

Korean Wave Issue as A Soft Power Strategy in Taiwanese Presidential Election 2016

Raaf Bezkarannu

International Relations Master Programme, Faculty of Social and Political Studies,
Universitas Indonesia

E-mail: raaf.bezkarannu@ui.ac.id

Ani Widayani Soetjipto

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Studies,
Universitas Indonesia

E-mail: anisoetjipto@gmail.com

Abstract

Both state and non-state actors need the power to influence others to achieve their desired goals. Soft power is often used by state or non-state actors to attract the attention of others without using coercive actions to achieve the desired goals. This strategy has been widely used in various cases, including in the issue of China and Taiwan, especially in the "Taiwan Flag" incident involving Tzuyu, a K-Pop artist who declared herself a Taiwanese and carried the Taiwan flag on a South Korean television program. This incident was later brought up by Tsai Ing-wen, a politician from Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to cooperate with the Taiwanese people against China in the 2016 Taiwan Presidential Election. This article will discuss how Tsai Ing-wen and the people of Taiwan used Korean wave as a soft power strategy in the 2016 Taiwan Presidential Election to "fight" against China. Those gave positive results due to the similarity of political values believed by Taiwan and carried by the Korean wave, as well as the goals shared by Tsai Ing-wen and people of Taiwan, thereby defeated the pro-China Kuomintang (KMT) party in the election.

Keywords: *Soft Power, Taiwan, China, Korean Wave, Taiwan Presidential Election 2016, Taiwan Flag Incident*

Abstrak

Baik aktor negara maupun non-negara memerlukan kekuatan untuk mempengaruhi pihak lain agar tujuan yang diinginkan dapat tercapai. Salah satunya adalah soft power yang mengedepankan upaya menarik perhatian pihak lain tanpa menggunakan tindakan koersif untuk mencapai tujuan yang diinginkan. Implementasi strategi tersebut telah banyak dimanfaatkan dalam berbagai kasus, salah satunya dalam isu China dan Taiwan dalam the "Waving Taiwan Flag" incident yang melibatkan Tzuyu yang merupakan artis K-Pop yang mendeklarasikan diri sebagai warga negara Taiwan serta membawa bendera Taiwan dalam salah satu program televisi di Korea Selatan. Insiden tersebut kemudian diangkat oleh Tsai Ing-wen, seorang politisi dari Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) untuk bekerja sama dengan masyarakat Taiwan untuk melawan China dalam Taiwan Presidential Election 2016. Artikel ini membahas bagaimana Tsai Ing-wen dan masyarakat Taiwan memanfaatkan isu Korean wave sebagai strategi soft power dalam Taiwan Presidential Election 2016 untuk "melawan" kampanye pro China yang disuarakan oleh KMT. Implementasi isu Korean wave sebagai strategi soft power dalam Taiwan Presidential Election 2016 memberikan hasil positif dan ikut mempengaruhi kemenangan Tsai Ing-wen dalam pemilu di Taiwan di tahun 2016.

Kata Kunci: *Soft Power, Taiwan, China, Korean Wave, Pemilu Presiden Taiwan 2016, Insiden Bendera Taiwan*

INTRODUCTION

Power to influence the targeted parties is crucial factors that must be considered by state and non-state actors to accomplish their desired goals. The power is exerted in either hard power which consists of coercive, threatening actions (sticks) and lure or payment (carrots), or soft power which derived from attraction (Suryani, 2015). As a form of power, soft power emerges to exert relatively huge impact when harnessed as a strategy in international political practices (Sendow et al., 2019).

Soft power itself is a popular concept, particularly in the context of foreign policy or public diplomacy (Hahm & Song, 2021). Introduced by Joseph Nye, soft power is kind of measures asserted by a party to gain its intended purposes by attracting the attention of other parties without using coercive actions (Nye, 2004). Soft power strategies have been practiced in countries around the globe to solve multifarious issues, including the relation between China and Taiwan.

Taiwan's soft power strategies, as delivered by the Vice President of Taiwan Annette Lu, have their foundation on five core values: human rights, democracy, peace, love, and cutting-edge technology. In addition, Lee (2005) mentions three underpinning aspects of Taiwan's soft power strategy: Taiwanese willpower to protect their country, civilian-based defense, and Taiwan's close relations with the US and Japan. These foundations are resulted from the economic development and the transitioning government system from authoritarian to democracy which started three decades ago (Lee, 2005). In addition, this strategy is implemented in order that Taiwan gain respects as well as support from other nations considering the fact that Taiwan does not have any

diplomatic relations with other countries in the world (Hoadley, 2013).

On the other hand, China also exerted soft power strategies, particularly in their relations with Taiwan. In fact, Taiwan is one of the determining factors of China's soft power. Issues surrounding Taiwan are strategic issues for China, and therefore incorporated into many agenda of China's international relations (deLisle, 2010). China's soft power that is campaigned in Chinese public diplomacy aims to deliver the narratives of Chinese history to the world, disseminate Chinese government policies and perspectives, and promote Chinese culture to international community. Furthermore, Chinese diplomacy seeks to fight against foreign propaganda which antagonize China to counterattack Taiwan's effort for independence and promote unification, and to spread foreign policies that are supportive and in favor of China (Ding, 2014). The ultimate power of the contemporary strategy of soft power in China is mainly derived from two key sources: 1) the success of rapid and sustainable economic development in China, and 2) China's foreign policy that is based upon the principle of respect towards the sovereignty of other countries (deLisle, 2010). In addition to this, China's effort to promote its nation through diplomacy and culture dissemination has made some countries prefer nurturing bilateral relationship with China to Taiwan (Courmont & Delhalle, 2022).

Nevertheless, there was an incident of "Waving Taiwan Flag" or "Tzuyu Scandal" between 2015 and 2016 (Ahn & Lin, 2019), which involved Chou Tzu-yu or Tzuyu, a Taiwanese female singer and a member of South Korean girlband TWICE. In an episode of reality show *My Little Television* MBC South Korea, Tzuyu introduced herself as a citizen of Taiwan and brought Taiwan

national flag, waving it to the audience. As a result, she was criticized by Huang An, a Taiwanese artist and an anti-democracy activist, who then labelled Tzuyu as a pro-democracy activist.

This criticism sparked rage among people in China who then decided to collectively boycott TWICE, JYP Entertainment, and all artists managed by the JYP agency (Ahn & Lin, 2019; Shim, 2018). In order to address this, JYP Entertainment would like to regained its goodwill by releasing Tzuyu's apology video for the incident through their official channel on YouTube and Weibo, stating that there is only one China and that she is proud to be a citizen of China. In turn, this statement enraged Taiwanese people towards Chinese government and netizens, blaming the Taiwanese politicians for their failure to protect one of their citizens who were publicly ashamed for proudly expressing her identity as a Taiwanese to the world (Shim, 2018).

This incident also affected the campaign of Taiwanese Presidential Election 2016, particularly toward Tsai Ing-wen and her Taiwan pro-independence political party Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) that had been strongly criticizing China. On the other hand, Tzuyu scandal brought advantage to one of the candidates of Taiwan's 2016 President, Tsai Ing-wen who managed to turn back the uproar into an opportunity to support Tzuyu while gaining support from who advocated anti-China (Shim, 2018). The contributing factors to the winning of Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan's 2016 Presidential Election included the Sunflower Movement, or the grassroots social movement involving university students and actors of civil society, which was dubbed "the rise of civilians in Taiwan" and "the third political power" in Taiwan politics which raised protests against the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement

(CSSTA) between China and Taiwan to KMT political party (Rowen, 2015; Schneider, 2019).

There have been numerous factors and analysis of Tsai Ing-wen's victory in 2016 in addition to the anti-China public sentiment fueled by the Tzuyu scandal and the rise of civilians to fight against China. Yeoh (2016) reported that the victory of Tsai Ing-wen was also attributed to the reinforced Taiwanese identity amid the deepening economic integrity between Mainland China and Taiwan. Waving Taiwan Flag incident (Tzuyu scandal) implied the connection between Korean wave or hallyu, a soft-power, cultural strategy of South Korea which also includes music, film, and other form of entertainment industry to attract international audience and foreign countries (Sendow et al., 2019; Suryani, 2015). This strategy transcends the regular political dimensions and goes beyond the geographical territory of South Korea, which potentially impact its multilateral relationship.

The Korean wave issues have been subjected to general observations, taking the viewpoint of South Korea as the users of the soft power strategy. Nevertheless, the Korean wave issue exerted in China-Taiwan bilateral relation, especially in the event of Taiwan Presidential Election 2016 has not been investigated extensively and intensively. This article will discuss how Korean wave was harnessed in imposing soft power strategy in Taiwan Presidential Election 2016, and the repercussions which include the bilateral relationship between China and Taiwan.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPT

The first underpinning theory of this study is soft power. According to Nye (2004), soft power is the capability of a party to achieved something or goals by

attracting attention from other parties, rather than advocating coercive actions or economic sanction. Soft power is based on the ability to form preferences favored by the other parties in order to achieve the desired goals in political realm, especially through partnership instead of violence. This partnership is established from two-way attraction based on mutual values and justice, as well as the obligation to contribute to accomplishing the said values. The soft power of a country is derived from three sources: **culture, political values, and foreign policies** (Nye, 2004).

Further, Tan (2022) stated that soft power utilizes cultural and economic aspects to generate power to gain support from both foreign government and international organizations, even to make these stakeholders act in accordance with the interests of the power-exerting country without the use of military forces (Tan, 2022). In its implementation, soft power can be exercised only if it is known by other parties, and the targeted parties must share equal determination to strengthen each other in order to accomplish mutual goals. When one country is still eager to dominate the other through coercive approach, the soft power strategy is nullified (Yani & Lusiana, 2018). In addition, the said other parties like small countries and non-state actors can harness this soft-power strategy as an effort to actualize goals that are difficult to achieve using hard power strategy. There has been more ease to implement soft power with the current development of information and communication technology (Lee, 2005).

The second underpinning concept in this study is the Korean Wave. According to Korea Tourism Organization, Korean Wave is a popular phenomenon of popular Korean culture in foreign countries (Bae et al., 2017). At the end of 1990s, Korean cultural industries started to be cultivated

to accommodate multiple interests in economy, politics, or culture, which are perceived by the Korean government as a soft power instrument aiming to showcase Korean dynamics (Sitompul, 2020). The products of Korean wave may include but not limited to drama series, movies, and pop music (Yang, 2012).

RESEACRH METHOD

This research was conducted in a qualitative method. Qualitative approach aims to gain understanding of a particular phenomenon currently happening and is experienced by the research subjects holistically which encompasses behavior, perceptions, motivation, or actions, and then describe these experiences into narratives in a language of specific scientific context using scientific methods (Moleong, 2017). This study was conducted to unravel the Waving Taiwan Flag incident and analyze the process of emotional transformation of Taiwan public towards triggering political identity in Taiwan Presidential Election 2016.

The collecting data is using documentation method which gathered data in form of records, transcripts, books, newspaper, magazines, inscription, minutes of meeting, agenda, and other resources (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015). In this study, the sources of data were books, scholarly journal articles, and news items which contained information related to the chronological narratives of the Waving Taiwan Flag incident, the Taiwanese public reactions of the incident, and the impact on the implementation of Taiwan Presidential Election 2016.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chou Tzu-yu, or popularly known for her stage name Tzuyu, is a Taiwanese member of TWICE K-Pop girl band under the management of JYP Entertainment in South

Korea. Starting their debut in 2015, TWICE is a popular, nine-personnel girl band in South Korea (TIME, 2019). The Waving Taiwan Flag incident has sparked mixed reactions among people in China. The repercussions of this incidence included Huawei's terminating endorsement contract with Tzuyu, and even worse, a public boycott was imposed to all agenda and activities of Tzuyu, TWICE, and all artists under the management of JYP Entertainment that had been organized in China, such as Anhui Spring Festival (Reitov & Nagell, 2017). In addition, some netizens in China did not like Tzuyu because she is a Taiwanese who generates money in China (The Korea Times, 2016).

In response to this incidence and mixed reactions elicited from the public, the founder of JYP Entertainment, Park Jin-Young, expressed his public apology on the official channel of JYP Entertainment in Weibo for being culturally insensitive and endangering multilateral geopolitical conditions in the area (Ahn & Lin, 2019). The excerpt of his public apology is as follow: "First, I would like to sincerely apologize to the Chinese fans who felt hurt. ... We will do our best to make sure this doesn't happen again." (Shim, 2018).

Additionally, Park showed his support to One China Policy (QUARTZ, 2016). Meanwhile, Tzuyu made a clarification statement and released a video of her public apology to the Chinese community through the official channel of JYP Entertainment in YouTube China on 15 January 2016 (Ahn & Lin, 2019). The English translation of her statement (originally expressed in Korean) is below:

"Hello. I am Chou Tzuyu. I am sorry. I should have apologized earlier. [...] There is only one China. The two sides of the Taiwan Strait are one. I have always considered myself to be Chinese and felt proud of this. As a Chinese person, I feel very, very sorry and guilty that

my inappropriate words and actions while abroad harmed my company [JYP] and the feelings of netizens on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. I've decided to terminate of all my activities in China and seriously reflect on this. Once again, I am very sorry." (Ahn & Lin, 2019).

Upon the release of Tzuyu public apology video, the Taiwanese people condemn the video and perceived it as a violation of human rights because they suspected an attempt of solicitation towards Tzuyu during the making of the video. This public anger was targeting multiple stakeholders including the Chinese government and netizens, and Taiwanese politicians who were considered failed to protect Tzuyu, a Taiwanese citizen (Shim, 2018). The repercussion of this video was the reemerging shame and disappointment of Taiwanese community who considered Taiwan as a sovereign country but whose existence and official status as an established countries has been denied by the United Nations and many international organizations. Even worse, the fact that the apology video was released only one day prior to Taiwan Presidential Election 2016 has made Taiwanese people felt insulted (Xie et al., 2018).

Public anger also spilled over to the users of PTT, a renowned platform for online discussion in Taiwan established in 1990. PTT users were angry with Tzuyu's apology video, so they posted various comments which mainly highlighted their opinions that pro-China approach by Ma Ying-jeou from the nationalist pro-China party Kuomintang (KMT) was a mistake, and that it revealed the weakness of Taiwanese Government to such extent that jeopardizing Taiwanese sovereignty in international world. These users of PTT forum were lashing insults to KMT Party, calling it names like *Goumindang* (the dog people's party) or *lesedang* (the trash

party). Taiwanese netizens also voiced their aggravation to circulating assumptions that the Taiwan Waving Flag incidents is a form of independence movement intended to attack and undermine China by generalizing China as a homogenous group which constantly threatening Taiwan sovereignty, either verbally or diplomatically (Ahn & Lin, 2019).

The crucial moment in Taiwan politics, namely the Taiwan Presidential Election 2016 was turned into an event in which Taiwanese people were demanding justice over the insults targeting Taiwan and its people. During this event, the Taiwanese people, especially the younger generation, demonstrated political attitude with a tendency to support Taiwan and advocate anti-China. This incidence was perceived as China's exerting efforts to limit Taiwan's access and existence in international world, which brought disgrace to Taiwan and further encouraged Taiwanese people to be more decisive in their fighting against China (Jacob, 2016). One of the examples of these public indignation was expressed by a Facebook user named Chung Nian-huang in a post as follows:

"If someone forces you to forget something you shouldn't forget, you should revolt and fight... Those of you who haven't voted yet, use your vote to fight back. Today is D-Day." (BBC, 2016).

This public uproar of Taiwanese people as a response to the Waving Taiwan Flag issue is harnessed by Tsai Ing-wen, one of the candidates of Taiwan President in 2016 Election, as a strategy to win the election. The Korean wave issue was represented by K-Pop or popular music from South Korea through Tzuyu. As a cultural product, K-Pop is considered successful in promoting values of democracy to the global community, and it is demonstrated by the

high-level of participation among the members of K-Pop community, the inclusiveness of K-Pop community, and the liberate characters of both K-Pop members and community (Akçevin, 2021).

Similar to the concept of soft power introduced by Nye (2004), Tsai Ing-wen's strategy in capturing the opportune moments by directing public indignation to support his cause in the presidential election has granted him the luxury of gaining more favor and support from the public community across Taiwan. It is due to the analogous Korean wave (K-Pop) values with Taiwanese political values in terms of democracy and liberty, which enable these two concepts to interfuse and resist the propaganda efforts exerted by China through the incidence.

This soft power strategy turned out to be fruitful as the results of Taiwan Presidential Election 2016 saw a dramatic change in the total count obtained by the president candidates. Tsai Ing-wen, the candidate from DPP Party gained 3.66% extra votes compared to Eric Chu, the candidate from KMT Party who lost around 2.62% of the votes in the period between 4 November 2015 and 16 January 2016 (Xie et al., 2018). This movement was captured in the vote share graphic of both candidates of Taiwan 2016 President as illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1: Graphic of the Dynamics of Vote Share for Tsai Ing-wen



(Source: Xie et al., 2018)

Figure 2: Graphic of the Dynamics of Vote Share for Eric Chu



(Source: Xie et al., 2018)

In addition, Tsai Ing-wen also dedicated his victory to Tzuyu to demonstrate his support of the incidence, and he stated that not a single Taiwanese citizen would ever apologize for revealing their identity as a Taiwanese during his presidency (Yeoh, 2016). It proved the statement of Yani and Lusiana (2018) that the strong determination of Tsai Ing-wen and Taiwanese people to defend their fellow Taiwanese citizen has been the vital driving factor to the successful exertion of soft power strategy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that the Korean wave issue harnessed through the “Waving Taiwan Flag” incident which involved a Tzuyu, a Taiwanese member of a K-Pop girl band has been an example of a successful soft power strategy exerted by Tsai Ing-wen and Taiwanese people to fight against China, particularly in the event of Taiwan Presidential election 2016. The mutual values upheld desired goals to achieve by both Taiwan and K-Pop have come to fruition and produced the intended outcome. This practice is in line with the underpinning principles established by both Nye (2004) and Yani and Lusiana (2018). The output that could potentially be achieved using hard power would be different, or not better than the one accomplished through soft power, considering the fact that Taiwan’s hard power is inferior to that of China, as explained by deLisle (2010).

REFERENCES

- Ahn, J. H., & Lin, T. W. (2019). The Politics of Apology: The ‘Tzuyu Scandal’ and Transnational Dynamics of K-pop. *The International Communication Gazette*, 81(2), 158–175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048518802947>
- Akçevin, Y. (2021). Wolf Warrior Diplomacy and Chinese Soft Power: K-Pop as a Testing Ground. *History of Modern China*, 1–29.
- Bae, E. S., Chang, M., Park, E. S., & Kim, D. C. (2017). The Effect of Hallyu on Tourism In Korea. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40852-017-0075-y>
- BBC. (2016, January 18). *Taiwan election: How a penitent pop star may have helped Tsai win - BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35340530>
- Courmont, B., & Delhalle, H. (2022). A China’s Soft Power in the Pacific: the Example of the Solomon Islands and the Pacific Games 2023 Project. *Asia Focus, ASIA PROGRAMME*, 2–20.
- deLisle, J. (2010). Soft Power in a Hard Place: China, Taiwan, Cross-Strait Relations and U.S. Policy. *Orbis*, 54(4), 493–524. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2010.07.002>

- Ding, S. (2014). Chinese Soft Power and Public Diplomacy: An Analysis of China's New Diaspora Engagement Policies in the Xi Era. In *EAI Fellows Program Working Paper Series No. 43*.
- Hahm, S. D., & Song, S. (2021). The Impact of The Korean Wave on South Korea-Taiwan Relations: The Importance of Soft Power. *Asian Survey*, 61(2), 217–240.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/AS.2021.61.2.217>
- Hoadley, S. (2013). Taiwan Update: Domestic Reform and Soft Power Diplomacy. *New Zealand International Review*, 38(1).
- Lee, S. (2005). A New Interpretation of “Soft Power” for Taiwan. *Taiwan International Studies Quarterly*, 1(2), 1–23.
- Moleong, L. J. (2017). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung : Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power : The Means To Success in World Politics*. Public Affairs.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1538-165x.2004.tb01291.x>
- QUARTZ. (2016, January 16). *A 16-year-old pop star was forced to apologize to China for waving Taiwan's flag*.
<https://qz.com/596261/a-16-year-old-pop-star-was-forced-to-apologize-to-china-for-waving-taiwans-flag/>
- Reitov, O., & Nagell, R. (Eds.). (2017). *Art Under Threat: Freemuse Annual Statistics on Censorship and Attacks on Artistic Freedom In 2016*. Freemuse.
- Rowen, I. (2015). Inside Taiwan's Sunflower Movement: Twenty-Four Days in a Student-Occupied Parliament, and the Future of the Region. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 74(1), 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911814002174>
- Schneider, F. (2019). Digital Democracy in Taiwan : The Sunflower Movement and its Legacies. *Taiwan Fellowship Report*, 1–20.
- Sendow, B. E. D., Mamentu, M., & Rengkung, F. R. D. (2019). Korean Wave Sebagai Instrumen Soft Power Diplomasi Kebudayaan Korea Selatan Di Indonesia. *Jurnal Politico*, 7(4).
- Shim, D. (2018). Efficacy of Korean Wave: Beyond Industry, Beyond Superpower. In *Hallyu White Paper* (pp. 59–75). Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange.
- Sitompul, F. L. I. (2020). The Hallyu Effect : Persebaran Budaya Pop Hallyu Sebagai Ancaman Terhadap Juche. *Journal of International Relations*, 6(2), 267–277.
- Suryani, N. P. E. (2015). Korean Wave Sebagai Instrumen Soft Power Untuk Memperoleh Keuntungan Ekonomi Korea Selatan. *Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional*, 16(1), 69–83.
<https://doi.org/10.7454/global.v16i1.8>
- Siyoto, S., & Sodik, M. A. (2015). *Dasar Metodologi Penelitian* (1st ed.). Literasi Media Publishing.
<http://library1.nida.ac.th/termpaper6/sd/2554/19755.pdf>
- Tan, C.-B. (2022). China and Chinese Overseas: A Softer Soft Power [?] Policy Needed ? *ISEAS: Perspective*, 22,

1-9.

The Korea Times. (2016, January 21). *K-pop band Twice embroiled in controversy over Tzuyu's nationality*. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2016/01/201_195435.html

TIME. (2019, September 20). *What to Know About K-Pop Group Twice*. <https://time.com/5671342/twice-k-pop-everything-to-know/>

Xie, Z., Liu, G., Wu, J., & Tan, Y. (2018). Big Data Would Not Lie: Prediction Of The 2016 Taiwan Election Via Online Heterogeneous Information. *EPJ Data Science*, 7(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-018-0163-7>

Yang, J. (2012). The Korean Wave (Hallyu) in East Asia: A Comparison of Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese Audiences Who Watch Korean TV Dramas. *Development and Society*, 41(1), 103-147. <https://doi.org/10.21588/dns.2012.41.1.005>

Yani, Y. M., & Lusiana, E. (2018). Soft Power dan Soft Diplomacy. *Jurnal Tapis: Jurnal Teropong Aspirasi Politik Islam*, 14(2), 48-65. <https://doi.org/10.24042/tps.v14i2.3165>

Yeoh, E. K. K. (2016). Political Governance and Strategic Relations: Domestic-Foreign Policy Nexus and China's Rise in The Global System. *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal*, 2(1), 1-11