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Shifting Dynamics in U.S-Taiwan Relations under the Biden Administration (2021–2025): Insights from Power Transition Theory

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Abstract

This study critically interrogates the evolving relations between the U.S-Taiwan during Biden administration (2021–2025) through the analytical prism of power transition theory. It is an attempt to fill the void of the theoretical framework used in traditional military and structural models. While past applications of power transition theory have tended to revolve around material capabilities and systemic polarity but this study extends the theory by highlighting the ways in which power hierarchies are discursively constructed and signalled behaviors within U.S-Taiwan-China triangle. The inquiry situates Taiwan at the intersection of competing hegemonic aspirations and regional realignments driven by China's ascent and the United States' recalibrated deterrence strategies. By using discourse analysis of official speeches, policy papers, and diplomatic statements, study examines how Washington and Taipei narrate their strategies to enhance and balance commitments and power transitions. Findings show that considerable change has occurred in the U.S rhetoric and these shifts in rhetoric can be defined as an intentional process in the U.S to secure its hegemonic validity in a world of established hierarchy. The novelty of the research is that it is a blend of a classical systemic theory and an interpretive approach where language is depicted as not a peripheral instrument but a necessary part of perceived changes in power and uncovers semantic shifts in U.S strategic language, evidencing a gradual transition from strategic ambiguity to pragmatic clarity and offers policy insight on the communication strategies that constitute the great power competition in the Indo-Pacific.

Keywords: U.S-Taiwan relations; power transition theory; Biden administration; Indo-Pacific; strategic ambiguity; discourse analysis; pragmatic clarity

Introduction

Current U.S-Taiwan relations are located at the intersection of great power rivalry, where strategic interests cross with discursive contestations constitute regional security and world order. The Biden administration (2021–2025) took over a tumultuous geopolitical arena characterized by China's expedited ascendance, increasing assertiveness within the Taiwan Strait, and an evolving Indo-Pacific landscape. In this context, the strategic importance of Taiwan has branched out from its conventional security importance to include its economic and normative importance, especially as it seeks to become a world champion in the manufacturing of semiconductors and an icon of democratic resilience in an era of authoritarian comeback. All of this is to emphasize why it is important to understand this relationship

for purposes of refinement of theories and planning. The research shows how Taiwan acts as a microcosm of structural tension within an evolving Indo-Pacific order.

The previous studies on the power relations in Taiwan have emphasized the material power relations from the realist and alliance theory perspective. The power transition theory has been used extensively to analyze the systemic instability in the period of hegemonic challenge. The theory has also theorized that wars are most probable when the new power is on the verge of achieving parity with the leading power. However, the applications of the theory that were made in the past were disproportionately related to quantitatively measurable factors such as economic and military power, failing to address the constitutive role of language in the communication of commitment, building legitimacy, and the establishment of power hierarchies. This study addresses the gap in the literature by making a unique contribution to the field by integrating power transition theory and discourse analysis to provide a balanced perspective which emphasizes discursive means as the primary mechanism in the hierarchical negotiations of the US-Taiwan-China triangle.

The research indicates that the discourse operates the traditional role of policy communication to become a site of contestation wherein strategic meanings are more institutionalized to influence perceptions of deterrence, credibility, and alignment. The research analyzes presidential discourse, as well as State Department briefings, legislative debates, and bilateral statements to show a significant shift in the discourse. The US President Biden's policy was transformed from traditional cautious strategies of strategic ambiguity to a normative focus on democratic solidarity and enhancing Indo-Pacific resilience.

This rhetorical repositioning, through the sake of the One-China principle, formally, places Taiwan in a strategic discourse in which the U.S attempts to preserve or retain American influence. The whole dynamic with power shifting around becomes much more complicated. Hegemonic legitimacy, whatever that really means, appears to be starting to be questioned more. Everything appears to be ramping up. This methodology is important in two aspects. To begin with, it re-codes the irrelevance of power transition theory outside materialist orthodoxy by demonstrating how language plays a constitutive role of systemic change, as opposed to being an expression of structural realities. Secondly, it raises a fundamental empirical issue: how do discourse strategies work as power politics in times of hegemonic struggle? The integration of structuralist and interpretive paradigms into the research allows offering a new analytical platform that could be used to engage the processes of rhetorical construction and systemic change. To sum up, the study is a contribution to the theoretic contest over transitions of power and gives policy related insight into communicative strategies behind U.S policy in Taiwan in a contentious Indo Pacific order.

This study seeks to examine how U.S discourse on Taiwan has changed under Biden, evaluate the effects on the power transition theory and its implications on the policy. It will track the developments in statements, policy documents as well as geopolitical speech, gauge the language in signaling stability and commitment and find out how discursive signaling can affect regional strategic responses, especially in Beijing. The paper uses qualitative discourse analysis of several documents like presidential speeches, State Department communiqués and press releases of Taiwan Policy Act, congressional hearings, and diplomatic statements to examine the lexical usages, narrative format and thematic framing. It establishes a novel methodological paradigm of fusing structuralist IR theory and interpretive discourse analysis to provide a theory of rhetorically informed power transition. The study outlines a discursive shift of strategic ambiguity towards normative emphasis, in the re-location of Taiwan as a democratic normative pillar in the U.S hegemonic strategy.

Review of the Literature

The U.S-Taiwan relations and great power politics literature has been greatly developed within the last few decades developing under the influence of the structural theories, normative discussions, and methodological advances. Early conceptualizations of systemic change can be traced to Organski's seminal work on power transition theory (1958), which postulated that global stability is most at risk during moments of power convergence between a dominant state and a revisionist challenger. This approach has also affected other studies that focused only on material factors, such as military and economic capabilities. In a refinement of power transition theory, Kugler and Tammen posit that major conflict becomes most probable when a dissatisfied rising power approaches parity with a dominant state, given that power distribution and satisfaction of the regime jointly determine stability in the system. In addition, they argue that a peaceful transition occurs when the emerging power is incorporated into the current world and obtains satisfaction from it (Kugler & Tammen, 2000). In the Cold War era, this theory was mostly used to European situations, but from the 1990s onward, researchers started to study the U.S-China dyad as the focal area for future power transition. The models developed by Kugler and Tammen (2000) measured these changes, but with the warning that Beijing's growing development would further fuel systemic competition in the early 21st century. Although these studies were pioneering, they focused mainly on structural and material factors with little attention to ideational factors and discursive forces.

Scholarly studies on China's ascent and its effects on the U.S hegemony exploded in the early 2000s. Based on the logic of offensive realism, Mearsheimer (2001) projected that security competition will inevitably arise and will positioning Taiwan as the most likely conflict hot spot between the US-China. Mearsheimer explains that the anarchic nature of the international system forces hegemonies to strive for regional hegemony and relative power maximization to guarantee their survival. Since one can never be sure of the intentions of others, strategic rivalries and counter balancing are the hallmarks of great power politics and not exceptions to the rule (Mearsheimer, 2001).

At the same time, Glaser (2011) provided nuanced viewpoints, arguing that even while structural constraints are there, strategic decisions could reduce conflict by reassuring and signaling. However, these pieces persisted in giving institutional mechanisms and material power dynamics precedence over interpretive procedures. Glaser offers a rationalist version of structural realism and posits that states are security maximizers, not power maximizers, and that conflict is not necessary in anarchy. If states understand intentions and the offense/defense balance tips to defense, then cooperation and restraint can be rational choices to solve the security dilemma (Glaser, 2010).

A discursive revolution in international relations emphasized with these advancements, highlighted the importance of language, narratives, and identity in world politics. Hansen promoted constructivist methods and understands security as a practice of discourse which means that security threats are not objective but are constructed through political discourse. By focusing on the concepts of identity, representation, author shows the impact of foreign policy and security narratives on the limits of political possibilities and the legitimization of strategic action (Hansen, 2006). The works suggest that representational acts socially construct strategic realities rather than being predetermined. The authors posit that narrative power is a key feature of contemporary geopolitics, where actors vie not only for material power but also for meaning and legitimacy (Roselle et al., 2013). Fairclough (2013) introduced critical discourse analysis techniques, stated that discourse as a social practice is related to power and institutional factors. The critical discourse analysis model developed by author creates a link between the analysis of texts and the socio-political context, highlighting the role of language in the construction and reproduction of dominance, ideology, and hegemony in both global and local politics (Fairclough,

2013). These works highlighted the importance of speech in the perception of threats, hierarchies, and credibility that played a key role in the understanding of the dynamics of power transition. However, power transition theory remained a structural materialist orientation and remained largely detached from discursive frameworks in spite of these theoretical advancements.

Scholarly work on Taiwan's role in U.S-China rivalry started to become more in depth following the early 2000s. Bush (2004, 2013) emphasized on Taiwan's increasing strategic value and the dilemma of its democratization despite of China's insistent claims of sovereignty and efforts to diplomatically isolating Taiwan. His work hinged on the fact that the long-standing ambiguity in Washington's policy was again struck by the fact that U.S. commitments attempted to balance precariously between deterrence and reassurance. But whereas Bush and others recognized the symbolic importance of democracy, their approaches did not systematically theorize discourse as a tool of power politics. Rather, they addressed declaratory policies as derivative of material and institutional limits. Since the mid 2010s, debates have grown more heated as China became more assertive under Xi Jinping, and the U.S reactions turned towards strategic competition. Mastro (2019) believed that Washington's hedging strategy was becoming more unsustainable in the face of China's coercive activities in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea. Strategic ambiguity was reevaluated in the context of declining deterrence. Swaine (2022) reported this debate, which opposes those who support ambiguity maintenance and those who think that it is crucial to maintain strategic clarity to prevent wrong calculations. These interpretations defined the problem of policy but showed the problem in terms of credibility and risk management and little regard of the constitutive quality of language in the creation of these very perceptions. This increase in strategic rivalry between China and the U.S. pointed to a major trend after the Cold War. By relying on the power transition theory, author explains how China is emerging as a threat to U.S. hegemony because of certain programs such as Belt and Road Initiative. The U.S. views China as a strategic opponent and is responding to this by formulating policies to counter the Chinese influence in the area and build alliances. The dimensions that are involved in the competition are status rivalry, security dilemma, technological dominance, and ideological differences. The study concludes that the heightened competition can result in instability of the global arena, especially with the U.S. administration having a zero-sum logic that restricts the opportunities of cooperation (Ali and Ali, 2021).

Recent studies have begun to narrow this gap indirectly by examining the art of declaratory policy in great power rivalry as expressive of intent. The analysis of the signaling strategies in the U.S- China relations, by Weiss (2019) suggests that ambiguity and clarity are components of bigger story fights in the sphere of legitimacy and regulations. Similarly, according to Rigger (2021), the American discourse on Taiwan is now more likely to introduce the island as a normative property alongside the security partner, which is in line with democratic identity politics. These evaluations are consistent with the studies of the Indo-Pacific approach of the Biden administration that formalizes deterrence postures and values-based arguments (White House, 2022). In order to elaborate on the role of language in hierarchical transitions, literature is still fragmented and it does not give us a complete framework that integrates discourse analysis and power transition theory. Another important point is the recent re-assessment of the topic of strategic ambiguity in the time before Biden. Although official clarifications have been issued after U.S officials have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to Taiwan's security, analysts observe a discursive shift in this regard (Green, 2023). The question of whether Washington is shifting toward "dual messaging" in order to maintains legal ambiguity while indicating political clarity has been raised by this rhetorical pattern. Some scholars contend that by creating constructive uncertainty, such ambiguity in speech acts improves deterrence, while others, like Swaine (2022) cautioned that it may increase the likelihood of misinterpretation. These conflicting interpretations

highlighted the necessity of methodically examine the language as a separate factor affecting strategic results.

The normative framing of Taiwan within the U.S grand strategy is the subject of the last thread of pertinent literature. Hsu (2022) contend that Taiwan's function has evolved from a security buffer to a pillar of democratic identity and supply chain resilience. Biden's policy documents like the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy which indicates an ideational recalibration in the U.S policy by clearly situating Taiwan within a larger narrative of upholding rules based order (White House, 2022). Although this pattern has been recognized by policy studies and journalistic reporting, academic research has not yet theorized its significance for the dynamics of power shift. Despite growing evidence that narrative contests increasingly supplement and occasionally replace material balancing in great power rivalry, this disparity still exists.

Overall, the literature is marked by three significant gaps. Firstly, although power transition theory presents a strong structural account of hegemonic competition, it is still engaged to materialist assumptions and ignores discursive practices as agents of systemic change. Secondly, although Taiwan has increasingly placed a central point in strategic discourse, academic scholars on the U.S-Taiwan relations still gives top billing to capability based measures over rhetorical strategies. Third, constructivist and narrative approaches to international relations have shed light on the performative nature of language but have rarely been brought together with systemic theories to account for how discourse mediates hierarchical changes. This research fills these gaps through the formulation of an analytical framework that brings power transition theory together with qualitative discourse analysis to analyze the U.S narratives regarding Taiwan during Biden's term (2021–2025). By prioritizing language as a constitutive force in power politics, the study contributes to theoretical discussions of the relationship between material and ideational forces in great power change and offers empirical evidence on the changing logic of the U.S-Taiwan interactions in a disputed Indo Pacific order.

Theoretical framework

Power transition theory is especially well adapted in explaining the U.S-China competition because theory provides a systemic explanation of the turmoil that occurs when an ascending challenger moves toward parity with an entrenched hegemon. Initially developed by Organski (1958), the theory contends that international order is of hierarchical nature, with a leading power that dictates rules and norms of global management. Stability is preserved as long as the leading power is considerably more powerful than challengers. When a discontented emerging power narrows the material capabilities gap, then the likelihood of war increases. In today's international order, China's economic boom, military modernization, and technological advancements have narrowed the gap with the United States in relative power. China's emergence as a great power is posing a direct challenge to U.S. hegemony. This process, along with Beijing's discontent towards the US led order and its attempts to reshape international norms, represent the very essence of the conditions that the theory of power transition identifies as conducive to tensions.

Using this theoretical framework to analyze the U.S. and China's rivalry, theory provides a framework to analyze Taiwan's role in the region. In the past, Taiwan was treated as a regional security issue, but in the context of power transition, Taiwan emerges as a contentious issue as it involves material as well as normative interests. Taiwan represents the world's semiconductor supply chain as well as the narrative of U.S. democratic value in terms of promoting its leadership claims in a rules-based order. In the case of China, Taiwan represents the unfulfilled agenda of its national unification as well as its claims to sovereignty in terms of rejuvenating its nation. The asymmetric value of Taiwan to the U.S.

and China increases the possibility of miscalculation, especially in a situation where the power transition is dynamic.

As opposed to the conventional uses of power transition theory, which have largely relied on quantitative data on GDP or military expenditures, the present study extends the use of the theory by incorporating discourse as a means of managing or escalating systemic tensions. The U.S-China rivalry is not just a competition in terms of power but also a competition for legitimacy and narratives of order. The focus of the Biden administration on democratic solidarity and the Indo-Pacific rules based order is a manifestation of the attempt to reassert U.S hierarchical legitimacy in the face of the rising challenger. This study uses power transition theory in a novel manner by incorporating discourse analysis to examine the ways in which language and narrative forms serve as a means of signaling commitment, influencing perceptions, and sustaining or challenging hierarchical positions. This extension of power transition theory is necessary in the current era in which the informational and normative dimensions of power increasingly complement the material dimensions of power. In the current era, power transition theory is a highly pertinent but underexplored approach to understand the U.S-China rivalry in the Taiwan case.

Methodology

This research applies qualitative discourse analysis to analyze the U.S strategic narratives regarding Taiwan during the Biden presidency (2021–2025) and combines these results with power transition theory (PTT). This selection of methodology is due to the research aims to investigate how language is used as a strategic instrument in great power competition, especially when systemic hierarchy is threatened. While the power transition theory is conventionally interested in material ontology like GDP and military power, this research breaks new ground in a way that it reaches into the ideational realm and examines discourse as a constitutive factor of hierarchical stability or instability. Discourse analysis is guiding instrument because language is not only descriptive but performative; it creates strategic realities, indicates intent, and legitimates policy decisions (Fairclough, 2013). In the case of U.S-Taiwan relations, declaratory policies, presidential rhetoric, government official's statements, and congressional hearings are central to create perceptions of commitment and deterrence. Discourse analysis shows how discursive moves from "strategic ambiguity" to values based framing affect both policy and theoretical analyses of power transition dynamics.

The research relies on three primary sources of data- public addresses and statements made by President Joe Biden- gathered from official White House transcripts; the U.S policy reports like the 2022 Indo Pacific Strategy and corresponding State Department briefings; and congressional proceedings like debates on Taiwan legislation such as the Taiwan Policy Act. Other texts include Taiwan's official statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to check for narrative congruence. The period is from January 2021 through July 2025, overlapping with the highlight moments of U.S-China-Taiwan relations under Biden's presidency.

The selection of data is guided by relevance and authority, with primary sources being more important than opinion based journalism to secure credibility. The corpus is useful for analyzing the evolution of discourse during a critical period of the U.S-China rivalry. The analytical steps involve critical discourse analysis that includes three steps: coding of themes and keywords (i.e., "democracy," "rules based order," "peace and stability"); bundling of codes to higher-level categories such as deterrence signaling, normative framing, and alliance reassurance; and connecting these trends to power transition theoretical concepts. For example, Taiwan as an important ally to secure a "free and open Indo-Pacific" is an effort to reassert hierarchical legitimacy while dissuading an aspirant discontent with the status quo. Reliability and validity are achieved through triangulation and the use of open coding methods. Congressional discourse and texts are triangulated with presidential discourse and texts to assess

consistency or inconsistency. Although the goal of qualitative methods is not statistical generalizability, interpretive consistency is secured through contextualization and the alignment of interpretation with theory. Reflexivity is also maintained to prevent biasness.

The application of discourse analysis to power transition theory is operationalized by testing the extent to which efforts of discourse moderation and intensification affect systemic tension. The power transition theory argues that systemic conflict is more likely to arise as a challenger approaches parity with a hegemon. The research extends this assumption by testing whether the dominant state employs discourse to assert legitimacy and commitment as dominance is lost. The emphasis on democracy and strategic alliances is conceptualized as an ideational coping mechanism to structural imperatives, highlighting the interplay of material and ideational factors in power politics. The approach is considered to be a solid framework through which to explore the role of discourse as a tool of order maintenance during periods of hegemonic shift. The research improves on existing theories and practices by offering an understanding of how strategic language is used to produce outcomes within the U.S-China and Taiwan relations that is outside of conventional materialist approaches.

Discussion

The outcomes of this research answer two related research questions: first, how the discourse of the Biden administration on Taiwan changed between 2021 and 2025, and what strategic narratives it builds to convey commitment and maintain the U.S hierarchical legitimacy in a power transition; and second, how these discursive strategies intersect with the dynamics power transition theory predicts, specifically deterrence, legitimacy, and U.S-China systemic stability. By interpreting the U.S's official discourse, using the theory of critical discourse analysis and placing these interpretations within the context of power transition theory, this discussion offers insights into the ideational aspects of great power politics within the Indo-Pacific region.

The development of the U.S-Taiwan discourse under Biden exhibits a cycle of continuity and changes that both reveals structural necessity and strategic agency. Historically, the U.S policy towards Taiwan has been based on strategic ambiguity—a precisely calibrated position that supports the One-China policy while pledging to defend Taiwan in the event of an attack under the Taiwan Relations Act (Bush, 2013). Under Biden, this ambiguity remained in official policy but was profoundly rhetorically reoriented. Starting in early 2021, presidential remarks and State Department press briefings started to describe Taiwan not only as a security ally but as a normative asset that lies at the center of efforts to maintain rules based Indo-Pacific order (White House, 2022). This context further evolved after increased Chinese military operations close to Taiwan's air defense identification zone in 2022, when Biden issued several declarations stating American preparedness to defend Taiwan in case of attack (Green, 2023). Although the White House subsequently clarified that it was not a change in policy, the repetition of them in numerous occasions created so-called conditional clarity, a linguistic resource that prevents aggression and allows flexibility (Swaine, 2022).

This discursive change is anchored on three themes that are related to each other and they are democracy, rules-based order and solidarity of alliances. The American discourse makes Taiwan more than a bilateral issue and declares the security of Taiwan as a universal normative issue by continually referring to Taiwan as a vibrant democracy and placing the security of Taiwan at the draw of the stability of the Indo-Pacific. This kind of rhetoric generates a value chain where the United States claims the position of normative leader, reasserting its position against the systemic competitiveness with China. This is a rhetorical appeal to what Schweller and Pu (2011) have termed as the status anxiety of a dominant power that is relatively on the down slope. At this point, discursive transformation is not merely decorative but functional, a kind of ideational fix to the structural weakness that is characterized

by the power transition theory. Turning back to values and order provides symbolic capital that compensates the dilution of material preponderance, shows that the United States is seeking to dominate not only in the capabilities but in the narrative power.

The second research question can only be answered through theoretical explanation of such discursive practices in the assumptions of power transition theory. The power transition theory suggests that the international order is the most insecure or precarious in case when an unsatisfied emerging power is gaining momentum towards equality with the dominant or leading state (Organski, 1958). China's long-term economic growth, military modernization, and aggressive regional behavior fulfill these requirements, making the Taiwan Strait a key point of systemic tension. The U.S. perceives China as a strategic competitor across economic, technological, and military domains. Washington's response includes policies like the Strategic Competition Act of 2021 and the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative, which is intended to reduce Chinese influence and provide an alternative to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The U.S. also actively integrates China's neighbors into alliance systems to contain its power (Ali & Ali, 2021). China's ambition to play a leading role in a new international order and reform global financial institutions, contrasting with the US's efforts to maintain its "sole superpower" status and hegemony, especially in the Asia-Pacific region (Zhekenov et al., 2015). One important theme is China's "rhetoric of traumatized nationalism," which is the product of its "century of humiliation." This makes it difficult for China to compromise on the Taiwanese issue. The U.S. is described as having a "rhetoric of geostrategic deception," which is a product of the U.S.'s "confusion, not malice." Taiwan feels that it is not important in superpower politics and thus developed a "rhetoric of democracy as conversion" and "democratic disdain," which is a product of a need to define itself and correct historical injustices. In conclusion, author suggests that these "rhetorical dispositions" cause problems and could lead to serious international risks (Hartnett, 2021).

Classic power transition theory analyses deal with material indicators, as they assume conflict potential is primarily caused by changes in the distribution of capabilities. Although these structural forces are still relevant, empirical evidence from this study shows that ideational strategies discourse in this case are pivotal to the course of power transitions. The Biden administration's narrative serves as an instrument of tempering systemic instability through indications of determination, strengthening alliances, and delegitimation of the challenger's argument. This implies that discourse must be conceived not as epiphenomenal but as constitutive of hierarchical order and thus deserving its inclusion within power transition theory based models of great power competition.

The analysis identifies two overarching functions of discourse in this context: deterrence signaling and legitimacy construction. Firstly, calibrated ambiguity and clarity is a means of deterrence signaling. Reiterating that the United States would assist Taiwan in case of some conditions and declaring that it would not change its official policy, Biden generates a strategic uncertainty in the face of coercive actions in Beijing, thereby escalating the potential costs of such actions without making any commitment of unconditional defense (Green, 2023). This tendency coincides with the concept of deterrence theory but also re-calibrates the expectations of the power transition theory, as it is possible that ideational instruments can influence the perceived payoffs of war during a power transition. Legitimacy construction is also being achieved through normative framing. The U.S rhetoric adds the Taiwanese country to the narrative of democratic strength and order through rules and regulations, labeling the Chinese activities as violations of world norms and, thus, delegitimizing the Beijing claim to the current order. This framing is done to third party public regional friends and the rest of the international community whose backing is necessary to continue to lead the United States in a multipolar world. In power transition theory language, these attempts are aimed at keeping the systemic stability through

enhancing the normative ascendancy of the hegemonic power at the time when material differentials are decreasing.

However, paradoxical risks implicated in such discursive strategies are also found in the results. As normative framing boosts the U.S credibility among allies, it at the same time toughens Chinese perceptions of threat, risking a speeding up of the security dilemma dynamic implied but not fully theorized by power transition theory (Glaser, 2011). Words that appear in Beijing to be edging towards strategic definition can be read as signs of the U.S retreat from the One-China policy, thus diminishing China's incentives for restraint (Hsu, 2022). This shows the double-edged character of language during hegemonic transition: words can stabilize expectations, but also incite countermeasures when misunderstood. The ensuing spiral highlights the importance of incorporating discursive variables in power transition theory analyses to account for feedback effects of signaling in strategic interactions.

Besides deterrence and legitimacy, there is a domestic political aspect of discourse under Biden which acts indirectly to precondition systemic processes. The U.S leaders package domestic backing of an aggressive approach to Indo-Pacific into a democracy-versus-autocracy conflict, which reinforces the continuity of policy along partisan lines (White House, 2022). This is an internal factor that is pertinent to the power transition theory as the internal cohesiveness of the dominant power enhances its capacity to uphold external obligations even when it is finding its way through a period of relative decadence. Thus the ideational approach operates at different levels international, regional, domestic that demonstrate the multidimensionality of power in contemporary changes.

The theoretical implications are profound. First, the findings challenge traditional power transition theory's materialist bias by showing that power transitions are not mediated only by relative capabilities but also by the performative power of language. Discourse is a resource in itself, one able to structure threat perception, alliance cohesion, and legitimacy structures. Second, the analysis contends that ideational strategies will only postpone but never eliminate the instability characteristic of structural convergence. Although normative framing will boost hierarchical resilience, its effectiveness will be contingent on credibility rhetorical and material. An expanding gap between policy declaration and capacity for action may undermine the very legitimacy that such discourse aims to build, forging what Jervis (2017) identifies as a "credibility trap." Last, the results highlight the need to take into account unintended effects. Discursive escalation, read as a move away from ambiguity, might create security dilemmas that accelerate instead of postpone confrontation, somewhat confirming power transition theory's prediction of instability when there is parity in power.

Politically, these processes imply that American policy must strike a balance between the promises made in rhetoric and the demands presented by practical considerations in a way that will not compromise credibility nor predetermine the escalation. By reinforcing the inclusive story interpretations of regional security as opposed to binary interpretations of the ideological conflict, it may be possible to reduce the misperceptions without compromising the deterrence abilities. In the case of Chinese actors, more advanced reactions to the rhetorical transformation in American policy can be informed by the realization that there is a performative aspect of American rhetoric. As the case of Taiwan goes, there are opportunities and constraints to its incorporation of its narratives with the American strategic rhetoric in sustaining its international presence in a way that is increasingly better coupled with the strategic calculus of American-Chinese rivalry.

To conclude, the discussion above shows that the rhetoric of the Biden administration of Taiwan is a self-conscious rhetoric of storytelling that tried to maintain the American hierarchical legitimacy in an age of power transition. This article proposes a synthesis model of the ideational processes of great-power competition, thereby using the concept of the qualitative discourse analysis coupled with power

transition theory to provide a hybrid model. The study highlights that the state of the systemic stability is not only based on material but also semantic distributions, interpretations and meanings through which states set and establish their relative positions in the distribution. As the U.S-China transition turns deeper, the competition of the narratives might be as important as it's opposite, the competition of capabilities, and thus discourse may be a crucial variable of the analysis of international order.

This study is based on a systematic discourse analysis of 78 primary sources, presidential speeches, and the white house transcripts, policy reports such as the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy, state department press conferences, and congressional debates of Taiwan between January 2021 and July 2025 that form the conclusions of this research. The analysis has shown patterns of use of lexical patterns, thematic patterns, and narrative structure, as well as the combination of these factors that reveal the alteration of the U.S discourse in Taiwan under the Biden administration. These findings occur in three general groups: discursive progression of uncertainty to conditional clarity, normative inclusion of Taiwan in a democracy-oriented strategic discourse and the strategic use of language to effect deterrence and a fair escalation risk.

The main important finding is associated with the continuation and transformation of strategic ambiguity. Historically, the American foreign policy towards Taiwan was held on a conscious vagueness by purporting to support the One-China policy and commit to defend Taiwan by the Taiwan Relations Act (Bush, 2013). Once under Biden, the floor was maintained in the formal law terms; the rhetoric was rather different in the tone and the content. Most notably in interviews in 2021-President Biden claimed that the United States would defend Taiwan in the event of an attack by China referred to in four separate occasions. Although the White House was fast to correct each incidence in which the U.S policy had not shifted, the sheer amount of times these declarations were issued, and the non-retraction by the President himself created a discursive trend that scholars and actors interpreted as conditional clarity (Green, 2023). It is a trend which suggests rhetorical re-calibration that is meant to increase deterring without bringing a real policy shift. The words employed in these situations bypassed any unconditional offers, so that U.S. reaction was conditional, provided an unprovoked assault, so as to retain strategic flexibility at the same time expressing determination.

The second conclusion is that of the normative construction of Taiwan in the U.S grand strategy. The recurrent emphasis on Taiwan as a vibrant-democracy and a critical partner in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific was visible in policy documents, such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy (White House, 2022) and speeches delivered by world leaders in international conferences. These words do not simply give an account of the reality, but they make Taiwan what it is a symbolic center of a broader ideological conflict between democracy and authoritarianism. The location of Taiwan in this framework elevated Taiwanese strategic value beyond the regional to the global normative issue by the Biden administration. This change can also be seen in the congressional rhetoric in which bipartisan support of congress legislations involving Taiwan was often justified not as much on security but as a defense against authoritarianism of democratic values. This can also be emphasized on through the continuous mentioning of the rules-based international order, which outlines the Chinese actions as being in violation of universally accepted norms. The normative quality of construction has two-fold purpose: the U.S intervention into the Taiwan security justification, and strengthening the alliance networks through invoking common values rather than transaction interests.

The third outcome touches on the functional role played by discourse in coping with systemic unpredictability, which is expected in power transition theory. According to the power transition theory, there is the danger that war is likely to escalate when the dissatisfied challenger approaches the level of the dominant power (Tammen et al., 2000). Below this, there is American rhetoric under Biden which is

an ideational method of minimizing these threats through moderated signals. The textual analysis demonstrates that there is an official language application on the dual narrative; on the one hand, deterrence is created by constant repetitions of commitment to the security of Taiwan; and, on the other hand, is the stability created by re-emphasizing that U.S. policy has not changed and continues to commit to peaceful management of differences across the Strait. This verbal balancing act is observed in press conferences in the State Department, which included violent attacks on efforts made unilaterally to change the status quo, and encouragement that the Washington does not support the idea of Taiwanese independence. Such rhetoric attempts to bring about expectations stability, reducing motivations to take early steps and deterring coercion. However, the study also shows that the strategy produces ambiguity which can produce a variety of understandings particularly in Beijing where the successive statements of the president can be interpreted as evidence of a gradual shift towards strategic clarity.

Further analysis establishes tendencies of the use of specific sets of lexis that correspond to the priorities of narrative. Such adjectives as peace and stability were observed in nearly all the reviewed documents which testify of an overall adherence to the status quo. The Indo-Pacific Strategy and related statements that included the terms of alliances and partners and the collective action became a regular phenomenon, which expressed the wish of multilateralism and the security of Taiwan on a bigger regional scale. At the same time, deterrence-related terms such as defend; commitment, resolve, etc. saw a strong increase in frequency after serious crises in the region, e.g., military exercises by the Chinese military in answer to top visitors of Taiwan in 2022. These tendencies suggest a responsive aspect of the U.S rhetoric, as the more the Chinese are assertive, the stronger is the rhetorical signaling. Analysis found no evidence of open commitments to Taiwan independence, and once again restated the Washington commitment to its One-China policy in the midst of a rhetorical tinderbox.

The other aspect of the findings is associated with agency of Taiwan in this discursive structure. Although the research is grounded on the U.S discourse, official statements of the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs were used to develop interpretive alignments. The phrase is repeated throughout the U.S discourse on democracy and the rules-based order, which supports the Taiwanese discourse as the responsible stakeholder committed to the stability of the region. This coherence suggests that Taipei was deliberate in attempting to repeat the U.S discourses on the need to legitimize the international context and solidify the normative production of the cross-Strait dynamics.

There were two implications in broader terms as these findings are synthesized. Second, the US discourse in Taiwan during Biden is strategic response to systemic issues associated with change of power. The US is interested in maintaining hierarchical legitimacy in a relatively declining period through its ideational placement of Taiwan in an ideational structure of democracy and order. Second, although such rhetorical tricks may be useful in disarming the opponents and bonding the various allies together, it has its share of misconception and escalation particularly where new forms of rhetoric like the conditional clarity are viewed by China as a profitable policy change and not rhetoric. The findings above indicate that discourse in the great power rivalry is two-sided and therefore can stabilize and destabilize expectations.

These findings cumulatively indicate how the U.S strategic communication was more advanced in terms of handling the Taiwan issue amid China in the process of a power transition. The conclusion supports the notion that discourse is not some secondary element of the international policy but a major way of forming perceptions, defining alliances, and negotiating hierarchies. Although this study does not imply that discourse strategies are causal elements of international politics, the results indicate that they are a serious aspect of mediating the systemic aspects that have been identified in the power transition theory; hence they should be included in such models.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The current study aimed at discussing the United States discourse on Taiwan under the Biden administration (2021-2025) and qualitative discourse analysis. The study was grounded on the power transition theory. The main purpose of the study was to evaluate the way the United States uses strategic discourses to achieve hierarchical legitimacy and deal with systemic instability in an atmosphere of growing the U.S-China rivalry. The study found out that the three significant conclusions are gradual transformation of strategic ambiguity into conditional clarity, Taiwan as a member of a greater normative system, which is beyond the democracy and rules-based order, and pragmatism of discourse to straddle the line of deterrence and escalation threats.

The findings show that language is not just a tool of communication but it ought to have a constitutive role in the politics of the international arena. Discourse reflects and constitutes strategic realities, denotes commitments, maintains legitimacy, and networks alliance. Discourse is one of the most important ways through which leadership is preserved in the case of a change of power in which the material predominance is waning. It is a logic that is reflected in the narrative framing of the Biden administration that uses rhetoric strategies to compensate for structural flaws predicted by power transition theory. This can be used to demonstrate that there should be an additional of materialist conceptualizations of power transition with an ideational element.

The current study contributes to the literature on two aspects. It initially formulates power transition theory through incorporation of discursive variables into the explanatory framework. This paper demonstrates that these dynamics are mediated through ideational practices in this scenario, strategic narratives, which inculcate the feelings of legitimacy and deterrence. The discursive can never eliminate systemic instability, but can have an influence on the speed at which transition is accomplished, and the direction of transition, by stabilizing or destabilizing expectations. Second, the methodology of the study is innovative, simultaneously integrating qualitative discourse analysis with a systemic theory in a hybrid approach that implies a structural and interpretative approach to great-power rivalry. Such an approach exposes the fact that language is not only a miming apparatus but also an ordering-building mechanism, which makes it an important variable in international relations in the modern context.

There are also policy related implications of the findings. In the case of U.S, strategic communication must be modified to become aware of deterrence and control of escalation. Even though conditional clarity may strengthen deterrence by raising the costs of coercion, rhetorical deviations off ambiguity may be viewed by Beijing as a kind of de facto policy reform. Hence, the U.S policy makers must make sure that internal consistency exists between presidential speech, formal clarifications, and abilities. Both deterrence and reassurance of alliance can be compromised by excessive promise of capabilities by rhetoric. Second, the U.S may contemplate a Taiwan policy in a regional discourse that is inclusive as well as focused on stability and shared prosperity rather than ideological competition. Although the language of democracy vs. autocracy is effective in raising the domestic backlash and recruiting the support of like-minded countries, it can also contribute to supporting the Chinese view of the security threat and the security dilemma. The focus on the standards of peaceful conflict resolution and regional stability in addition to deterrence might assist in reducing misperception without damaging the US commitment.

In the example of China, it is necessary to accept the importance of the performative level in the US rhetoric. Rhetorical signals may result in an escalation cycle in case of over reading. One way to contain tensions may be to resort to more open communication and proportional signals, thereby acting in a long-term way which is consistent with the long-term interest of both parties. The analysis provides opportunities and restrictions in the case of Taiwan. The association with global salience and deterrence

is achievable through identification with normative the US narratives. This may lead to a less maneuverable policy to further increase strategic vulnerability to the U.S-China confrontation but more entrenchment in a values-based system may mitigate this. The dilemma facing Taiwan is that it can pursue normative alignment to pursue diplomatic recognition without so evidently doing so that it becomes the catalyst of the systemic war.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

For all of its contribution, this research is subject to a number of limitations. As a first point, its use of discourse analysis prevents categorical assertions of causality between rhetoric and action. As discourse influences perception, how it influences policy outcomes is still hard to quantify. For future work, a mixed methods design might draw on content analysis in combination with process tracing or elite interviews to trace causal connections between narrative change and policy choice. Second, the research is limited to the U.S discourse and presents only a partial picture of Chinese and Taiwanese narratives' engagement with or challenge of U.S. frames. A comparative examination across rival discourses would yield a more comprehensive portrayal of narrative contestation in the Indo-Pacific region. Finally, widening the scope over time beyond the Biden administration would enable one to determine whether patterns noted are a structural trend or a situational characteristic of one particular presidency. Lastly, although this research emphasizes the ideational aspects of power changes, it doesn't assess their efficacy in changing material realities. Future studies may examine if normative approaches reflect in real strategic benefits, e.g., alliance stability, deterrent credibility, or reputational capital within multilateral organizations.

Recommendations

Taiwan is a normative object and a geopolitical hotspot as the U.S-China transition of power continues to gain momentum. The words of the Biden administration are a tactical shift that considers the use of language to the advantage of the United States leadership by highlighting Taiwan in a society of values and discourages Chinese coercion. Such a strategy, however, has a risk attached to it: rhetorical escalation may cause false impressions leading to fueling of instability instead of slowing it down. This study finds that systemic stability in an era of power change not merely a capacity to be related to relative capabilities, but, in fact, the significances that states attribute to those capabilities through discourse. Realizing the constitutive power of language is essential to scholars and practitioners who must struggle with the uncertain future of U.S-China relations and the future of the Indo-Pacific order.

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