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Tactical choices of diaspora movements: comparing Hongkonger, Thai, Burmese, and Ukrainian mobilizations in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Diaspora movements are campaigns launched by migrant minorities who maintain allegiance to their homelands. This article investigates the recent mobilization of the Hongkonger, Thai, Burmese, and Ukrainian diasporas in Taiwan to understand the factors behind their tactical choices. While the existing literature pays more attention to the protester-government interaction to understand how movement leaders decide on their movement strategy, we contend that certain pre-existing characteristics of the diaspora communities matter more. The use of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) leads us to conclude: (1) ethnic discrimination, migrants' class position, and the host government's support do not affect the tactical choices; (2) a sufficiently large community with available mobilizing networks makes it possible to recruit and collect resources entirely from ethnic compatriots (reach-in); (3) linkages to local civil society enable it to speak to a broader audience and activate local responses (reach-out).

Introduction

Conducting a field observation on how Burmese[1] mobilize for their home country's democracy in Taiwan can be a challenge for the uninitiated. Huaxin Street, on the outskirts of the greater Taipei metropolis, has long been a thriving neighborhood of Chinese Burmese. Nestled in the busy street market is a grocery store with only Burmese signs. There a fundraising event launched by the Taiwan Alliance with Myanmar takes place every Sunday morning. Ethnic foods such as rice noodles and *shemai* (rice pudding) are displayed on a nondescript table without price tags or explanations. A steady stream of Burmese-speaking customers descend as stall

vendors duly note each transaction in a notebook. Sale proceeds will go to the resistance movement currently battling the military junta since the 2021 coup d'état. It takes US$20 a month to "adopt" a resistance soldier, and they use this weekly gathering to recruit donors.

Visiting a pro-Ukraine event, by contrast, is more like joining an upbeat cultural event, not dissimilar to the reception for international college students. In downtown Taipei, Taiwan Stands with Ukraine books a floor space for its fundraising event. Participants are required to pre-register online, and they receive a hand stamp upon entry. The venue is decorated with campaign posters written in both English and Chinese, and Ukrainian food, beer, souvenirs, and artworks are available for sale. The event begins with an interactive online game introducing Ukrainian culture, culminating in a spirited chant of *Slava Ukraini* (Glory to Ukraine). Besides Ukrainians, there are also Taiwanese and other Europeans, from whom TSU organizers solicit donations for the purchase of ambulances in Ukraine. While both diaspora activists are fundraising in support of threatened democracies at home, Burmese activism appears parochial, traditional, and geared toward their own compatriots, whereas the Ukrainian approach is cosmopolitan, trendy, and welcoming to outsiders.

This article looks at diaspora movements in Taiwan – a self-governing democracy whose international statehood is challenged by a revanchist China. During the high cold-war era, the Taiwan engaged in an anti-communist crusade by sponsoring the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and the Thibetan revolt in 1959, while its regime ruthlessly suppressed domestic dissidents. When the Tiananmen Incident happened in 1989, there emerged a brief spell of fervent patriotism for Chinese mainland compatriots. After Taiwan's democracy was consolidated in this century, annual commemorative rally for the Tiananmen Incident revived in 2011, and the theme ostensibly shifted from Chinese nationalism to a resistance against Chinese authoritarian expansion (Ho 2020). Under the shadow of an increasingly powerful China, Taiwan has to rely on the support from its international allies, which explains why the island country continues to emphasize its democratic achievements. As a democratic identity takes root, Taiwanese begin to be concerned about democratic crisis abroad. For instance, when Myanmarese and Thai governments cracked down protesters in 1988 and 1992, there was practically no response in Taiwan. But more than thirty years later, there emerged strong solidarity and diaspora actions.

Hongkonger, Thai, Burmese, and Ukrainian campaigns in Taiwan share the same goal of safeguarding democracy in their homelands, although the specific threats each faces differ: China's infringement on autonomy in Hong Kong, military-royalist conservatives in Thailand, the military junta in Myanmar, and Russian invasion in Ukraine. All these threats emanate in the

worldwide spread of the authoritarian and revisionist powers of Russia and China, which back anti-democratic forces in Thailand and Myanmar. These pro-democracy campaigners know well that they are fighting the same opponent, which explains why #MilkTeaAlliance evolves from an internet meme to on-the-ground exchanges and collaboration (Dedman and Lai 2021).

With most of scholarship on diaspora activism focuses on ethnic campaigners in the democratic West and the North–South interaction dynamics (Koinova 2021; Junker 2019; Moss 2022), Taiwan provides an alternative perspective to look at how similar mobilization takes place in a non-western country, expanding our understanding of East-East and East–West interactions. Taiwan provides a particularly relevant backdrop for these diaspora mobilizations since the island democracy itself is under military threat from a more assertive China. Autocratization in Hong Kong and the war in Ukraine bring home to Taiwanese the existential danger they face, since China claims that Hong Kong serves as a roadmap for Taiwan's future, and its warplanes and jet fighters constantly intrude the territory. Although Taiwanese are less familiar with the anti-democratic threat posed by power-grabbing soldiers or an unreconstructed monarchy, they are still cognizant of the democratic backsliding found in Thailand and Myanmar because of close economic and civilian ties.

This article contends that the ethnic community's structure and its relationship with civil society in the host country profoundly shape the tactical choice. A large and connected community makes it possible to adopt an inward-looking strategy that exclusively targets coethnics. If the community is small or its constituencies lack "mobilizing network" (Mcadam, Mccarthy, and Zald 1996, 3), or interpersonal connections intrinsic to the group, campaigners find it necessary to obtain support from outside. But this outward-facing strategy depends on their familiarity and connections with local society.

Our article emphasizes structural issues that exist prior to the onset of protest activism, rather than subsequent interaction with opponents. The current literature mostly understands tactical choice as a dialectical process of protester innovation and government control (Chang 2015; Mcadam 1983). Radicalization is usually understood as an interactive outcome of movement escalation and police repression (Della Porta 2013; Goodwin 2001). The relational turn reflects a widespread disenchantment with structural explanations and thus shifts the research focus to what Fligstein and Mcadam (2012, 84) have called "the iterative strategic dance." However, classical researchers understood that not all protesters are created equal, and their inherited traits more and less structure the subsequent tactical choice. Tilly's (1978, 62–8) analysis of a contending group's organizational traits (category and network) and McCarthy's investigation (1987, 55–9) of a

movement's "infrastructure" (connection and occupational distribution) are the insights we intend to bring back.

Diasporas as outsiders

Acknowledging the increasingly diffuse and inclusive use of the term (Brubaker 2005; Clifford 1994; Dufoix 2008), this study follows Shain (1999, 8) in defining diaspora as "a people with common ethnic-national-religious origin who reside outside a claimed or an independent country." With the passage of time, it is possible that diasporas can be fully assimilated to the extent that such an appellation no longer applies. Diaspora members are characterized foremost by their outsider status, and they differ widely in terms of their immigration status (migrant workers, refugees, permanent residents, or naturalized citizens), intended length of stay (temporary or permanent), purpose (study, work, marriage, and others), and so on. Ethnic and cultural differences influence whether these newcomers can be fully accepted into the host society. These preexisting conditions are the primary concern when diaspora leaders formulate movement strategies. Since diaspora activism is inevitably a movement of a minority, the tactical choice is accentuated by the dilemma of whether to be inclusive but diluted or to be exclusive but focused – analogous to the situation of an ethnic minority or sexual minority.

The political involvement of diaspora groups is often expressed through marches, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and sometimes violent actions and self-immolations (Baser and Swain 2011). Due to their strategic locations, diaspora activists often serve as mediators, facilitating the cross-border diffusion of protests. While diaspora movements differ in goals, their actions typically include broadcasting the demands of home-based allies, sending remittances back to home countries, liaising with different political forces, and recruiting volunteers on the frontlines (Alunni 2019). Diaspora activists become more assertive if their home countries crack down on protesters, for example by requesting military intervention by host countries (Moss 2016,10). Otherwise, they adopt a more moderate approach by advocating policies that encourage gradual changes at home (Koinova 2013).

Being a racially and culturally labeled minority, diaspora movements encounter a bifurcated audience, their own compatriots and the larger public. An ethnic community's concern is easily neglected by mainstream society; conversely, a "mainstream" issue might elicit little response from the diaspora groups. Social movements face several recurrent dilemmas, and one of the difficult strategic choices is whether they should reach out to outsiders or reach in by concentrating their efforts on insiders (Jasper 2004). Reaching-out involves employing a broader approach to garner empathy and support from an external audience, whereas reaching-in prioritizes cultivation of in-group cohesion and strong emotional ties, albeit potentially limiting

their support base. A diaspora movement would like to have the best of both worlds; however, due to the difficulties associated with audience segregation and resource constraints, such an ideal is often easier said than done.

Diasporas and tactical choices

How does a diaspora movement make the strategic decision? Given the bewildering complexity of worldwide migrants and their activisms, existing works have found a plethora of explanations, including identity formation (Jeyapal 2016), political opportunities (Lee 2023), generational differences (Hess and Korf 2014), and previous activism (Bermudez 2010). This article proposes to conceptualize possible explanations into external factors that are largely preexisting before the migrant arrival and internal ones that are closely connected with migrant communities, with the understanding that dividing lines could be blurry in some places.

External factors

Migrants are bound to encounter an unfamiliar environment with varying acceptance of their presence and tolerance of their political actions. These external conditions cannot be changed due to the efforts of diaspora community in a short period of time. Destination countries of migrants affect their political action. The attitude of host government matters because the actions taken by political leadership bestow legitimacy on diaspora movements. Yet, even in democratic countries, government incumbents need to take economic interests, geopolitical tensions, diplomatic ties, and other issues into consideration before taking an official stance. The United States used to support friendly dictatorships (including pre-democratization Taiwan) if they served the purpose of Cold War anticommunism (Shain 1999, 80). Since the perceived national interest is likely to guide the responses of host country leadership, their diverse attitude is likely to have an impact on diaspora movements and their strategic consideration.

While racial and ethnic discrimination might be coeval with human civilization, the quickened pace of trans-border migration in the era of globalization has brought about pervasive resentment, fueling what has been identified as "cultural backlash" (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Understandably, if host-country people find migrants an unwelcomed and uninvited intruder, they are less likely to offer sympathize with their home-oriented advocacy (Jeyapal 2016). What constitutes discrimination could be very subtle and context-dependent, but, negative impressions on people with darker skin and those from less developed countries also exist in Taiwan. It easily becomes a stereotypical misunderstanding that these diasporas simply live off their host societies, rather than contributing to them.

Internal factors

Internal factors are those migrant characteristics pertaining to diaspora communities. First, size clearly matters, as the larger its population size is, the more diversified actions a diaspora can take. In addition to quantity, quality in term of human capital has a direct bearing on the scope of actions. Professional migrants, or what are colloquially referred to as "expats," possess more expertises and financial resources that be devoted to diaspora activism; by contrast, refugees, asylum seekers, and low-skilled migrants are typically deficient in their capacity. While university students have not entered the job market and thus their skill level remains unclear, those who venture beyond their borders to receive international education tend to be more ambitious and competitive than their peers who stay in home countries. As such, we see overseas students as a part of skilled migrants and the latter's presence is expected to be conducive to diaspora movements.

It is common for migrants to reside in ethnic enclaves, concentrate in some trades, or worship in some churches or mosques. These residential, professional, and religious ties sometimes can function as a "social incentive" (Mcadam 1982, 45–6) by encouraging diaspora members to participate for their group interests. The existence of these social ties makes it easier to spread the movement message and collect resources since people tend to trust people of their own kind. We expect the presence or absence of mobilizing networks affects the course of diaspora movements.

In some extreme cases where a diaspora community is small, deficient in professional skills, and lack of organizational resources and mobilizing networks, it is still possible for them to find some local partners whose help can compensate these deficits. Typically, human rights activists, humanitarian charities, and activist churches would like to lend a helping hand. Quinsaat (2016) notes that solidarity workers in the host country stimulated the growth of diaspora movements. Following Koinova's (2021, 12) discussion on "socio-spatial linkages", we hypothesize that the linkage to host civil society enable a diaspora community to launch their political actions.

In examining diaspora communities' tactical choices of reaching-in and reaching-out, we include two environmental traits (host government support and discrimination) and four migrant characteristics (large community, skilled migrants, mobilizing networks, and linkage to civil society) to see how these factors played out in Taiwan's context.

Research methods

This article applies the method of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) (Ragin 1987) to understand the necessary conditions for diaspora minorities to launch a certain movement strategy. QCA is based on Boolean logic which

deals with binary variables (presence or absence), and is particularly useful for small-n studies that focus on the contextual details.

Like multivariate statistical analysis, QCA is also interested in locating casual mechanisms, but it differs at least in three methodological assumptions. First, QCA applies a holistic approach toward historical cases, rather than disaggregating them into variables. Secondly, QCA allows the possibility of conjunctural causation in that combination of circumstances can produce unexpected results much more complex than what statistical interaction would allow. Since diaspora movements are often diversified in national contexts and idiosyncratic in their manifestations, QCA is uniquely suitable for this research topic. In his early elucidation, Ragin (1987, 136–49) uses the research on ethnic mobilization to demonstrate the utility of QCA, and this method has been applied to theme of diaspora movements (Koinova 2021; Rubenzer 2008).

The research data came from journalistic and internet sources, interviews, and field observations. The four diaspora mobilizations began at different times: Hongkongers in June 2019, Thais in August 2020, Burmese in February 2021, and Ukrainians in February 2022. For journalistic data, we collected journalistic reports in *Liberty Times* and *Apple Daily* (Taiwan), two local newspapers, for the first eight months of the initial protest actions. As for the internet sources, we tracked the social media postings (Facebook and Instagram) of diaspora organizations including Hong Kong Outlanders, Taiwan Hong Kong Association, Taiwan Alliance for Thai Democracy, Mingalarpar (Myanmar), Generation Z (Myanmar), Taiwan Alliance for Myanmar, Taiwan Stands with Ukraine, Ukrainian Voices, as well as Taiwan's home-grown human rights and solidarity organizations.

From October 2019 to December 2023, we conducted in-depth interviews with 28 involved persons. In terms of places of origin, among the interviewees there were 12 Taiwanese, 6 Hongkongers, 4 Burmese, 2 Thais, 2 Ukrainians, 1 Lithuanian, and 1 Pole, although some non-Taiwanese interviewees have obtained local citizenship through naturalization or marriage. There were 16 males and 12 females in our sample. They were recruited primarily from among participants who have spoken publicly on the issues with publicly available contact information, or were accessible via the authors' personal network. Our interview with Hongkongers, Chinese Burmese, and Taiwanese proceeded in Mandarin, but for interviewees of other nationalities, we used English. While Taiwanese interviewees are not part of those diapora communities, they provide valuable insights because their working experiences with different ethnic groups, whose immigrant characteristics and tactical choice are central to our investigation. Interviews were transcribed and anonymized to conceal their identities. We also conducted field observations of demonstrations, rallies, and other events. Our research has received the approval of Research Ethics Committee National Taiwan University (202305HS091).

Dynamics of diaspora movements

We define a protest event as an occurrence in which participants gather together to raise their claims in a public space (Tilly's 1981, 76). This definition excludes events that are launched by a single person, internet-based (crowdfunding), and indoor (press conferences and arts exhibitions). We also are interested primarily in the actions of diaspora communities, rather than supportive actions by outsiders. In case of collaboration between these two groups, it is considered a diaspora event. From journalistic and internet sources, we found 46 Hongkonger events, 9 Ukrainian, 5 Thai, and 4 Burmese ones in the first eight months after the trigger incidents (Figure 1).

Protest events come in the form of demonstrations, rallies, concerts, film screenings, and others. Common to these four cases is the difficulty in maintaining the momentum, even though armed conflicts (Myanmar and Ukraine) and protests (Hong Kong and Thailand) persist. While there were no further Thai or Burmese protests after the fourth month, Hongkonger and Ukrainian movements also saw a visible decline after the fifth month. Given their lack of familiarity with local regulations, diaspora communities found it difficult to initiate demonstrations and rallies on their own, sometimes requiring assistance from sympathetic Taiwanese. Among the Hongkonger events (46), those with local collaboration (26) outnumbered exclusive initiatives (20) by the diaspora community. Clearly, the local enthusiasm for Hongkongers' cause helped their diaspora activism flourish and persist.

Diaspora communities know that the main front of defeating anti-democratic forces lies in their homelands, they engage in an auxiliary campaign to gather more international support to turn the tide. In Taiwan, diaspora movements concentrate more attention on the following three tasks. First, they broadcast the movement's message to attract more international
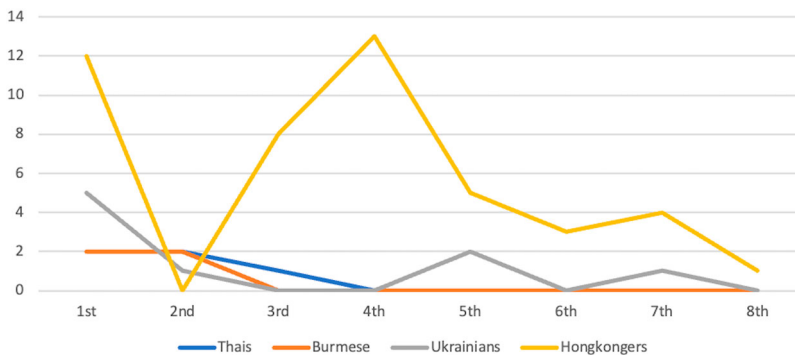
Figure 1. Diaspora protest events in eight months after the major incidents. Notes: Sources are from journalistic reports in *Liberty Ti*mes and *Apple Da*ily as well as the social media pages of major diaspora movement organizations.

attention, especially as authoritarian governments improve their mastery over information warfare to hide their human-rights violations. Secondly, they seek to collect resources as home fronts are in constant need of supply in money, protest gear, and weaponry, and as such, diaspora campaigners may be in a strategic position to fulfill the role of logistics suppliers who need to obtain sympathy and donations in the host countries. Lastly, they advocate for intervention by host country governments, which can either empower the pro-democratic forces or punish the authoritarian rulers and their allies. While policy lobbying typically addresses governmental decision-makers outside of the diaspora community, the first two tasks, broadcasting and resource gathering, can both proceed internally or externally. We classify lobbying as well as externally-oriented broadcasting and resource gathering as a reach-out strategy, while a reach-in strategy consists of broadcasting and resource gathering geared toward diaspora compatriots.

Environmental traits for four diaspora movements

Facing the four crises in democracy, Taiwan's governmental responses varied. At the onset of Hong Kong's protest movement, both the presidential office and the legislature publicly opposed the proposed extradition bill in June 2019. Following the imposition of the National Security Law in June 2020, Taiwan announced a humanitarian program to assist those who fled from Hong Kong. In the wake of Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a special account for donation which received US$ 30 million in the first month. Since Taiwan does not maintain a diplomatic service in Ukraine, the money was transferred to neighboring countries to accommodate the refugees. However, the strong rejoinders were not replicated in the cases of Thailand and Myanmar. Taiwan's government refrained from mentioning the pro-democracy protest in Thailand, and while the official spokespersons condemned the military coup in Myanmar, there was no follow-up action. Clearly, the government perceived the crises in Hong Kong and Ukraine more geopolitically relevant.

In terms of discrimination, Taiwan's guest worker program allowed some Southeast Asians to work in low-wage and low-skilled jobs, which reinforced Taiwanese's stereotypical view of Southeast Asia as backward and impoverished (Liang 2011). Thus, Thais and Burmese in Taiwan had to deal with the unpleasant reality of discrimination. When Chinese Burmese first arrived in Taiwan, they emphasized their Chinese identity rather than their Burmese heritage (Lu 2008, 52–3). Hongkongers came from an affluent city and shared cultural affinity with Taiwanese, which largely spared them from ethnic discrimination. Most Ukrainians in Taiwan were white and thus on top of the "racial order" based on skin color.

Hongkonger mobilization: balance of reach-in and reach-out

The Taiwan government legally defines residents of Hong Kong and Macao as "nationals without household registration" – an intermediate category between citizens and foreigners. It is easier for Hongkongers to acquire citizenship, and the process is called "permanent settlement" rather than naturalization. With preferential policy, geographical proximity, and cultural affinity, Hongkongers have long been present in Taiwan. Migration to Taiwan fluctuated; on the yearly average, 1,402 Hongkongers (1991–1997) received citizenship before the city's transfer to China, and the number dropped to 558 (2001–2014) as the city was largely free of direct intervention by Beijing after the handover. The failure of the 2014 Umbrella Movement, a pro-democracy mass occupy protest, triggered a new wave of migration to Taiwan, with the figure rebounding to 1,272 (2015–2022). Furthermore, there are also 10,813 temporary residents, who are mostly professionals and students in 2020.[2] In Taiwan, Hongkongers are mostly composed of skilled migrants. Previously, they leaned toward the Kuomintang because of the Chinese identity; but with the flare-up of the home city's pro-democracy protests, more and more Hongkongers shifted to support the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party.

In June 2019, Hong Kong's protests flared against a proposed legal revision that would allow Hongkongers to be extradited to mainland Chinese courts, which immediately triggered corresponding actions among Hongkongers in Taiwan. As the proposed legal change would also apply to expats and transit visitors in Hong Kong, opponents intended to raise global alarm and launched a far-flung "international front" campaign (Ho 2023). Hongkongers, Taiwan-based and beyond, campaigned to garner more public support in the hope that international pressure could be applied to the Hong Kong government. After protest activism in the home city subsided following the imposition of a draconian national security law in June 2020, Hongkonger campaigners, in collaboration with their local allies, have been advocating for refugee protection in Taiwan.

As the Hong Kong government applied coercive force to suppress the resistance and protesters began to arm themselves with helmets, goggles, and masks, the shortage of these supplies prompted overseas Hongkongers to purchase and ship such protest equipment to their home city (Li and Fung 2021). In Taiwan, given the popularity of motorcycles, a campaign to collect rider helmets received an overwhelming response. A Taipei-based church became a supply depot, with its pastor busy receiving, sorting, and sending these donated resources. As the crackdown intensified, many young protesters fled to Taiwan. In response, Hongkongers chipped in their resources to accommodate these exiles. There were also voluntary migrants from Hong Kong, who saw Taiwan as "a democratic paradise" (Li and Liao 2023), thus making the migrant communities stronger and more committed.

The anti-extradition movement became Hong Kong's largest-scale protest since the city's handover, which galvanized Taiwan-based Hongkongers to take unprecedented actions to organize their communities. Beyond Taipei, newer diaspora organizations sprouted in Taichung, Tainan, Kaohsiung, and Ilan, and the participants included students and more established middle-class professionals. Hong Kong Outlanders was founded by students and recent graduates, focusing on movement advocacy, whereas Taiwan Hong Kong Association (THKA) was led by an activist lawyer and oriented toward establishing a Taiwan-based migrant community. Thus, thanks to more evenly distributed participation, Hongkongers in Taiwan were able to mobilize their compatriots across the divide in age and regions, thus deepening the penetration of their reach-in strategy.

These newly formed Hongkonger associations strove to maintain their distinctive identity. They held several Hong Kong-style street fairs to create opportunities for new migrants to meet. As many migrants run restaurants, cafés, and bookstores, THKA launched a campaign to encourage Taiwanese to patronize these shops so that pro-democracy Hongkongers could better take root in their new environment. As the Hongkonger community grew in number and connections, they became more capable of providing resources to the diaspora movement. While Hong Kong's political crisis ultimately arose as a response to Beijing's efforts to tighten its grip, China skepticism found a receptive audience in Taiwan. Diaspora activists stressed the potential for a shared fate between Taiwanese and Hongkongers. Hongkonger mobilization was able to practice reach-in and reach-out strategies simultaneously, and their remarkable visibility in Taiwan became an inspiring lesson for the subsequent diaspora movements.

Thai mobilization: an assisted reach-out

On the surface, Thais have a large presence in Taiwan, with 64,017 permitted to stay in 2020.[3] Among them, 88 percent are on the guest workers program as Thailand represents Taiwan's fourth-largest source of foreign labor, while only 1,326 are on student visas and 373 are on professional visas. Thus, the majority of Thais in Taiwan are unskilled migrants. Since the 2020 anti-government movement in Bangkok was initiated by students and youth, it was not a surprise that overseas Thai students were among the first to respond. As the protests in Bangkok surged, Thai students launched a rally in front of the Thailand Trade and Economic Office in Taipei on August 2. Although the event was small and not reported in the media, it gave rise to the Taiwan Alliance for Thai Democracy (TATD), co-founded by Thai students and Taiwanese collaborators.

Thai mobilization faced several challenges. There is no Thai migrant association in Taiwan. Ethnic Chinese in Thailand were more assimilated and were

less likely to seek citizenship in Taiwan, compared to their counterparts in other Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar (see below). Among the tiny group naturalized Thais, there is no clear indication of their political preference nor a history of activism on their diaspora community in Taiwan. Since Taiwan employs a strict regulatory framework toward blue-collar foreign labor, Thai workers were reluctant to get involved, even though there is a numerically significant population. Their long working hours and the need to earn overtime pay on the weekends also prevented them from joining a protest. Fear is also an inhibiting factor, as a Thai student described,

> "They do not want to touch any taboo. They are afraid of the Taiwanese police, too. They are afraid that if they show political ideas, maybe they will be in trouble. They maybe feel that here is the same as in Thailand, where we cannot speak out freely."

Therefore, while the Thai diaspora community was sufficiently large, they did not possess the mobilizing network. From our field observation, Thai students' familiarity with Taiwan is minimal because of the lack in fluency in Mandarin. Thai student numbers began to rise only after Taiwan government promoted its New Southbound Policy in 2016, and they did not have school-based student associations like those of Hongkonger and Burmese students. Moreover, their stay is typically limited to the years of study, and they return upon receiving the degree, which makes it difficult to sustain the activism.

Given the above-mentioned constraints, Thai activism relied deeply on Taiwanese partners, especially student and NGOs activists. Hongkongers in Taiwan were willing to help since protest activism in their city had recently subsided and they intended to demonstrate their solidarity with pro-democracy allies. In several TATD-initiated events, Thai and non-Thai activists worked closely, and Taiwanese participants took care of a few preparatory tasks including inviting politicians, liaising with the press, and borrowing the necessary equipment. Perhaps, the greatest help Taiwanese allies offered was sharing their local knowledge of how to hold a protest. During their first rally at the de facto embassy, Thai students were warned by the country diplomats that their action was illegal without prior application. As their Taiwanese allies reassured them that no permission was needed for an emergency gathering, they were confident in launching follow-up rallies.

Thai students were familiar with human rights discourse due to their activist background, and they had just witnessed the flourishing Hongkonger's campaign; therefore, they knew how to present their messages to Taiwanese and other audiences. They chose Taipei's transport hub (the railway station) and tourist attractions (Ximending) to launch their rallies, and Thai, Mandarin, and English were used in their speeches and placards. They emphasized that Thais were an integral part of the #MilkTeaAlliance, fighting authoritarian expansion together with Taiwanese and Hongkongers. China was often

mentioned as a common threat because its nationalistic netizens, the so-called "little pinks," were constantly trolling pro-democracy movements in different places. TATD's social media page frequently shared the news of pro-democracy activists in the region, and its activists also joined the local pride parade to build local connections.

Thais consciously pursued a reach-out movement targeting a non-Thai audience. Their outward strategy was less developed because their effort focused mainly on communication without requesting intervention by the Taiwanese government. While Thai student activists certainly intended to see more participation from fellow workers and deliberately chose the Taipei Railway Station as a rally site, a magnet for Thai workers during the weekend, it remained difficult to launch the reach-in strategy. Thais in Taiwan lacked the necessary mobilizing network, and without Taiwanese collaborators, it would be difficult for their diaspora activism to get started. Such disadvantages explained why the Thai mobilization was short-lived (less than four months) and failed to attract a sizeable crowd.

Burmese mobilization: an entrenched reach-in

While the Thai community is weakly established, the Burmese have a long presence in Taiwan. Taiwan used to welcome overseas Chinese to obtain citizenship and settle down. Burmese migrants came to Taiwan in two routes. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the retreating Nationalist soldiers in the wake of the civil war relocated to the ethnically diverse highland Burma. Many of them were originally from the neighboring China's Yunnan province or Burmese borderland minorities, and they were evacuated to Taiwan for humanitarian reasons (Lu 2019, 45). The other stream came from Yangon-based Chinese in lowland Burma, who mostly came from China's maritime Fukien and Guangdong provinces and were more established in the host land. Anti-Chinese riots in the 1960s and the repression of pro-democracy movement in 1988 resulted in a mass exodus of urbanized Chinese Burmese. The newer wave of migration was concentrated in Zhonghe District of New Taipei City, which had over 40,000 migrants around the turn of the century, the largest Chinese Burmese community abroad (Lu 2008, 30). Taiwan does not allow Burmese to come on the guest work program, and those who stay on professional and student visas number fewer than Thais.[4] Therefore, the Burmese diaspora in Taiwan mainly consists of ethnic Chinese who have been rooted in Taiwan for a long time, and they were not skilled migrants when first arrived.

Within the diaspora community, there is a cultural association, Mingalarpar (a greeting phrase in Burmese), that publicizes the country's ethnic food and history. This arose as the municipal government promoted Huaxin Street as a tourist attraction for its Burmese culture, and hence, self-governing bodies

sprouted in the community. The Burmese community was not politically active before the coup in February 2021 when the military refused to accept electoral defeat and imprisoned Aung San Suu Kyi and her political allies. In tandem with the uprising in Myanmar, a demonstration was held immediately on Huaxin Street, leading to the formation of the migrants-based Taiwan Alliance with Myanmar (TAM) and the student association Generation Z. In March 2021, they held two major rallies in Taipei's Liberty Square to condemn the brutal repression by the military junta.

The Burmese diaspora movement faces several constraints. The first is the tight schedules of some potential participants. Taiwan is attractive to Burmese students mostly because of the possibility of gainful employment. A Generation Z activist mentioned that he "worked on weekends and took a job in the factory during winter and summer vacation." It was difficult to be devoted to movement activism with such long working hours. Established migrants with citizenship and stable economic resources made it possible for TAM to continue its activism without outside assistance. However, TAM chose not to develop close collaboration with Taiwan civil-society activists. Elder Burmese migrants have a strong Chinese identity due to their homeland and migration experience and have developed a strong attachment to the conservative party Kuomintang, which sat in odd juxtaposition to the growing Taiwan identity propelling the island's democratization.[5] Some Burmese participants were wary of Taiwanese NGO participation, fearing that they would use the Burmese issue to advance their own agenda. A Taiwanese NGO staff shared his experience,

> "During the second rally at the Liberty Square, I was holding the flag of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, which had a rainbow on it. These senior participants who supported the Kuomintang and conservative values thought we were an LGBT group, and told us not to come."

While the Burmese diaspora movement partnered with Taiwanese activists, the relationship remained distant and ad hoc. Although long settled in Taiwan, Burmese migrants generally lacked political experience and their distance with the civil-society activists worsened it, as a TAM leader reflected,

> "I have been in Taiwan for more than thirty years. I was never involved in protests and did not know NGOs or lawmakers. In fact, I did not even know the ward chief. But for the Myanmar issue, I needed to work hard."

While the protest activisms in both Hong Kong and Thailand subsequently declined, a civil war in Myanmar ensued, with the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG) organized by dissidents continuing to battle against the government army. Taiwan's Burmese activism shifted gears to fundraising for NUG. TAM did not solicit resources from the broader society nor request the government to apply sanctions to the military junta. Most of

the resource collecting was directed inward, primarily targeting the Burmese community on Huaxin Street. Since charity sales were held within a tightly knit ethnic neighborhood, the absence of other languages in signs or posters signified that these events were not intended for outsiders.

A sufficiently large and connected community enabled Burmese to bring their preferred repertoire to rallies. They invited participants to bring their own pots and banged them loudly, symbolizing the drive to be rid of the military rulers. Buddhist monks were also present to offer their blessings to those killed in the crackdown. Taipei-based Burmese organizers chose not to adopt the #MilkTeaAlliance frame, which would have attracted more interested audience. By contrast, Burmese protesters in different places of the world deliberately used symbolism of yellow construction helmets (Hong Kong) and #MilkTeaAlliance to gain international attention (Chan 2023). TAM's social media posting reflected the inward-looking orientation, as it mainly reposted NUG's news in Burmese, primarily about the progress of armed resistance and donation solicitations for frontline fighters. There was no attempt to attract non-Burmese readers, and neither did they offer reasons why Taiwanese should be involved.

Lack of familiarity with Taiwan civil society and knowledge regarding fundraising regulations prevented Burmese from obtaining more broad-based support. The Burmese diaspora movement primarily practiced a reach-in strategy, focusing on information-sharing and resource-collecting within their own community. Within the first months, there were public events that welcomed Taiwanese participants, but afterwards, the movement took a subterraneous turn by digging in within the ethnic community. Except for a minor demand not to repatriate activists after their visas expired, Burmese leaders did not raise political demands with the government.

Ukrainian mobilization: a successful reach-out

Situated on a distant corner of the Eurasian continent, Taiwanese only have a vague understanding of Ukraine, and there were very few Ukrainians working or studying in Taiwan when the war broke out on 24 February 2022.[6] The day after the Russian invasion, a Ukrainian launched a one-person protest by waving the national flag in front of the Representative Office of the Moscow-Taipei Commission, the de-facto Russian embassy. Afterwards, Ukrainians, Taiwanese, and other European participants created Taiwan Stands with Ukraine (TSU), which became the voice of the diaspora community. The initiator revealed,

> "In the beginning, I did that by myself. But I posted some Tweets, and asked some people to spread the news … The next day, we had 20 people there. On Saturday, we had hundreds or more. People who have similar ideas are spreading the message. This is how TSU started. Before the war, I didn't know any Ukrainians, but we all come together now."

The war created a Ukrainian diaspora community in Taiwan. While some migrants came to Taiwan for work or marriage prior to the war, Taiwan's government offered financial aids to attract some graduate students to come for research and study as part of humanitarian assistance. Ukrainians in Taiwan are mostly skilled migrants, and since most of them do not have citizenship, they evince no local political preference. Knowing that Ukrainians were a tiny minority, TSU adopts a cosmopolitan approach by welcoming individuals of all nationalities. By contrast, in the neighboring countries where Ukrainian communities were suddenly augmented by the influx of war refugees, such as Poland (Trzeszczynska et al. 2024) and Turkey (Deniz and Murat Özgür 2022), diapora activism assumed more an ethno-natoinalist direction by focusing on preserving cultural heritage and language. Proximity also allows their collaboration with the Ukrainian government more closely (Özgür and Deniz 2023).

TSU started from a Facebook fan page and remained an informal organization, and there was no recognized leader or membership definition. An insider estimated that around 40 percent of core participants were Ukrainians, while the rest were equally split between Taiwanese and other Europeans. Expat participants also had previous experience, as they were involved in the protest against the Russian occupation of Crimea, the Belarussian crackdown on dissidents in 2020, and for LGBT activism in Europe. They were well-versed in human rights discourse and eager to collaborate with Taiwan civil-society activists, and TSU adopted a conscious reach-out strategy by targeting both a Taiwan-based and overseas audience and soliciting their support and donations.

TSU highlighted the Russian aggression as an incidence of authoritarian expansion, framing it as sharing many geopolitical similarities with the way in which China is currently seeking to undermine Taiwan's democracy. The TSU narratives conveyed the message that international attention and sympathy was ultimately beneficial to Taiwan by deterring China from indulging in similar militarist adventurism. The common theme of opposing authoritarian aggression helped unite Ukrainians, Eastern Europeans who were fearful of Russia's revanchist ambition, and Taiwanese who had an equally bellicose neighbor at their doorstep.

Consistent with this reach-out strategy, TSU social media frequently reposted Taiwan's media reports on the Ukrainian situation and expressed gratitude to the local support. TSU also emphasized that Ukrainians and Taiwanese shared a similar fate,

"I think all Taiwanese should be concerned about what is happening in Ukraine. We should be alert to the ongoing international relations, and should stand with Ukraine. What we can do is to understand the current situation and to look into the causes. Taiwanese can ask themselves: If Putin cannot be stopped, what will happen to Taiwan?"[7]

Table 1. Activities and strategies of four diaspora movements.

	Broadcasting (Inward)	Broadcasting (outward)	Fundraising (inward)	Fundraising (outward)	Demanding intervention	Movement strategies
Hongkongers	√	√	√	√	√	Reach-in and reach-out
Thais		√				Reach-out
Burmese	√	√	√			Reach-in
Ukrainians		√		√	√	Reach-out

Some speakers at rallies used a trope that described Taiwan and Ukraine as "candles in the dark" confronting sinister forces that denied their existence. The unity between Taiwanese and Ukrainians was often stressed as both peoples opposed oppression from dictators. A crowdfunding project, Divchata Power ("girls" in Ukrainian), was launched in 2022 on a Taiwanese platform to help displaced and distressed Ukrainian women; it ended up collecting NT$1.8 million (US$57,700), far exceeding the original goal.[8] In May 2022, there was a die-in protest in which participants played the role of victims in the Bucha Massacre by lying down in Taipei's Liberty Square as the sound of gunshots was broadcast from a loudspeaker. Although the event had fewer than 100 participants, it was widely reported in the international media. The image was circulated among Ukrainian parliamentarians, leading to a pro-Taiwan caucus and their subsequent visit to Taiwan. It was due to TSU's protest, the Putin-friendly soprano Anna Netrebko's Taipei concert originally scheduled in March 2023 was cancelled.[9]

TSU also spread its reach-out activities in different directions by holding cultural events featuring food and music to highlight the message of Ukraine as an independent "nation with its own language and historical background." In these gatherings, live performances and fundraising also took place. TSU and its Taiwanese allies also raised demands on Taiwanese firms that continued to operate in Russia to join an international campaign of business sanction.

The small size of the population of Ukrainians in Taiwan made it nearly impossible to practice a reach-in strategy. The existence of collaborative ties with Taiwan's NGO activists helped Ukrainians receive attention and resources beyond their diaspora community, and thus, their demands and narratives were often framed to emphasize the commonalities shared by Ukrainians and Taiwanese.

The following table summarizes the above discussion (Table 1).

Applying the QCA

We code the presence or strength of a variable as 1 and its absence and weakness as 0. Table 2 shows their variable configurations.

The QCA proceeds with a Boolean logic of minimization by systematically removing variables that are irrelevant, incidental, or functionally identical

Table 2. Truth table for four diaspora movements.

	External factors		Internal factors				Strategies	
	GOV	DIS	LARGE	NET	LINK	SKILL	IN	OUT
Hongkongers	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Thais	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Burmese	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
Ukrainians	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1

Note: Abbreviations are GOV (host country government support), DIS (discrimination), LARGE (large community), NET (mobilizing network), SKILL (skilled migrants), IN (reach-in), and OUT (reach-out).

Table 3. QCA minimization results.

Configuration	Factors	Applicable cases
Reach-in	LARGE*NET	Hongkongers and Burmese
Reach-out	LINK	Hongkongers, Thais, and Ukrainians

Note: In Boolean logic, the operator * represents "and".

until it is no longer possible to find more simple combinations. The above truth table generates the following result: (Table 3).

The results indicate that for diaspora communities to launch reach-in strategy, it is necessary for them to have both large community and mobilizing network. By contrast, the threshold for the reach-out strategy is lower, they only need to possess linkage to civil society. In addition, the above analysis is helpful to reject some conjectures. Both Thais and Burmese face discrimination, but that did not prevent Thai activists from making claims directly to Taiwanese. Host government support might appear to increase the social acceptance of diaspora movements, as seen in the cases of Hongkongers and Ukrainians, but again, Thai campaigners adopted the reach-out strategy without such official blessing. Hongkongers, Thais, and Burmese all have sizeable communities in Taiwan, but Thais are not able to practice the reach-in tactic because their deficiency in mobilizing network. It indicates that large community per se is not enough for reach-out because it still requires the presence of mobilizing network. The availability of skilled migrants might seem to help Hongkongers and Ukrainians to reach out, but this turns out not to be a necessary condition, as Thais could compensate for this deficit with their linkage to local civil society.

Discussion

Our analysis indicates that external factors, host government support and discrimination, have no effect on Taiwan-based diaspora movements. By contrast, the migrant characteristics affect a diaspora movement from the very beginning, as migrants are always minorities with longstanding differences. Community size and their mobilizing network are of primary importance.

Small population size itself does not preclude the emergence of diaspora movements, as evidenced by the fact that there were fewer than three hundred Ukrainians in Taiwan, and yet, their actions succeeded in garnering local and international attention. However, the small size makes it impossible to practice a reach-in strategy, since practically all its members know what is going on and their contribution is comparatively insignificant.

Having a large community is a necessary, but insufficient condition for a reach-in strategy. Thai mobilization is a relevant case here. Although there were more than sixty thousand Thai migrant workers in Taiwan, their long working hours, geographic distance, and fear of reprisal made it difficult for them to participate. Thai students were not able to bridge the class divide to build an inclusive movement. As such, the Thai movement did not adopt a reach-in strategy, but concentrated its efforts toward outsiders. In contrast, the Hongkongers and Burmese populations were sufficiently large and established. Thanks to a favorable immigration policy, many senior members had obtained Taiwan citizenship, and at the same time, the younger generation (Taiwanese-born Burmese and Hongkonger students) were also actively involved. With these conditions, the Hongkonger and Burmese movements were able to practice a reach-in strategy.

For diaspora communities to apply a reach-out strategy, a small community (Ukrainians) or the absence of skilled migrants (Thais) does not stand in the way. The key has to do with the linkages to civil-society actors. If the diaspora campaigners obtain local partners, they can launch protest activities addressing the larger society, and even raise effective requests for interventions. Hongkongers, Thais, and Ukrainians launched highly visible reaching-out campaigns regardless of their pre-existing characteristics. The linkage to civil society does not have to exist prior to mobilization. Only a few Thai students and Ukrainian expats knew Taiwanese NGO workers before taking their actions; yet, the lack of prior personal relationship did not preclude their collaboration once the crisis of democracy set in.

If the reach-out strategy is based on the availability of local civil-society linkage and the latter can be obtained subsequently, the Burmese movement stands out as a contrasting case in that its leaders chose not to form a partnership with local NGOs, but relied on their own dint. In a sense, Burmese campaigners chose not to reach out because their distance from Taiwan's civil society, which reinforced the insular characteristics of their action. That the affinity of diaspora communities with civil society in the host country should not be taken for granted underscored the fact that worldwide civil-society actors operated with global norms of human rights, democracy, and others (Schofer and Longhofer 2011), and this set of values were not necessarily embraced by all ethnic communities, as evidenced in the case of Burmese in Taiwan.

While Jasper (2006, 127) sees it as a difficult dilemma for movement leadership, as "you gain breadth but lose depth", this article is more interested in the enabling conditions for their adoption. Reach-in is only available when the community in question is sufficiently large and possesses mobilizing network, and reach-out requires linkage with local civil society. It is also possible for a diaspora movement to practice the two strategies simultaneously if they have these necessary conditions.

Conclusion

Taiwan's four diaspora movements were all triggered by an acute crisis of democracy in their home countries. Within a span of less than three years, the four movements successively emerged, providing ample opportunities for mutual learning. The Hongkonger movement was the first to take place, and its success in activating local responses should have served as a template for their successors. Many Taiwanese and Hongkonger activists also joined the latter three movements. Such cross-fertilization would be expected to bring about isomorphism in strategy. Yet, the above analysis indicates that the Thai, Burmese, and Ukrainians did not replicate the Hongkongers' balance of reach-out and reach-in approaches, but only concentrated on one aspect.

The existing literature pays more attention to the interaction between movement challengers and state incumbents. Our research emphasizes the pre-existing traits of migrant communities and their linkage with the host civil society. Following Shi (2010, 38), these characteristics could be thought as "roots and routes." Roots means the places of origin, and routes the path of their movement. Diaspora communities are not permanently tied to their ancestral place, as their adventures in the new environment can shape a new identity. If that happens, "routes become roots." A large community with mobilizing networks makes it possible to practice a reach-in strategy, whereas linkage to civil society is necessary for a reach-out strategy. These migrant characteristics matter because diaspora communities often find themselves in the position of precarious outsiders, with varying degrees of local acceptance, and while these ascribed traits are certainly not immutable, they are sure to stay for a long time.

For worldwide diaspora campaigners, our research reveals two practical lessons. First, it is possible to entirely focus on coethnics without communicating with outsiders if the community is of enough size and willing to be engaged. Secondly, if they can speak the universal language of human rights and other global norms, they can also enlist the host society's civil-society actors to broaden their message. These two conditions are not mutually exclusive, which means a diaspora movement can be internally embedded and externally appealing at the same time, thus maximizing its chance of success.

Notes

1. Myanmar is now the formal name of the country, and this article uses Burmese when referring to its people and the language.
2. National Immigration Agency, https://shorturl.at/uFlPW, accessed on July 24, 2023. Figures are based on authors' calculation.
3. National Immigration Agency, https://shorturl.at/ajvDW, accessed on July 23, 2023.
4. There were only 55 professionals and 1,079 students from Myanmar in 2021, see National Immigration Agency, https://shorturl.at/ajvDW, accessed on July 24, 2023.
5. For instance, in Zhengnan Ward of Zhonghe District, which comprises the Burmese community in New Taipei City, 49% voted for the Kuomintang candidate in the 2024 presidential election, whereas the national average was 33%. Central Election Commission's database, https://t.ly/7LPuS, accessed May 12, 2024.
6. The immigration statistics shows 220 Ukrainians in Taiwan as of 2022, https://shorturl.at/ajvDW, assessed on July 25, 2023.
7. A TSU Facebook post, February 26, 2022, https://reurl.cc/qL45Xn, accessed on July 25, 2023. The English version is modified to more authentically reflect the message originally written in Chinese.
8. See https://shorturl.at/UX016, accessed on July 27, 2023.
9. See https://t.ly/LCj0E, accessed on December 28, 2023.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethics statements

The research has received the approval of Research Ethics Committee National Taiwan University (202305HS091), which was granted on June 28, 2023.

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