

Public Opinions in Taiwan about Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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"Peace Now!" poster by Edward Locke

This news report intends to analyze and compare public opinions in Taiwan about Russia's "Special Military Operation" or invasion in Ukraine. Information cited comes from both mainstream and non-mainstream mass media, printed or online, including YouTube videos, in Chinese language. The following conclusions could be made:

In Taiwan, opinions are generally in favor of Ukraine's resistance; however, an important ethnic-political divide exist. Among Native Taiwanese, more people are sympathetic to Ukraine; among Mainlander-Taiwanese, or descendants of the followers of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist Party, opinions are sharply divided based on the current attitudes of the individual, either strongly anti-Communist and extremely right-wing, or pragmatically reconciliatory toward China's current Communist-dominated government and strongly nationalist. The former advocate reconciliation between United States and Russia on the current Ukraine crises and fight China together even with a "pre-emptive strike;" the later advocate policies similar to those adopted by the Chinese Government.

Worries about China's role in ending the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a mediator is intensive in Taiwan. An article titled "*If Mainland China Mediate Russia-Ukraine Conflict, It Would Not Be Beneficial for Taiwan*" and subtitled "*The Chinese Side Shall Take the Opportunity to Obtain More Important Military Technology, the United States Might Be More Self-Restraint in Supporting Taiwan in Order to Win Over Beijing,*" on page A9, Taiwan-1 section, Sunday, March 27, 2022, in The World Journal, reveals Taiwanese political elites' opposition to China's joining the process of diplomatic mediation to end the Russian-Ukraine conflict. The news story said that after the start of Russia-Ukraine war, several world leaders called on China to play a more active role, although generally speaking, the possibility for Beijing to mediate the conflict is not high. Inside Taiwan, there are already people who worry about the scenario that, if China succeeds in mediation, then it would not be good for Taiwan. In addition, some scholars believe that, under the impact of Russia-Ukraine conflict, the United States could restrain its support for Taiwan in order to avoid offending Beijing and prevent convergence of China and Russia. Guo Yuren, the Chief Executive of National Policy Institute, pointed out that before the breakout of the war, Beijing's relations with both Russia and Ukraine were very close; at present time, both Russia and Ukraine are willing to negotiate, leaving Beijing large space for exerting its special influence; although there are difficulties in terms of conditions and timing, should Beijing succeeds in mediation, Ukraine which suffers severe war damages and Russia which suffers from comprehensive scope of sanctions, shall become economically more deeply reliant on China; and at this time, Beijing could ask for important key military technologies that were previously refused by both Russia and Ukraine; and this is bad for Taiwan. Huan Jiezheng, Assistant Professor at Dan Jiang University and Director of International Affairs Department of the Chinese Nationalist Party in Taiwan, pointed out that at the present time, the United States does not want to open up a second battlefield, and in order to prevent a Russia-China convergence, the United States would not offend Beijing for Taiwan's sake; therefore, the intensity of American support for Taiwan could be restrained.

In Taiwan, mass media controlled by the "Green Camp," or the political parties supported by Native Taiwanese, or Taiwanese whose ancestor live in Taiwan since ancient times, including the center-right wing Progressive Democratic Party which advocates "Taiwan independence,"

are mostly sympathetic to Ukraine and opposed to Russia. This is true for other “Green Camp” parties and factions that might not be right-wing or advocating “independence” for Taiwan; a small minority of “Green Camp” Taiwanese are middle-of-the-roader or even accept China’s call for peaceful unification under the “One Country Two Systems” formula. Out of Taiwan’s approximately 23 million people, close to 20 million are Native Taiwanese. The common ground shared by “Green Camp” people and groups is not ideology or values, but their common grievances against the “White Terror” totalitarian regime of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Nationalist Party, and monopoly of positions of power in Taiwan’s government institutions, state-owned enterprises, and mass media by the exiled Mainlander Chinese, during the “White Terror” rule. The basic consensus of “Green Camp” regarding the outside world include widely accepted conclusions that (1) the Chinese Nationalist Party’s “White Terror” regime was much worse than the Japanese colonial rule before; (2) the Mainlander Chinese who retreated to Taiwan after Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek lost the Chinese Civil War in 1949 were not as well-educated and “civilized” as Native Taiwanese or even their previous Japanese colonial rulers; and (3) Native Taiwanese, NOT Mainlander Taiwanese or Chinese from the People’s Republic of China, should be the masters of Taiwan’s destiny; and finally, any solution to the relations between Taiwan and China should be found between the Native Taiwanese and Chinese Government; in other words, the exiled Mainlanders or supporters of the Chinese Nationalist Party, cannot cut private deals with Chinese Government, because it is a so-called “Outsider’s Regime.” In the recent three decades, political elites in the United States have basically stopped supporting the Chinese Nationalist Party in Taiwan; and accept Native Taiwanese right to govern Taiwan. The current ruling party of Taiwan, the Progressive Democratic Party, is still pushing agendas to eliminate traces of legacies of Chiang Kai-shek’s rule in Taiwan. Each year, around February 28, the day of Taiwanese people’s armed insurrection against Nationalist Chinese Government, the Taiwan Center will hold commemorative events at its facilities at 3001 Walnut Grove Ave. Rosemead, CA 91770, which features a library with books on the subject. Thus, most of “Green Camp” people are sympathetic to Ukraine, not to Russia, for obvious reasons.

In contrast, the mass media controlled by the “Blue Camp,” or descendants of the exiled Mainlander Chinese in Taiwan, are split between pro-Zelensky and pro-Putin, but mostly apologetic of Putin’s war and unsympathetic to Ukraine, and lecturing on Ukraine about a “peace with honor.” This is primarily due to its traditional conservative and right-wing ideology that appeared to be aligned with the strong and looked down upon the weak, and to the positions of privilege and wealth they occupied in Taiwan. The root causes of pro-Putin and anti-Zelensky sentiments of some “Blue Camp” commentators in Taiwan include the support of American political elites for the process of political democratization in Taiwan in the last three decades, which brought an end to the totalitarian rule of Chinese Nationalist Party in Taiwan, and an end to Mainlander Taiwanese monopoly of political power in Taiwan, and consequentially, grievances among some Mainlander Taiwanese against United States foreign policies. Recently, some “Blue Camp” figures started to defend the positions of the Chinese Government, reversing their parents’ staunch anti-Communist stand; this reflects the fact that a lot the wealthy “Blue Camp” tycoons have invested heavily in Mainland China and amassed unprecedented amount of profit out of China’s cheap labor and out of China’s “United Front Preferential Treatment”

policies towards its former enemies, i.e., the exiled Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan; and thus, have a stake in maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, or “maintaining the status quo.” This does not necessarily mean that they want genuine peace with Mainland China; what is needed for them is “status quo” or a “no independence, no war, no unification” framework for them to make profits playing the United States and China against each other, but under controllable conditions. These positions are reflected in the statements of some important figures of the “Blue Camp,” including party leaders, specialists on international politics and “Big Mouths” (well-known talk-show hosts). Some analysis about the Russia-Ukraine conflict and predictions about its potential outcomes made by “Blue Camp” people are rational and interesting; while the “conspiracy theory” about the United States’ plan to transform Taiwan into Asia’s Ukraine and reduce China’s power through a bloody military confrontation across Taiwan Strait, as predicted by a few “Blue Camp” commentators, are rather irrational and “self-fulfilling,” reflecting the latter’s traditional modus operandi of playing with China and United States at the same time, getting both sides to confront each other, so as to harvest political benefits for themselves. As US president Joe Biden already declared several times in official occasions, the United States does not intend to have a Cold War in China, does not intend to promote a regime change in China, and does not support Taiwan’s independence from China, and Russia is an enemy while China is a competitor/cooperator depending on issues, the “self-fulfilling prophecies” of a few “Blue Camp” people are not credible, although their capabilities of fomenting nationalist sentiments in both Taiwan and Mainland should not be ignored.

Interviewed by IVBS HD station (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ok7YbPeU1BQ>), Zhang Yazhong, General Principal of Sun Yat-sen School, a cadre training institution for political activists of the Chinese Nationalist Party in Taiwan, said that, the war in Ukraine has lasted more than one month and thus is a tragedy; Zelenski is not knowledgeable about international laws when he asked the UN to expel Russia; when Russia started the war and NATO clearly indicated that it will not fight Russia on Ukraine’s side, the war is practically over. For Russia. It has prepared for the war for eight years; thus, clearly, Crimea shall not be returned to Ukraine anymore; this is so because Russia has gone through a referendum in Crimea during which the majority of people in Crimea voted to join Russia; Russia’s demand for Ukraine’s demilitarization together with its occupation of southern and eastern parts of Ukraine means that, it intends to degrade Ukraine into an agricultural state. Zhang Yazhong claimed that on the surface, Russia and Ukraine are fighting each other, in fact the conflict is one between Russia and the United States; and that the United States is trying to prolong the conflict in order to weaken Russia’s power and influence in international affairs. He believes that if the European Union countries can no longer bear the consequences of inflation caused by sanctions and counter-sanctions, then the continuation of fighting will become meaningless.

Senior media man Xie Hanbing believes that Ukraine does not possess the abilities of recovering Crimea and Donbas; Russia’s current strategy is to expand its gains in Donbas through a protracted war; although a lot of countries are sympathetic to Ukraine, all countries have their own national interests, and they cannot support President’s Zelenski’s desire to recover Crimea or Donbas; therefore, Zelenski’s speech against Russia or other countries that fail to offer him sufficient support are meaningless. Although the United States criticizes China for not joining

the sanctions, President Zelensky has not said anything bad against China yet because he believes that after the war, China is a potential source of investment for reconstruction, like what China did before the war; in fact, Ukraine's foreign minister even praised China for the offer of humanitarian aid; even Zelenski himself tried to talk to Chinese President Xi. The anchor of the station quoted opinions from CNN, political specialist from Rand Corporation, high-ranking former US Defense Department officials; and he points out that the West has no more tools to use against Russia because Putin is able to come up with counter-sanctions to defeat sanctions imposed by the west; that the prolongation of Russia-Ukraine war is not in the best interest of the United States in the long run; Ukraine compared with Russia is militarily weaker, and if it fails to seek peace but instead continue to fight till it loses all valuable bargaining chips and abilities, then Ukraine is leading towards its own self-destruction; therefore, the best thing to do now is to negotiate a peace settlement with Putin.

Huang Zhenghui, a retired officer of Taiwan's Navy, said that he was very surprised when he met an Ukrainian living in Taiwan who vowed to fight till the end; when asked about what benefits are there to continue the war instead of seeking peace, he told the Ukrainian that so far, what actually happens is that Zelenski was praised as a national hero, but close to 10 million people became refugees, nothing else has been achieved; the Ukrainian did not care; he then said that people are blind; they are vulnerable to high-spirited propaganda; the most important thing in any country is the leaders; when Trump was elected, he started to think about the problems that existed in democracy, same thing is true for Zelensky's election, and Hitler's election. Huang Zhenghui then said that although a lot of people in the West criticize China's political system as undemocratic, Chinese leaders are chosen from bureaucracy at grassroots or municipal level through provincial to central levels, are experienced, moderate and pragmatic; Zelenski, Trump and Hitler are not experienced as administrator but all of them knew how to give high-spirited speech demagogically. Huang Zhenghui concluded that democracy allows people to be chosen as national leader right from the bottom, even without experience on how to govern a town, a city, a province; this type of democracy based on one man one vote is useless. Obviously, Huang Zhenghui's position prefers top-down authoritarian rule over bottom-up democracy.

Zhang Cheng, a former military engineer for Taiwan's armed forces points out that the third largest natural gas and coal mines are located in Eastern Ukraine, thus Russia wants to take over the area for the control of resources to benefit its future economic development; (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybJHLExShjg>), the values of these resources are higher than the cost of invasion. This war is based on high tech. Once Donbas is under control, Russia shall possess both of its industrial power and natural resources. Zhang Cheng claimed that Ukraine is not really sovereign and independent state, but a client state that relies on the United States for survival.

Lai Yeqian, International Politics Specialist, said that, think tanks in US are happy because through the war, Russia's military might has been tested and also reduced, thus its threat to NATO has been reduced rapidly. Lai Yeqian then claimed that next time, the US will try to duplicate this Ukraine experience in Tawan Strait to get China's power reduced through bloody conflict; and this is the intension of US strategic planners aimed at maintaining the position of

the United States as the Number One Power. Lai Yeqian said that it is time for all parties in the conflict to negotiate; indicating that in the anti-Putin international coalition, the Anglo-Saxon countries, i.e., the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, are different from Continental European countries, notably Germany and France; the Anglo-Saxon countries are actively providing weapons and other support to Ukraine, but Germany and France want negotiations with Putin; Zelensky's positions change from time to time because he cannot make own decision but listens to his foreign backers; and this is similar to the situation in Taiwan, where Tsai Yingwen, Taiwan's current leader, is not the real decision-maker but United States President Joe Biden is. Lai claimed that the United States uses the blood and wealth of Ukraine's people to reduce Russia's military might; and it will next do the same thing in Taiwan to encourage independence and war with China, using Taiwan's blood and wealth to reduce China's military and economic might, through such mechanism as "two China," "Taiwan independence," etc.; but people in Taiwan are wiser than Ukrainians; Ukraine is very tragic, Taiwan should learn a lesson.

Shuai Huamin, another "Blue Camp" commentator and retired Lieutenant General of Taiwan's armed forces, expressed similar opinion as Lai Yeqian; he said that America's domination of world politics is now collapsing, because Germany France pay Russian Rubles for oil and natural gas under the table; Hungary and Serbia are on Russian side; Southeast Asia and Saudi Arabia are all on Russian and Chinese side; the new Cold War has started; new lines of demarcation between enemies and friends are being drawn because of economic pressure; the United States has no choice but to use Ukraine to the greatest extent possible to decrease Russia's power; the next step the United States will move is to deal with China in similar fashion using Taiwan; and people in Taiwan should see the situation clearly, not to fall into America's trap.

CTI HD, a mass media operated by CTI Television Inc., Taiwan, and associated with "Blue Camp" or Chinese Nationalist Party in Taiwan, invited three guest speakers who expressed the most anti-American and far-left opinion found so far, with regards to Russia-Ukraine war and China's policy of neutrality (March 21, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXGO7OCJm0Q>). Political Commentator Dong Zhishen (董智森), or Brother Dong said that he agreed with the position of Mr. Zhao Lijian, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson. He accused "shameless" Western mass media of not being genuinely neutral, objective and fair; branded it "tools of imperialism" for the interests of the United States, United Kingdom and European Union; furthermore, he accused the United States and European Union of sowing the seeds of discords between Ukraine and Russia to provoke a war; and praised China's position of "neutrality" as a way to end conflict. Dong Zhishen condemned the five rounds of eastward expansion of NATO into Russia's borders, the freezing of assets and confiscation of properties from Russian tycoons and state institutions as looting other people's properties. Dong Zhishen then accused the United States Secretary of State of making threats to China against possible Chinese assistance to Russia, before President Biden's online meeting with President Xi, in an attempt to coerce China to join the sanctions against Russia, to split the two countries apart, and then to impose sanctions on China again. Dong Zhishen then made a flamboyant, ultra-nationalistic and anti-American statement declaring that, without China and Russia, all countries will become colonies and slaves of the United States. He further accused

Western mass media of prejudice and double standards, quoting the 2015 massacre of more than 500 children and 14,000 adults in Luhansk and Donetsk by Ukrainian troupes, which continued killing ethnic-Russians for a straight seven years (2014-2021), questioning why the Western mass media did not make a big deal out of this tragedy and why after Ukraine's troupes killed ethnic Russians in 2015, Ukraine did not get sanctions, Coca-Cola, MacDonalds and other American corporations did not stop normal businesses operation. Dong Zhishen did admit that Putin is an aggressor but insisted that the West is the worst sinner that pushed Putin to corners and provoked his reaction; thus, NATO and EU, not China, are responsible for ending the conflict. He alleged that the West take advantage of the war to harvest huge amounts of economic benefits, through confiscating Russian-owned properties and other means. European Union and NATO of "hypocrisy" in terms of fomenting conflict to hurt Ukraine but refusing to fight directly on Ukraine's side. Regarding Ukraine's aspiration to join the European Union, he claimed that Ukraine is "backward, corrupt and poor," and its membership in EU will cause the collapse of EU economy due to large amount of economic assistance needed, citing the cases of Spain and Greece as examples. Another two important figures in the show are He Qisheng, ("Brother Qisheng," Director of the Office of Zhang Yazhong, Chief Principal of Sun Yat-sen School, and General Convenor of the League against Military Procurement from the United States), and Tian Fanglun (former KMT Youth League General Director). Both are active in Taiwan's "Blue Camp" politics.

In summary, public opinions with regards to Ukraine crises in Taiwan varies widely, based on group identity, partisanship, ideology and personal preferences.