Current Psychology
https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-05166-z

Exploring ideological differences in Taiwanese perceptions of cross-strait relations

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Accepted: 22 August 2023

Abstract
This is an exploratory research that seeks to investigate how ideology predicts Taiwanese perceptions of cross-strait relations, including attitudes toward Taiwan independence, perceptions of mainland China and Chinese people, Chinese invasion of Taiwan, and Chinese democracy. We took an inductive approach to left-right differences in Taiwan to offer a more systematic empirical understanding of ideology beyond the West. To do so, we conducted a nationally representative survey among adult Taiwan citizens ($N = 1{,}350$). Findings revealed that those who identified with the Left (vs. Right) tended to demonstrate more negative perceptions of cross-strait relations. Specifically, the political left is more negative about the outlook of Chinese democracy while favoring Taiwan independence, than the political right. Furthermore, the political left perceives both mainland China and the Chinese people more negatively than the political right. These findings underscore the role of ideology for a full comprehension of cross-strait relations, as they indicated a fundamental difference between the political left vs. right in terms of perceptions of cross-strait relations. The present research extends existing political psychology literature on ideology and international relations, particularly in the East Asian context.

Keywords China · Cross-strait relations · Ideology · Perception · Taiwan

Introduction

In early August 2022, mainland China conducted the largest military exercises to date in the Taiwan Strait following U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan (Lee & Wu, 2022). China's reactions drew global headlines and renewed tension to the region, reminding people of the intractable conflict in the Taiwan Strait and how Taiwan was once named the most dangerous place on earth by the *Economist* ("The most," 2021). How do Taiwanese people perceive this prolonged tension and the imminent threat of a military conflict with mainland China? This is the central question this paper seeks to investigate. Particularly, we are interested in how ideology predicts Taiwanese perceptions of cross-strait relations. More specifically, how do people who identify as being on the right or left of the ideological spectrum differ regarding attitudes toward Taiwan independence, perceptions of mainland China and Chinese people, Chinese invasion of Taiwan, and Chinese democracy? To do so, we conducted a nationally representative survey among adult Taiwan citizens.

Cross-strait relations: a brief historical background

Following World War II, a civil war between the ruling Nationalist government (i.e., Kuomintang, KMT) and Chinese Communist Party ensued in China. As the Nationalist force lost grounds in the mainland, it retreated to the southeastern island of Taiwan in 1949. This marked the beginning of the over seventy years divide between the two sides. Taiwan has enjoyed *de facto* independence since 1949, however, mainland China continues to view the island as a province and has never relinquished to eventually "reunify" Taiwan with force. On the other hand, Taiwan has become

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Published online: 04 September 2023

a young democracy, holding its first presidential election in 1996. Since then, it has peacefully transferred power between the two major political parties, namely, pro-reunification KMT and pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

Ideology in East Asia

Research on political ideology in East Asia has been relatively rare, limiting our understanding of the nature and effect of ideology beyond the West. To begin a broader investigation, Beattie et al. (2021) conducted a survey in mainland China, where past research has found that the left-right ideological schema is recognized and applicable (Pan & Xu, 2018) in a Chinese cultural context with a vastly different political context. Their findings suggest that across cultures, psychological traits incline people toward certain of the ideological options available in their environments. Further research in East Asia, especially in a new democracy like Taiwan, is needed for exploring the predictability of ideology on political perceptions and attitudes beyond the West.

Ideology in Taiwan

In essence, ideology is one's political worldview; it concerns one's systems of beliefs about how the world does and should work. Ideology has long dominated Western politics, as the meanings of left and right gradually stabilized through a series of historical events over a long period of time (Jost et al., 2009). In the U.S., for example, "liberal" and "conservative" are synonyms for "left" and "right," respectively. As Jost et al. (2009) pointed out, despite imperfections in applying abstract ideological concepts, the majority of American citizens possess and utilize a subset of fundamental values or principles that can be seen as ideological, as they provide overarching stances to elucidate and validate various social and political conditions. In short, the correlation between the two core aspects of the left-right dimension can be attributed to historical factors. Over the past several centuries, Western societies have witnessed a growing emphasis on egalitarian principles concerning human rights, liberties, economic distribution, and the distribution of political power (Jost et al., 2009). As a result, these historical developments have linked the two dimensions together. Indeed, the left-right dimension often evolves into a "super-issue," gradually encompassing all significant matters within a polity (Inglehart, 1990).

Despite its Western origin, prior research has shown that the ideological spectrum of left-right is applicable (more or less) to the East Asian context. In mainland China, for example, past research has found that the left-right ideological schema is recognized and applicable (Beattie et al., 2021; Pan & Xu, 2018). Notwithstanding, research on political ideology in East Asia has been relatively scarce, limiting our understanding of the nature and effect of ideology beyond the West.

How does the left-right schema apply in the Taiwanese context? Prior research has indicated that liberalism/conservatism underlies Taiwanese politics although the terms liberal/left or conservative/right are rarely used in everyday language and political discourse (Hsu et al., 2019). In Hsu et al.'s (2019) study, they linked moral foundations to patterns of liberalism/conservatism within political groups and factions, highlighting the presence of bottom-up liberalism/conservatism as a psychological characteristic in Taiwan, suggesting that the bottom-up liberal/conservative tendency might be a culturally universal phenomenon (cf. Jost et al., 2009). Moreover, utilizing data from Taiwan's Election and Democratization Studies (TEDS) in 2001 and 2008, Qiu (2017) found that Taiwanese showed a more reliable understanding of left-right when provided with the cue of political party. Nonetheless, the *content* of Taiwanese ideological understanding remained unexplored (see also Jou, 2010). Does left-right carry the same connotations in a new democracy like Taiwan as in advanced Western democracies?

To address this gap in the literature, Chen and Beattie (in press) examined the meaning of these labels in Taiwan and found that a majority of the participants understood what left-right means, commonly associating the left with liberty/change, and the right conservatism/tradition. Moreover, participants attributed the labels to values and the issue of independence/reunification, while political parties provided an important cue to the meaning of ideology. The findings suggest that those who self-identified as left (compared to right) tended to affiliate with pan-green parties (e.g., DPP) and support Taiwan independence.

Ideology and cross-strait relations

Is the influence of these ideologies on worldviews significant in the context of cross-strait relations? Previous studies conducted within the Western cultural context have shown that an increaseddesire for security and certainty leads to conservative justifications of the status quo as fair and legitimate, including in the context of international relations (IR, Gries & Yam, 2020). For instance, support for foreign economic aid is lower among conservatives (Gries, 2014), and typically, they uphold the current economic system while downplaying the significance of climate change (Hennes et al., 2016). Preferences formore stringent foreign policies

aimed at asserting cultural dominance and ensuring national security are also linked to higherconservatism (Jost, 2021). For example, studies have shown that conservatives are more likely to oppose immigration compared to liberals (Stewart et al., 2019), and exhibithigher prejudice towards immigrants (Sears & Henry, 2003). Moreover, conservatives are especially responsive to threats and uncertainties that can influence their information processing in the realm of IR (Jost et al., 2017).

How does Taiwanese ideology predict perceptions of cross-strait relations? The association between Taiwanese ideology and views of cross-strait relations remains relatively underexplored. In previous studies on Taiwanese foreign relations attitudes, it was found that mainland China was the only country that elicited significantly different partisan views (Gries & Su, 2013). Specifically, supporters of the pan-blue coalition expressed significantly warmer feelings towards mainland China compared to pan-green supporters (Gries & Su, 2013). Similarly, Gries and Su (2013) found that the most significant partisan disparity in policy preferences was related to mainland China, where pan-green supporters favored a more stringent policy approach towards it. On the matter of independence or reunification, all Taiwanese, including pan-blue partisans, showed support for independence and opposition to reunification (Gries & Su, 2013): however, the distinction lies in the fact that green partisans expressed significantly stronger support for independence and opposition to reunification compared to blue supporters.In brief, the average Taiwanese did not aspire for reunification with mainland China. Although the majority,particularly green partisans, preferred *de jure* independence, they were content with *de facto* independence.

In terms of policy priorities, Taiwanese placed particular emphasis on: (1) trade and economics, and (2) respect and international space (Gries & Su, 2013). As Gries and Su (2013) indicated, there was no significant partisan divergence when it came to prioritizing economicsor trade, and only a marginal partisan discrepancy concerning the desire for respect and international autonomy. In sum, blue and green partisans exhibited significant differences in their support for independence and reunification. While party identificationexerted some influence on sentiments and foreign policy preferences towards other countries, its most substantial impact was on feelings and, particularly, policy preferences regarding mainland China.

Mapping partisanship onto the ideological dimension, as aforementioned, pan-green supporters have been found to be more likely to self-identify as left/liberal and to favor Taiwan independence (Chen & Beattie, in press; cf. Jou, 2010). Extrapolating those insights to views of cross-strait relations, it may be expected that the left (vs. right) should be more supportive of Taiwan independence. Overall, compared with the right, the left should demonstrate stronger negative perceptions of China, including higher perception of a potential Chinese invasion, unfavorable outlook for Chinese democracy, and stronger negative feelings toward China as well as its people.

Overview of the present research

The present research is exploratory in nature and seeks to address the central research question: How does Taiwanese ideology predict perceptions of cross-strait relations? We took an inductive approach to left-right differences in Taiwan to offer a more systematic understanding of ideology beyond the West. Our main aim is thus to provide a better empirical understanding of Taiwanese perceptions of cross-strait relations, in examining extant ideology theories (based largely on prior research in the Western cultural context). We tested the following main hypotheses:

H1 The Left (vs. Right) should perceive China more negatively.

H2 The Left (vs. Right) should demonstrate higher negative perceptions of the Chinese people.

H3 The Left (vs. Right) should perceive a less positive outlook for Chinese democracy.

H4 The Left (vs. Right) should perceive a higher potential of Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

H5 The Left (vs. Right) should be more supportive of Taiwan independence.

Method

Participants

A nationally representative sample of 1,350 Taiwanese adults in terms of age, gender, and region was recruited through national online panels by CINT between May and June 2022 (see Supplement 2 for Taiwan quotas). Each participant was compensated approximately USD $2 for their participation. Since ideology variables are core of this paper, we excluded 190 participants who indicated *"I don't know"* on either of the ideology items, giving us a valid sample of 1,160. Post-hoc sensitivity analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that a sample of 1,160 yielded adequate power (test family: t-tests, $\alpha = 0.05$, $1\text{-}\beta \geq 0.80$) to detect

small effects (d = 0.13). Participants' age ranged from 18 to 65 (M_{age} = 39.75, SD = 12.37). For other sample characteristics, please refer to Table 1.

Measures

Ideology

We adapted three items that are commonly used in the literature to measure ideology (Jost, 2021). Specifically, participants were asked to self-report their ideologyacross the domains of politics *("When it comes to politics, do you consider yourself more liberal or conservative?")*, economics (*"When it comes to the state's role in the economy, do you favor a high or low level of state regulation?"*), and culture (*"When it comes to cultural values, do you consider yourself more open to change, or more traditional?"*) on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores representing more conservative orientation.

Table 1 Sample Characteristics (N = 1,160)

Variable	Category	N (%)
Gender	Male	634 (54.66)
	Female	519 (44.74)
	Other	7 (0.60)
Education	Primary school	2 (0.17)
	Junior high school	21 (1.81)
	High school/vocational	173 (14.91)
	Technical college	133 (11.47)
	University	628 (54.14)
	Postgraduate	203 (17.50)
SES	Lower	80 (6.90)
	Lower middle	243 (20.95)
	Middle	600 (51.72)
	Upper middle	201 (17.33)
	Upper	36 (3.10)
Voting intention	Democratic Progressive Party	297 (25.60)
	Chinese Nationalist Party	220 (18.97)
	Taiwan People's Party	162 (13.97)
	New Power Party	34 (2.93)
	Taiwan Statebuilding Party	17 (1.47)
	Other (no preference, non-voters)	430 (37.07)
Ethnicity	Taiwanese Minan	813 (70.09)
	Taiwanese Hakka	160 (13.79)
	Mainlander	91 (7.84)
	Aboriginal	20 (1.72)
	Other/Mixed	54 (4.65)
	Recent migrant	22 (1.89)
Residence	North	614 (52.93)
	Central	221 (19.05)
	South	301 (25.95)
	East	20 (1.72)
	Offshore	4 (0.34)

Perception of Mainland China

Perception of China was measured with nine items in three domains: economics (trade with China, Chinese investments, Chinese technology, Belt and Road Initiative, China's impact on the global natural environment), political (China's rise as a major power, China's military power), and cultural (China's influence on democracy in other countries, promotion of Chinese culture and language). Sample items include "trade with China" (economics), "China's rise as a major power" (political), and "promotion of Chinese culture and language" (cultural). Participants were asked to indicate how positively or negatively they feel about various issues on a scale of 0 (*cold/negative)* to 100 (*warm/positive*). Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions of China.

Perception of Chinese people

In order to obtain more nuanced answers, we measured the perception of Chinese people with five items, distinguishing between five groups of Chinese people: PRC Chinese students (in TW), PRC Chinese politicians, PRC Chinese tourists (in TW), PRC Chinese spouses (in TW), PRC Chinese dissidents. Participants were asked to indicate how positively or negatively they feel about those groups of people on a scale of 0 (*cold/negative)* to 100 (*warm/positive*). Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions of the Chinese people.

Perception of probability of Chinese invasion

One item was used to measure the perception of a cross-strait military conflict, *"In your opinion, how likely is a Chinese invasion of Taiwan in the next 10 years?"* Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*), with higher scores indicating higher perception of a military conflict across the strait.

Perception of Chinese democracy

One item was used to measure the perception of Chinese democracy, *"Do you believe that China will become democratic one day?"* Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (*definitely no*) to 7 (*definitely yes*), with higher scores indicating more favorable perception of a democratic China.

Stance on independence/reunification

To provide a more nuanced understanding, we measured stance on independence/reunification with two items: (1) *"in the current political reality of cross-strait relations,"* and (2) *"if you could choose freely without any repercussions."* Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*strong*

reunification) to 7 (*strong independence*), with higher scores indicating stronger support for Taiwan independence.

National identification

National identification was measured with three items (Huang, 2007): *"I feel a bond with Taiwanese people," "I am glad to be Taiwanese,"* and *"The fact that I am Taiwanese is an important part of my identity"*. Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating higher Taiwanese identification.

Party affiliation

Participants were asked to report their party affiliation on a scale from 1 (*deep green*) to 7 (*deep blue*).

Voting intention

Participants were asked, *"If there were parliamentary elections this weekend, which party would you vote for?"*

Procedure

Data for this research have been obtained from the Sinophone Borderlands Indo-Pacific Survey, part of the bigger Sinophone Borderlands Survey, which investigated global views of China and other issues through a series of large-scale representative surveys of public opinion in multiple parts of the world. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Palacký University Olomouc under ref. no. 03/2022.

The survey was initially developed in English and later translated into Mandarin by two native-speaking researchers by parallel translation method (Harkness et al., 2004). The survey was administered online in Mandarin.Each participant provided written consent before participating online, after which they responded to approximately 60 questions. All questions were randomized to minimize order effect (see Supplement 1 for the entire survey; other supplementary materials are available at: https://osf.io/wdn69/). Only a subset of the data related to the goals of the current paper is reported in this research (see Measures).

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of the Ideology Variables

Ideology dimension	Descriptives		Correlations (r_s)		
	Mean	SD	1. Political	2. Economic	3. Cultural
1. Political	3.55	1.60	1		
2. Economic	4.27	1.50	0.09**	1	
3. Cultural	3.56	1.60	0.42***	0.15***	1
Ideology (mean of 1. and 3.)	3.56	1.35			

Note: $p < 0.05$ (*), $p < 0.01$ (**), $p < 0.001$ (***)

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations of ideology variables

Descriptive statistics of ideology variables are reported in Table 2. Upon Spearman correlation analysis between the three ideology items, we found that the economic dimension had low correlation coefficients with the political and cultural dimensions, indicating its negligible relationship with the two other variables. Therefore, we removed it from further analysis and computed the mean ideology score based on political and cultural dimension that showed a significant moderate correlation of 0.42 (Bollen & Lennox, 1991).

Relationship between ideology and other variables

To explore the relationship between other variables and ideology we conducted a linear regression with ideology as dependent variable and other variables with a possible effect of ideology as predictors. In the first step, we created a categorical variable for age (18–25, …, 61–65; by 5 years). Furthermore, we calculated a mean national identity score from the three items of the scale.

As predictors, we included sociodemographic variables gender, age (categorical), education, SES, region, and ethnic identity, supplemented by national identification, voting intention and party affiliation. The model with all predictors was significant ($F(38, 1089) = 4.386$, $p < 0.001$), but relatively weak, explaining only 13.27% (multiple R^2), resp. 10.25% (adjusted R^2) of the variance of the dependent variable. At the level of individual predictors, we were only interested in variables that explained at least 1% of variance of dependent variable and variable levels with $\Pr(>|t|)$ lower than 0.001 (critical value after Bonferroni correction was 0.001). Out of all the sociodemographic variables, only SES seems to explain some variance of ideology (1.60% of explained variance). Specifically, results showed that the upper class (M = 4.38, SD = 1.92) was significantly more on the Right than other classes (means between 3.31 of lower class and 3.67 of upper middle class).

The other two variables that predicted ideology were national identification ($p < 0.001$, 1.69% of explained variance) and party affiliation ($p < 0.001$, 2.50% of explained variance). The results indicate that the stronger participants' identification as Taiwanese, the less they placed themselves on the Right, and the more "deep blue" they felt the more they placed themselves on the Right (see Supplement 3).

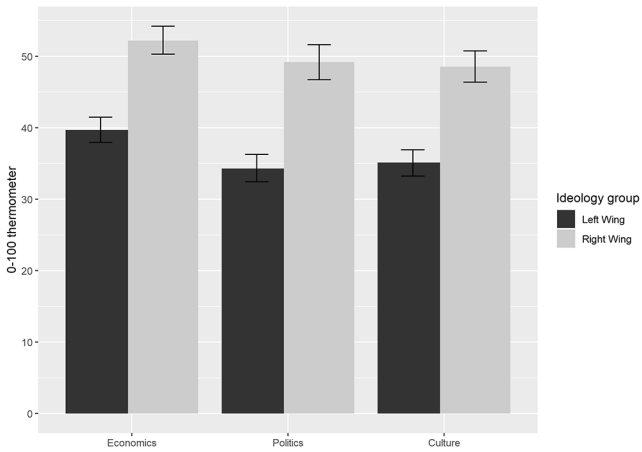

Fig. 1 Perception of China by ideology

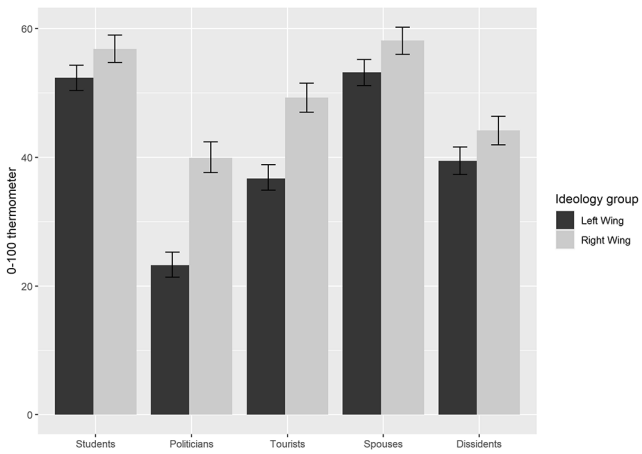

Fig. 2 Perception of chinese by ideology

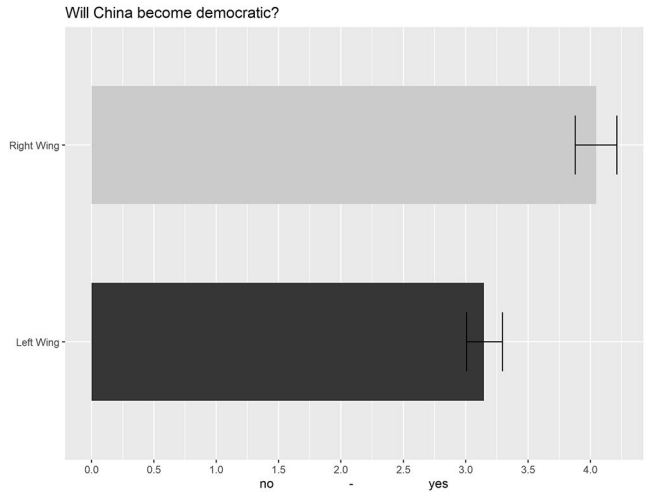

Fig. 3 Perception of chinese democracy by ideology

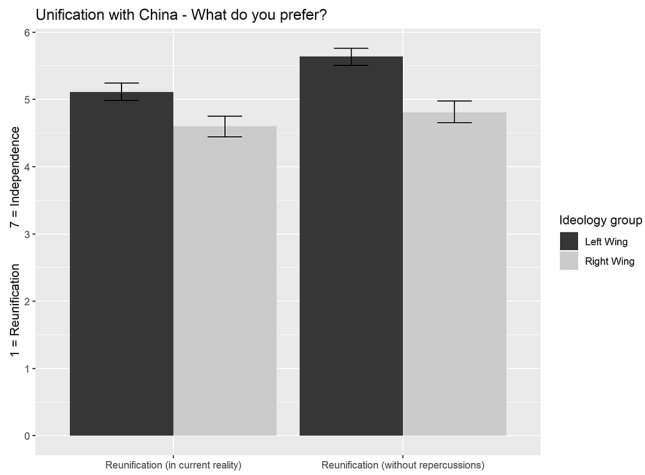

Fig. 4 Stance on Independence/Reunification

Hypotheses testing

Subsequently, we grouped participants with average ideology scores below the mean as "Left" and those above, as "Right" in the following analyses. To test H1-H5, we conducted a series of independent samples *t* tests. Results revealed participants who were on the Right (vs. Left) reported significantly more favorable perceptions of mainland China in the economic ($t(1158) = -8.789$, $p =$, 95% CI [-15.296, -9.713]), political ($t(1158) = -9.409$, $p =$, 95% CI [-17.984, -11.778]), and cultural ($t(1158) = -9.161$, $p =$, 95% CI [-16.301, -10.550]) domains, supporting H1 (please see Fig. 1).

Similarly, as Fig. 2 shows, mainland Chinese across the board were perceived as significantly more favorable by those who identified as Right (vs. Left), supporting H2: students ($t(1158) = -3.007$, $p =$, 95% CI [-7.406, -1.558]), politicians ($t(1158) = -10.644$, $p =$, 95% CI [-19.721, -13.582]), tourists ($t(1158) = -8.043$, $p =$, 95% CI [-15.613, -9.489]), spouse ($t(1158) = -3.301$, $p =$, 95% CI [-7.894, -2.009]), dissidents ($t(1158) = -2.951$, $p =$, 95% CI [-7.915, -1.593]).

As expected (H3), the Right (vs. Left) demonstrated a significant positive perception of the outlook of Chinese democracy ($t(1158) = -8.078$, $p =$, 95% CI [-1.119, -0.682], please refer to Fig. 3). There was no significant difference between the two camps pertaining to the perception of conflict, thus H4 was not supported. With ($t(1158) = 5.116$, $p =$, 95% CI [0.315, 0.708]) or without ($t(1158) = 7.593$, $p =$, 95% CI [0.616, 1.045]) repercussion, those on the Left (vs. Right) were more in favor of Taiwan independence, supporting H5 (please refer to Fig. 4).

Discussion

The current exploratory study sought to investigate the association between Taiwanese ideology and perceptions of cross-strait relations. Findings revealed that, overall, those who identified with the left (vs. right) tended to demonstrate more negative perceptions of cross-strait relations. Specifically, the political left is more negative about the outlook of Chinese democracy while favoring Taiwan independence, than the political right. Furthermore, the political left perceives both mainland China and the Chinese people more negatively than the political right. These findings underscore the role of ideology for a full comprehension of cross-strait relations, as theyrevealed a profound and fundamental disparity between the political left and right regarding perceptions of cross-strait relations.

The only hypothesis that was not supported was H4, namely, those on the Right and Left share a similar perception of cross-strait military conflict. Intriguingly, approximately half of the participants self-identified as being in the Center, while results pointed to a Center-to-Right ideological landscape. We suspect that this might be a methodological issue, as the cursor was automatically placed in the center, resulting in careless responses (Pokropek et al., 2023). More importantly, however, we believe this reflects the fact that due to heightened tension across the Taiwan Strait of recent, there appears to be a strong perception of potential conflict between the two sides which transcends political lines. This is evident also from the survey item included in this research on the likelihood of a Chinese invasion on Taiwan in the next decade, with almost 61% of Taiwanese respondents envisioning such a possibility, which is a percentage exceeding any single party affiliation, be it the KMT or DPP. While this question was administered before Pelosi's visit, polls conducted immediately after her visit confirm this result, with 64% of the respondents believing China would launch a military attack on Taiwan "soon" or "sometime" ("Polling", 2022).

Why did the economic dimension correlate poorly with the other two dimensions? We speculate that it might be due to item wording, as the question was stated "When it comes to the state's role in *economic development*, do you favor a high or low level of state regulation?" Traditionally, the government in Taiwan has played a significant role in the country's economic development in leading the country to become one of the Four Asian Tigers in the 1970s-1990s (Jia & Chao, 2016). On the other hand, there is evidence that cultural and economic conservatism may be different in terms of psychological antecedents (Thorisdottir et al., 2007). For instance, the European context differs significantly from the American context, given its history of socialist traditions. Indeed, people may differ ideologically on social, fiscal, or military issues (Fessler et al., 2017). Some have suggested that personal needs for security (and certainty) should be linked to social conservatism while not necessarily aligning with economic conservatism (Johnston, 2013; Malka & Soto, 2015), since economic issues lack the same intrinsic symbolic significance as social concerns, individuals with a stronger need for security may find themselves drawn towards governmental economic regulations and safeguards, aiming to mitigate risks stemming from the principles of free-market capitalism (Federico & Malka, 2018). In a recent survey encompassing 99 nations, it was discovered that culturally and economically right-wing inclinations exhibited a notable tendency to be inversely correlated, implying distinct psychological roots for right-wing and left-wing ideologies within these diverse domains (Malka et al., 2019). We found the results particularly intriguing and are currently conducting further research in order to offer a more systematic review of the correlation between the three ideological dimensions (political, economic, and social/cultural) across the East Asian context.

Notably, recent research has revealed the increasing significance of moderate or nonpartisan voters in Taiwanese politics, including in the realm of cross-strait relations. Specifically, it is argued that over time, the cross-strait stance among Taiwanese voters displays a consistent inverted U-shaped pattern (Wang, 2019), attributed to the fact that the majority of nonpartisan individuals, often overlooked in polarization studies, tend to hold moderate views. Wang (2019) pointed out, a sharp increase of nonpartisan individuals (formerly identified as pan-blue) since 2014, coupled with the increased influence of highly extreme pan-blue voters, has led to a resurgence of polarization within partisan groups. This is reflected in the upcoming presidential election in 2024, with the three candidates perceived as "green," "blue," and "moderate" (Hioe, 2023). Given our finding that a considerable proportion of participants identified as moderate, what role the moderates play in the evolving Taiwanese politics and cross-strait relations presents an intriguing subject for future investigation.

The present research extends extant political psychology literature on ideology and international relations, particularly in the East Asian context. Research on political ideology in East Asia has been relatively rare, limiting our understanding of the nature and effect of ideology beyond the West, including its association with IR. Gries and Yam (2020) called for an "end to the beginning" of the study of the relationship between ideology and IR. As they pointed out, in general, the literature exhibits a U.S. and Eurocentric focus, with limited exploration of ideology beyond Western contexts. Furthermore, there is even less research on the correlation between ideology and IR outside the Western sphere. Beyond the context of global geopolitics that underlies cross-strait relations, the exploration of ideology directs our attention to the individual level, enabling an investigation into the motives behind our varied

experiences and desires for different worlds, which in turn contribute to international conflicts.

In addition, at the practical level, findings of this research is of particular significance since the state of cross-strait relations has implications beyond the immediate region. Indeed, as Allison (2022) pointed out, Taiwan represents the potential flashpoint that could trigger a major conflict between the U.S. and China, the two most powerful countries in the world. Our current investigation provides an initial lens to the understanding of how ideology associates with Taiwanese perceptions of cross-strait relations.

In summary, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that ideology plays a pivotal role in conflicts (Gutierrez & Wood, 2014; Harel et al., 2020; Maynard, 2019). Recently, for instance, Harel et al. (2020) proposed a theoretical framework highlighting a potential reciprocal relationship between intractable intergroup conflicts and intragroup ideological polarization: external intergroup conflict may intensify intragroup ideological polarization, and conversely, intragroup ideological polarization can also reinforce external intergroup conflict. However, most empirical research has been based on the Western context. We hope that this initial investigation into Taiwanese perceptions of cross-strait relations extends prior research by advancing the understanding of intractable conflicts through an ideological lens in a non-Western context. Overall, the current findings shed light on the political psychology of ideology beyond the West, which offersvaluable theoretical contributions to the existing literature and provides practical guidance for researchers seeking to understand the ideological landscape of emerging democracies, such as Taiwan.

Limitations and future directions

Similar to any study, the present research has several limitations, which present promising opportunities for future investigations. First, the current study utilized an online survey thus the data are correlational in nature. Future research should seek to employ multiple methodologies to see whether the results could be replicated. Second, as Gries and Yam (2020) indicated, future research should seek to reverse the link between ideology and IR by examining the effects of IR on individual-level ideologies. For example, how the current cross-strait crisis impacts Taiwanese ideological orientation by testing the "conservative shift" hypothesis, which argues that threatening events can lead people to become more ideologically conservative as a way to cope with anxiety and insecurity (Jost et al., 2017). Third, while the current study took a more cognitive approach by focusing on ideology, the role of emotion (e.g., anger) in motivating various perceptions of cross-strait relations remains a fascinating topic for future research.

Conclusion

In the face of a threat, like the one across the Taiwan Strait, perhaps knowledge is the best defense. We hope that this initial investigation of the association between ideology and perceptions of cross-strait relations shed some light on the understanding of the motivations underlying intractable conflict. In addition to enhancing mutual understanding and formulating policies aiming at mitigating tension, the ultimate goal is to prevent conflict and foster peace.

Author contributions Conceptualization: Rong Chen, Kristína Kironská; Data curation: Jiří Čeněk; Formal Analysis: Jiří Čeněk; Funding acquisition: Kristína Kironská; Investigation: Rong Chen, Kristína Kironská; Methodology: all authors; Writing – original draft: Rong Chen, Jiří Čeněk; Writing – review & editing: All authors.

Funding Open access funding provided by SCELC, Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium. This work was supported by the European Regional Development Fund – Project "Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges" CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.

Data Availability All materials and data for this research are available at the Open Science Framework under the following link (anonymous): https://osf.io/wdn69/?view_only=c925402b4d9245a6826329f034d82773

Declarations

Conflict of interest All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Research ethics This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Research Ethics Panel of Palacký University Olomouc under Ref. No.: 03/2022 from 6 to 2022. No identifying information about participants was collected, nor used in this article. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study (by clicking on the "*Agree with participation*" button at the beginning of the online questionnaire).

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