felt I am Taiwanese; I never said I am from ROC so I intuitively wrote Taiwan. Actually I thought Taiwan is quite nice too and won’t cause confusion. Some children now are quite confused about ROC and even question their teachers why we need to write ROC.”

The dramatic change of No.2 from “choose a new nation name” to “keep current name ROC” in the focus group was obviously affected by the discussion about war.

“War’s influence on me was particularly big, because I recently read a comic book about war. Its description about war was horrible so I was shadowed by it. I don’t think I will be able to face the consequence of a war if a war could really happen. There has been news about Pakistan and Lebanon, which make me felt terrible; not to mention the news about Tibet, which scared me. I am really afraid of the possible casualties.”

“I remembered very well that even before the second answer sheet was spread out I already told you I felt so regretful and I wanted to change my choice [on the first answer sheet]. My head was full of images of my father and my brother serving in the army, and even my boyfriend and that they all died and never came back. ... [at that time] It was impossible for me to think of other things like economy, national pride or people’s dignity. I believe when the security issue was involved, there was no room for dignity concern.”

To No.2, this imaginary picture is obviously much stronger than a balance point No.5 made during the discussion: Taiwanese do not understand their own culture and history well and therefore the insistence on national independence is weak.

“I remembered how No.5 sorrowfully mentioned that nowadays the young generation is too cold and cares too little about their own culture and history. ...Actually I feel quite upset hearing that because I feel the same way, being someone with still a bit of conscience. I also understand how sorrowful those who care much about ethnic issue feel. Because there are some issues I care much about but I also feel very sad and sorrowful that no one cares. So I understand how she feels...I did take some time to think about what she said.”

“It is after the worst situations of both options were read and discussed that I felt that they have different weights. I inevitably thought more towards the option that of greater weight. So, I felt that I shouldn’t have so little passion about Taiwan. ...I felt that losing the passion for Taiwan will make me gradually forget about my own history. Even though, I still tend to look at things from the point of view that causes the least casualty. After all, culture and history can be recreated while lives cannot. Although No.5’s remark made sense to me, the most important value in my life is not a country....To young people who are cold about politics like me, that kind of patriotism no longer exists in our minds. To me, the keeping own family is more important.”

No.2’s remark also confirmed my previous observation during the focus group discussion: Her being the first to talk, giving strong reactions, and making speeches that set a direction and tone for later discussion.

4.3 Interview with No. 6 (Ms. Yang from Kaohsiung County)

No.6 consistently chose “keep current ROC name” in both of the inserted questions in the telephone interview and the first answer sheet of the focus group session. What made No. 6 a special case is that she changed her answer to “choose a new nation name” after the group discussion.

During the one-on-one interview, No.6 seemed to be a little anxious and reluctant to accept that she changed her choices. She said, "I don't remember the process of making the judgment" many times. She seemed to be very concerned that the research team knew her inconsistency and became defensive during the interview. Although she had my explanation about the design and purpose of this research, the topics of our conversation had to be redirected to other issues to decrease the level of anxiety. Hence, I wasn't able to get complete reasons of her changing in her choice.

The following two passages reveal the principles that No.6 used when making a choice, which are similar to those used by No.1: there should be no wars.

"I would like to choose the lesser of two evils. If there is a war, we would be possibly alive, but it is equally possible that we will be killed. Compared to the downside of the other option about the losing national identity, having a war with Mainland China is mixed of too much uncertainty and cost. Since we were part of China hundreds of years ago, the worst would be going back to that stage and learning history of China all over again. But, at least we should be alive..."

"...The possibility of war determined my decision. If there is a war involved, I wouldn't change nation name and prefer keeping the current name ROC. But if you tell me there won't be a war or serious consequences, I would prefer changing nation name. ... If you still put war as the possible consequence of changing nation name, I think the worst scenario is losing national identity, which I would accept."

5. Conclusion and discussion

The volatility of national identification within country is a special phenomenon in Taiwan (and a few other countries such as North Ireland). The current relevant theories concerning volatility of identity did not include and explain the phenomenon of the volatility of national identification in Taiwan (or rather, there is no relevant theory concerning the change of national identification). That is, it requires further clarification when there is a change in people's national identification, whether it is caused by the party ambivalence deriving from the confrontation among political parties or by the policy ambivalence from the inconsistency of preferences of political parties and their policies. Therefore, the present study is not deductively verifying certain or established theories, but attempting to draw conclusive meanings from experiences and phenomenon, as a preparation for establishing new theories.

The key issue of current research on Taiwan people's national identity is to precisely capture voters' national identity via simple questionnaire. The common way is to use options of ethnic identification, "Taiwanese" "Chinese" or "both Taiwanese and Chinese," as an indicator of national identification. Although this method is indeed simple and direct, and easy for interviewees to understand, its merit is also its limitation. The labels "Taiwanese" and "Chinese" carry many complex connotations (such as culturally connected with China, emotional ties with the island of Taiwan, and the geographically concerns of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu) that are not easy for interviewees to clarify in a short period of time. The information collected via this method would also cause difficulties for the researcher. It is hard to discover the reason behind the phenomenon of volatile and vague national identification for those who answer "both Taiwanese and Chinese," or "both Chinese and Taiwanese." Therefore, systematic research is needed to find out what indicators of identification interviewees are using in labeling themselves thus.

The present research cannot confirm if the choice of nation name is the best indicator of national identification, which requires further investigation. This constraint is worth some discussion. Once one person's identification is established, it is hard to change fragmentally, after all. For those who changed their preferences of nation names (such as No.1, No.2 and No.6 in this research), these changes do not necessarily mean there were radical changes in their identification. Rather it seems that their national identification is still in the process of developing, and that process shouldn't be hindered by this investigation or other stimulus. Thus, the indicator of nation name used in this research perhaps captured the political preferences of the participants, rather than their true identification.

Usually, researchers are not concerned with uncovering the "true" or "the deepest" identification of the interviewees. This is because identification is a process of learning and development after all. Thus, this digging for the truth is not that meaningful. For one thing, it is very difficult to carry out the research; for another thing; it is unknown to what extent there is a link between the deepest identification and superficial preferences.

At the very least, this research showed that such a link is very weak. Those who had unstable national identification during telephone interviews and one on one interviews (there were at least two week intervals between the telephone interview, focus group discussion, and one on one interview) did not shape their preferences of nation name based on political parties' images or ideology, but based on situational and conditional judgments. If they have to shape their own identification based on discussion or interpersonal interaction to make decisions, then the discussion or interpersonal interaction at the time would greatly affect their judgment. In other words, superficial choice of nation name will be affected by situations. Also in the process of interpersonal interaction, participants do not necessarily want to reveal or are not capable of revealing their deepest identification.

From the record of the interviews, this paper has shown that the participants' ability to verbally express their ideas (capable participants will bring more information, symbols and opinions to the discussion), the sequences of speaking

and the interpretations and stresses on certain stimuli (such as the terror of war) all influenced the judgment of those who have unstable identification. I discovered it was the participants who spoke first, who had better expression abilities, and who injected emotional factors shaped the profile of the discussion. You could say these participants were throwing driftwood into the sea of linguistic symbols for the others to grab and follow.

However, this does not mean that interpersonal interaction will definitely affect participants' judgment. Concerning the logic of preference change in this case study, it is highly likely that most people would choose "safe options" (such as "both Chinese and Taiwanese") when asked with identification, controversial or politically sensitive issues in a research interview. It is therefore inappropriate to interpret such information as people's true preferences.

The indicators of national identification used in this research may seem too simple. However, they can more or less assist the participants to focus and to convert the cultural or geographical identification into choices that will shape the future of the nation. Therefore, this information would be more meaningful for future policies.

Although the findings of this research cannot be applied to the entire youth population or the majority of voters in Taiwan, the thinking mentioned in these discussions is not completely unrepresentative either. The reasons behind of participants' changes in preferences are possibly quite representative of those who have volatile preferences when asked to make decision on the future of the nation. Voters who have volatile national identification, or belong to a heterogeneous political communication network tend to hide own preferences (such as No.1). Under the auspices of "choosing the lesser of two evils," participants tend to choose identification based on the rational logic of picking the option with the least costs (such as No.2 and No.6). Although the worst case for both options were presented in each telephone interview and focus group discussion to the interviewees, the fear caused by the negative impacts of "choose a new nation name" out-weighted the pressure caused by the negative impacts of "keep current name ROC."

These findings generate some new ideas for the discussion of deliberative democracy. In Taiwan the concept of deliberative democracy has been the subject of actual practice and experiments in the "public forum." This is usually used by the government to justify the legitimacy of policy. The present research echoes the concerns of recent scholars (e.g., Ho & McLeod, 2008): people with volatile identification will not only be influenced by those who have firm identification, but also be further lead by emotions due to the lack of personal belief.

This study also shows that it is difficult to make an important assumption concerning practices in the public forum: the participants in public forums are expected to have a similar level of knowledge and emotions towards the issues and the options. Even after I controlled for the participants' education level, they differed significantly regarding the perception of Taiwanese history, the importance of the civil responsibilities, and even the necessity of national defense in the face of PRC's military threat. This outcome was different from what I had expected before beginning this research—that the negative consequences associated with each option should be perceived as equally severe to the participants. Hence, future studies that aim to further the exploration of how national identification can be deliberated rationally should consider framing questions in terms of losing lives and property in both options. This will increase the difficulty level for participants when they are making decisions.

Last, some other constraints in this study are worth mentioning. First, it was difficult to select participants from the pool of survey participants. Few respondents in the telephone survey were willing or had time to come to the focus group. Therefore, it was not possible for us to balance the distribution of gender in the first place. As a result, it was difficult for us to judge if the inactivity of the only male participant (No.4) was due to the fact that he was the only male participant, or due to his own conservatively defensive attitude. It was equally difficult to judge if the horrifying image of war that was mentioned many times during the discussion would have greater weight for a female participant. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, nation name choice may not be the best indicator of one's national identification. The effectiveness of this measure still requires further verification, even though we did our best to exclude the possible influence of identification with Chinese culture in both the telephone survey and interviews by not mentioning the cultural relationship between Taiwan and China.

Thirdly, the design of questions of this choice questionnaire was fairly subjective and did not quite meet the method of Neijjens', which points out the possibilities of the consequences of every option (even although the possibilities of such can be quite subjective, too). Brain storming is suggested to check if participants with various backgrounds correctly understand the meaning and the consequences of each option.

Finally, I acknowledge that the second phase of the focus group in the research is not exactly what Fishkin defined as public forum. Although the stimulants and the balance points for two options were provided in the process, the materials prepared for discussion were limited; no paper information was provided before the discussion and there was no so called "experts" on site for consultation. As such, emotions may have played an excessively large role in the focus group. Future research, therefore, should explore the extent to which the influence of emotions identified in this research has the same effect on other focus groups.

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Notes

Note 1. The survey was done by Computer Assisted Telephone Interview System—CATI. Survey period was between January 13th and 16th, 6pm to 10pm. The interviews were eligible voters over 20 years old. Sample numbers were 1,120. Sampling error is 95%, 3% more or less under level of confidence. Samples are weighted distribution of sex, age, education level, and geography based on the data of national population.

Note 2. The interviewees were told that this was an anonymous research and therefore they could give answers freely. However for the sake of research, we still marked on their seat numbers so it is still traceable that which answer sheet was written by whom.

Note 3. It is worthwhile mentioning that No.4 had kept a very low profile throughout the group interaction and was not too active in discussion. Therefore his personal identification hardly made any influence through interpersonal interaction. This might further explain that originally unstable No.1 and No.2 were affected by No.3 and No.5.

Note 4. There was no request that focus group participants sign their names on the answer sheets. The purpose is letting participants feel comfortable to reveal their true preferences. I disclosed the procedure to the three interviewees during the in-depth interviews.

Table 1. Consistency (or inconsistency) of the participants' answers of the two questions of the "choice of nation name" in the telephone interview

| Question 1 | Question 2 | | | | N |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|------|
| | Choose new nation name | Keep current name ROC | Don't know | No comment | |
| Choose new nation name | 151 (61.38) | 22 (0.09) | 13 (0.05) | 60 (24.39) | 246 |
| Keep current name ROC | 14 (0.02) | 451 (73.93) | 23 (0.04) | 122 (0.20) | 610 |
| Don't know / No comments | 6 (0.02) | 25 (0.09) | 148 (0.56) | 85 (0.32) | 264 |
| N | 171 | 498 | 184 | 267 | 1120 |

Source: Collected by the author. The numbers in the parentheses are row percentages.

Table 2. Basic information of the participants of the focus group

| No. | Title | Age | Education | Place | Telephone interview 1 | Telephone interview 2 | Focus group discussion 1 | Focus group discussion 2 |
|-----|-----------|-----|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Ms. Huang | 30 | Graduate school student | Taipei County | N/A | ROC | Taiwan | ROC |
| 2 | Ms. Chang | 23 | University student | Taichung City | ROC | Taiwan | Taiwan | ROC |
| 3 | Ms. Wei | 26 | University graduate | Keelung City | ROC | ROC | ROC | ROC |
| 4 | Mr. Li | 20? | University student? | Chiayi County | N/A | Taiwan | Taiwan | Taiwan |
| 5 | Ms. Tseng | 45 | Graduate degree | Yunlin County | ROC | ROC | ROC | ROC |
| 6 | Ms. Yang | 32 | University degree | Kaohsiung County | ROC | ROC | ROC | Taiwan |

Source: Collected by the author

Remark: The interviewee No.4 never revealed his true age. We only know that he is a senior high school student. N/A means "Don't know" or "No comments." ROC means the choice of "keep the current name ROC;" Taiwan means "choose a new nation name."

Attachment 1. The first answer sheet of focus group discussion.

(This is the first answer sheet)

If you have the right, the only right, to decide, would you (1) prefer Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu to have our own nation name, such as Taiwan, Taiwan Nation, Formosa, or Taiwan Republic? Or (2) keep using the current nation name “ROC?” Please circle your choice and then turn the paper upside down

I would choose 1

I would choose 2

Attachment 2. The second answer sheet of focus group discussion.

(This is the second answer sheet)

After some discussion, you have heard some different opinions, if you have the right, the only right, to decide, would you (1) prefer Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu to have our own nation name, such as Taiwan, Taiwan Nation, Formosa, or Taiwan Republic? Or (2) best keep using the current nation name “ROC?” Please circle your choice and then turn the paper upside down

I would choose 1

I would choose 2