Party Image and Taiwan’s Electorate, 1992 to 2000

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Abstract

The term, party image, has been used by a wide variety of political scientists over the years and is generally accepted to represent an important means by which voters choose between the parties and by which the parties differentiate themselves from their competitors. Knowing how those parties are perceived helps us understand the basis of a party system.

In Taiwan, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has been established for more than a decade. It gradually won support from the electorate and, by the 2001 legislative election, its vote share exceeded Kuomintang’s (KMT) for the first time. Under the chairmanship of Shin Ming-teh and Hsu Hsin-liang, the DPP started a series of party transformations in order to change its rooted impressions from the electorate. They make efforts to get rid of deeply rooted impressions such as ‘a violent party’ ‘fight in the Legislative Yuan’, or ‘support Taiwan independence’. In the 1994 Taipei city mayoral election, the DPP candidate’s keynote speech appealed for ‘happiness and hope’ instead of resorting to ‘tragedies’. It is, however, doubtful whether these efforts successfully changed the electorate’s perceptions of the DPP.

The Taiwanese party system has changed dramatically in the past fifteen years or so. The KMT, the once hegemonic political organisation, finally lost its majority in the 2001 legislative election. The DPP, the New Party (NP), People First Party (PFP), and Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) by contrast, gradually won support during the same period. I would like to argue that one reason why the KMT gradually lost support is that the electorate’s impressions of the political parties have changed. The electorate perceived the DPP more positively, while they correspondingly judged the KMT more negatively for reasons I shall explore in this paper.