

Taiwan: TRANSGENDER ISSUES ENTER THIRD PARTY POLITICS

Friday 5 January 2024, by [CHEN Yo-Ling](#) (Date first published: 4 January 2024).

IN THE PAST three months, transgender issues have gained unprecedented attention within third party politics in Taiwan, with the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) rebranding itself as the only political party against abolishing compulsory surgery for changing one's legal gender and Green Party Taiwan (GPT) putting forward Taiwan's first transgender woman to run for office, Abby Wu, as an at-large legislative candidate. This is the first time in Taiwan's history that transgender issues have been explicitly incorporated into party campaigning. While transgender issues have yet to become a campaign issue in mainstream party politics, the current standoff between GPT and TSU offers a first look into how such politicization would likely play out as the struggle for transgender rights in Taiwan continues.

Efforts to change existing regulations requiring sterilization surgery for changing one's legal gender have garnered increasing public attention the past few years. These efforts, primarily led by the Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights, resulted in [Taiwan's first transgender woman to change her legal gender without providing proof of surgery](#), Xiao E, in November of 2021. Gender critical feminists quickly mobilized to oppose changes to compulsory surgery, establishing the online organization [No Self ID Taiwan](#) within just a few months of the [Taipei High Administrative Court's ruling on Xiao E's case](#) in September of 2021. On September 21st of this year, Taiwan's Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) made a ruling against compulsory surgery, contributing significantly to a growing legal consensus both within Taiwan and regionally (see [Hong Kong](#) and [Japan](#)) that individuals seeking to change their legal gender should not be required to surgically remove their sexual reproductive organs.

Immediately following the SAC's ruling in September, TSU made a [public Facebook post](#) condemning the ruling and warning the public of societal chaos should compulsory surgery be abolished. [TSU further clarified](#) that the party's position is to "respect tongzhi" but reject abolishing the surgery requirement for changing one's legal gender, and went on to charge those pushing for abolishing compulsory surgery as "damaging" the image of the broader tongzhi movement.

Taiwan's gender critical movement also further mobilized in the wake of the SAC's ruling by establishing the Taiwan Women Association (台灣婦女會, TWA). TWA's membership likely contains considerable overlap between the existing gender critical community surrounding No Self ID Taiwan, as regular contributor [Jaclynn Joseph](#) currently serves as a TWA supervisor. Much of No Self ID, TWA, and TSU's recent talking points on transgender issues overlap substantially, such as how [gender self-identification endangers women's rights](#) and the sanctity of gender segregated spaces such as restrooms, hotspots, and dormitories, as well as women's sports. Like other gender critical groups, TSU's defense of compulsory surgery arises from an understanding of gender as biological sex and thus "transgender" as "transsexual."

On December 10th, [TSU co-hosted a press conference with TWA](#), further consolidating ties between

the two groups and broadcasting their understanding of transgender issues. TSU secretary-general Chou Ni-an (周尼安) and two other TSU officials appeared in drag in order to emphasize that, in the words of their press release, [“crossdressing is not transgender,”](#) a subtle expression of their biological determinism. TWA chairwoman Lin Shu-fan (林淑芬) was much more explicit, stating that “there is no such thing as psychological gender... gender should only be understood as biological” (“[心理性別不存在... 性別只應被理解為生物性](#)” [6:26](#)).

Lin also raised alarms about “childhood sex change” (“[童年性別轉換](#)” [31:06](#)), warning that due to increased social support and public education on gender diversity, minors are more likely to cave into the “transgender trend” (“[跨性別趨勢](#)” [31:21](#)) and begin gender affirming hormone therapy at as young as 11 years old and genital surgeries at as young as 14. According to TWA and TSU’s analysis, the ideology of gender diversity has already thoroughly infiltrated Taiwan to the point where compulsory surgery is on the verge of being abolished, so-called “gender friendly” standards are being enacted in public education, and transgender people who have not undergone sterilization surgery are winning anti-discrimination lawsuits—all of which threaten the safety and rights of women and children. TSU claims that other political parties either fully embrace legal change or are conspicuously silent on transgender issues, positioning itself as the sole political party that is able to defend women’s rights in the face of an encroaching gender ideology. TSU secretary-general Chou implored press conference attendees to vote for TSU in the upcoming election if they care about women, stating that if next term’s legislature includes TSU, an opposition voice to abolishing compulsory surgery will finally be heard.

In late October when GPT announced Abby Wu’s candidacy, Wu stated that she is running for office to [“make more people understand the plight of the transgender community and push forward transgender rights legislation and policy.”](#) Co-founding the Intesex, Transsexual and Transgender People Care Association (ISTScare) in 2009, Wu’s is a well-known figure in Taiwan’s transgender rights movement who has been publicly advocating for abolishing the surgery requirement for changing one’s legal gender for over a decade, efforts which were [almost realized in 2014](#). A month prior to her campaign announcement, Wu organized an [ISTScare demonstration](#) outside of TSU’s headquarters in protest of their statement against the SAC ruling. After Wu joined GPT’s ticket, the GPT-TSU standoff on transgender issues has only continued, with both parties responding directly to each other in staking out their respective positions.

In November, GPT organized a [press conference](#) with Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary-general Shih Yi-Hsiang directly calling out TSU for their mobilization of anti-trans rhetoric in their campaigning and misunderstandings of gender diversity. TSU secretary-general [Chou promptly responded](#) by denying GPT accusations of discriminatory intent and [transphobia](#), emphasizing the need to simultaneously protect the rights of *both* transgender people *and* women instead of, in her understanding, the rights of only the former. By the second half of November, [GPT](#) and [TSU](#) once again talked past each other on the issue of “declarative transition” (宣告性別轉換, or changing one’s sex solely through spoken declaration), a term that GPT charges anti-trans groups of inventing this year but TSU claims is a longstanding threat to women’s rights. In early December, TSU organized both a [public demonstration](#) and the aforementioned co-hosted press conference with TWA to double down on their stance. Perhaps sensing that further public engagement with TSU was unproductive, GPT has not directly responded to the TSU’s continued campaign against abolishing compulsory surgery since. Abby Wu, however, has [publicly responded](#) to the TSU-TWA press conference through ISTScare.

While TSU’s party platform includes other items, such as [decreasing migrant workers’ salaries](#), there has nevertheless been a noticeable foregrounding of transgender issues. [TSU’s party platform](#) this election cycle lists their defense of compulsory surgery as the number one item, adding that efforts to abolish compulsory surgery “threaten woman and children” (威脅婦女和兒童). In contrast, [GPT’s](#)

[party platform](#) lists “defending bodily autonomy for people of all genders” as an item within their broader goal of realizing substantive gender equality, which makes up just one out of 16 policy goals. While GPT [“is arguably Taiwan’s most gender progressive party.”](#) gender diversity and equality are just one of the many progressive issue areas that GPT advocates for. GPT has enunciated transgender rights through a broader discourse of human rights, anti-discrimination protections, and support for multiple marginalized groups.

It is unclear to what extent TSU’s staunch position against abolishing compulsory surgery will garner votes, just as it is unclear to what extent GPT’s support for transgender rights is specifically attracting electoral support. Neither TSU nor GPT have garnered enough votes to earn a seat in the last two legislative elections, with the TSU’s vote share in 2020 dropping to a mere 0.36%. The results of the upcoming election will give some indication to the extent to which transgender issues can gain traction as a campaign issue, be it through TSU’s attempted revival through its political alliance with gender critical feminists or GPT’s bid for Taiwan’s first transgender legislator.

What is clear is that the amount of campaigning around transgender issues within third party politics this election cycle is garnering increasing attention. On December 21, Taiwan Equality Campaign [condemned TSU](#) for spreading misunderstanding of the transgender community and co-opting gender issues as an election strategy. The public visibility of transgender issues will only rise as they continue to be discussed through GPT and TSU’s election campaigning. Regardless of the outcome, the 2024 legislative elections have already become a milestone moment in Taiwan’s history when transgender rights first entered into electoral politics through third parties.

Yo-Ling Chen

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French.

P.S.

New Bloom

<https://newbloommag.net/2024/01/04/tsu-gpt-transgender-issues/>