Ping-Hsuan Wang

Populism against Same-Sex Marriage in Taiwan.
Integrating Stance-taking and Framing in Facebook Posts and Comments

Abstract: Populist discourse represents a singular 'people' against 'the elites'. To elucidate such discursive representation in Coalition of Happiness for Our Next Generation's (CHONG, 下一代幸福聯盟) Facebook posts against same-sex marriage (SSM) in Taiwan, this Interactional Sociolinguistic study integrates the 'stance triangle' (evaluation-positioning-alignment) and frame theory. Discourse analysis of texts and images on CHONG's Facebook page (2017-2019) demonstrates how CHONG transformed its anti-SSM stance into populist movements under democratic guise before and after the 2018 referendum. CHONG negatively evaluated SSM to position the government in opposition to 'the people' and deter SSM legislation. The 'referendum' is equated with 'the will of the people', thereby positioning the anti-SSM stance as 'democratically sanctioned'. Subsequently, the object of comment evaluations shifted from marriage-oriented to government-directed, indicating commenters' increasing alignment with CHONG's populist framing of SSM in legal terms. Findings contribute to theorizing online populist movements in Asia.

Keywords: *same-sex marriage*, *referendum*, *populism*, *stance*, *framing*, *Facebook comments*

1. Introduction

The legalization of same-sex marriage (SSM) in Taiwan on 17 May 2019 headlined local news and attracted worldwide attention as the liberal beacon of Asia's LGBT rights. However, on the same day, a major anti-gay organization in Taiwan, 下一代幸福聯盟 ('Coalition of Happiness for Our Next Generation', CHONG), denounced the legislative decision as undemocratic by citing the 2018 referendum results. Claiming to represent the people of Taiwan, CHONG decried the government's violation of the 'will of the people' by passing SSM legislatures. To untangle this debate, I analyze CHONG's Facebook presence throughout the referendum cycle. I argue that CHONG utilized the affordances on Facebook to disseminate a populist discourse that delegitimizes SSM and marginalizes sexual minorities by vilifying multiple government sectors. In doing so, their Facebook page serves as an online venue for collective stance-taking, which leads to the social construction of competing realities pertinent not only to the right to marriage but also to whether it is legitimate to influence policymaking in a democratic society.

In recent years, the term populism (*民粹*, míncuì) is gaining currency in Taiwan, albeit being used pejoratively and thus rendered an unfavored epithet that "serves more to stigmatize than to analyze".[1] However, as I show below, it is imperative to acknowledge its analytical value in order to "deepen our understanding of democracy"[2] under exigent circumstances of anti-SSM movements that can be observed around the world, such as *Sentinelle in piedi* ('Watchman Standing') in Italy and *la Manif pour tous* ('Demonstration for All') in France. In CHONG's case, its populist discourse pits the followers against the ruling party and democratic institutions. The present analysis seeks to advance

---

[1] Rogers Brubaker, "Why Populism?", *Theory and Society*, 46.5 (2017), 358.
[2] Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 11.

the current research by examining right-wing populism as a social movement against sexual pluralism in Asia.

With the prominent role of social media in public participation, this study focuses on the mediated aspect of populism that undergirds previous studies, i.e., political claims in the media to represent the people.[3] To elucidate such mediated dynamics in the online interaction, the analysis combines stance-taking and frame theory in Interactional Sociolinguistics to analyze Facebook posts and comments, i.e., the text-based interaction in computer-mediated communication (CMC).[4] This framework builds on Herring and Androutsopoulous' postulate that "written language constitutes the primary resource for creating social reality".[5] Right-wing extremist discourses create a reality that oppresses sexual pluralism and sexual citizenship,[6] an increasingly salient intersection among European academics.[7]

This integrated framework uses discourse analysis (DA) to illuminate how words are not merely descriptive but performative and 'action-oriented'.[8] Analytically, discourse both reflects social order and shapes individuals' (inter)action.[9] It is for this reason that Bourdieu and Wacquant assert that language as a symbolic system is not only an instrument of knowledge but one of domination.[10] Facilitated by social media, this oppression is taking place across the globe and manifesting as a global 'web of hate'.[11] To contribute to the extant research on SSM in Taiwan,[12] this paper adopts stance-taking for "its indexical property that connects local language use to the knowledge system in the society".[13] The analysis shows that while populist sentiments can be stoked up on Facebook or other social media platforms, participating in online commenting is an active way to neutralize its negative impact.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 *Populism*

Populism entails three core elements: (1) 'the people' who are morally pure, (2) 'the elite' who are corrupt, and (3) the antagonistic representation between them. 'The people' is constructed as a homogenous group, or an empty signifier,[14] because it is retroactively defined by who the enemy is.[15]

---

[3] Gianpietro Mazzoleni, "The Media and the Growth of Neo-Populism in Contemporary Democracies", in Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Stewart and Bruce Horsfield, eds., *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Comparative* Analysis (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 7.

[4] Ping-Hsuan Wang, "Stance, Framing, and the Construction of Reality in Facebook Comments about Taiwan's Same-Sex Marriage Bills", *Discourse & Society*, 31.2 (2020), 218-234.

[5] Susan Herring and Janis Androutsopoulos, "Computer-Mediated Discourse 2.0", in Deborah Tannen, Heidi Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin, eds., *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 139.

[6] Diane Richardson, "Rethinking Sexual Citizenship", *Sociology*, 51.2 (2017), 208-224.

[7] Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond* (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2020); Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan and Andrea Petö, *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[8] Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction* (London: Sage, 1996).

[9] Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, "Introduction: Perspectives on Discourse Analysis", in Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, eds, *The Discourse Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

[10] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13.

[11] Mojca Pajnik and Birgit Sauer, *Populism and the Web: Communicative Practices of Parties and Movements in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[12] I-Ching Lee and Wei-Fang Lin, "Us Versus Them: The Debates on the Legislation of Same-Sex Marriage (1994 - 2015) in Taiwan", *Journal of Homosexuality*, (2020), 1-22; Xuekun Liu, "'But If Taiwan Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage…': Discourses of Homophobia and Nationalism in a Chinese Antigay Community Online", *Critical Discourse Studies*, (2020), 1-16.

[13] Wang, 229; John Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle", in Robert Englebretson, ed., *Stancetaking in Discourse* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 139-182.

[14] Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

[15] Francisco Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2005).

By contrast, 'the elite' refers to the political, economic, or cultural group that disregards or works against the 'general will'.[16] Given this foundation, populists espouse a democratic representation that symbolically relies on their construction of the 'real people', a call that bypasses democratic procedures.[17] For the present analysis, I follow the discursive/ideational approach to populism, which maintains that the discursive practices under examination meet the three aforementioned criteria. This is consistent with the Interactional Sociolinguistic view of discourse as "a collection of inherently contextualized units of language use".[18] Therefore, the meaning of 'discourse' becomes twofold: it refers to text, speech, and other expressions in general on the one hand and "any complex elements, in which relations play a constitutive role" on the other.[19]

Populism comes in a plentitude of forms, from left-wing parties to right-wing organizations, each exhibiting a cause by which 'the people' and 'the elite' are demarcated. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser explain that populism's malleability comes from its being a 'thin-centered ideology' that needs to be combined with other 'host ideologies'.[20] For example, when attached to socialism, left-wing populism criticizes socioeconomic inequality, whereas, when connected to nativism, right-wing populism supports anti-immigrant policies. What the different iterations have in common is alleging an absolute representation of the imagined 'people', which imperils the representative and constitutional foundation of a liberal democracy (i.e., a representative democracy where individual liberty is protected by rule of law). Thus, by focusing on the online mobilization in Taiwan, this paper argues that the anti-SSM populism is a danger to democracy because it "speaks the language of democracy values"[21] to exact exclusionary measures and oppress sexual minorities.

In presenting the case of anti-SSM movements in Taiwan, this paper aims to contribute to populism research by addressing three areas that have not received sufficient attention. First, many studies have focused on 'charismatic leaders' with the rise of right-wing populist leaders in this century.[22] However, populism, the discursive approach stresses, provides an organizing principle for public movements, e.g., Occupy Wallstreet[23] and the Tea Party,[24] realizing bottom-up enactments of populism. In similar veins, CHONG's anti-SSM movements were grassroots initiatives without a strong and clear top-down hierarchy. As CHONG calls for a referendum with the principle that only heterosexual couples stake the claim to marriage, implying that "a *part* of the people *is* the people", it is de facto populist.[25]

Also, while scholars are seeing populism as a global phenomenon,[26] Asia is still sometimes left out of the discussion with the 'Atlantic bias', which pays more attention to (Western) European and (North) American politics. Joining other studies that examine populism in Asia,[27] this study relates CHONG's populist movement to those in other parts of the world, thereby highlighting the 'transnational connections' of populist politics, a spatially-informed perspective with "transnational people against

---

[16] Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017).

[17] Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 27; Albert Weale, *The Will of the People: A Modern Myth* (London: Polity, 2018), 3.

[18] Deborah Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 39.

[19] Laclau, 67.

[20] Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 21.

[21] Müller, *What is Populism?*, 6.

[22] John Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016).

[23] Emil Husted, "From Creation to Amplification: Occupy Wall Street's Transition into an Online Populist Movement" in Julie Uldam and Anne Vestergaard, eds., *Civic Engagement and Social Media: Political Participation Beyond Protest* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 153-173

[24] Rachel Meade, "Populist Narratives from Below: Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party", *IdeAs*, 14.14 (October 1, 2019).

[25] Müller, *What is Populism?*, 22 [*italics* in the original].

[26] Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Standord U.P., 2016).

[27] Youngmi Kim, "Digital Populism in South Korea? Internet Culture and the Trouble with Direct Participation", *Korea Economic Institute*, 3.8 (2008); Thomas Pepinsky, "Migrants, Minorities, and Populism in Asia", *SSRN* (June 5, 2019).

transnational elites".[28] Specifically, this paper considers how sexuality arises as a debated issue amidst global anti-SSM populist movements.[29]

Finally, despite the growing concern about homophobic populism,[30] most accounts remain descriptive without meaningfully engaging with the three criteria of populism as laid out above. DA treats populism as "a language" that seeks to mobilize ordinary people against the "self-serving and undemocratic" elites,[31] and has provided the "empirical vigor" that Hawkins calls for.[32] For instance, Wodak has written on how right-wing populism in Europe instrumentalizes the language of fear to construct dangers and scapegoats.[33] This paper scrutinizes CHONG's homophobic populism to broaden the scope of the literature.

2.2 *Integrating Stance and Frame for Analyzing Online Comments*

In Interactional Sociolinguistics, the notion of stance-taking can be traced back to Ochs' works,[34] in which she propounds that the relation between the language and gender is not direct but mediated by social constructs such as stances. Among them, a stance is defined as "a display of a socially recognized point of view or attitude"[35] through the use of (para)linguistic features such as lexical items and intonation. The study of stance-taking, then, probes the complex relations of social meanings that constitute "domains of social reality".[36] DA approaches stance-taking not as a cognitive process or a psychological state but as a public and intersubjective achievement that indicates the speaker's position and their relationship with others in the interaction.[37] This study adds to recent research that applies this framework to examine online communication.[38]

Building on the intersubjective aspect of stance-taking, Du Bois (2007) proposes the 'stance triangle', a theoretical model in which a stance-taker evaluates the stance object, positions the subject (the self), and aligns with another subject either convergently or divergently (Figure 1). When one takes a stance toward a certain topic, the present stance can be linked to the previous one and the subsequent one. This results in 'stance accretion', where stances accumulate to form a larger network

---

[28] David Featherstone and Lazaros Karaliotas, "Populism", *Soundings*, 72 (2019), 44.

[29] Romana Kuhar and Edme Ajanović, "Sexuality Online: The Construction of Right-Wing Populists' 'Internal Others' in the Web", in Mojca Pajnik and Birgit Sauer, eds., *Populism and the Web: Communicative Practices of Parties and Movements in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Eric Louis Russell, *The Discursive Ecology of Homophobia: Unraveling Anti-LGBTQ Speech on the European Far Right* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2019).

[30] Rachel Savage, "Rising Populism Stokes Homophobic Hate Speech across Europe – Rights Group", *Reuters* (February 4, 2020); Tim Wyatt, "Rising Populism Is Stoking Homophobia across Europe, Say Campaigners", *The Independent* (February 4, 2020).

[31] Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 1995).

[32] Kirk Hawkins, "Is Chávez Populist?: Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective", *Comparative Political Studies*, 42.8 (2009), 1040-1067.

[33] Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

[34] Elanor Ochs, "Indexing Gender", in Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, eds., *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1992), 335-358.

[35] Ochs, "Constructing Social Identity: A Language Socialization Perspective", *Research on Language and Social Interaction,* 26 (1993), 288.

[36] Ochs, "Indexing Gender", 343.

[37] Elise Kärkkäinen, "Stance Taking in Conversation: From Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity", *Text & Talk*, 26.6 (2006); Scott Kiesling, "Stance in Context: Affect, Alignment and Investment in the Analysis of Stancetaking", presented at the iMean conference (Bristol: The University of West England, April 15, 2011).

[38] Ping-Hsuan Wang, "Opposition to Gender Equity Education in Taiwan: A Linguistic Perspective on Social Conservative Language on Facebook", in Caleb M. Clark, Alexander C. Tan, and Karl Ho, eds., *Taiwan: Environmental, Political and Social Issues* (New York: Nova Science, 2021), 299-330; Cynthia Gordon and Didem İkizoğlu, "'Asking for Another' Online: Membership Categorization and Identity Construction on a Food and Nutrition Discussion Board", *Discourse Studies,* 19.3, (2017), 253–271; Kiesling, Umashanthi Pavalanathan, Jim Fitzpatrick, Xiaochuang Han, and Jacob Eisenstein, "Interactional Stancetaking in Online Forums", *Computational Linguistics*, 44.4 (December 2018), 683–718.

---

of meanings.[39] The stance triangle centers on the public and dialogic nature of stance-taking by including the concept of alignment into the theoretical model, thus underscoring the erstwhile point that one's relation to discourse and others is mediated through likened or differentiated interpersonal alignment.[40]
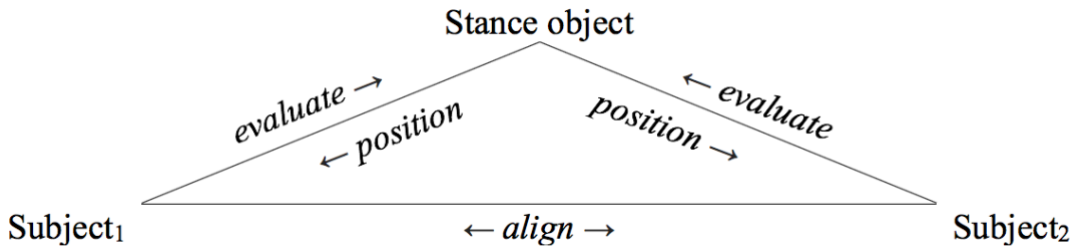

Fig. 1: The stance triangle[41]

The idea of frame is often accredited to Goffman's micro-sociological theorization of interactants' ongoing engagement in and understanding of events in everyday social interaction.[42] As a metacommunicative message that organizes participants' perception,[43] a frame is defined as "a definition of the situation" that is "built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events".[44] Tannen and Wallat incorporate this framework into Interactional Sociolinguistics to describe "what is going on in interaction",[45] accounting for how participants construct meanings and negotiate relationships based on their knowledge of the topic. While Interactional Sociolinguistic research continues to delve into the moment-by-moment interaction, studies in other disciplines, including political communication, have noted how frames are instrumental in the public's understanding of policy and their interpretation of reality.[46]

Scholars have since compared stance and frame,[47] illustrating the common theme of participants' active role in defining the situation as they navigate their relationships to the discourse and to one another. Consequently, alignment is key to bridging the micro-level realization of participant involvement in CMC through language use and macro-level consequences of sociocultural representation in populist movements. Building on the idea that alignment is "an integral part of every

---

[39] Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle", 157.

[40] Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2007).

[41] Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle", 163

[42] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1974).

[43] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).

[44] Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 10.

[45] Deborah Tannen and Cynthia Wallat, "Interactive Frames and Knowledge Schemas in Interaction: Examples from a Medical Examination/Interview", in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Framing in Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1993), 59.

[46] Alberto Ardèvol-Abreu, "Framing Theory in Communication Research. Origins, Development and Current Situation in Spain", *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 70 (2015); Merlijn van Hulst and Dvora Yanow, "From Policy 'Frames' to 'Framing': Theorizing a More Dynamic, Political Approach", *The American Review of Public Administration*, 46.1 (2016), 92-112.

[47] Ping-Hsuan Wang, "Co-Constructing Complex Frames Using Repetition and Evaluation in Family Dinner Talk", *Working Papers of the Linguistics Circle of the University of Victoria*, 28.1 (2018), 26-46; Cynthia Gordon, "Framing and Positioning", in Deborah Tannen, Heidi Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin, eds., *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 324-345; Alexandra Jaffe, *Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (Oxgord: Oxford U.P., 2009); Kiesling, "Stance in Context".

act of evaluation and positioning" through which meanings are shaped by the participants,[48] I present an integrated framework developed in earlier work.[49] The integration is designed to explain online interaction by closely examining online users' active role and the social corollary of the dynamics arising from the interactions between users (Figure 2).
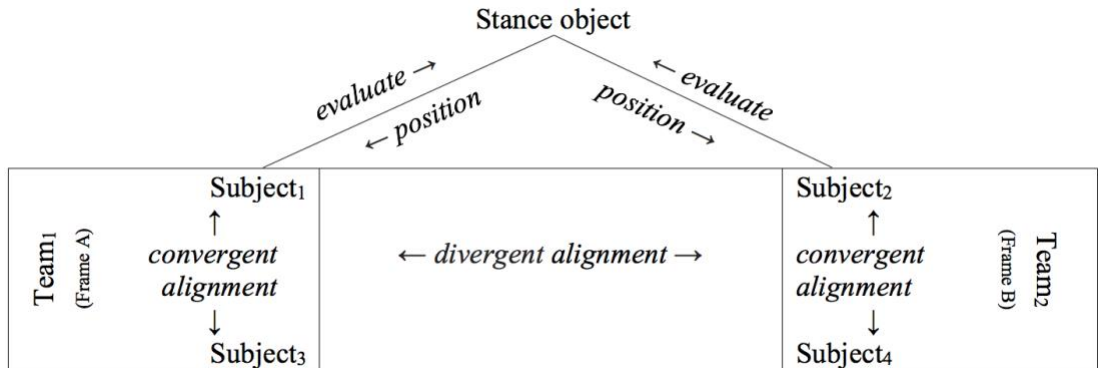

Fig. 2: Sustaining competing frames through alignment in the stance triangle

Synthesizing Goffman's elaboration of 'performance team',[50] frame, and participant alignment (which he terms 'footing'),[51] this integrated framework outlines how participants of the same team collaborate to project an agreed-upon definition of the situation, i.e., a frame, and how this frame is susceptible to change when the alignment shifts. This alignment comes from stance accretion and recruits stance-takers as 'teammates', whose collaboration sustains the frame.[52] Therefore, matching evaluations and positionings of similar stances result in convergent alignments that uniformly define a situation. Conversely, opposing stances from counter positions lead to divergent alignments that divide participants into different teams, each fostering a competing frame in which participants generate "a reality of [their] choice".[53] This theoretical integration aims to encapsulate the relational dimension of stance-taking, for a frame is "involved in the evaluation of the messages it contains".[54] Thus, gauging alignment becomes paramount in investigating the conflictual relationship that essentially defines populism.[55] In sum, this framework allows for a close-up view of how populism as 'a language' creates antagonism at the micro level.

3. Data

The Civil Code of Taiwan stipulated that marriage be an agreement made between "the male and the female parties" (Article No. 972). In response to a petition for constitutional interpretation on SSM (20

[48] John Du Bois and Elise Kärkkäinen, "Taking a Stance on Emotion: Affect, Sequence, and Intersubjectivity in Dialogic Interaction", *Text & Talk*, 32.4 (2012), 441.

[49] Ping-Hsuan Wang, "Negotiating Racialized Sexuality through Online Stancetaking in Text-Based Communication", in Nicole D. Farris, D'Lane R. Compton and Andrea P. Herrera, eds., *Gender, Sexuality, and Race in the Digital Age* (New York: Springer, 2020), 187-203.

[50] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).

[51] Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

[52] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*.

[53] Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 5.

[54] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 188.

[55] Judis, *The Populist Explosion*, 15.

August 2015), 14 grand justices of the Judicial Yuan (司法院) made Interpretation No. 748 (24 May 2017), in which Article No. 972 was ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court (CC).[56] The ruling set a two-year deadline, by which time either the Civil Code should be amended or new laws be enacted to ensure equal rights to marriage for same-sex couples. This ruling heralded the legalization of SSM in Taiwan but CHONG promptly condemned the ruling on its Facebook page and proposed three 'pro-family' referendum questions (Case 10 and 12; Case 11, on gender equity education, outside the purview of this paper). In turn, pro-SSM organizations proposed a 'marriage equality' referendum question (Case 14).

Table 1: 2018 referendum questions and outcomes on legalizing SSM in Taiwan.

Number	Referendum Question	For		Against	
		n	%	n	%
Case 10	Do you agree that marriage defined in the Civil Code should be restricted to the union between one man and one woman?	7,658,008	72.48	2,907,429	27.52
Case 12	Do you agree to the protection of the rights of same-sex couples in cohabitation on a permanent basis in ways other than changing of the Civil Code?	6,401,748	61.12	4,072,471	38.88
Case 14	Do you agree to the protection of same-sex marital rights with marriage as defined in the Civil Code?	3,382,286	32.74	6,949,697	67.26

The referendum results came out on 24 November 2018 as a victory for CHONG and a defeat for the pro-SSM camp (Table 1). By the Referendum Act, Case 14 was vetoed and, per Case 12, CHONG submitted a bill that limited the rights for same-sex couples with legal terms such as 'cohabitation of relatives' in place of 'marriage' and 'spouse'. In contrast, the Executive Yuan (行政院), led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), drafted another bill in February 2019. It applied articles from the Civil Code mutatis mutandis (apply where applicable) pursuant to Interpretation No. 748. The bill was passed at the Legislative Yuan (立法院) on 17 May 2019 and went into effect one week later. CHONG rallied against the Executive Yuan's version by accusing the DPP of dismissing the 'will of the people' (WOTP) as shown in the referendum results, despite Bill Case 12's contradictory preposition to Interpretation No. 748.

Similar civic initiatives have been taken worldwide, such as *Aliancia za rodinu* (AZR, 'Alliance for the Family') in Slovakia and *U ime obitelji* (UiO, 'On Behalf of the Family') in Croatia (Table 2). However, anti-SSM popular votes per se are not populist. Related movements become populist only when referendum outcomes are equated with the WOTP and leveraged against the government to hijack policymaking.[57] Although some studies examine past instances leading up to the referendums,[58] few follow up the campaigns post-referendum. To illustrate how the referendum in Taiwan was exploited to a populist end, this paper analyzes posts and comments on CHONG's Facebook page from 2017 (pre-referendum) to 2019 (post-referendum).

---

[56] Judicial Yuan of Taiwan, "No. 748 Same-Sex Marriage Case", (May 24, 2017), https://cons.judicial.gov.tw/jcc/en-us/jep03/show?expno=748.

[57] Weale, *The Will of the People*, x.

[58] Veronika Valkovičová, "'Regrettably, It Seems That Breaking One Border Causes Others to Tumble': Nationalism and Homonegativity in the 2015 Slovak Referendum", *Politique Européenne*, 55.1 (2017), 86-115.

Table 2: States, years, and outcomes of recent popular votes on SSM.

State	Year	Response %		Result
		For	Against	
Croatia	2013	33.72	66.28	Amended*
Slovakia	2015	4.13	94.50	Vetoed**
Ireland	2015	62.07	37.93	Adopted
Slovenia	2015	36.49	63.51	Vetoed
Bermuda	2016	31.64	68.54	Vetoed
Australia	2017	61.60	38.40	Adopted
Romania	2018	6.60	93.40	Vetoed**

*Croatian Constitution was amended to ban same-sex marriage.
**The voter turnout fell below the required threshold.

Both CHONG's posts and comments in reply are publicly available, i.e., anyone with or without a Facebook account can access and read the content. Except for CHONG, commenters have been anonymized with assigned pseudonyms. The texts were translated from Mandarin Chinese into English by the author before being coded by semantic themes, with similar ones conglomerated into aggregated tags (e.g., 'constitution' and 'separation of powers' fall into 'government'). The analysis focuses on the textual and visual representation of events in the referendum cycle, showing how CHONG equated the referendum outcome with the WOTP, eventually turning the ruling party into "the enemy of democracy".[59]

4. Analysis
In this section, I analyze two junctures across the referendum cycle to illustrate how CHONG created polemics between 'the people' and a given establishment, from the grand justices during the interpretation stage to the DPP after the passage of the SSM bill. In the first two instances, I present CHONG's textual descriptions and cartoon illustrations that portray the grand justices as authoritarian. In the third instance, I demonstrate that commenters have adopted CHONG's formulation: that the referendum results should be taken as the WOTP and, by implication, the basis upon which policies should be made.

4.1 *The Judicial Elites vs. the People*
After the grand justices gathered for the CC on 25 March 2017, CHONG's post depicted the meeting as exclusionary. The textual description and a cartoon illustration labeled the grand justices as 'judicial elites' (*司法菁英*, sīfǎ jīng yīng).

---

[59] Weale, *The Will of the People*, x.

Excerpt 1: 'One-voiced constitutional court' (29 March 2017)

【憲法法庭一言堂】
在憲法法庭的同婚討論中，並未充分考量貿然修改婚姻制度對全民的影響，少數司法菁英的意見將凌駕整體全民的聲音。
#司法菁英凌駕全民
#少數意見竟多過多數意見
【One-Voiced Constitutional Court】
In the Constitutional Court's discussion of SSM, the effects on the people of hastily changing the institution of marriage have not been thoroughly evaluated. The opinions of a few judicial elites will override the voice of the people.
#JudicialElitesOverrideThePeople
#MinorityOpinionsSurprisinglyOutnumberMajorityOpinions

CHONG's post negatively evaluates the CC by describing it as an establishment that ignores the constituency whose voice is silenced in the SSM debate. The title of this post 'one-voiced hall' (一言堂, yīyántáng), an idiom in contemporary Mandarin Chinese that refers to a dictatorial style of decision-making, echoes CHONG's anti-institutionalist stance. Adverbials, 'hastily' (貿然, màorán) and 'not thoroughly' (未充分, wèi chōngfèn), are expressive of CHONG's dismissive stance toward the grand justices' decision. CCs in modern democracies "protect basic political rights and preserve pluralism in politics and society",[60] but CHONG's evaluation positions it in opposition to 'the people'. In contrast, 'the people' (全民, quánmín, literally 'all people', often used in legal context) stands for a homogenous entity that is excluded and, therefore, disadvantaged. While the grand justices are dubbed the 'judicial elites', 'the people' is positioned through 'victimization',[61] where the group is affected by the change that would ensue should SSM be legalized.

---

[60] Müller, *What is Populism?*, 55.
[61] Kuhar and Ajanović, "Sexuality Online".

Fig. 3: 'One-voiced constitutional court' (29 March 2017)

The antagonistic relationship is visually represented in Figure 3: the CC keeps out the 'the dissenting opinion' (*反方意見*, fǎnfāng yìjiàn), with the issue of SSM discussed only among a few stakeholders. A glass jar separates the meeting attendees from 'the people' outside. Sitting at the table are three persons marked by the titles above their heads: the non-governmental organization (NGO), the government sector, and the grand justice (left to right). The NGO representative, while dressed in white, has a rainbow symbol on one sleeve, implying support for gay rights. Across the table is the grand justice in the official Taiwanese court dress for judges. With the government representative seated in the middle also in formal attire, the outfits not only highlight the respective roles of the three participants but distinguish them from the 'outsiders' in plain clothes, who are meant to personify ordinary citizens.

Excerpt 2 are illustrative comments in reply to this post. Commenters highlight different facets of the issue by evaluating gay rights activism and the CC. Negative evaluations position some of them opposite the grand justices, thus creating a convergent alignment with CHONG.

Excerpt 2: Comments in reply to 'One-voiced constitutional court'.

Comment types	Examples
Gay rights	Tang: 為什麼同運團體在反同婚聲浪日益高張時來訴請釋憲法庭?因為他們在歐美國家就是按照這種模式而操作成功。只要把同婚的焦點牽制在人權，平等，成功的機率提高很多。 Why did gay rights activists petition for constitutional interpretation at the height of anti-SSM backlash? It's because those in the European and American countries succeeded by taking this strategy. With the focus pinned on human rights and equality, the success rate increases considerably.
Government	Ling: 我不相信大部分法官看不出來同婚完全是意識形態的問題。數以百計千計的法條同時要修改，怎可能對社會毫無影響?這是很明顯的謊言!我認為真相是，這個法足以傾覆國家! I don't believe the justices can't tell that SSM is entirely ideological. With hundreds or thousands of laws to amend, how can it exert no influence on the society? A blatant lie! I think the truth is this law is enough to subvert the country! Kung: @Ling 你是不是好好的去了解法律程序再來談，不然看起來真的滿好笑的，這是釋憲，不是什麼公聽會 Could you try to really understand the legal process before discussing this, otherwise you sound ridiculous, this is constitutional interpretation, not some public hearing

Tang mentions the peculiar timing of the petition and the CC in an unfriendly climate to SSM. The 'rights discourse' is invoked to develop an 'us-versus-them' differentiation, emphasizing different ideas and divergent outcomes.[62] Also, by relating Taiwan's pro-gay activism to that in the West, Tang concomitantly traces a transnational anti-gay conservatism. Ling questions the ruling and warns of the threat to the country. Evaluating against SSM, Ling is self-positioned as a 'concerned citizen', masking the homophobic stance with a nationalist discourse that buttresses opposition to SSM.[63] Replying to Ling's comment, Kung clarifies that the CC is a due process at the highest level, especially for the petitioner, rather than a public hearing, whose legal nature involves direct citizen's participation at the local level. Kung's evaluation acknowledges the legitimacy of the CC, positioning away from the anti-SSM stance and disaligning with CHONG. The stance-taking in the commenter interaction can be illustrated using the integrated framework (Figure 4), in which the convergent alignment between CHONG and Ling, and that between the CC and Kung widens the schism between the two teams. This echoes the increasing bipolar views regarding SSM observed by Lee and Lin.

---
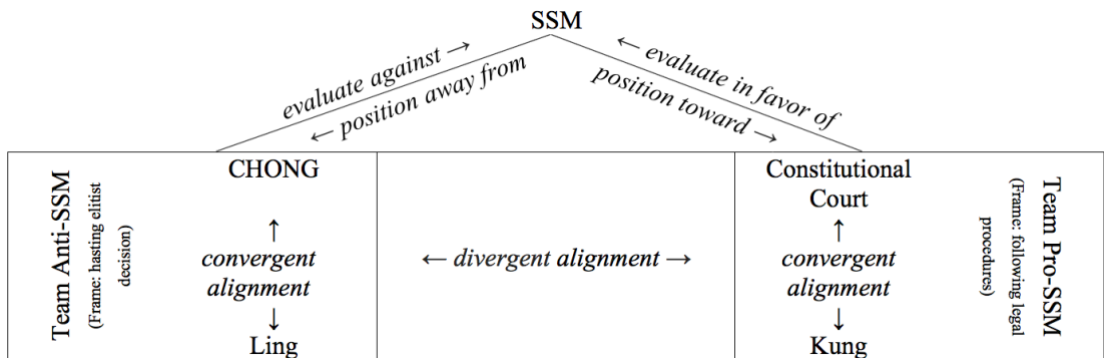
[62] Lee and Lin, "Us Versus Them".
[63] Liu, "'But If Taiwan Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage…'".

Fig. 4: Stancetaking and framing in Excerpt 2

In sum, the CC is attacked for addressing the SSM controversy while 'the people' are placed on the same side as CHONG in opposition to SSM. The disalignment emerges accordingly in text-based CMC at the micro level that gradually gains momentum and ramifies in the referendum votes at the macro level.

After Interpretation No. 748 was made, CHONG posted an image, denouncing the Judicial Yuan for "colluding with the gay rights activists" on legalizing SSM.

Fig. 5: 'Cross it in two years' (Judicial Yuan: Listen up! Cross it in two years or I'll kick you off!/ Legislative Yuan: But…we're still figuring out a way to cross it!/ Caption: When the judicial branch overpowers the legislative branch, a disaster begins for the people…, 29 May 2017).

The grand justice (left) is dressed in the official court robe in Taiwan to highlight his institutional role as part of the Judicial Yuan. He is pictured with a menacing look and an overbearing posture, with a telling age difference and disproportionate size to the two persons (right) in the position of the Legislative Yuan. Moreover, the two directives (*你們聽好*, nǐmen tīng hǎo and *兩年內不過去*, liǎng nián nèi bù guòqù) are conveyed in a screaming speech bubble, indicated by the jagged outline. This phrasing oversimplifies Interpretation No. 748 and exaggerates the magnitude of the authority. Contrarily, the legislative figures' reply is included in a regular speech bubble, with ellipsis signaling hesitation[64] or even disagreement and confusion.[65] Both the image arrangement and the linguistic features resonate with the caption at the bottom (*司法權高於立法權*, sīfǎ quán gāo yú lìfǎ quán), foreboding a predicament for 'the people' (*人民*, rénmín, often used in everyday context).

The structure where 'the people' are positioned in an antagonistic relation to 'the elite' is palpable. Here, populism as a thin-centered ideology is embodied by an anti-SSM ideology. Like that of AZR and UiO, a 'pro-family' stance with respect to the one-man-one-woman definition of marriage reinforces the heterosexual hegemony that invalidates same-sex couples' right to marriage. The grand justices are presented as colluding with the gay rights activists. This characterization is evidenced in the illustration by the rainbow-shaded wooden bat held by the grand justice. Without resorting to

---

[64] Erika Darics, "Relational Work in Synchronous Text-based CMC of Virtual Teams", in Rotimi Taiwo, ed., *Handbook of Research on Discourse Behavior and Digital Communication: Language Structures and Social Interaction* (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2010), 830-851.

[65] Kenneth Keng Wee Ong, "Disagreement, Confusion, Disapproval, Turn Elicitation and Floor Holding: Actions as Accomplished by Ellipsis Marks-only Turns and Blank Turns in Quasisynchronous Chats", *Discourse Studies*, 13.2 (2011), 211-234.

explicit hate speech or homophobic remarks,[66] CHONG manages to propagate its approved definition of marriage by persistently positioning the grand justices as the self-serving elites working against 'the people'. CHONG's posts so far exemplify how discourse can be used "to provide continual indices of who they are and what they want to communicate".[67] This also sets up the condition for its commenters to (dis)align, thereby shaping how the event is framed and understood.

Of the 202 comments written in reply to this post, a number of them (N = 75) evaluate gay rights issues as the stance object (Table 3), including homosexuality itself and SSM (Excerpt 3). However, equally prominent in the thread are comments on the government, including its branches and officials. Judging from the comment composition, CHONG's populist discourse is taking effect in combining the anti-SSM views with the anti-elite sentiments. When commenters express discontent with the government and the grand justices' ruling, they simultaneously disapprove same-sex couples' right to marriage. To delegitimize SSM, CHONG's homophobic populism bases its strategies on villainizing the government.

Table 3: Numbers and percentages of comments in reply to 'Cross it in two years' (N = 202).

Topic	Gay rights		Government		CHONG		Political party	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Negative	47	23.3	31	15.4	15	7.4	13	6.4
Positive	28	13.9	40	19.8	9	4.5	12	5.9
Unclear	0	0.0	3	1.5	4	1.9	0	0.0
Total	**75**	**37.1**	**74**	**36.6**	**28**	**13.9**	**25**	**12.4**

Next, Excerpt 3 presents some examples to show how commenters attend to different aspects of the SSM issue. Ultimately, with their respective evaluations and positionings, the commenters align with CHONG convergently or divergently.

---

[66] Der-Lan Yeh, "Good Words Hurt Too: The Cyberdiscourse against Same-sex Marriage in Taiwan", *Journal of Archaeology and Anthropology*, 86 (2017), 69-110.
[67] Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse*, 133.

Excerpt 3: Comments in reply to 'Cross it in two years'.

Comment types	Examples
Gay rights	Ming: 說實在的，就讓那些亂搞的去玩吧～這些人生病之後，社會就安靜多了 Honestly, let the promiscuous play around~ once they're ill, the society will be much quieter Hsieh: @Ming 糟糕的是這些人染愛滋還是照玩不誤 Worse still, these people keep on playing even when infected with AIDS Shang: @Ming 異性戀也會得愛滋病，別再推給同性愛了，好嗎？ Heterosexuals get AIDS too. Stop scapegoating same-sex love, okay?
Government	Cheng: TMD 原來過去幾十年來，我們被違憲的法律鉗制著。快，再審視其他，還有沒有違憲的 Dammit. Turned out for the past decades we've been muzzled by unconstitutional laws. Hurry, check if there's more unconstitutional ones Dan: 司法院又不凌駕於民意之上～ It's not like the Judicial Yuan's above the WOTP~ Shih: 你們到底懂不懂權力分立?你們再造謠生事，才是災難的開始 Do you even understand the separation of powers? If you keep starting rumors, that's the real beginning of a disaster
CHONG	Tsui: 下一代幸福加油!婚姻家庭全民決定加油! Support CHONG! Support 'Marriage, family; people decide'!
Political party	Yang: 等等，什麼時候冥盡擋開始擁護憲法了。 Hold up, since when did DPP start supporting the constitution. Chi: @Yang 嗯，只要把一切問題推給民進黨就不用繼續思考，這樣的人生也挺輕鬆的啦 Yeah, just blame everything on DPP and give up thinking, that's a pretty easy life

Ming characterizes non-heterosexuals as 'the promiscuous', a common anti-gay judgment based on moral values related to sex.[68] Similarly, the association with HIV, which is corroborated by Hsieh, draws on the stereotype of non-heterosexuals as sexually active and, therefore, prone to sexually transmitted diseases. [69] This moralist framing excludes same-sex couples' sexual citizenship by imagining an ideal relationship in which the partners do not 'play around'. Shang counters by saying that heterosexuals are just as susceptible to HIV and identifies the moral judgment as unfounded and wrongly stigmatizing non-heterosexuals.

Cheng mocks the ruling by remarking the seemingly spontaneity of determining whether a law is constitutional or not. In response, Dan notes that the Judicial Yuan's, and by extension the grand justices', actions are not unchecked by the people. Shih chimes in to locate CHONG's accusation in the post and the discussion in the comments in terms of the separation of powers. The interrogative structure in Mandarin (V-not-V) and the intensifier 'even' (到底, dàodǐ) serve the rhetorical function of refuting the attack on the CC and its ruling. Also, in CMC, recycling the phrase in CHONG's illustration 'beginning of a disaster' (災難的開始, zāinàn de kāishǐ) redefines the situation not as faulting the government's inadequacy but as displaying ignorance of government division, thus signaling a derisive shift in the emotional stance toward CHONG, the cited speaker.[70] Through direct reply, their respective stances accrue to form competing frames (Figure 8).

Tsui voices support for CHONG and its cause by repeating the anti-SSM slogan 'marriage, family; people decide' (婚姻家庭，全民決定, hūnyīn jiātíng, quánmín juédìng), which again invokes the concept of 'the people' and traditional family values, imbued with an anti-establishment view. The favorable evaluation of this message disputes the legitimacy of SSM (upholding the marriage definition that excludes same-sex couples) and the Judicial Yuan's authority (entrenching the antagonistic relationship between 'the people' and the government). This slogan later went on to

---

[68] Yeh, "Good Words Hurt Too", 80.
[69] Lee and Lin, "Us Versus Them", 4.
[70] Wang, (2020), 230.

materialize as CHONG mobilized its followers in a 2018 march protesting against Central Election Commission (*中央選舉委員會*, zhōngyāng xuǎnjǔ wěiyuánhuì) pre-referendum (Figure 7). Clearly, support for CHONG does not simply stay on Facebook; tangible actions transpire through constant issue framing on social media, catalyzed by digital affordances like commenting and sharing.

Fig. 6: A screenshot of a video showing CHONG's march with participants raising 'marriage, family; people decide' signs (20 March 2018)

The text-based interaction can be understood in Figure 8. Commenters who negatively evaluate SSM convergently align with CHONG, which renders a team cooperation that fosters a frame.[71] Within this frame, the situation is defined as 'the judicial elites colluding with gay rights activists to dismantle the values of family and marriage'. Contrariwise, commenters who positively evaluate SSM convergently align with the government by affirming its legitimacy. The convergent alignment between pro-SSM teammates builds a different frame, maintaining a definition of the situation that 'the grand justices' ruling is part of a properly functioning government that strives for marriage equality'. Amidst the competing framing of Interpretation No. 748, CHONG purports to stand with 'the people' by alluding to a government that repudiates the WOTP.
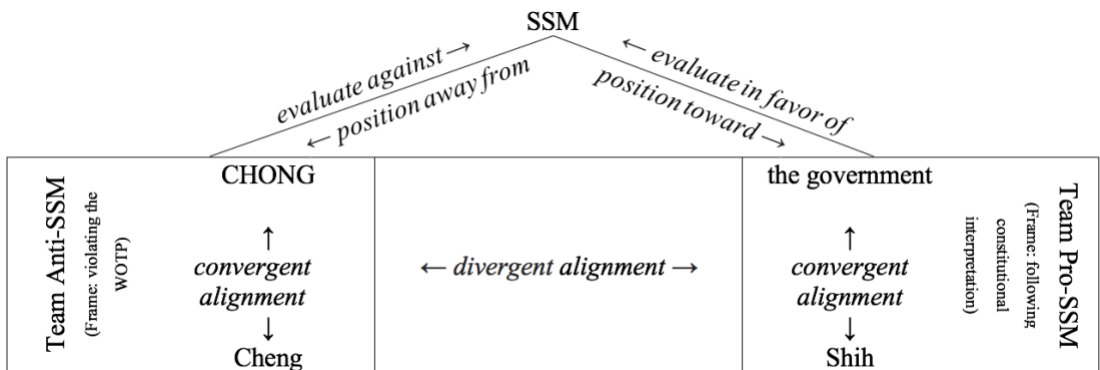

Fig. 7: Stance-taking and framing in Excerpt 3

---

[71] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self; Frame Analysis*.

This raises two critical points. First, framing is a powerful discursive strategy that influences how the audiences interpret the event. Though Müller mentions populists' distrust of the media for "distorting political reality",[72] they in fact exploit media and the affordances to advance their messages and policy preferences. Qualifying this anti-SSM movement as a populist one is that CHONG has successfully transformed the SSM issue into a governmental crisis in which 'the people' suffer the consequences. This is reflected in the online discussion of SSM where the concern with governmentality catches up with that of sexuality. Even when both negative and positive comments are present, they are nonetheless oriented in the same direction. The second point, however, suggests that, albeit reactive to CHONG's initial framing, the comments can still gain enough traction to form a competing frame and make a counterclaim. Given that messages are defined "by virtue of their sharing common premises or mutual relevance",[73] to prevent online populist rhetoric from exerting 'symbolic violence' that dominates,[74] commenters can and should play an active role in shifting the discourse.

4.2 *The WOTP vs. SSM*

On 17 May 2017, when the Executive Yuan's SSM bill was passed in the Legislative Yuan, CHONG continued to provoke the populist sentiment by citing the referendum results and criticizing the DPP's decision to legalize SSM.

The referendum is a common theme in the discussion of populism, especially after Brexit in 2016, because it fits into the populist view that it is an unmediated expression of the WOTP. What CHONG conjures is an imaginary form of participatory democracy, i.e., the populist idea of popular sovereignty that comes from "exercise[ing] direct and decisive control over the making of government policy".[75] In other words, populists, who are anti-institutionalist and "impatient with procedures," request for referendums not to "start an open-ended deliberation among actual citizens" but to ratify and justify their own cause.[76]

Excerpt 4: 'The darkest day' (CHONG, 17 May 2019).

慟！民主史最黑暗的一天！執政黨違反公投結果、強推同婚法案
今（17）日立法院就同婚相關草案進行表決，執政黨祭出黨紀，動員立委以坦克車壓陣，以絕對多數之優勢，強硬通過違反公投民意的同性婚姻法案，使得 517 淪為台灣民主上最黑暗的一天。
去年愛家三公投平均獲得 700 多萬票，公投第 12 案要求用「民法婚姻以外之其他形式」保障同性二人共同生活之權益，公投第 10 案要求「民法婚姻應限定在一男一女的結合」。綜合兩公投案之主旨，執政黨應該用「非婚姻」制度，而不是用「結婚」等相當於「婚姻」之文字，去規範同性共同生活。
執政黨對外宣稱，大法官釋憲位階等同憲法、高於公投，所以要推動同婚法案，還幫這個同婚法案取名為「司法院釋字第七四八號解釋施行法」，執政黨刻意用「婚姻」或「結婚」去規範同性二人之共同生活關係，內容還不斷「準用」民法婚姻，其實是變相修改民法婚姻規定，已嚴重違反公投第 10 案和公投第 12 案之精神，踐踏 700 多萬公投民意！
Disheartening! The darkest day in the history of Taiwan's democracy! Against the referendum results, the ruling party forced through the SSM bill.
Today (17 May) the Legislative Yuan made a decision on the SSM bill. The ruling party mobilized its legislators and, with a majoritarian advantage, forcefully passed the SSM bill that violated the WOTP in the referendum. 17 May is thus the darkest day in the history of Taiwan's democracy.
Last year, the three pro-family referendum questions garnered an average of over 7 million votes. Case 12 demanded that the right to cohabitation between two people of the same sex be ensured「in ways other than changing of the Civil Code」. Case 10 demanded that「marriage in the Civil Code be restricted to the union of one man and one woman」. Based on them, the ruling party should regulate same-sex cohabitation using「non-marriage」institution rather than「getting married」and words that equal「marriage」.
The ruling party claims that the grand justices' constitutional interpretation has an equal ranking to the Constitution above the referendum, applying「mutatis mutandis」the marriage in the Civil Code, which actually alters the marriage in the Civil Code. This has seriously violated the spirit of referendum Cases 10 and 12, trampling the WOTP as in over 7 million votes in the referendum!

---

[72] Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 22.
[73] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 188.
[74] Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.
[75] Weale, *The Will of the People*, 70.
[76] Müller, *What is Populism?*, 29.

CHONG's anti-SSM discourse may appear idiosyncratic when juxtaposed to its counterparts elsewhere. For example, AZR in Slovakia employed a nationalist rhetoric in 'cleavage-building' between 'depraved Europe' and 'pure Slovakia' in its referendum campaign;[77] the *Sentinelle* in Italy situated itself as normative and protective of traditional family values whereas homosexuality was associated with negative attributes.[78] In comparison, CHONG underpinned its anti-SSM movement with a populist framework, in which they defended the referendum results as the legal principle for policymaking. Hence, the government was blamed for dereliction of fulfilling the WOTP when SSM was legalized contra CHONG's demand.

Fig. 8: 'The darkest day' (CHONG, 17 May 2019).

Not only has CHONG reconfigured its homophobic animus into continuous invectives against the government sectors, but its consistent stance-taking on Facebook recast its followers' anti-SSM sentiments in a populist formation that took on a partisan character and reviled the DPP. The positioning became recurrent and invited commenters to align convergently, thus framing the SSM issue as a legal conundrum and the governmental procedures as failing 'the people'. This right-wing populism manifests in the transition in comment composition (see Table 4): the percentage of gay rights-related comments declined (13.8%) while that of government-related disputes rose (46.6%), followed by attacks on the DPP (32.8%). The opposition to same-sex couples' sexual citizenship is built less on the moral ground than on a legal one. Instead of blatant aggressions based on religious values, CHONG's populist mobilization conceals its homophobia with an illusion about policy by the people, which confuses democracy (institutionalized debates under the rule of law) with a populist regime (direct mandates from the people). [79] The referendum, then, allows "unchecked majoritarianism" to oppress sexual minorities, as is the case in Slovakia, Slovenia, etc.[80]

---

[77] Valkovičová, "'Regrettably, It Seems".
[78] Russell, *The Discursive Ecology of Homophobia.*
[79] Weale, *The Will of the People*, xi.
[80] Elżbieta Kużelewska, "Same-Sex Marriage – A Happy End Story? The Effectiveness of Referendum on Same-Sex Marriage in Europe", *SSRN*, 46.1 (July 11, 2019), 15.

Table 4: Numbers and percentages of comments in reply to 'The darkest day' (N = 399).

Topic	Government		Political party		Gay rights		CHONG		Others	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Negative	122	30.6	129	32.3	35	8.8	9	2.3	7	1.8
Positive	57	14.3	2	0.5	13	3.3	9	2.3	0	0.0
Unclear	7	1.8	0	0.0	7	1.8	2	0.5	0	0.0
Total	**186**	**46.6**	**131**	**32.8**	**55**	**13.8**	**20**	**5.0**	**7**	**1.8**

Next, Excerpt 5 shows the interaction between both pro- and anti-SSM commenters debating over the role of the government in the decision of legalizing SSM.

Excerpt 5. Comments in reply to 'The darkest day'.

Hsiao: 冥盡洞就是扭曲第十二條啊
    DPP forced SSM by distorting Case 12
Huei: @Hsiao 內容跟民法的婚姻法 一模一樣 整個拷貝民法內容
    The content is identical to that of the Marriage Chapter, copying the Civil Code.
Yong: @Huei 然後呢 動了民法了嗎 如果你不知道憲法為最高階 與其抵觸都無效的話麻煩去重讀國中好嗎
    So what? Did they change the Civil Code? If you don't know that the Constitution is the highest in ranking
    and that contradicting it would invalidate laws, please retake middle school civics courses
Guo: @Huei 同婚通過害你損失了什麼？別人能結婚礙到你什麼？你還是異性戀吧？日子照樣過不是嗎？
    What do you have to lose when SSM is legalized? Are you still heterosexual? Life as usual?
Joyce: 公投的第 12 條專法=不歧視，卻不等於同性結婚，敗壞風俗！
    Case 12 = non-discrimination, not the same as SSM and corrupting traditions!
Jun: @Guo 全亞洲沒有一個國家認同同婚，你的意思是全亞洲都很狹隘全亞洲都在壓迫同運嗎？台灣民主儼
    然被民進黨糟蹋的一文不值
    No country in Asia recognizes SSM. Are you saying that all of Asia is narrow-minded, all of Asia is
    oppressing gay rights movements? DDP disparages Taiwan's democracy till there's nothing left
Chien: @Jun 如果公投可以超越憲法才是把民主法制踐踏的體無完膚
    Should the referendum supersede the Constitution, that'd be the real destruction of democracy

Hsiao's and Huei's comments illustrate CHONG's legal framing of SSM. Between them is a convergent alignment when they make a matched evaluation that the legalized SSM bill "distorts" the referendum because it shares the same terms as the Civil Code. This refers to the mutatis mutandis approach taken by the DPP, where, instead of creating new laws, existing ones are borrowed. CHONG and its supporters interpret this as changing the Civil Code and infringing on Case 12. The populist stance epitomizes its anti-pluralist essence, which insists on the legal exclusivity of heterosexual couples and denies "the status of certain citizens as free and equal".[81] Yong counters with a rhetorical question, suggesting that the Civil Code has in fact remained intact and declaring that the Constitution has the highest order in legal matters.

    In comparison, the homophobia in Joyce's and Jun's comments reveal how, within this frame, the anti-SSM stance is neither a form of discrimination nor oppression. Whereas Joyce distinguishes between Case 12 that does not discriminate and SSM that "corrupts traditions",[82] Jun rejects equating the absence of SSM in Asia with oppression.[83] As the sentence construction detaches their anti-SSM

---

[81] Müller, *What is Populism?*, 82.
[82] Yeh, "Good Words Hurt Too", 90.
[83] Liu, "'But If Taiwan Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage…'", 4.

stance from the discriminatory and oppressive connotation, it also connects their language use to the tradition on a societal level and SSM recognition on a regional/global level. Meanwhile, the DPP is held accountable for it apropos referendum and democracy. Oppositely, Guo and Chien endorse the legality of SSM respectively by stressing its banality and restating the Constitution's status above the referendum.

The analysis of comment-to-comment interaction reifies online stance-taking as a "distributed action",[84] where interactants across successive turns/comments can nonetheless achieve alignments through affordances such as tagging.[85] The discursive relationships can be represented in Figure 8: because of stance accretion, anti-SSM teammates/commenters' alignment maintains a frame in which the DPP's effort is undemocratic for ignoring the referendum results,[86] whereas pro-SSM team's cooperation frames the same event as constitutional for adhering to Interpretation No. 748.
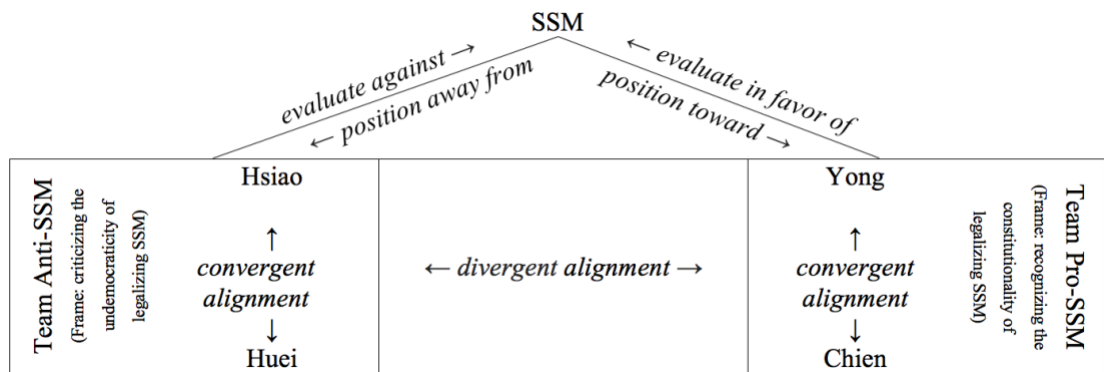

Fig. 9: Stance-taking and framing in Excerpt 5

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated how an anti-SSM organization in Taiwan promotes a conservative stance on Facebook by leveling populist sentiments at the government, thereby increasingly grounding its opposition in legality rather than morality. The analysis of the phenomenon illustrates a veritable example of mutualism: populism as a thin-centered ideology is substantiated by homophobia to attack the authority while resistance to equal sexual citizenship is shored up by the populist framework to disguise itself as democratic. The examination of CHONG's Facebook posts and the comments in reply accentuates the role of populism as a new medium of homophobia in Asia, connecting the global right-wing oppressions of sexual minorities.[87] Using the integrated framework in DA, this study teases out how the emerging legal/political framing transpires through collective stance-taking in Facebook comments while concealing homophobic biases. CHONG's anti-SSM message is embedded not only in textual descriptions that antagonize 'the elites' but in polemical images that tokenize 'the people'.

Alternatively, commenting is a way of continuous engagement with the populists.[88] It can be seen that, while the referendum is used to perpetuate intractable conflict, leaving an indelible mark on the path to legalizing SSM, pro-SSM commenters can reaffirm a constitutionalism democracy (e.g.,

---

[84] Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, "Taking a Stance on Emotion", 441.
[85] Wang, 2020.
[86] Liu, "'But If Taiwan Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage…'", 9.
[87] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism.*
[88] Müller, *What Is Populism?*; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism.*

separation of powers). With the rise of social media, active participation in online comments can effect societal change, for alignment is a "key dimension of the social construction of intersubjectivity".[89] After all, Rousseau's "general will" means "enlightened self-interest," i.e., voters in an election or a referendum "should not be thinking about [their] own interest but about the common good"[90] and should not use the praxis of "majority rule to circumvent minority rights".[91] By presenting Taiwan's case of homophobic populism, this paper highlights the importance of recognizing the constitutional foundation of a democratic society as the debates move online. The integrated model illustrates how right-wing populism against sexual pluralism can be contained with online commenting that reframes the issue not through more antagonism but through more meaningful alignment.

---

[89] Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, "Taking a Stance on Emotion", 440.
[90] Weale, *The Will of the People*, 25.
[91] Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 83.