

Discoursing Unity: Language, Power, and Reunification in Chinese and Taiwanese Political Speeches

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ABSTRACT

Language does not merely reflect political reality, it actively constructs, legitimizes, and contests it, especially in contexts marked by ideological rivalry and contested sovereignty. Situated within this premise, this study examines how reunification is discursively framed in Chinese and Taiwanese political speeches through the intersecting lenses of language, power, and ideology. Although cross strait relations have been widely discussed in political and international studies, limited attention has been given to how reunification is linguistically constructed through competing rhetorical strategies in official speeches. Addressing this gap, the study investigates selected speeches by Xi Jinping and Tsai Ing wen to reveal how each leader mobilizes discourse to shape public meaning, national identity, and political legitimacy. Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative descriptive design using Critical Discourse Analysis grounded in Van Dijk's framework, with NVivo 14 supporting textual coding, word frequency analysis, and thematic pattern identification. The findings show a clear ideological divergence between the two political discourses. Xi Jinping frames reunification as a historical necessity tied to national rejuvenation, collective destiny, and culturally embedded values associated with Confucian harmony and unity. In contrast, Tsai Ing wen constructs Taiwan through the discourse of democracy, sovereignty, inclusion, and self-determination, positioning reunification as a potential threat to democratic life. These contrasting linguistic patterns demonstrate that political speeches function as strategic sites where power is normalized, resisted, and symbolically negotiated. This study offers an original contribution by integrating discourse analysis with cross strait political rhetoric and provides broader implications for understanding how language shapes geopolitical tensions, identity formation, and regional stability in East Asia.

1. Introduction

Few geopolitical issues in East Asia are as historically layered, ideologically charged, and discursively contested as the question of China Taiwan reunification. Beyond territorial sovereignty, reunification constitutes a struggle over meaning, identity, memory, and political legitimacy. Since 1949, cross Strait relations have been shaped by competing narratives through which Beijing and Taipei define historical continuity and future political order. Beijing frames reunification as national restoration, whereas Taiwan increasingly associates it with democratization, identity consolidation, and the preservation of political autonomy (Brown, 2020; Shen, 2022; Stošić, 2023; Wong, 2019). These competing positions are

reinforced by enduring political distrust, divergent institutional trajectories, and the strategic influence of the US PRC Taiwan relationship (Brown, 2020; Shen, 2022; Stošić, 2023; Wong, 2019).

Crucially, these tensions are not only geopolitical but also discursive. Political speeches function as sites where ideological realities, national identities, and moral claims are actively constructed. Existing scholarship demonstrates that Taiwan's democratization and distinct identity complicate Beijing's "One China" framework, while shifts in US policy and regional power dynamics shape both sides' strategic calculations (Campagnola, 2024; Shen, 2022; Stošić, 2023; Wong, 2019).

Despite escalating tensions, a fragile status quo persists through interdependence, soft power, and strategic ambiguity (Brown, 2020; Shen, 2022). While some studies foreground identity politics and historical crises, others emphasize economic statecraft and strategic narratives; collectively, they confirm that cross Strait relations remain structurally tense and dynamically contested (Shen, 2022; Stošić, 2023; Wong, 2019).

Within this broader context, Confucianism has re-emerged as a central ideological resource in Chinese political discourse. As a longstanding ethical tradition, it continues to shape governance, public morality, and national identity, and its revival reflects a strategic effort to anchor contemporary authority in cultural continuity (Villa, 2020; Wang, 2024). Recent scholarship shows that Confucian ideas are embedded in civilizational rhetoric and adapted to modern governance and socialist reform (Qü, 2023; Villa, 2020; Wang, 2024). At the same time, tensions persist between Confucian relational ethics and liberal universalist norms, alongside state attempts to reconcile tradition with contemporary political objectives (Dykman & Bruun, 2021; Marrafa, 2025; Miao, 2020). Consequently, Confucianism operates as a dynamic and strategic source of legitimacy (An et al., 2020; Wang, 2024), reappropriated to reinforce authority and identity amid global transformation (Sebastien, 2007). However, these studies largely overlook how Confucian values are linguistically enacted within political speeches on reunification.

Parallel to this, research on Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream illustrates how discourse integrates nationalism, civilizational revival, and political legitimacy. Since 2013, this narrative has emphasized national rejuvenation, collective advancement, and prosperity, reinforcing the alignment of party, state, and nation (Callahan, 2016; Marinelli, 2018; Mazuelos, 2022). It also supports greater centralization and a more assertive foreign policy framed through cooperation and core-interest protection (Callahan, 2016; Mazuelos, 2022; Nasirova, 2020). Concepts such as ecological civilization, social harmony, and a shared global destiny further strengthen both domestic governance and international positioning (Callahan, 2016; Liu & Xie, 2023; Marinelli, 2018; Ramachandran, 2017). While some scholars highlight its cosmopolitan framing, others point to tensions with sovereignty and human rights discourse (Liu & Xie, 2023; Lu, 2016; Ramachandran, 2017).

Meanwhile, studies in Taiwan reveal heterogeneous public attitudes shaped by ideology and socioeconomic conditions, with stronger pro-independence orientations and skepticism toward China among certain groups (Chen et al., 2024). Yet, these studies remain largely focused on ideology and public opinion rather than on the linguistic construction of reunification discourse. This study addresses that gap by examining reunification as a discursive and

ideological construct. Existing research has extensively analyzed geopolitical strategy, identity, and political culture, but has given limited attention to how these dimensions are articulated through language. China's discourse of power, for instance, frequently employs civilizational narratives to frame its rise as morally grounded and historically justified, with Confucianism reappropriated to promote legitimacy, discipline, and national pride (Rolland et al., 2020).

At the same time, comparative studies demonstrate that Confucian values can coexist with democratic systems in Taiwan and South Korea, while aligning more closely with authoritarian support in China and Singapore (Rolland et al., 2020). Building on these insights, this study offers a novel contribution by analyzing how such ideological tensions are linguistically constructed in the speeches of Xi Jinping and Tsai Ing wen, positioning discourse as a central arena of political contestation.

The significance of this study is both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, it investigates how political leaders shape public understandings of reunification, sovereignty, democracy, and national identity. Theoretically, it advances discourse analysis by demonstrating how language operates as a mechanism of ideological production and power negotiation. Specifically, this study aims to reveal how Confucian ideals and political systems are mobilized and contested in reunification discourse, and how each leader constructs distinct visions of legitimacy and cross Strait futures.

Structurally, this paper proceeds as follows. The literature review examines the intersections of Confucianism, political legitimacy, authoritarianism, and democracy, and introduces Van Dijk's discourse framework. The method section outlines the qualitative design, data sources, and analytical procedures supported by NVivo 14. The results section presents the key lexical and rhetorical patterns in the speeches, highlighting contrasting constructions of reunification. The discussion then situates these findings within existing scholarship, emphasizing the competing symbolic frameworks that underpin cross Strait discourse.

In conclusion, reunification is most productively understood as a discursive and ideological struggle rather than a purely geopolitical issue. Political language plays a central role in constructing and contesting legitimacy, identity, and historical meaning. By integrating discourse analysis with cultural and political perspectives, this study demonstrates how Confucian thought, authoritarian governance, and democratic values are mediated through language. Its broader implication lies in underscoring the role of discourse in shaping geopolitical perceptions and regional tensions in East Asia. Language, therefore, is not peripheral to political conflict, but one of its most decisive instruments.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Confucianism, Political Legitimacy, and Democratic Tension

Confucianism remains central to understanding the ideological foundations of reunification discourse in China and Taiwan. Historically, Confucianism has been closely linked to monarchy and authoritarian political order, which makes its relationship with democracy highly contested (Chan, 2018). At the same time, Confucianism is not a single and fixed tradition, but a diverse body of thought that includes imperial, reform, elite, merchant house, and popular forms. As a result, any attempt to define its connection with democracy will always be partial and dependent on how both Confucianism and democracy are interpreted (Baogang, 2012). In Chinese political culture, Confucianism has long shaped moral reasoning, governance, and cultural psychology, especially through values such as *Ren* and *Li*, which stress benevolence and ethical conduct in public life (Hu et al., 2021). In broader East Asian contexts, Confucianism has also interacted with liberalism, modernization, and rule of law in culturally specific ways (Paramore, 2020). Survey based findings further show that Confucian legacies may strengthen collective welfare oriented political preferences while also nurturing trust and tolerance that support civic life (Sin, 2012).

The concept of *tianxia* expands this discussion by framing political order as a morally unified world under a virtuous center, rather than as a system of equal sovereign states. This concept is especially relevant to reunification discourse because it allows political integration to be presented as cultural and ethical unity. However, Confucianism is not interpreted identically across the Strait. China and Taiwan show different social expressions of Confucian values, with different implications for trust, risk orientation, and temporal outlook (Liu et al., 2014). Their cultural policies also differ, as China adopts a more minimalist approach while Taiwan plays a more active role in cultural governance (Chan, 2011). Taiwan's citizenship education has increasingly moved toward pluralism, unlike the stronger continuity of traditional Confucian values in China (Hung, 2015). This divergence may create fragmentation if left unresolved (Hung, 2015), yet Taiwan has also developed a more pluralistic cultural orientation shaped by broader identity recognition (Huang, 2023; Gao, 2005).

2.2 Authoritarianism, Democracy, and Reunification Narratives

Authoritarianism and democracy form the second major conceptual axis of this study. In China, authoritarian resilience has been explained through a governing structure in which the central government controls officials while local governments manage the population, allowing the state to reduce risk and

preserve long term political stability (Cao & Zhang, 2018). This structure is important because it reveals how centralized authority is sustained not only through institutions, but also through ideological justification. Within reunification discourse, this framework enables political unity to be represented as historically necessary and socially beneficial.

Such ideological contrast is clearly visible in the speeches of Xi Jinping and Tsai Ing wen. Xi Jinping's discourse combines Marxist Leninist foundations with nationalism, presenting the Chinese Communist Party as the central force of national rejuvenation and order (Rudd, 2024). His rhetoric is linked to broader narratives such as the "China Dream" and *tianxia*, which envision a strong and unified China under party leadership (Gering, 2023). This discourse is also reinforced by an assertive strategy toward Taiwan that includes both military and non military means (Madoka, 2022). By contrast, Tsai Ing wen frames Taiwan through democracy, sovereignty, and self determination. Her discourse emphasizes democratic governance, human rights, and restorative justice, including reconciliation with indigenous communities (Chu & Huang, 2021). She also promotes Taiwanization, de Sinicization, and stronger international engagement as part of Taiwan's distinct political identity (Gacek et al., 2023; Xin, 2013). These contrasting positions show that reunification is not only a political question, but also a conflict between competing visions of legitimacy, governance, and national future.

2.3 Political Discourse, Van Dijk's Framework, and Research Gap

The third variable of this study is political discourse as the space where ideology, identity, and power are linguistically constructed. The coexistence of Confucian ideals and authoritarian practices makes reunification discourse especially complex. Confucianism can be used to frame unity as moral harmony, while authoritarian governance raises concerns about autonomy and democratic survival. To examine these tensions, this study applies Van Dijk's discourse theory, which views discourse as both shaped by and productive of social power. This framework is useful because it reveals how political leaders construct in groups and out groups, legitimize authority, and embed ideological struggle in language (Ye, 2022).

Although many studies have examined Confucianism, authoritarianism, identity, and cross Strait relations, most have focused on political philosophy, governance, or geopolitical strategy in separate ways. Much less attention has been given to how these elements are discursively articulated in official speeches. This is the main gap addressed by the present study. Its novelty lies in integrating Confucian political philosophy, authoritarianism theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis to examine reunification as a linguistic and ideological contest. The study therefore

contributes to discourse studies, political linguistics, and critical language research by showing how language functions as a strategic instrument for shaping legitimacy, identity, and public meaning. In a broader context, it also offers insight into how discourse influences geopolitical tension and cross-national identity formation in East Asia.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine how reunification is discursively constructed in Chinese and Taiwanese political speeches. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to address why and how questions in depth, while also complementing broader descriptive concerns such as who, what, where, how many, and how much, which are commonly explored through quantitative methods. In this sense, qualitative inquiry helps make policy related analysis more meaningful and contextually grounded (Kodithuwakku, 2022). Since political discourse is inherently complex, contextual, and ideologically loaded, this design was particularly suitable for capturing the interaction of language, power, and political representation within official speeches.

The analysis was guided by Van Dijk's Discourse Analysis Model. Within this framework, language is understood as a means through which speakers represent their own group positively and other groups negatively. Because ideology contains moral, cultural, theological, and political dimensions, it is regarded as a central concern in Critical Discourse Studies. Van Dijk further explains that ideology commonly operates through polarization, intergroup comparison, and the distinction between in groups and out groups. His model also distinguishes macro and micro levels of textual analysis, allowing the researcher to connect broader sociopolitical meanings with specific linguistic features in the text (Ye, 2022).

This framework was therefore selected because it provides a systematic basis for examining how political leaders construct authority, legitimacy, identity, and ideological opposition through discourse.

3.2 Data Source and Data Collection

The primary data of this study consisted of selected official speeches by President Xi Jinping and President Tsai Ing wen that explicitly addressed the issue of reunification. These speeches were chosen purposively because they represent the official and authoritative positions of both leaders on one of the most sensitive issues in cross Strait relations. President Xi's speeches generally frame reunification through themes of historical continuity, national rejuvenation, and collective destiny, whereas President Tsai's speeches emphasize democracy, sovereignty, and the

right to self-determination. By selecting speeches directly related to reunification, this study was able to compare how each leader linguistically constructs political reality and shapes public understanding of cross Strait relations.

The speeches analyzed in this study were obtained from official and publicly accessible sources, specifically President Xi Jinping's address as published on the Chinese government's official website and President Tsai Ing-wen's speech from the official presidential website of Taiwan.

To ensure accessibility for non-Chinese-speaking audiences, the materials were examined through carefully selected English translations, accompanied by interpretive summaries designed to preserve the intended meanings as well as the contextual nuances of the original texts. Particular attention was given to key phrases and culturally embedded expressions, which were explained within their context to maintain both clarity and analytical depth. This approach allowed the analysis to remain accessible without sacrificing the ideological and discursive richness of the source material.

Following the identification of the relevant speeches, the texts were systematically compiled, organized, and prepared for analysis using NVivo 14, enabling a structured and methodologically consistent examination of the data.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis in this study integrates descriptive interpretation with the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, supported by the use of NVivo 14 as a qualitative data analysis tool. This software enabled a systematic and structured approach to examining the speech data, facilitating processes such as coding, word frequency analysis, text search queries, and thematic exploration. Through these features, the analysis was able to move beyond surface-level description toward a more nuanced understanding of linguistic and discursive patterns.

In addition, NVivo 14 generated a range of visual outputs, including word clouds and word trees, which proved instrumental in identifying recurrent lexical items and their contextual usage within the speeches. These visualizations allowed for clearer recognition of patterns in language use, as well as the relationships between key terms across different segments of the texts.

As a result, they supported the identification of dominant themes, ideological emphases, and rhetorical tendencies in each leader's discourse, thereby enhancing the overall systematicity, clarity, and transparency of the analytical process. The overall process of analysis is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the data analysis procedures using NVivo.

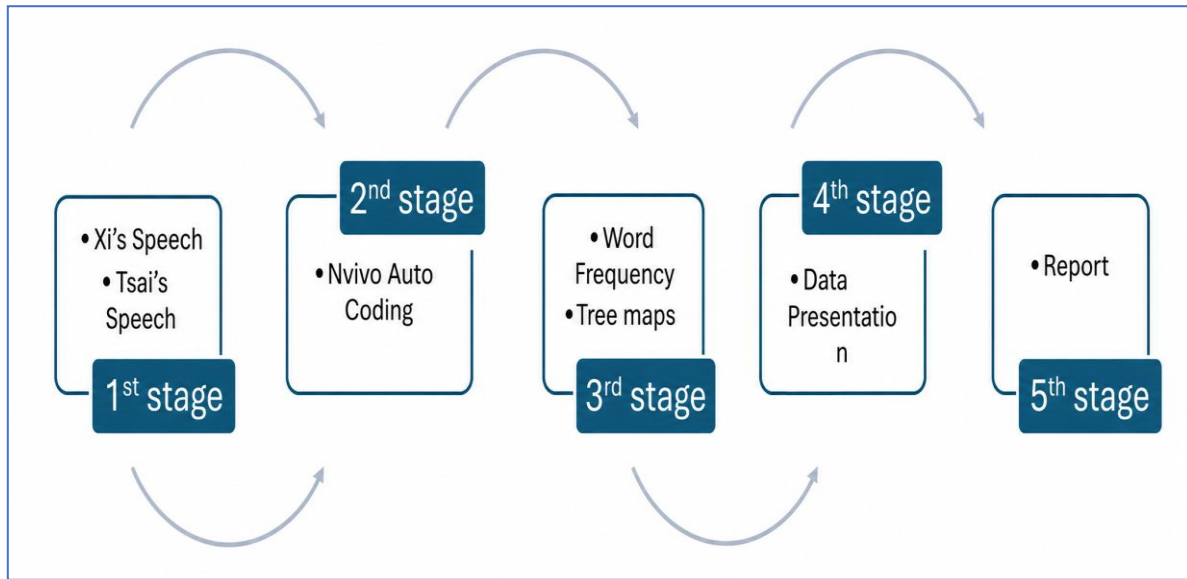


Figure 1. Data analysis procedures using NVivo

The analytical process was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher carried out a close reading of the selected speeches to identify key themes, repeated lexical patterns, and rhetorical strategies. Second, the texts were coded in NVivo 14 based on concepts related to reunification, democracy, sovereignty, harmony, identity, and political legitimacy. Third, the coded findings were interpreted using Van Dijk's Discourse Analysis Model at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, the analysis focused on thematic structures, ideological positioning, and broader sociopolitical meanings. At the micro level, attention was given to lexical choices, evaluative expressions, and discursive strategies that reveal how each leader constructs self and other, authority and resistance, as well as unity and division (Ye, 2022). Through this procedure, the study moved beyond surface description to uncover the ideological work performed by political language.

This methodological approach also responds to a limitation in previous scholarship. Although political discourse has been widely examined, much of the existing literature has focused more strongly on overt political content than on the subtle ways language shapes ideology and public perception. Likewise, studies on China Taiwan relations have often emphasized geopolitical and economic issues while paying less attention to the discursive mechanisms embedded in official speeches. By applying Van Dijk's framework to the speeches of Xi Jinping and Tsai Ing wen, this study addresses that limitation and offers a more integrated account of how language functions within the contestation of reunification discourse. Overall, the method was designed to ensure analytical clarity, contextual sensitivity, and theoretical relevance

in examining how language, power, and ideology interact in Chinese and Taiwanese political speeches.

4. Result

This research employed NVivo 14 Plus to analyze the speech data, as the software offers advanced capabilities for identifying keywords and generating visual representations such as word clouds, word trees, and word tree maps. These features, derived from text search queries and word frequency analysis, facilitated a more efficient and systematic examination of the speech transcripts. By organizing and visualizing patterns in language use, NVivo enabled a clearer understanding of how specific terms and expressions recur and interact within the texts. The results show that the discourse of reunification in Chinese and Taiwanese political speeches is constructed through two markedly different linguistic and ideological orientations. The visual outputs generated through NVivo 14, particularly the word clouds and word trees, reveal that President Xi Jinping and President Tsai Ing wen organize their speeches around different lexical centers, different political values, and different visions of collective future. Xi's discourse is dominated by national development, historical continuity, and collective rejuvenation, while Tsai's discourse foregrounds democratic identity, international visibility, and sovereign self-positioning. These differences are not merely stylistic. They indicate two competing discursive constructions of legitimacy, unity, and political destiny.

To clarify the major contrasts identified from the visual and textual analysis, Table 1 summarizes the dominant lexical patterns and their interpretive significance.

Table 1. Comparative Summary of Lexical Patterns and Discursive Orientation

Speaker	Dominant words	Discursive emphasis	Interpretive meaning
Xi Jinping	new, China, people, year, development, everyone, life	development, national progress, collective well-being, historical unity	reunification is framed as part of national rejuvenation and shared prosperity
Tsai Ing Wen	Taiwan, world, global, economic, eight years, years	democratic identity, global engagement, sovereign visibility, governance achievement	Taiwan is framed as a legitimate democratic actor distinct from China

4.1 Xi Jinping's Speech: Developmental Optimism and Historical Inevitability

The findings from Xi Jinping's speech show a highly consistent discursive pattern in which reunification is framed as part of a broader narrative of national progress, collective welfare, and historical continuity. The key result is that Xi does not present reunification as a stand alone political demand. Instead,

he incorporates it into a more appealing discourse of modernization, prosperity, harmony, and national rejuvenation. This pattern is important because it reveals that the legitimacy of reunification is built indirectly through developmental and moral language. In other words, the speech persuades not by foregrounding conflict, but by linking unity with progress, public well being, and an imagined common future.



Figure 2. NVivo Word cloud of the most frequent word in Xi Jinping's speech
Source: process by the author using NVivo 14 plus software

This pattern is first visible in Figure 2, which presents the word cloud of Xi Jinping's speech. The most frequent word is *new* with 16 occurrences, followed by *China*, *people*, *year*, and *development*, each appearing 11 times. The words *everyone* and *life* also appear with notable frequency, each recorded 7 times. These lexical repetitions are analytically meaningful because they show that the speech is strongly future oriented, nation centered, and people focused. The prominence of *new* suggests a discourse

of renewal and transition, while *China*, *people*, and *development* indicate that national identity, state success, and public welfare are closely interwoven. At the lexical level, therefore, Xi's speech is not dominated by the language of threat or opposition. It is dominated by the language of advancement and collective aspiration.

To present this lexical pattern more clearly, Table 2 summarizes the dominant lexical items and their discursive functions.

Table 2. Dominant Lexical Items in Xi Jinping’s Speech

Lexical item	Frequency	Discursive function	Interpretive focus
new	16	signals renewal and forward movement	frames the nation as entering a new stage
China	11	foregrounds national identity	places the state at the center of the discourse
people	11	emphasizes collective legitimacy	links governance to public interest
year	11	marks reflection and projection	connects achievement in the past with hope for the future
development	11	highlights modernization and progress	legitimizes state authority through material advancement
everyone	7	suggests social inclusion	extends national discourse to all citizens
life	7	stresses everyday welfare	translates policy ambition into lived well being

Table 2 indicates that the speech is structured around aspiration rather than antagonism. The repeated lexical focus on renewal, development, and public welfare constructs a political image of the state as productive, caring, and future driven. This choice is

significant because it makes reunification appear compatible with a broader national project of improvement. Rather than being articulated as a disruptive political act, reunification is embedded in an affirmative discourse of collective flourishing.

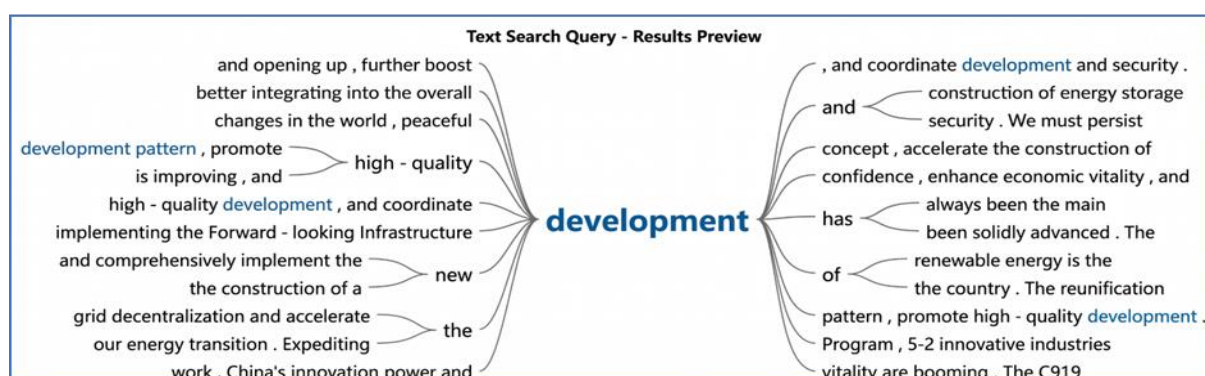
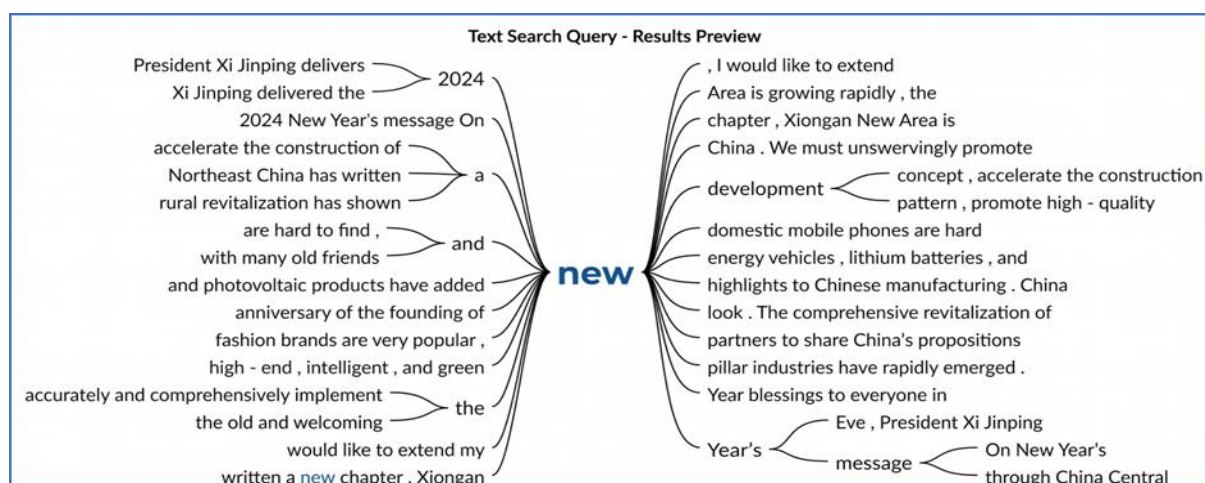


Figure 3. Word trees of the most frequent word in Xi Jinping’s speech
(Source: process by the author using NVivo 14 plus software)

This lexical evidence is reinforced by Figure 3, which presents the word trees generated from Xi's speech. The word trees show that *new*, *development*, *everyone*, and *life* repeatedly appear in contexts related to economic recovery, industrial modernization, social improvement, and national planning. This demonstrates that the most frequent words are not isolated repetitions, but core elements of the speech's ideological structure. The contextual recurrence of *new* points to new achievements, new opportunities, and new stages of development, while *development* is tied to regional revitalization, technological growth, and improved standards of living. Likewise, *everyone* and *life* show that the speech repeatedly shifts from macro national ambition to ordinary social experience. This makes the discourse more persuasive because state progress is translated into human benefit.

The textual excerpts strongly support this visual pattern. Xi begins by reflecting on struggle and success in a way that immediately produces a tone of optimism:

Excerpt 1 (XJ, Data 1)

"In 2023, we continued to struggle and forge ahead, experienced ups and downs, saw beautiful scenery, and achieved heavy harvests. Everyone has remembered the difficulties of the past year and is full of confidence in the future."

This excerpt reveals a clear rhetorical movement from hardship to confidence. Difficulty is not narrated as failure, but as a necessary stage leading to achievement. The phrase "full of confidence in the future" is particularly important because it directly aligns with the prominence of *new* and *year* shown in Figure 2. Time is discursively organized as progressive. The past confirms resilience, while the future is framed as a space of justified hope. This is a powerful strategy because it positions the state as capable of guiding the nation through uncertainty toward renewal.

The developmental dimension of this discourse is made more concrete in the next segment:

Excerpt 2 (XJ, Data 2)

"The modern industrial system has become more complete, and several high end, intelligent, and green new pillar industries have rapidly emerged."

Here, modernization is presented as visible proof of national advancement. The lexical emphasis on *modern*, *intelligent*, *green*, and *new pillar industries* reinforces the frequency pattern identified in Figure 2 and the contextual clustering displayed in Figure 3. Development is therefore framed not as a neutral economic process, but as evidence of a stronger and more future ready China. The speech uses these markers of progress to project competence, planning capacity, and strategic direction.

Xi expands this developmental narrative further through a wider account of national transformation:

Excerpt 3 (XJ, Data 3)

"Grain production has been abundant for twenty consecutive years, green waters and green mountains have become more beautiful, and rural revitalization has shown a new look. The comprehensive revitalization of Northeast China has written a new chapter, Xiong'an New Area is growing rapidly, the Yangtze River Economic Belt is pulsing with vitality, and the Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area is at the forefront."

This excerpt is important because it broadens the discourse of development across agriculture, ecology, rural reform, and regional growth. The cumulative listing of achievements creates the impression of comprehensive national movement. China is represented as progressing across multiple sectors and spaces at once. This cumulative effect matters because it builds a discursive environment in which reunification can later appear consistent with all other forms of advancement already underway. The speech therefore establishes a sense of momentum before explicitly introducing unity as part of that same trajectory.

That ideological move becomes fully explicit in the next passage:

Excerpt 4 (XJ, Data 4)

"Next year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of New China. We must unswervingly promote Chinese style modernization, fully, accurately and comprehensively implement the new development concept, accelerate the construction of a new development pattern, promote high quality development, and coordinate development and security."

"The reunification of the motherland is a historical necessity. Compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Straits must join hands and share the great glory of national rejuvenation."

This is one of the most important excerpts in the subsection because it shows how reunification is inserted into a discourse already saturated with modernization, development, security, reform, and strategic planning. The phrase "historical necessity" is particularly significant because it removes reunification from the realm of political debate and places it within the realm of inevitability. At the same time, the invitation to "join hands" softens the force of this claim by giving it a cooperative and collective tone. Rather than sounding overtly coercive, the discourse frames reunification as shared participation in the broader project of national rejuvenation. Linguistically, this is a sophisticated legitimizing strategy. It turns unity into the natural continuation of progress.

The people centered moral logic of the speech becomes even more evident when Xi shifts from national strategy to everyday welfare:

Excerpt 5 (XJ, Data 5)

“Our goal is both ambitious and simple. In the final analysis, it is to let the people live a better life.”

This short statement condenses the broader legitimacy claim of the speech. State ambition is justified through ordinary life. The phrase “better life” is especially important because it directly corresponds to the lexical prominence of *people* and *life* in Figure 2. National development is thus not framed as an abstract policy agenda, but as a people oriented moral mission. This rhetorical move allows political authority to appear humane, practical, and ethically grounded.

The affective and paternal dimensions of the speech are reinforced in the next excerpt:

Excerpt 6 (XJ, Data 6)

“The upbringing and education of children, the employment and success of young people, and the medical care and elderly care of the elderly are family affairs and state affairs. We must work together to get these things done well.”

“We need to create a warm and harmonious social atmosphere, expand an inclusive and active space for innovation, and create convenient and comfortable living conditions so that everyone can be happy, live a brilliant life, and make their dreams come true.”

This excerpt is especially revealing because it shows how governance is framed through care, social inclusion, and emotional reassurance. The state is represented not only as an administrative power, but also as a guardian of children, youth, families, and the elderly. The repeated references to *everyone* and *life*, already identified in the visual data, are here connected to happiness, comfort, and aspiration. The phrase “make their dreams come true” is particularly noteworthy because it extends the discourse from policy into the sphere of personal hope. At this point, the speech has effectively moralized governance. Reunification, although not directly mentioned in this excerpt, becomes indirectly associated with the same order of welfare, harmony, and collective care.

Xi then broadens this discourse through a global moral frame:

Excerpt 7 (XJ, Data 7)

“The Chinese people are well aware of the preciousness of peace. We are willing to work with the international community to build a community with a shared future for mankind and build a better world with the future of mankind and the well being of the people in mind.”

This final excerpt extends the speech beyond domestic development and national unity. China is represented as peace oriented and globally responsible. This matter because it places the national discourse within a wider ethical horizon. If China is discursively

positioned as pursuing peace, human welfare, and a shared future, then reunification can also be made to appear as part of an ethical and constructive order rather than an act of domination. In this sense, the speech enlarges the meaning of unity by linking it to peace and common destiny at a global scale.

Taken together, Figure 2, Figure 3, Table 2, and Excerpts 1 to 7 reveal a carefully layered rhetorical structure. Xi Jinping’s speech constructs a discourse of developmental optimism in which national progress, public welfare, and historical continuity are merged into a single persuasive narrative. Within this structure, reunification is not foregrounded as a divisive political demand. Instead, it is embedded within a broader project of modernization and collective advancement. This embedding gives the discourse much of its persuasive force because it repeatedly aligns unity with prosperity, stability, welfare, and destiny.

A closer reading of these findings indicates that Xi’s speech operates through a strategy of integrative legitimization. Reunification is not justified solely through explicit claims or direct political argumentation, but rather through its consistent association with a range of already valued and widely accepted concepts, including development, security, education, social harmony, care, and peace. At the linguistic level, this strategy is realized through the clustering and repetition of positive, forward-looking lexical items that create an overall tone of progress and optimism. At the ideological level, it reframes national unity as an extension of collective well-being, presenting it as a condition for shared flourishing rather than political imposition. This dual mechanism explains why the speech appears both assertive and reassuring. Its persuasive force lies in portraying integration as ethically consistent with, and necessary for, a better future.

Taken together, this subsection shows that Xi Jinping’s speech constructs reunification through a discourse of optimism, welfare, and historical inevitability. The visual data highlight terms related to renewal, development, people, and life, while the qualitative excerpts show how these choices portray the state as modernizing, caring, and unifying. The key finding is that reunification is legitimized not through explicit claims, but through a broader rhetorical framework that embeds it within narratives of national rejuvenation and shared prosperity.

4.2 Tsai Ing wen’s Speech: Democratic Identity and Global Positioning

The findings from Tsai Ing wen’s speech reveal a discursive pattern that contrasts sharply with Xi Jinping’s rhetoric. Tsai constructs political legitimacy through democratic identity, sovereign visibility, and international engagement. Rather than invoking historical inevitability or civilizational continuity, she frames Taiwan as an established democratic community grounded in freedom, inclusivity,

resilience, and global relevance. This framing positions Taiwan not as an incomplete entity awaiting reunification, but as a coherent and legitimate actor whose future should be determined through democratic self-understanding and international recognition.

Within this structure, reunification is not presented as fulfillment; instead, it is implicitly rendered incompatible with the political and moral order Taiwan has already developed.

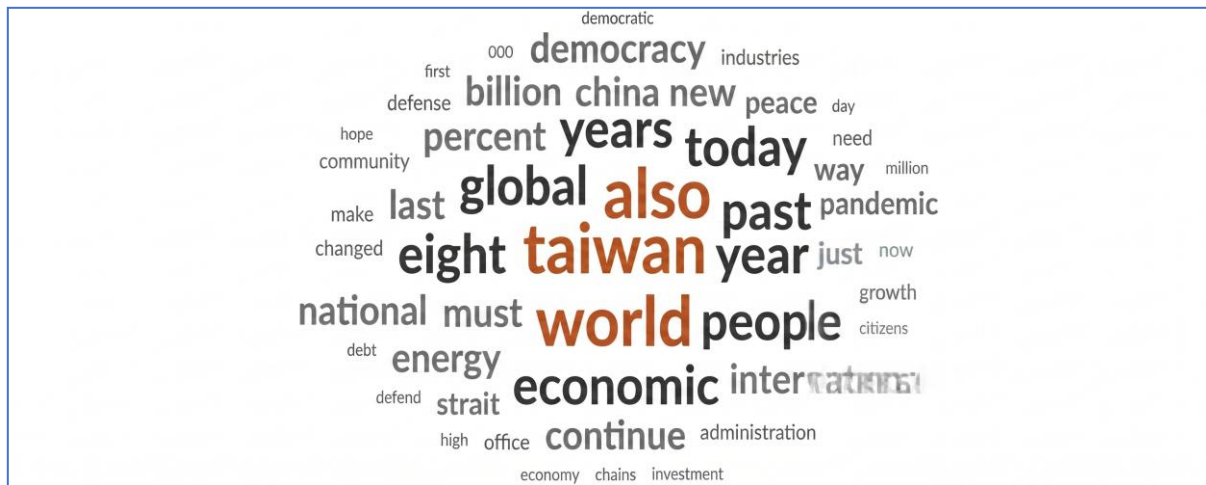


Figure 4. Word cloud of the most frequent word in Tsai ing wen’s speech
(Source: process by the author using NVivo 14 plus software)

This pattern is first visible in Figure 4, which presents the word cloud of Tsai Ing wen’s speech. The most frequent word is *Taiwan* with 54 occurrences, followed by *also* with 20, *world* and *global* with 17 each, *year* with 17, *years* with 16, *eight* with 12, and *economic* with 11. These frequencies indicate that Tsai’s discourse is organized around a strong and repeated naming of Taiwan itself, along with its connection to global affairs and governance performance. The prominence of *Taiwan* is especially important because it performs more than a topical

function. It repeatedly affirms Taiwan as a visible, coherent, and self-defining political subject. Meanwhile, the repeated presence of *world*, *global*, and *economic* shows that Taiwan is discursively positioned not in isolation, but in active relation to international systems, external recognition, and material capability.

To make this lexical pattern clearer, Table 3 summarizes the dominant lexical items and their discursive functions.

Table 3. Dominant Lexical Items in Tsai Ing wen’s Speech

Lexical item	Frequency	Discursive function	Interpretive focus
<i>Taiwan</i>	54	foregrounds national identity	presents Taiwan as a distinct and central political subject
<i>also</i>	20	adds cumulative emphasis	builds continuity between values, actions, and achievements
<i>world</i>	17	highlights international relation	positions Taiwan within global change and influence
<i>global</i>	17	signals worldwide recognition	frames Taiwan as internationally relevant
<i>year</i>	17	marks present reflection	links recent governance to current legitimacy
<i>years</i>	16	emphasizes duration	reinforces a record of sustained achievement
<i>eight</i>	12	anchors administrative period	connects political claims to Tsai’s years in office
<i>economic</i>	11	stresses governance performance	supports legitimacy through development outcomes

Table 3 shows that Tsai's discourse is structured around recognition, continuity, and democratic self affirmation. Unlike a discourse organized around reunification or integration, this lexical pattern centers Taiwan as already meaningful in political, moral, and international terms. The repeated naming of Taiwan,

together with words associated with global engagement and economic progress, constructs a rhetoric of established legitimacy. Taiwan is not described as waiting to be completed. It is represented as visible, capable, and already participating in shaping the world.

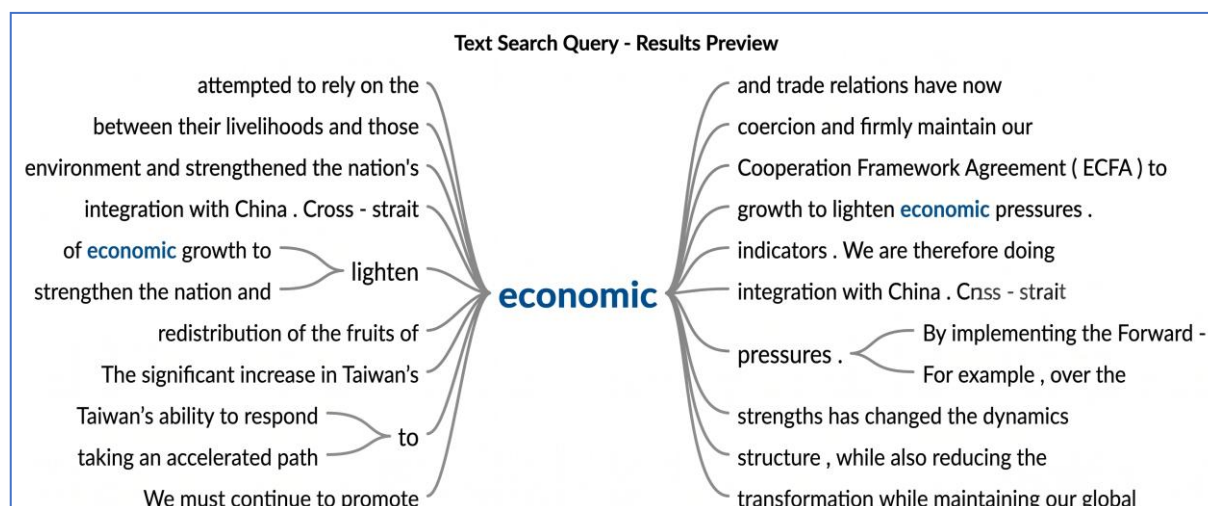


Figure 5. Word trees of the most frequent word in Tsai ying wen's speech

This lexical tendency becomes more specific in Figure 5, which presents the word trees generated from Tsai's speech. The contextual clusters around *global*, *economic*, and *eight years* reveal that these words repeatedly appear in relation to Taiwan's achievements, democratic development, international cooperation, and administrative progress. The word trees show that Tsai's lexical choices are not random repetitions. They form a coherent rhetorical architecture. *Global* repeatedly points to recognition, responsibility, and geopolitical relevance. *Economic* is tied to governance success, structural strengthening, and improved quality of life. *Eight years* functions as a temporal anchor that connects present legitimacy to a measurable record of leadership. Together, these patterns indicate that Tsai builds political authority not through claims of destiny, but through performance, democratic endurance, and global participation.

The textual excerpts strongly reinforce this interpretation. Tsai begins by elevating democracy and freedom from abstract values to geopolitical foundations:

Excerpt 1 (TIW, Data 1)

"Democracy and freedom are not just values we espouse; they stand as a fortress within geopolitics that we must defend."

This statement is central to the subsection because it transforms democratic values into strategic necessities. Democracy and freedom are not treated as symbolic preferences, but as protective structures sustaining Taiwan's position in a contested geopolitical

environment. This rhetorical move positions Taiwan not merely as a state with democratic values, but as a site where those values must be actively defended. In discursive terms, democracy becomes both identity and security.

Tsai immediately expands this point by linking Taiwan to global transformation:

Excerpt 2 (TIW, Data 2)

"While the 23.5 million people of Taiwan have participated in the world's changes, they have also participated in changing the world."

This excerpt closely corresponds to the prominence of *Taiwan*, *world*, and *global* in Figure 4. Taiwan is represented not as a passive recipient of international events, but as an actor that contributes to shaping them. The phrase "changing the world" is especially important because it rejects any discourse that reduces Taiwan to a peripheral or subordinate position. Through repeated reference to Taiwan and the world, Tsai's speech internationalizes Taiwan's identity and presents it as globally consequential. This is a powerful rhetorical strategy because it relocates Taiwan from the margins of regional dispute to the center of democratic and geopolitical relevance.

Tsai then strengthens this international framing through the language of recognition and responsibility:

Excerpt 3 (TIW, Data 3)

"Today, 'Taiwan Can Help' is an initiative recognized by the world."

This brief statement carries considerable discursive weight. It frames Taiwan not as a burden or a contested problem, but as a constructive contributor to the international community. The importance of this excerpt lies in its positive reversal of vulnerability. Taiwan is portrayed as helpful, capable, and recognized, which reinforces the lexical prominence of *world* and *global* in the visual data. In rhetorical terms, recognition from the world becomes a source of legitimacy that stands alongside domestic democratic values.

The speech further develops this global democratic stance in the next passage:

Excerpt 4 (TIW, Data 4)

“As the world sees renewed conflict between freedom and democracy versus authoritarianism, Taiwan’s choice remains this: we continue to defend democracy and protect peace.”

This excerpt is central to the interpretation of Tsai’s speech because it places Taiwan within a broader moral conflict between democracy and authoritarianism. Taiwan is not described merely as defending itself. It is described as choosing democracy and peace in a world where those values are under pressure. This framing gives Taiwan a symbolic role larger than its territorial scale. It becomes a democratic frontline. The phrase “Taiwan’s choice remains this” is also crucial because it signals consistency, agency, and principled decision making. Taiwan’s legitimacy, in this discourse, is not derived from history but from ethical commitment and democratic persistence.

That commitment is reinforced through a sharper formulation of peace and security:

Excerpt 5 (TIW, Data 5)

“I must emphasize that for peace, goodwill is necessary, but strength is crucial.”

This is one of the strongest indicators of Tsai’s rhetorical stance. Peace is not framed as passive accommodation or simple desire. It is tied to defense, preparedness, and determination. The contrast between *goodwill* and *strength* is especially important because it reveals a dual logic. Moral intention alone is not enough. Democratic peace must be protected by capability. This makes Tsai’s discourse fundamentally different from a rhetoric of passive harmony. In her speech, peace is an achievement that depends on resilience and vigilance. The lexical prominence of *global* and *economic* in Figure 5 therefore carries ideological force. Taiwan is positioned as globally engaged, materially capable, and politically prepared.

The governance dimension of this legitimacy is expanded in the next passage:

Excerpt 6 (TIW, Data 6)

“Over the past eight years, we have done our utmost to strengthen the nation and lighten economic

pressures. By implementing the Forward looking Infrastructure Development Program, 5+2 innovative industries plan, and our Six Core Strategic Industries policy, we have improved the investment environment and strengthened the nation’s economic structure, while also reducing the gap between urban and rural areas and enhancing overall quality of life.”

This excerpt directly explains why *eight, years*, and *economic* appear so prominently in Figure 4 and Figure 5. Tsai grounds her political authority in measurable governance outcomes. The speech highlights infrastructure, industrial planning, investment, economic structure, regional equality, and quality of life. This matters because it allows democratic legitimacy to be supported not only by values, but also by policy results. Taiwan is represented as a functioning and capable polity that delivers material improvement. This reinforces the broader discourse that Taiwan’s status is already substantive and not dependent on external political incorporation.

The inclusive and democratic nature of Tsai’s discourse becomes even clearer in the next segment:

Excerpt 7 (TIW, Data 7)

“Today Taiwan has achieved global recognition. We have incomparable democratic diversity.”

This statement condenses two major themes of the subsection, namely global visibility and internal democratic richness. Taiwan is represented as externally recognized and internally plural. The phrase “democratic diversity” is especially important because it constructs Taiwan not only as democratic in procedural terms, but also as socially open and politically inclusive. This expands the meaning of sovereignty beyond territorial control and into the realm of civic life and plural belonging.

That inclusive civic identity is elaborated more explicitly in the following lines:

Excerpt 8 (TIW, Data 8)

“No matter your gender, you can become president or vice president or start a family with the person you love.”

This excerpt is highly significant because it grounds the democratic identity of Taiwan in everyday equality and lived freedom. The speech moves beyond abstract references to democracy and illustrates it through opportunities, rights, and intimate life choices. Taiwan is thus constructed as a political community where citizenship is not defined by hierarchy, but by access, dignity, and inclusion. In discursive terms, this strengthens the moral contrast between Taiwan’s democratic identity and any political arrangement perceived to threaten it.

Tsai then concludes this inclusive framing with an appeal to collective ownership:

Excerpt 9 (TIW, Data 9)

“This country belongs to us all.”

This short statement carries strong ideological force. It defines the nation as shared civic space rather than inherited civilizational destiny. The phrase “belongs to us all” is especially important because it frames Taiwan through democratic participation and collective ownership. The nation is not imagined as something to be absorbed into a larger unity. It is imagined as a community already constituted by its people. This is a decisive contrast. Where Xi’s discourse integrates the people into a civilizational project of reunification, Tsai’s discourse integrates the people into a democratic project of shared sovereignty.

Taken together, [Figure 4](#), [Figure 5](#), [Table 3](#), and [Excerpts 1 to 9](#) reveal a coherent rhetorical structure in which Taiwan is discursively constructed as a democratic, globally recognized, and politically self-sufficient actor. The visual evidence shows strong lexical concentration around Taiwan, the world, global engagement, time in office, and economic performance. The textual excerpts demonstrate how these lexical patterns are transformed into a broader narrative of democratic defense, sovereign agency, governance achievement, and inclusive citizenship. Within this structure, reunification is not explicitly rejected in every line, but it is rendered increasingly incompatible with the identity and legitimacy the speech constructs.

A deeper interpretation of these findings suggests that Tsai’s discourse operates through what may be described as *democratic legitimization through visibility and performance*. Taiwan is legitimized through two interconnected mechanisms. First, it is made visible through repeated naming, global recognition, and participation in international affairs. Second, it is made credible through governance outcomes, democratic resilience, and social inclusion. At the linguistic level, this works through lexical clustering around Taiwan, world, global, years, and economic progress. At the ideological level, it turns Taiwan into an already complete democratic community whose future is to be defended rather than surrendered.

Overall, this subsection demonstrates that Tsai Ing-wen’s speech strategically constructs political legitimacy by foregrounding democratic identity, strengthening global positioning, and promoting an inclusive notion of sovereignty. The visual evidence indicates a strong concentration of keywords related to Taiwan, the international community, global relevance, governance, and economic performance. These lexical patterns are further reinforced by qualitative excerpts, which illustrate how such terms are deployed to present Taiwan as visible on the global stage, resilient in the face of challenges, and firmly grounded in moral and democratic values.

Taken together, these findings suggest a coherent discursive strategy: Taiwan is not depicted as a political entity in transition or one awaiting reunification, but rather as an already established and fully functioning democracy. Its political legitimacy and moral integrity are portrayed as complete in their current form. Consequently, reunification is not framed as a natural or inevitable goal, but instead as a possibility that could disrupt or even threaten Taiwan’s existing democratic way of life.

4.3 Comparative Discursive Construction of Reunification

The comparative analysis shows that Xi Jinping and Tsai Ing-wen construct reunification through two fundamentally different discursive systems that compete not only at the level of policy, but also at the level of identity, legitimacy, and political imagination. The key finding of this subsection is that reunification is not represented as a shared destination with different routes. Instead, it is discursively produced as two incompatible realities. In Xi’s speech, reunification is framed as a historical necessity embedded in national rejuvenation, developmental optimism, and collective destiny. In Tsai Ing-wen’s speech, Taiwan is framed as an already legitimate democratic community, grounded in sovereignty, inclusivity, and global recognition. This portrayal highlights Taiwan’s stable political identity and its position as a self-governing entity within the international sphere. This contrast is particularly significant because it shows that the disagreement extends beyond issues of governance or territorial control. Rather than being limited to institutional or geographic concerns, it reflects deeper divergences in how political belonging, peace, and the future are understood. In this sense, the tension arises not only from competing political claims but also from differing conceptual frameworks that shape each side’s views on identity, stability, and long-term aspirations.

The comparison becomes clearer when the lexical and rhetorical patterns from the two speeches are placed side by side. As shown earlier, Xi’s discourse is dominated by *new, China, people, year, and development*, which collectively build a rhetoric of progress, state leadership, and shared national advancement. By contrast, Tsai’s discourse is centered on *Taiwan, world, global, economic, years, and eight*, which together produce a rhetoric of democratic identity, international positioning, and governance-based legitimacy. These differences are not merely verbal preferences. They reveal two distinct systems of political meaning. Xi’s language integrates Taiwan into a larger civilizational future, while Tsai’s language consolidates Taiwan as an already meaningful democratic subject. The same issue, therefore, is narrated through two different logics of legitimacy.

To sharpen this contrast, [Table 4](#) synthesizes the main discursive oppositions identified in the two speeches.

Table 4. Comparative Discursive Construction of Reunification Speeches

Analytical dimension	Xi Jinping's discourse	Tsai Ing wen's discourse	Comparative interpretation
Core political frame	national rejuvenation and historical unity	democratic sovereignty and self determination	reunification is framed through incompatible political foundations
Lexical center	<i>new, China, people, development</i>	<i>Taiwan, world, global, economic</i>	each speech centers a different imagined political community
Source of legitimacy	developmental progress and historical necessity	democratic performance and global recognition	legitimacy comes from destiny in one case, and from civic achievement in the other
Emotional appeal	optimism, harmony, confidence, prosperity	dignity, resilience, inclusion, democratic defense	each speech mobilizes a different moral and affective register
Representation of peace	peace through unity and common destiny	peace through strength and democratic protection	peace is defined either as integration or as defended autonomy
Meaning of reunification	natural continuation of national progress	implied disruption to an existing democratic order	reunification is normalized in one discourse and problematized in the other

Table 4 demonstrates that the two leaders are not merely using different language to address the same topic. They are constructing different political worlds. Xi's discourse imagines the people as part of a larger national body moving toward rejuvenation, while Tsai's discourse imagines citizens as members of a shared democratic community already grounded in participation, equality, and collective ownership. This difference is central to the interpretation of the findings because it helps explain why the discourse of reunification remains so resistant to compromise. The two speeches do not begin from a common understanding of what unity means, who the political subject is, or what kind of future is desirable.

The comparative tension is particularly clear when examining how each leader frames the relationship between collective identity and political authority. In Xi's speech, authority is legitimized by its ability to deliver development, stability, and historical continuation. This is evident in statements such as:

Excerpt 1 (XJ, Data 4)

"The reunification of the motherland is a historical necessity. Compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Straits must join hands and share the great glory of national rejuvenation."

This excerpt shows that reunification is framed as an inevitable element of a broader collective destiny. The phrase "historical necessity" is especially important because it removes the issue from the realm of negotiation and places it within the logic of destiny.

The invitation to "join hands" gives the statement an inclusive tone, but the underlying assumption remains clear. Unity is legitimate because history demands it, and because it promises access to "the great glory of national rejuvenation." In this discourse, political authority flows from the state's role as the guardian of national continuity and future prosperity.

By contrast, Tsai's speech grounds political authority in democratic agency, self-determination, and civic belonging. This is visible in her repeated emphasis on Taiwan as an inclusive democratic space:

Excerpt 2 (TIW, Data 9)

"This country belongs to us all."

This line is simple, but ideologically decisive. It frames Taiwan as a shared political home whose legitimacy comes from the people who inhabit it. Unlike Xi's discourse, which places the people within a larger civilizational narrative, Tsai's discourse places the nation within the democratic ownership of its citizens. This changes the meaning of unity entirely. Unity is no longer something to be achieved through historical integration. It is something already realized through collective participation and shared democratic identity.

The contrast becomes even sharper when the two leaders' treatment of peace is compared. Xi's discourse associates peace with prosperity, harmony, and shared destiny. This is evident in his people centered and globally oriented statements:

Excerpt 3 (XJ, Data 7)

“The Chinese people are well aware of the preciousness of peace. We are willing to work with the international community to build a community with a shared future for mankind and build a better world with the future of mankind and the well being of the people in mind.”

Here, peace is discursively linked to common destiny, welfare, and moral leadership. This framing allows reunification to appear compatible with a wider ethical vision of order and harmony. The rhetoric is expansive and reassuring. It seeks to reduce the coercive appearance of unity by embedding it in a vocabulary of peace and collective benefit. Tsai, however, constructs peace through a very different logic:

Excerpt 4 (TIW, Data 5)

“I must emphasize that for peace, goodwill is necessary, but strength is crucial.”

This statement shows that, in Tsai’s discourse, peace is not secured through integration or goodwill alone, but must be protected through resolve, preparedness, and democratic strength. Peace is therefore not passive, but defensive and vigilant. This contrast is a key finding of the comparative analysis: for Xi, peace aligns with common destiny and integrated development, whereas for Tsai, it is linked to resisting coercion and preserving democratic life. The same term thus carries distinct ideological meanings across the two speeches.

A similar contrast appears in how each leader defines the future. Xi’s future is developmental, integrated, and historically continuous. This is visible in his emphasis on modernization and better living standards:

Excerpt 5 (XJ, Data 5)

“Our goal is both ambitious and simple. In the final analysis, it is to let the people live a better life.”

This statement condenses the legitimacy of Xi’s discourse into the promise of collective welfare. The future is framed as something the state can organize and improve through coordinated development and unity. Reunification becomes persuasive because it is attached to this promise of a better life. Tsai’s future, by contrast, is civic, plural, and globally engaged. This is clear in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 6 (TIW, Data 7)

“Today Taiwan has achieved global recognition. We have incomparable democratic diversity.”

Excerpt 7 (TIW, Data 8)

“No matter your gender, you can become president or vice president or start a family with the person you love.”

Together, these excerpts show that Tsai’s future-oriented discourse is grounded not in historical destiny, but in democratic plurality and lived inclusion. Taiwan is portrayed as a society where recognition, diversity, equality, and participation are materially realized, rendering reunification unnecessary at best and threatening at worst. If Taiwan is already globally recognized and internally inclusive, integration into another political system is difficult to frame as progress. The comparative results reveal a clear affective divergence between the two speeches. Xi’s discourse centers on hope, confidence, harmony, and prosperity, inviting audiences to view unity as uplifting and historically meaningful. In contrast, Tsai’s discourse emphasizes dignity, resilience, democratic defense, and shared ownership, encouraging audiences to value and protect Taiwan’s existing identity. These affective structures are central, not secondary, to the argument. In both speeches, persuasion relies not only on policy claims but also on the emotional worlds each leader constructs.

This contrast can be summarized through two broader modes of legitimization. Xi’s speech operates through *integrative legitimization*, in which reunification is justified by being embedded in a larger narrative of development, stability, welfare, and historical fulfillment. Tsai’s speech operates through *democratic legitimization through visibility and performance*, in which Taiwan is justified through repeated naming, global recognition, governance achievement, and inclusive citizenship. These two modes are fundamentally different. One seeks to absorb Taiwan into a national future. The other seeks to secure Taiwan within a democratic present and an internationally visible future.

Taken together, the comparative findings show that the speeches of Xi Jinping and Tsai Ing wen do more than present opposing viewpoints. They construct rival symbolic orders. Xi’s discourse turns reunification into a morally elevated national mission, while Tsai’s discourse turns Taiwan into a politically complete democratic subject. This means that the conflict over reunification is not only geopolitical. It is discursive and ideological at its core. The struggle concerns who has the authority to define history, who belongs to the political community, and what kind of future should count as legitimate.

Overall, this subsection demonstrates that reunification is constructed through two competing systems of meaning that are difficult to reconcile because they are grounded in different concepts of legitimacy, peace, identity, and political destiny. It seems the comparative evidence from the lexical patterns, rhetorical framing, and qualitative excerpts shows that Xi and Tsai do not merely disagree about policy. They differ in the symbolic foundations of political life. Thus, reunification is not merely political but a profound discursive contest over unity, sovereignty, and the future of cross-strait relations.

5. Discussion

This study highlights that reunification in Chinese and Taiwanese political speeches is not merely articulated as a geopolitical or diplomatic issue, but is fundamentally constructed through competing systems of language, ideology, and power. The key finding is that Xi Jinping and Tsai Ing wen employ discourse as a strategic instrument to define political reality in profoundly different ways. Xi's rhetoric integrates reunification into a broader narrative of national rejuvenation, developmental progress, and historical continuity, whereas Tsai's discourse constructs Taiwan as an already legitimate democratic polity grounded in sovereignty, inclusivity, and global visibility.

These findings demonstrate that political speeches function not simply as communicative tools, but as discursive sites where meaning, legitimacy, and future political possibilities are actively negotiated. In this sense, reunification emerges as a struggle over symbolic authority, aligning with scholarship that emphasizes the importance of temporality, narrative framing, and futurity in shaping political legitimacy and national identity (Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 2025; Betancourt et al., 2025; Lams & Liao, 2011; Sullivan, 2024).

A closer examination of Xi Jinping's discourse reveals that the construction of reunification is deeply embedded within the ideological framework of the Chinese Dream. This state narrative integrates socialist heritage, civilizational identity, and national aspiration into a cohesive discourse of prosperity, strength, and collective revival (Brown & Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 2018). The present findings extend this scholarship by demonstrating how reunification is discursively normalized through its association with development, stability, and collective welfare. Rather than being framed as a contested political objective, reunification is positioned as a natural extension of national progress and historical inevitability. This supports the argument that Xi's rhetoric strategically aligns national aspirations with the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, transforming reunification into both an ideological project and an emotionally resonant narrative (Madoka, 2022). The persuasive force of this discourse lies not only in its appeal to history, but in its consistent linkage to promises of improved living conditions, social harmony, and a morally ordered future.

This discursive strategy can be further understood through the lens of the *tianxia* concept, which imagines political order as morally unified rather than territorially negotiated (Dreyer, 2015). The findings suggest that Xi's rhetoric implicitly draws on such a worldview by presenting China as a stable, development-oriented, and ethically grounded power whose unity is historically justified and socially beneficial. This aligns with research on authoritarian governance, which shows that state resilience is

sustained through centralized control, institutional coordination, and the management of risk (Cao & Zhang, 2018). In this study, however, these mechanisms are not examined through institutional structures, but through discourse that frames reunification as inevitable, desirable, and collectively beneficial (Betancourt et al., 2025; Cheng, 2006). In contrast, Tsai Ing wen's discourse constructs political legitimacy through democracy, sovereignty, and self-determination, presenting Taiwan as a participatory and rights-based community rather than a fragment of a larger civilizational order (Betancourt et al., 2025; Cheng, 2006). This contrast reveals a fundamental ideological divide between an authoritarian logic of integration and a democratic logic of self-definition.

The findings also contribute to ongoing debates on the political role of Confucianism. While existing scholarship recognizes Confucianism as a significant cultural resource, its political meaning varies across contexts (Hu et al., 2021; Paramore, 2020). This study demonstrates that Confucian values are not uniformly shared across the Strait, but are selectively reinterpreted within different political frameworks. In China, Confucianism is mobilized as a state-centered discourse emphasizing harmony, order, and collective welfare, consistent with a minimalist cultural policy that prioritizes stability (Chan, 2011). In Taiwan, by contrast, the discourse reflects a more pluralistic and civic-oriented ethos aligned with democratic values and the declining dominance of traditional Confucian norms in education and public life (Hung, 2015).

These findings support the argument that Taiwan has developed a more inclusive and plural cultural orientation (Huang, 2023; Gao, 2005), while China continues to deploy cultural tradition as a tool of centralized legitimacy. Consequently, Confucianism functions not as a shared foundation for reunification, but as a contested symbolic resource shaped by competing ideological agendas.

Importantly, this study also demonstrates the analytical value of Van Dijk's discourse theory in examining political language. The speeches analyzed clearly illustrate how discourse constructs in-groups and out-groups, legitimizes authority, and embeds ideological opposition within linguistic choices (Ye, 2022). Xi's discourse constructs a unified national subject moving toward rejuvenation, while Tsai's discourse constructs a democratic civic community defined by equality, recognition, and participation. This reinforces the view that discourse plays a central role in shaping political identity, historical memory, and moral authority (Almeida & Queiroz, 2020; Lams & Lu, 2018). At the same time, the study addresses a critical gap in the literature. While research on China–Taiwan relations has extensively explored geopolitics, ideology, and governance, it has paid comparatively limited attention to the linguistic mechanisms through which these dimensions are constructed and contested in official political speeches (Cao, 2007; Law, 2021).

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach. By combining Confucian political philosophy, theories of authoritarianism and democracy, and Critical Discourse Analysis, it examines reunification as a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the intersection of language, power, and ideology (Dykmann & Bruun, 2021; Jiang, 2018). This approach advances discourse studies and political linguistics by demonstrating how official speeches function as strategic instruments that normalize one political future while resisting another (Almeida & Queiroz, 2020; Dykmann & Bruun, 2021). The study therefore contributes not only to cross Strait scholarship, but also to broader discussions on how language constructs political reality and shapes ideological struggle.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it underscores the importance of discourse as a central analytical category in understanding political conflict, identity formation, and legitimacy construction. Practically, it highlights how competing discursive frameworks contribute to the persistence of cross Strait tensions. Each side does not merely defend different political positions, but articulates a distinct vocabulary of legitimacy, peace, and political existence. This insight suggests that any attempt to address reunification must engage not only with policy or diplomacy, but also with the underlying discursive structures that shape how these issues are understood. However, the study is not without limitations. Its focus on a limited corpus of official speeches and reliance on a single analytical framework may not capture the full complexity of public discourse or alternative interpretive perspectives.

Future research should expand this line of inquiry in several directions. One important avenue would be to examine how reunification discourse circulates across media platforms, including digital communication, journalism, and public commentary, where meanings may be contested and transformed. Comparative studies involving other Confucian-influenced societies, such as South Korea or Japan, would also provide valuable insights into how cultural traditions interact with different political systems. Additionally, integrating public opinion data, multilingual corpora, and alternative discourse analytical frameworks could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how reunification narratives are produced, negotiated, and received across different contexts. Such research would further illuminate the dynamic relationship between language, ideology, and political reality in East Asia.

6. Conclusions

This study highlights that reunification in Chinese and Taiwanese political speeches is most effectively understood as a discursive and ideological contest rather than a purely geopolitical issue. The key finding reveals that Xi Jinping constructs reunification through

a rhetoric of national rejuvenation, developmental progress, and historical inevitability, while Tsai Ing wen frames Taiwan as an already legitimate democratic community grounded in sovereignty, inclusivity, and global visibility. These contrasting discursive strategies demonstrate that political speeches do not merely reflect political positions, but actively shape how legitimacy, identity, and future political possibilities are constructed and contested.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, combining Critical Discourse Analysis, Confucian political philosophy, and the competing logics of authoritarianism and democracy to examine reunification as a linguistic and ideological construction. In doing so, it contributes to discourse studies and political linguistics by showing how language functions as a strategic instrument for normalizing, contesting, and negotiating political reality. The implications are both theoretical and practical: theoretically, the study reinforces the centrality of discourse in understanding power, identity, and legitimacy; practically, it highlights how competing linguistic frameworks sustain cross Strait tensions by shaping incompatible visions of unity, peace, and political belonging.

These findings suggest that any meaningful engagement with reunification must consider not only policy and diplomacy, but also the underlying discursive structures that frame the issue. Future research is recommended to extend this analysis by exploring how reunification discourse circulates across media platforms, public communication, and multilingual contexts, as well as by conducting comparative studies in other Confucian-influenced societies such as South Korea or Japan to further illuminate the dynamic relationship between language, ideology, and political reality in East Asia.

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