

Campaigning without issues: networks, face and service politics

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ABSTRACT The paper debates the relationship between the politician and the voter/supporter in Taiwan. Adopting an anthropological approach this paper claims that recognizing the influence of *guanxi* (interpersonal relationships) strategies on the interactions between politician and voter/supporter is key to understanding many idiosyncratic practices of Taiwan's political culture such as ubiquitous service centres (*fuwuchu*), vote-buying (*mai piao*) and the "handshaking culture" (*woshou wenhua*). In distinction to earlier studies on *guanxi* in Taiwanese politics, usually conducted in a rural setting and linked to local factions (*difang paixi*), this paper examines the phenomenon in an urban setting where factions are weaker. The paper maintains that voter expectations and established socio-cultural practices shape the campaign organization and activities to stress the cultivation of direct and symbolic personal contacts with voters/supporters as opposed to articulation of political issues and views.

Introduction

While quite a few studies have debated how direct mobilization and vote-buying works in Taiwanese elections in the context of local factions (*difang paixi*),¹ several other idiosyncratic features of Taiwanese election campaigns have been given less attention, especially its cultural and social aspects. Taken together, these political-cultural practices point towards a politician/voter relationship that is relatively personal and direct rather than mediated through organisations, such as political parties, and based on moral evaluation rather than on issue positions. It also highlights the pivotal importance of social networks for political mobilization. Needless to say, election campaigns in such a political-cultural environment need to be structured differently from campaigns in a more issue-oriented political culture.

The importance of social networks (*guanxi wang* or *renmai*) in Chinese society is widely acknowledged by scholars. Most of the existing literature on *guanxi* use in politics deals with *guanxi* networks among the political elite² or *guanxi* in the context of factionalism or, more broadly, informal politics.³ This paper temporarily brackets the mediating roles of both political parties and local factions in order to focus on the use of *guanxi* strategies between the politician and the voter/supporter in Taiwan. The paper examines how *guanxi* strategies shape candidates' election campaign activities, and in the process sheds some light on how politics works in a Chinese structural environment.

While the paper debates cultural phenomena in Taiwanese politics, it does not claim to propose a culturalist⁴ explanation to Taiwanese election behaviour. Neither does this paper treat political culture in the way political scientists conventionally do, i.e. as attitudes,

¹ Bosco 1992, Bosco 1994, Wu 1987.

² Li 1994, Dittmer 1995, Bachman 1996, Guo 2001. Yan Yunxiang has debated *guanxi*'s political functions as only one aspect among many in *guanxi* networks. Yan 1995.

³ Nathan and Kellee 1995, Pye 1995, Tang 1995, Dittmer 1995.

⁴ Cf. Aaron Wildavsky 1987.

values and opinions,⁵ rather it sees political culture more as embodied in conventional practices that provide a cultural “tool kit”⁶ to the initiated. The position adopted on culture is then that, while culture is not necessarily able to explain “big” things, it does frequently shape the form many things take.⁷ The paper thus studies political behaviour in Taiwan, while not being behavioralist. The approach is best described as a kind of political anthropology.

***Guanxi* as a basis for understanding Taiwanese campaign activities**

Long before “the networked society” became a fad, scholars have noted that Chinese society is built up through particularistic ties that form dense webs of social networks.⁸ Fei Xiaotong described Western societies as being based on an “organizational mode of association (*tuanti geju*), while Chinese society is built on a “differential mode of association” (*chaxu geju*) resembling countless spider webs, each with a person at its centre. Such a difference in social organization, if it exists, is bound to have implications also for the way an election campaign is organised. Today, the network conception of Chinese society is widely acknowledged and *guanxi* has become a prominent area of study.

Networks built of particularistic social ties (*guanxi*) goes hand in hand with the notion of *bao*, or reciprocity, which many scholars have noted is a central cultural institution in Chinese society.⁹ *Bao* denotes the moral obligations to reciprocate a received favour. The notion can have a very strong moral force in Chinese society. As one author put it, Chinese people are born indebted (to their parents).¹⁰ It seems not an exaggeration to say that much of what transpires in social interaction afterwards also can be seen as cycles of favours and reciprocations of received favours.

The *guanxi* concept has later received many negative connotations, becoming intimately related to corruption and bribery. Earlier scholars traced instrumental *guanxi* use to worker dependence on superiors in the work unit.¹¹ In Mainland China the calculated cultivation and use of *guanxi* in pursuit of some goal¹² is now most conspicuous in the interface between businessmen and officials, who control many of the resources or authorizations that businessmen need to run their businesses.¹³ Other scholars have responded that *guanxi* and corruption are far from synonymous. According to them, *guanxi* places much more emphasis on the emotional attachment (*ganqing*) and “human feelings” (*renqing*) inherent in a long-term relationship as well as the moral obligations they imply, than the material interest exchanged. In corruption the social relationship is purely instrumental. In strong *guanxi* emotional attachment is the glue.¹⁴

⁵ Almond and Verba 1963, Diamond 1994.

⁶ Swidler first articulated a tool kit approach to the causality of culture on action, as opposed to the value-oriented approach. Swidler sees culture as providing tools from which workable strategies of action can be constructed, given existing structural circumstances. Swidler 1986, pp. 273-286. Cf. Jayyusi 1991.

⁷ Snyder 2002.

⁸ Fei 1992 [1947], pp. 62-63, Jacobs 1979.

⁹ Hwang 1987, pp. 944-969.

¹⁰ Sun 1991, p. 35.

¹¹ Walder 1986, Ruan 1993.

¹² With “the art of *guanxi*” (*guanxixue*) Mayfair Yang referred to the exchange of gifts and favors, holding banquets and in a wider sense the cultivation of personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence and the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness. Yang 1994 p. 6.

¹³ See e.g. Wu 2001, pp. 20-48, Wank 1994, pp. 55-71.

¹⁴ Yang 2002, p. 465, Guo 2001, p. 90.

Deciding whether *guanxi* is essentially detrimental or benign is not very constructive, as this janus-faced image is inherent in the phenomenon. *Guanxi* can have both positive and negative private and social consequences. The framework scholars seem to converge on is that there is a continuum of social relationships of different quality in Chinese society, broadly moving between an instrumental and an emotional pole. In terms of giving a theoretical framework for understanding the logic of *guanxi*, an article by Hwang Kuang-kuo in 1987 was important. Hwang portrayed *guanxi* as moving on a continuum between an instrumental and an expressive (emotional) pole, with mixed relations in between. Expressive relations were close relations such as those between family members and close friends. Purely instrumental relations were those that ended once a transaction had taken place, e.g. when paying to a taxi-driver for the ride. The social ties referred to by the term *guanxi* therefore are usually mixed ties. Similarly, Yan Yunxiang has distinguished between a “primary” and an “extended” form of *guanxi*, the former being a kind of local moral world, while the latter are used for more instrumental purposes.¹⁵ Finally, Guo Xuezhi identifies a continuum of four different *guanxi* dimensions, shifting from the instrumental to the emotional. In between he adds an etiquette and a moral dimension.

In Guo's understanding the instrumental dimension is guided by calculations of gains and losses and can be characterized as an exchange relationship emphasizing material obligations. However, in distinction to some scholars,¹⁶ Guo sees even instrumental dimension relationships as aiming towards establishing a long-term relationship and a sense of obligation. The etiquette dimension is guided by the Chinese notion of *renqing* (debt of favour or “human feelings”) and a desire to harmonize social relations within one's social network following common rules of behaviour. *Renqing* possesses strong moral force and an obligation to reciprocate received help.

Guanxi's moral dimension involves even stronger obligations than either the instrumental or etiquette dimension. It is linked to the values of *zhong* (loyalty) and *yi* (ethic of brotherhood or righteousness) and usually involves either a debt of gratitude for a great favour (*enqing*) or frequent interaction and the cultivation of mutual dependence. Finally, the emotional dimension derives from *ganqing* (emotional attachment) or *enqing*. *Ganqing* refers to the deepest kind of emotional sentiment between two human beings and is different from duty or loyalty. It implies greater affection and is more personal than *renqing*, which is more concerned with proper social conduct.¹⁷

It is commonly accepted that a prerequisite for *guanxi* in Chinese society is a shared *guanxi base* between two people. Traditionally such bases have been family and kinship, locality, classmates, co-workers, superior-subordinate relations, “sworn brotherhood” and same surname.¹⁸ Of these, family ties are naturally the basis for the most emotional (strongest) *guanxi*. Family ties have consequently often played an important role in Chinese politics.¹⁹ Taiwanese elections, especially local ones, are also utterly a family business. However, the concept of the family is more elastic and inclusive in China than in the West. The Chinese family concept can cover not only the nuclear or even the extended family but also for example friends of family (male friends often refer to each other as “brothers”—*xiongdì*), connections by marriage to one's close family, distant relatives and their families.²⁰ The Chinese conception of family could thus be termed *wider family*. Within the

¹⁵ Hwang 1987, Yan 1995, pp. 22-25. See also Walder 1986, pp. 179-186.

¹⁶ E.g. Hwang 1987.

¹⁷ Guo 2001, pp. 72-88, Yang 1994.

¹⁸ E.g. Jacobs 1979, pp. 243-256, Yang 1994, pp. 111-119.

¹⁹ E.g. Jin 1999, pp. 137-162.

²⁰ See Fei 1925[1947], pp. 62-63. Hamilton 1991, pp. 48-65.

bounds of the family/social network, people are generally generous and giving. On the other hand, researchers have often noted the great discrepancy in Chinese behaviour towards people within one's own social network, and towards outsiders.²¹

Making use of existing relations in one's social network is an important element in Taiwanese election campaigns. In the absence of prior relationship or a *guanxi* base, various strategies can be employed to create one. A commonly used strategy is to use an intermediary, who knows both persons and can introduce them to each other.²² Alternatively one can build a relationship through frequent contacts and small gifts or favours. Such strategies can also be observed in Taiwanese elections. Below we will dissect the structure of a Taiwanese election campaign.

Anatomy of a Taiwanese election campaign

Elections for public office have been held in Taiwan since the start of the KMT period in 1949 (some local elections were organized already during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan). For a long time elections were truncated as only KMT members initially participated and only local elections up to the county-level were held. In 1969 elections were for the first time extended from the county level, and supplementary elections for the Legislative Yuan were held in the 1980s. But not until 1992, following political liberalization in 1987, were fully open and competitive Legislative Yuan elections held, followed by the first openly contested presidential election in 1996.²³

Taiwan is almost the only place, where the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) election system is still in use, after Japan scrapped its SNTV some years ago.²⁴ In this system voters cast a single vote for a candidate in their election district. Perhaps the most significant feature of the system is that, unlike proportional election systems, all candidates compete directly against each other also within the same party, and there is a relatively easily calculable vote threshold, gained by dividing the amount of votes cast by the amount of seats in the district. By securing the threshold votes one can be almost certain of being elected. The general structure of an election campaign organization and activities is more or less the same regardless of the election, but the size varies considerably depending on election. Taiwan possesses what has been claimed to be the most complicated administrative structure in the world. Arguably the island has more elections than anywhere else, although several elections have now already been scrapped or are in the process of being scrapped.

The campaign is formally headed by a secretary-general (*zong ganshi*), typically a socially prominent person.²⁵ Each candidate has a campaign headquarters (*jingxuan zongbu*), usually located in the area where the candidate's support is strongest, and in higher level elections also several branches in other areas.²⁶ Some candidates also do without branches because of lack of resources or time to set up branches. The main tasks of

²¹ Cf. Fukuyama's characterization of Taiwan as a "low-trust society" where there is a large gap between the high trust people have in insiders (family) and the scepticism they maintain towards outsiders. Fukuyama 1995, also Sun 1991, pp. 22.

²² See e.g. Walder 1986, pp. 183-183. Such intermediaries have been widely used by foreign companies operating in China. Yeung and Tung 1996, pp. 54-65.

²³ For an authoritative account of the crucial early 1990s, see Tien and Chu 1996, pp. 1141-1170.

²⁴ Noble 1997.

²⁵ The secretary-general is usually backed up by a vice secretary-general (*fu zong ganshi*), an executive secretary (*zhixingzhe*) and several vice executive secretaries (*fu zhixingzhe*).

²⁶ Because of the deterioration of the economy and tighter access to easy credit financing of campaigns, there has been a trend in the last elections toward a leaner campaign structure, cutting down branches.

a campaign HQ are to draw up the candidate's schedule; organize activities such as street parades with or without vehicles (*sao jie* and *chedui youxing*); mobilizing voters directly through key persons in every community, who help to attract votes (*la piao*) or buy votes (*mai piao*); produce campaign material, such as leaflets (*wenxuan*), posters (*kanban*) and flags (*qizhi*); organize support groups' activities; and direct service centre activities. In KMT campaigns, a legislative campaign HQ often involves several dozens of people and divides into several departments.

There are also commonly a number of "support groups" (*houyuanhui*), which are comparable to branches, but more informal. They operate in between elections as a stable contact point between the politician and a community and form a latent mobilisation platform helping to mobilize votes before elections. For example in a county mayoral election in Kaohsiung county, the DPP candidate who got elected had a support group or office with staff helping to mobilize votes in all 27 townships. In between elections contact with support groups is maintained through various social activities, such as sports events or charity work organized by the politician. Support groups usually follow a corporatist logic: doctors, taxi-drivers, teachers, labour unions, churches, associations etc, and are headed by someone with a high social standing. The KMT's support groups have traditionally been both comprehensive and permanent. Finally there are "advisory groups" (*guwentuan*), which often is a euphemism for semi-institutionalised corruption. The objective of the campaign organization is to achieve both wide sectoral and geographical coverage.

The core of the campaign people is normally formed by family and close friends, who are commonly unpaid helpers. In higher-level elections there is usually also a number of paid helpers. Sometimes people introduced by friends also help out. The candidate expects some help from all of his family, friends and relatives. Not giving any help might even sour the relationship if the relationship is close. The expected effort is related to the closeness of the relationship between the candidate and the person. Friends and relatives usually help out by working in the campaign offices, service centres, taking part in street parades, or "mobilizing" their own family and friends to vote for the candidate. Given that many volunteers have their own jobs, volunteering campaign help constitutes a big favour to the candidate. Naturally, friends and colleagues of the candidate are also expected to vote for him/her.

For the nuclear family of the candidate, the campaign is a very exhausting experience. Usually the whole family is directly involved daily for a lengthy period of time. However, the length of the campaign varies considerably from only a few weeks in less important elections (e.g. borough warden elections), to sometimes over a year in important elections (presidential or mayoral elections). Some family members may even quit their own work to help with the campaign. A brother, whose sister ran in the legislative elections, e.g. told that he had quit his job for several months to help out with the campaign.²⁷

On the whole, there is more "legwork" than "mouth work" in the Taiwanese election campaign. It is striking how little explicit "content" there is. Even speeches at political rallies tend to be mostly emotionally laden general pleas for support (votes), so that the candidate/party can help build a better society. The absence of apparent content does not, however, mean that there is no message in the campaign. The message just tends to be of a symbolic and subtle nature. Much of it is inherent in cues, hints and symbolic associations. The reference to "clean" mentioned in the beginning contains an implicit critique of the KMT, which many people associate with corruption and so-called "black-

²⁷ Author's interview in southern Taiwan, November 2001.

gold” (*heijin*)²⁸ politics. On the other hand, KMT candidates often project themselves as competent at ruling, a spike at the somewhat chaotic first two years of DPP rule.

Cultural features of the Taiwanese campaign

Previous studies touching on Taiwan's political culture have tended to focus on the direct mobilization of voters through networks of contacts and vote buying. Mobilization was, indeed, a key feature of the KMT's maintaining its power in local elections. According to informants, the KMT traditionally focused on cultivating contacts with key persons and mobilizing grassroots networks (*zagen*), while *sao jie* and mass rallies are a DPP tradition.²⁹ However, all parties now use both strategies. Today the other features more associated with the DPP style of campaigning are at least as important a feature of the Taiwanese election campaign.

The candidates are almost frantic to be seen and go out of their way to make direct contact with prospective voters. One of the most peculiar phenomena of Taiwanese politics is the “handshaking culture” (*woshou wenhua*) inherent in *sao jie*, loosely translating as “sweeping the street”. In practice this means that candidates run around for weeks or even months on end before the election shaking hands with everyone they possibly can in their electoral district. Campaign organizers make up very elaborate routes and schedules that try to ensure that all areas of the electoral district are covered and that as many people as possible are met with. The objective according to several informants (in practice unattainable in larger constituencies) is to shake hands with *every* eligible voter in the electoral district. In smaller constituencies this is almost possible.³⁰ For example, in a borough warden election campaign closely observed by the author, the candidates had by the end of the campaign gone through all the streets and every door in the electoral district at least three times. In larger constituencies it is not always possible to work every street and door, the candidate will therefore often focus on spots where many people gather, such as temples and markets. If the schedule is tight, the candidate will drive through uncovered areas on the rooftop of a car in a procession. According to interviewed organisers, all areas of the electoral district will for certain be covered in one way or another.

Most candidates, especially in the south, use all unallocated time in their campaign schedule to *sao jie* activities. They invariably put importance on this activity for the outcome of the elections. The activity is seen as a way of showing respect for people, especially appreciated by older people.³¹ Candidates will also visit numerous family events (*hun sang xi qing*) and community social events to pay their respects.³² The objective of such visits according to informants is to show partaking, empathy and sharing of feelings, while strengthening the personal bond between the politician and her/his supporters. The

²⁸ The term “black-gold” has been used in Taiwan to denote corrupt politics and gangster involvement in politics.

²⁹ Bosco 1994 also described a difference between factional vs. ideological mobilization, the former being more used by the KMT and the latter by DPP.

³⁰ Author's interviews in southern Taiwan, November 2001 and June 2002.

³¹ Author's interviews with several legislative candidates and campaign personnel in southern Taiwan, June 2002.

³² The schedule of the candidate is usually exceedingly tight when running around family/community events. On a short three-hour round together with a legislative candidate we visited nine events, ranging from a baseball match to a funeral. The whole thing is highly theatrical, the candidate's outfit and face/emotions can change radically within twenty minutes, from happiness during an opening ceremony to sadness on a funeral. Author's observations in southern Taiwan, November 2001.

organizers usually invite the candidate to visit, and will be disappointed and offended if s/he does not show up. In the south of the island, such community events are an integral part of the election campaign. In the north of the island politicians will rather spend time speaking in the parliament or on TV talk shows; in the south, politicians don't regard this as important.

Politicians employ various *guanxi* strategies to deepen the relationship between themselves and their main supporters, particularly in locally influential organizations and associations. If the candidate does not personally know anyone within an organisation, s/he will check with her office personnel and close supporters for anyone, who has a prior relationship with someone in the targeted organization. This person can then introduce the candidate to the key person and plead (*baituo*) her/him for support. It is crucial to choose the right person(s) within an organisation. Some candidates have an inherent advantage. A doctor will for example semi-automatically have support in the medical field, because s/he knows many doctor colleagues and people in the doctor's union, fellow medical students and patients. In general, the more one's prior profession involved frequent contact with people, the better. It is no coincidence that doctors, lawyers, businessmen and associationally active people flock the benches of the Legislative Yuan.

Key supporters sometimes volunteer their help during the campaign. More commonly the candidate pleads for the help of key persons within the community. The key supporters of a politician are called *zhuangjiao* (vote captains). Key supporters are usually sought among local notables, traditionally lower level leaders and people in a respected social position in the community, such as wealthy businessmen, highly educated or associationally active people, who have traditionally been able to sway the vote, especially in southern Taiwan.

The defining criteria of a good *zhuangjiao* are an extensive social network (*renmai*), social prestige/good reputation and trust between the candidate and the *zhuangjiao*. Because of the final criteria, the most effective *zhuangjiao* are personal friends of the candidate or her/his family. But there are only so many socially influential people in a community and one candidate can usually effectively control only a few key supporters, such as borough wardens. It is common for several candidates to contact a given borough warden seeking help. Often in order to maintain good relations with all candidates, the borough warden will "agree" to help them all, while s/he actually usually helps just one. Although there will be some general grasp of which borough wardens belong to whom, it is only possible in retrospect to infer based on the election result with whom the person's relationship was the strongest. The loyalty of key supporters is consequently a prime concern for Taiwanese politicians.

Trust is especially central in relations with other politicians or *zhuangjiao* where the instrumental element in the relationship is big and trust therefore never taken for granted. Consequently, candidates will use several strategies in order to make key political supporters "lock in" their support, so that it becomes difficult to change loyalty halfway through the campaign. Such strategies are e.g. photo-ops with the candidate with the photos later prominently on display; making decorative plaques to hang on the campaign office wall, where the supporter expresses support for the candidate; asking the person to appear together with the candidate on public events, such as on stage during a campaign rally etc. There can never be complete certainty about support and various "loyalty-proving" rituals therefore figure prominently during the campaign.

Donations or corruption: where do you draw the line?

Taiwanese elections are infamous for their extravagant spending. Campaign costs run up to staggering amounts considering that the population of the island is only 22 million. The biggest expense is the money spent on vote-buying, if the campaign involves that. Without vote-buying the biggest expense is food and drink that is provided throughout the campaign to all helpers, supporters or people just dropping in to the campaign office. Campaign costs for one candidate when buying votes commonly run to NT\$200-300 million (US\$6-9 million) in county magistrate/city mayor elections; NT\$100 million (US\$3 million) in legislative elections; and NT\$20-30 million (US\$600.000-900.000) in borough warden or city councillor elections. Without vote-buying, the figure is roughly a tenth of that.

There are three main kinds of money movement between candidates and other individuals in Taiwanese elections: 1) there are visible donations by ordinary supporters to a campaign recorded on red paper on the campaign office wall; 2) then there are very sizable non-disclosed donations by so-called *jinzhu* (translates loosely as “gold masters”) and *zhuangjiao* that are used to finance the campaign; 3) finally, there is money given by the candidate to voters, so-called vote-buying. However, it is hard to get a grasp of what effect money flows at the end of the day have for the election outcome, as money moves in several directions at the same time. While the central party headquarters and local party headquarters contribute to election spending, the bulk of the money has to be raised by candidates themselves.³³

One way of covering expenses is, as mentioned, donations from supporters. Apart from participating in the campaign work, donations to the campaign before the elections are both expected and usually given by friends and supporters.³⁴ The public record of ordinary donations gives face to the people who contributed. It is also written proof of the contribution to which the donor later can refer if seeking help. Donations can be both in the form of money and gifts of use to the campaign, such as campaign office decorations, drinking water or tea. In legislative elections it appears that money donations are more common than gift donations.

When the sum of money is relatively modest (although this can still be several hundred thousand NT\$), donations are not considered morally suspect, as money offered as a gift is a common way to express “human feelings” (*renqing*) in a Chinese cultural setting.³⁵ Nevertheless, big donations come very close to corruption and are given discreetly as they involve substantial sums of money and are given with a clear expectation of future benefits. The initiative to large contributions may originate either with the politician³⁶ or the supporter. For example, a wealthy businessman may give several million NT\$ to a candidate or a political party with the expectation that his business will receive favourable treatment when bidding for a public project. The ability to dispense political patronage and favours from public office has been seen as a key element in holding local factions together in Taiwan.³⁷

³³ While the claim is hard to substantiate, informants claimed that most of the campaign money comes from family, relatives, friends and supporters, with direct party support (direct) not being that big a factor. Author's interviews in southern Taiwan, November 2001-July 2002.

³⁴ In particular DPP candidates have traditionally relied heavily on donations, while KMT candidates traditionally had access to soft loans from local financial institutions, as long as the party was in power.

³⁵ The practice of gift giving and public record keeping of the gifts is also a prominent feature of village communities in contemporary Mainland China. E.g. Yan 1995, Wilson 1997.

³⁶ According to an assistant to a mayoral candidate interviewed during one campaign, the candidate will call up key supporters and ask them e.g. for a NT\$1 million contribution.

³⁷ Bosco 1992, pp. 164-165.

For ordinary supporters, the “service centres” (*fuwuchu*) are a major avenue of dispensing paybacks. Every self-respecting politician in Taiwan maintains one or several service centres, which operate as long as the politician is in office. Habitually the campaign headquarters is converted into a service centre with permanent paid staff if the election bid is successful. Service centres are coordinated from the legislator's office in the Legislative Yuan in Taipei. It is in the interest of the candidate to service as broad a segment of the population as possible, as a good “service record” usually is a key factor in building a social reputation and future electoral success.

Apart from requests for the politician to participate in family events, whose function according to informants is to give face to the organiser and establish or maintain a personal emotional relationship between the organiser and the politician, requests directed to the service centre usually involve seeking help to deal with some small problems. The services provided by the service centres vary, and depend on the candidate's former profession, personal contacts and interests. Some of the most common services offered³⁸ are free legal counselling in minor legal problems (often traffic-related), free medical consultation and help with job seeking.

The social functions of vote-buying

Vote-buying has long roots in Taiwan. After an initial coercive period upon its arrival on Taiwan, the ruling KMT party started a policy of selective co-optation and limited electoral opening in order to consolidate and institutionalise its rule.³⁹ The party confronted a situation where the majority of people belonged to different ethnic groups on whose loyalty the party did not count during the martial law era (1947-1987). Vote-buying by local factions⁴⁰ was manipulated by the KMT party to control local elections by trading particularistic political favours and patronage for votes.⁴¹

Many scholars have noted that vote-buying initially was modest and had a certain “morality”, meaning that a voter would only take money from one candidate, who s/he was inclined towards anyway and subsequently also vote for that candidate. The practice of large-scale vote-buying exploded in the early 1990s as the KMT's control of politics was crumbling and the party reached out to wealthy businessmen as well as gangsters, who spent substantially larger sums on buying votes. Voter behaviour also changed. Money was now accepted from many candidates in a non-committal way.⁴²

Despite the ruling party's deploring bribery and corruption for decades, not much was done about vote-buying as long as the KMT was in power, since the party itself depended on vote-buying to secure its support in local elections.⁴³ After the DPP's assuming power in the 2000 presidential elections, the new Justice Minister Chen Ting-nan tried to change the situation as the DPP government's credibility to some extent depended

³⁸ This list was provided by a person responsible for the services at a service centre, and crosschecked with other interviewees.

³⁹ Chu and Lin 2001, pp. 102-129.

⁴⁰ Chen 1995a, Bosco 1994, Bosco 1992, Liao 2000.

⁴¹ Bosco has identified common favours dispensed by factions as jobs, local improvements (e.g. roads, lights), bureaucratic problems of businesses (e.g. licences and tax audits), and problems of ordinary citizens (such as dispute mediation). Bosco 1992, p. 161.

⁴² See Jacobs, “Reporter's Notebook”, Crissman 1981, pp. 110-111, Kuo 2000.

⁴³ Chen 1995a.

on doing something about the “black-and-gold” (*heijin*) politics the DPP had continuously deplored.⁴⁴

According to all sources interviewed on this issue during two elections in 2001 and 2002 observed by the author, the new tougher official approach on vote-buying and visible gangster-politicians combined with a clampdown on the abuse of local financial institutions⁴⁵ has had the effect of reducing vote-buying and making it more discreet, although it has not done away with the phenomenon, especially in the south. Election workers e.g. reported that in the 2001 legislative elections in Kaohsiung city at least 8 of 19 candidates were buying votes.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the DPP itself has not been able to stay untarnished by the corruption that tainted the KMT. Many observers have lately deplored the DPP's going down the road travelled by KMT of developing intimate links between politics and business.

Vote-buying in Taiwanese politics is habitually deplored by political scientists, in particular Western ones, who see it as an embarrassing stain on Taiwan's otherwise successful political transition.⁴⁷ However, such an indiscriminately negative view of the practice ignores the social aspects of the phenomenon. The argument is based on three things. Firstly, it is commonly agreed that vote-buying, especially indirect vote-buying through *zhuangjiao*⁴⁸ has a very low rate of success in higher level elections, estimates ranging between 10-25%. With the rise of educational levels, the ability of money to affect people's vote has been in long-term decline. This means that a candidate, who bases her/his campaign exclusively on buying votes, while still perhaps able to get elected, will end up spending a huge amount of money in order for the money to have a meaningful effect. As an effective strategy, it is thus available only to the rich few.

Secondly, money is seldom given away indiscriminately. In Taiwan, people will tend to know what their neighbour's political inclination is, especially in the countryside. Money is generally not offered to people, who have a different political inclination and therefore are unlikely to vote for the candidate. Rather it is given to prospective voters to strengthen their support. Furthermore, the money seldom moves between complete strangers, instead it is given discreetly between friends, in the process strengthening the social bonds (*guanxi*) between the people involved.

Thirdly, even those who do not buy votes will give gifts instead. There is hardly a campaign in Taiwan that does not give something concrete to voters. In most cases caps, pens, lighters and other similar gifts are handed away. The campaign office also has open

⁴⁴ In recent elections a NT\$30 rule (ca US\$1) was instituted. That is, any gift worth more than this amount constitute vote-buying. The rule was backed up by frequent media advertisements urging voters to report vote-buying against a substantial reward. In recent years the customary sums given away have usually been between NT\$500 and NT\$2000 per person, but can run as high as NT\$10.000 in borough warden elections. Bruce Jacobs recalls that in the early and mid-1970s, the price for a vote was NT\$40, equivalent to US\$1 at the time, while Joseph Bosco reported figures of NT\$200-300 in a township executive election and NT\$200 in a county representative election in 1990. Jacobs, “Reporter's Notebook”, Bosco 1994, p. 39.

⁴⁵ Farmers' and fishermen's credit associations and local banks have traditionally been the KMT's source of loans (seldom repaid) and conduit for campaign money. As part of the drive against *heijin* spearheaded by Justice Minister Chen Ting-nan, the Justice Minister backed by the Ministry of Finance, put their own people in these organizations to control the money flows, thus cutting KMT candidates access to money.

⁴⁶ Author's interviews with election workers in southern Taiwan, November 2001.

⁴⁷ There is an interesting discrepancy here between political scientists, who generally deplore the practice, see e.g. Diamond 2001, and anthropologists, like Jacobs and Bosco, who stress the positive functions of the practice, socially and for Taiwan's democratisation.

⁴⁸ Usually a lump sum of money is distributed to a *zhuangjiao*, who is entrusted to redistribute the money in his “constituency”. Alternatively larger sums of money (on average) can be given directly to voters. In the latter case the probability of “winning the vote” is higher, but it requires larger amounts of money and the risks of getting caught are higher. E.g. Bosco 1994, pp. 39-40.

doors during the campaign, when people can come in and sit for a while. Food, tea, water, cigarettes or sweets are usually offered to all guests. The practice appears to apply across the board in elections on the island.

Observation of several election campaigns therefore led the author to the conclusion that vote-buying or gift-giving plays other important social roles in addition to their role as a way to sway the vote. They are also a social custom, which serves to strengthen social bonds between people, while showing generosity/hospitality on the part of the politician. Getting votes and strengthening bonds is not, however, yet an exhaustive explanation for the phenomenon of vote-buying. The explanation needs to be complemented with a face aspect. As with donations and the size of one's campaign, vote-buying is also a way of showing prosperity (although the money previously often came from bank loans not repaid), and indirectly high social position. The factor cannot be neglected, as there are ample indications that Taiwanese election campaigns often descend into escalating vote-buying "arms races". Furthermore, such incidences are particularly common at the least important and least rewarding political levels, such as in borough warden elections where races tend to become very personal. A typical scenario is that candidates A and B are running neck and neck for a borough warden position. Rumour has it that candidate A has bought votes for NT\$500, so candidate B pitches in with NT\$1000, forcing A to raise the stakes, and so on. The practice is similar to many other face-games in Chinese society, such as the battle to pay the restaurant bill.

The spent money can usually be taken back through the financial rewards associated with office and by using the political position for private business purposes. On the local level, the traditional way to recoup the money spent in elections is to "embrace construction" (*bao gongcheng*). Local politicians "take a cut" of the money allocated for public construction projects. They can do so because they have budgetary power. The construction companies will comply because they are afraid that otherwise their project will be cancelled. Furthermore, often the company managers or owners are relatives and friends to the politicians. On the local level, few politicians will make a political issue out of this practice because commonly everyone is in some way in on the take. The only loser is the taxpayer, who picks up the tab. On the national level, legislators take "consulting jobs", which according to insiders are the source of the really big money.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, politicians in Taiwan can also spend their family into ruin. An informant within a local KMT party organization told that two of the KMT candidates in the district in the last legislative/mayoral election got into deep financial trouble because of the election spending (one of the candidates lost, one won). While vote-buying might conceivably be due to the high stakes involved due to expected benefits accruing from office, the sheer excess in Taiwanese election spending⁵⁰ suggests that matters of face also play a part.⁵¹ For the same reason, candidates and parties often need to go on with an expensive show even when it is clear that their candidate will lose. An insider informant told that the local KMT party HQ knew already early on that their mayoral candidate did not stand a chance, but they still did what they could. If they had not done anything, the candidate might have lost with 50-60.000 votes, now they managed to cut the loss to 20.000

⁴⁹ For an account of the intimate relations between politicians and construction companies, see Chen 1995b.

⁵⁰ According to rumours, a legislative candidate, who was buying votes in the 1998 legislative elections, spent NT\$380 million (over US\$10 million), while in the 1994 election for a township mayor, the candidate bought votes for NT\$2000 and spent close to NT\$1 billion (US\$30 million).

⁵¹ In an interview with the son of a man, who once ran for borough warden, his father spent around NT\$700-800.000 on his campaign (mainly on treating everyone for food and drink during a month) even without vote-buying. The son was of the opinion his father participated in the election in order to gain some face in his community and "to be somebody". Author's interview in southern Taiwan, June 2002.

votes. The former result would have looked very bad (*nankan*) and probably resulted in heads rolling in the local HQ.⁵²

Making sense of politician/supporter interaction in Taiwan

This paper has claimed that Taiwanese politicians, consciously or unconsciously, build their election campaign around various *guanxi* strategies. Central elements of such strategies are: 1) making full use of all existing social connections in campaigns, drawing upon a sense of social or moral obligation to help because of the pre-existing relationship; 2) in the absence of a *guanxi* base, establishing new *virtual guanxi bases* with the supporter/voter through direct contact and small favours; 3) maintaining and enhancing social prestige (face); and 4) manipulating the voters sense of obligation to vote for people whom they personally “know” or have received a favour from.⁵³

At the same time, supporters/voters also use *guanxi* strategies in order to maintain or strengthen ties with a candidate they know. Especially older people in the south tend to trust politicians they personally know much more than faceless organizations. It is within this context that the meaning of both the handshake culture and politician visits to family and community events have to be sought. Such events no matter how fleeting, establish/maintain a personal relationship and rudimentary emotional connection between the voter/supporter and the politician. The importance Taiwanese attach to this direct connection is attested to by interviews both with voters and politicians.

Nevertheless, *guanxi* is a mixed blessing, because it entails a commitment and long-term obligations in any but the most instrumental of relationships. Investing in social connections and caring for them is time- and resource-consuming. Sometimes counterstrategies are therefore employed by people who want to avoid getting entangled in too many relationships or who do not have a desire to deepen the emotional component of their relationship with a person.⁵⁴ Such counterstrategies need, however, to be tempered by the necessary social tact, in order to save face.

Such *guanxi* evasion is observed when *zhuangjiao* have to appear to support several candidates, while they actually only support one. A similar situation arises when there is a conflict between the obligations of two or more relationships. Frequently used strategies to extricate oneself from the plight are to proclaim neutrality or to ask someone else to help mobilize votes for the candidate who is asking for help, if oneself is unable to due to a prior commitment. A vast *guanxi* network can hence sometimes create serious conflicts.⁵⁵ Often the pleaded person has to assess with whom her/his friendship is stronger or more important. To some extent, such behavioural patterns can be observed even during handshaking with voters. Judging from the visibly different facial and bodily expressions and enthusiasm (or lack of it) of the potential voter, it seems possible to guess if the person in question is eager to establish/maintain the relation or wants to avoid it.

⁵² Author's interview, June 2002.

⁵³ According to Hwang, *guanxi* strategies manipulate the relationship by offering mutual help and favours (concrete manifestations of *renqing*) in order to move it away from the instrumental pole and towards the emotional one, as this entails that the relation becomes more long-term, with concomitant obligations, including reciprocation of favours (*bao*). Hwang 1987, Jacobs 1979.

⁵⁴ King 1994, pp. 121-122.

⁵⁵ As David Wank has reported on *guanxi* between businessmen and politicians in Xiamen on the Mainland, a vast *guanxi* network can also increase political risks and jealousy, which can turn disastrous Wank 1999, pp. 147-149.

At this point we return to the *guanxi* distinctions made by Guo Xuezhi. In the table below, the various campaign activities described in this paper are sorted according to the four *guanxi* dimensions identified by Guo. On the vertical axis, the actions are further divided into politician-to-voter/supporter actions, supporter-to-politician actions and politician-to-politician actions. The last are closest to the elite relations within the CCP analysed by Guo himself with this framework. They are here offered as a comparison.

Table 1. Taiwanese election activities grouped according to Guo Xuezhi's framework.

Politician-to-voter/supporter	Supporter-to-politician	Politician-to-politician
<u>instrumental</u> 1. large-scale vote-buying 2. mobilizing supporters to attend pre-election rally	<u>instrumental</u> 1. big donations by <i>zhuangjiao</i> 2. professionals who volunteer at a service centre without a prior relationship with the candidate	<u>instrumental</u> 1. temporary election alliances between politicians, e.g. through mutual sharing of <i>zhuangjiao</i>
<u>etiquette</u> 1. handshaking 2. participation at family and community events 3. "ordinary" vote-buying 4. gift-giving 5. street parades	<u>etiquette</u> 1. asking politician to participate in family/community events 2. small donations by friends and ordinary supporters	<u>etiquette</u> 1. political alliances without any affective component, e.g. party heavyweights stumping for party candidates
<u>moral</u> 1. asking friends for help in campaign organisation 2. asking colleagues for help in offering free services	<u>moral</u> 1. mobilization help offered by long-term <i>zhuangjiao</i> 2. voluntary campaign helpers 3. professional friends helping voluntarily at service centres	<u>moral</u> 1. long-term political alliances between close friends (factions)
<u>emotional</u> 1. mobilizing personal social networks to vote	<u>emotional</u> 1. campaign help by wider family (family, relatives and close friends)	<u>emotional</u> 1. campaign help offered to close political protégés (patron-client relations)

The importance of the various campaign activities for the overall campaign varies. Very generally, instrumental dimension activities tend to be tactical moves. They may in some situations turn out to be decisive for the outcome. Etiquette dimension activities are compulsory for any campaign in southern and central Taiwan. No campaign can do without these as they are expected by people as a kind of courtesy and showing of respect to voters. As can be seen, most of the activities between politicians and ordinary voters fall within this category, whereas interaction between politicians and close supporters tend to occur more on the moral and emotional dimensions. Moral dimension activities are important for any campaign in financial, organizational and mobilizational terms. Finally, emotional dimension activities form the core of the campaign organisation, especially in local elections.⁵⁶ As Guo reminds us, it is difficult to draw clear lines between the four dimensions as they in practice usually are entwined. Therefore, the distinctions should be treated as analytical, not essential ones.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, they offer a framework for more rigorous analysis of the organisation of a Taiwanese election campaign.

⁵⁶ Note that we here only assess the effect of the election campaign itself on election success. However, other factors, especially party nomination, party affiliation in relation to party support in the election district and personal appeal are at least equally important to the outcome.

⁵⁷ Guo 2001, pp. 88.

The frequent electoral campaigns weave a complex web of mutual favours and obligations. Family, friends, relatives and colleagues, who help out in the campaign, all do a favour to the candidate. On the other hand, everyone offering help expects something in return, if the candidate is elected,⁵⁸ the expected return being roughly commensurate to the size of the help given. A donor of NT\$100 naturally cannot expect the same kind of help as someone giving NT\$100.000. Having been elected the politician is inevitably indebted in many directions.

Conclusions

Guanxi strategies and face maintenance are central aspects of the “front stage” of Taiwanese politics—the visible aspects of it. Admittedly, they leave a lot hidden behind the scenes and say nothing about the “content” of politics. They are nonetheless essential elements of election campaigns and a major part of politics in a context where the political content tends to become a sideshow beside the real and symbolic battles between politicians for prestige and office.

The relationship between the politician and voter in Taiwan appears to be more direct, personal, concrete and emotional than politician/voter relations in most of the West. The interviews and fieldwork conducted for this research suggests that seeing the possibilities of various *guanxi* strategies and understanding the rules of social tact in enhancing one's own and other people's face when appropriate, can make or break an election campaign in Taiwan. They are thus important cultural tools in the tool kit of the Taiwanese politician, likely to be at least semi-consciously understood by all those sharing a similar cultural background. On the other hand, a politician coming from another kind of political culture, where politics is more about issues, ideologies and “rational” debate might be at a loss in the Taiwanese political environment.⁵⁹

From the data, we can draw the tentative conclusion that Taiwanese voters in their evaluation of candidates (note that choice of political party is a separate issue) tend to lay stress on two things: *the relative strength of their personal relations with the candidates*—more important in local elections—and *a concrete moral evaluation of the candidate*—more important in higher level elections.⁶⁰ Moral is here not to be understood in the sense of “integrity”, rather in terms of whether one works for the direct/concrete benefit of the people, in particular one's supporters.⁶¹ It is thus inseparable from the politician's service record.⁶² A good service record will earn one the reputation of a “good” person, and important asset in Taiwanese politics.

Whether the features of the political culture described in this paper will remain unaltered is too early to say. The fact that the “Taiwanese” political culture described in this paper is more pronounced in rural or semi-rural areas than urban⁶³ (conversely,

⁵⁸ According to Mauss, a gift always expects something in return. There is no such thing as a gift, which is given without this expectation. Mauss 1990 [1925].

⁵⁹ Cf. Clastres 1989, Hirschman 1977.

⁶⁰ Wen Chong-I has noted that in a Taiwanese community, the higher the leadership level, the more evaluation of personal morality stand out as the decisive criterion for who becomes a social leader. Wen 1989, pp. 302-303.

⁶¹ Cf. Fei 1992 [1947], pp. 71-79.

⁶² It is interesting to note, that providing concrete public services of a philanthropic nature has been seen as a central element also of local elites maintaining their power in pre-20th century. See e.g. Brook 1994, pp. 43-50.

⁶³ Scholars have noted a difference in *guanxi* practices between village and city in China, the former being more focused on the moral aspects of the relationship, and the latter on the instrumental aspects of it. Yang

campaigning in Taipei is comparatively the most issue- and ideology-based) and among older people rather than younger, would seem to point in the direction that following urbanization, higher and more broadly dispersed educational attainment and wider exposure to Western conceptions of what democratic politics ought to look like,⁶⁴ the traditional Taiwanese way of campaigning may gradually fade. But the process is bound to be slow. Interestingly, from an anthropological point of view, and despite the alleged difference in political system, there are many similarities between Taiwanese politics and politics in Mainland China, especially with regards to the importance of social networks (*guanxi*) and face.

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talks about a difference between the rural gift economy and the urban "art of *guanxi*". Yang 1994, pp. 312-20; Fei 1992 [1947], p. 126.

⁶⁴ For a review of how a democratic consciousness spread in Taiwan, see Jiang 2000.

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