



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**Public diplomacy as a contributing factor to solving managing identity-based conflict: Taiwan repositions its identity and security status (2000-2020)**

Lin, Y.

**Citation**

Lin, Y. (2025, December 2). *Public diplomacy as a contributing factor to solving managing identity-based conflict: Taiwan repositions its identity and security status (2000-2020)*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4284142>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4284142>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# **Chapter 1. Introduction: East Asian Identity and Taiwan Studies Status**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Since its founding in 1989, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has facilitated increasing regional integration in East Asia. Intensive economic interactions among this region's countries have fostered a demand for a more stable and cooperative political environment (Solingen 2004). Despite these economic advancements, diplomatic relations did not always align with the economic progress (Lee and Melissen 2011). This disparity led to a shift in focus towards soft power and public diplomatic strategies to pursue rapprochement. Soft power is, contrary to hard power relying on coercion, the ability to persuade or attract others and is deployed through public diplomacy strategies that influence foreign publics (Nye 2004). This dissertation investigates why and how public diplomacy has become a tool for conflict resolution in East Asia. In the past two decades, China's rise has disrupted the power distribution in the region. A shift in regional power dynamics tends to generate more conflicts (Kapur 2003). Hence, for Taiwan, which faces historical identity-based conflicts with China and marginalization in East Asian regional integration, developing a counter-strategy to address regional power change and enhance participation in the regional community is crucial for its security. This research examines how Taiwan conceptualizes public diplomacy as a solution to addressing its identity and security status from 2000 to 2020. The period 2000–2020 is chosen because it captures Taiwan's democratic consolidation following its first peaceful transfer of power in 2000, while also coinciding with China's rise as a regional power. These simultaneous dynamics created a critical context for Taiwan to develop new forms of public diplomacy. This can be assessed through the government's internalization of regional security narratives into society and the externalization of Taiwan's identity by its citizens to enhance geopolitical strategic status.

## **1.2 Central Research Question**

The central research question guiding this dissertation is framed as follows: Is public diplomacy a factor that can contribute to solving the conflict between China and Taiwan regarding the status of Taiwan?

The overarching topic investigates the conceptualization of identity, security, conflict, conflict resolution, and public diplomacy by offering an original contribution by evaluating the developments of Taiwan's public diplomatic policy and practices from 2000 to 2020. Defining

the scope as 2000–2020 also allows for a systematic analysis of two decades of consistent policy evolution, rather than isolated events. This dissertation assumes that, during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, East Asian states' pursuit of public diplomacy has been related to strategizing it as a conflict resolution mechanism. Although the term, resolution, refers to the act of solving or ending a problem, I do not predict that the conflict will be resolved by public diplomacy. The reason is that I regard the state of conflict as fluid and not fixed. The state of conflict is always changing due to the mechanisms, approaches, and activities that aim to address or tackle the conflict. Hence, the objective of this dissertation is not to argue that Taiwan's public diplomacy will eventually solve its conflict with China; rather, I focus on the process of how Taiwan's public diplomacy is conceptualized as contributing to reframing and repositioning its identity and security status in the East Asian region. While East Asian regional dynamics and China's role form the broader context, this dissertation does not pursue a comparative regional analysis; rather, it focuses specifically on Taiwan's perspective, using references to China and East Asia to contextualize Taiwan's identity-based conflict and diplomatic strategy.

Taiwan's diplomatic efforts to navigate its precarious geopolitical position vis-à-vis China from 2000 to 2020 are important in this era characterized by intensifying great power rivalry and the resurgence of identity-based politics. As of 2025, trade disputes and military tensions between the United States and China continue to escalate. *The Economist* launched a series in May 2025, entitled The Taiwan Test, warning that Taiwan may be the flashpoint in China-US power competition<sup>1</sup>. The risk of escalation remains high, not only through economic conflict but also in military operations. Despite no war having occurred, the concern is that China's increasing routine and extensive military actions in the East and South China Sea may trigger a US strategic response<sup>2</sup>. China opposes being seen as a threat in the Asia Pacific region and emphasizes its neighborhood diplomacy features amity, sincerity, and mutual benefit, but its rhetoric of "Taiwan Question" posits Taiwan to be an inalienable part of China<sup>3</sup>. Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that the "Taiwan Question" harms Taiwan's sovereignty

---

<sup>1</sup> "A superpower crunch over Taiwan is coming," *The Economist*, May 1, 2025, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2025/05/01/a-superpower-crunch-over-taiwan-is-coming>

<sup>2</sup> William Matthews, "Perfect Storm: The Rising Risk of China-US Conflict Over Taiwan," *The Diplomat*, December 13, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/12/perfect-storm-the-rising-risk-of-china-us-conflict-over-taiwan/>

<sup>3</sup> "China firmly opposes comparisons between Taiwan question and Ukraine crisis, warns against NATO interference in Asia-Pacific," *Global Times*, June 4, 2025, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202506/1335403.shtml>

and democratic values<sup>4</sup>. Some propose “Taiwan’s resilience” to monitor how social requisites of democracy, together with historical and institutional factors, respond to rising geopolitical challenges<sup>5</sup>. This dissertation corresponds to this ongoing debate and argues that understanding how entities like Taiwan utilize non-coercive instruments to assert international presence, manage existential threats, and shape international perceptions is not merely academically significant but essential for policy discourse.

From the “Taiwan Question” to the “Taiwan Resilience,” this dissertation presupposes an examination of the East Asian security environment from 2000 to 2020 in *Chapter 2* and the dynamics of conflict resolution in *Chapter 3*. Together, these two chapters establish the explanatory framework by particularly focusing on the state of China–Taiwan relations. In the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the conflict status between China and Taiwan has been continuously shaped, while its underlying nature remains identity-based. The status of this conflict is influenced by the approaches to conflict resolution that both sides adopt. Rather than treating public diplomacy only as external communication, I interpret it as a strategic approach to managing the conflict status and its underlying identity dimension. It thus leads to *Chapter 4* exploring both sides’ interpretations of public diplomacy. These three chapters provide three foundations for my assumptions: (a) the nature of conflict in China–Taiwan relations is identity-based, (b) conflict resolution is a state’s approach to mediate threat perception and position itself in a relational structure, and (c) public diplomacy strategy is for both China and Taiwan to mediate threat perception and to position their status in the East Asian relational structure.

These three foundations differentiate approaches aimed at conflict resolution from those oriented toward strategic repositioning, which reflects Taiwan’s conceptualization of public diplomacy. Taiwan’s emphasis on public diplomacy for repositioning stems from domestic developments over the past twenty years, including democratization, identity formation, and sovereignization. The notion of sovereignization, which captures Taiwan’s evolving state-society relations, is defined in more detail in the following section, 1.3.2 Taiwan Studies Status. Earlier studies on Taiwan, particularly those from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, often regarded Taiwan’s situation as an extension of the 1945-1949 Chinese Civil War, viewing

---

<sup>4</sup> “外交部：嚴厲譴責中亞峰會稱台灣是中國不可分割領土,” 中央社, June 19, 2025, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aip/202506190052.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> David Arase, “Democratic Development and Social Resilience in the Asia Pacific,” Center for Asia Pacific Resilience and Innovation, May 4, 2024, <https://caprifoundation.org/democratic-development-and-social-resilience-in-the-asia-pacific/>

it within the context of the old Chinese regime. However, Taiwan has been transforming into a democratic society since the lifting of martial law in 1987, allowing citizens to voice their opinions in politics and identity, as well as endeavoring to become a sovereign state to enhance its security status in East Asia. This dissertation, therefore, takes Taiwan as the main subject to explore the conceptualization of identity and security.

A qualitative methodology is employed to examine how Taiwan utilizes public diplomacy strategies to address identity-based conflicts and enhance its security status in East Asia. The research design incorporates qualitative content and thematic analysis of data collected from Taiwan's annual diplomatic reports and interviews on Taiwanese living in or having moved to various countries in East Asia. The discussion integrates perspectives and analyses from these two data sets to argue that Taiwan has been strategizing public diplomacy as a solution to solving the identity-based conflict and repositioning itself in East Asia.

While references to China and East Asia are included throughout the dissertation to contextualize Taiwan's situation, this dissertation is not a comparative analysis; rather, it centers Taiwan as the primary analytical subject. The regional and comparative discussions serve as background rather than as competing analytical frames. The next section engages with conceptual debates in East Asian Identity and Taiwan Studies, providing the necessary context for this dissertation's Taiwan-centered investigation of identity, security, and diplomacy.

## **1.3 Defining Key Concepts**

An analysis of East Asia's conceptual scope reveals that identity plays a central role in regional conflicts. This view forms the central foundation that security issues and identity questions are inseparable. Within this context, Taiwan Studies emerges as a particularly relevant field. The evolution of Taiwan Studies in recent decades reflects the growing significance of Taiwan's identity-based conflict and its implications for regional security. This section ends with a clarification of the key analytical concepts: identity-based conflict, independence awareness, and sovereignization, which are central to understanding how Taiwan navigates its contested status through public diplomacy.

### **1.3.1 East Asian Identity**

What is East Asia? This question can be approached from geographical, cultural, or historical perspectives, each offering different criteria for defining what East Asia is and where

East Asia is. From a geographical perspective, East Asia has not been constructed by East Asian countries themselves but defined by the West following the discovery of other world continents (Fukasaku and Kimura 1998). Thus, East Asian identity is often seen as being constructed externally rather than emerging from within the region. This goes to the cultural perspective that, due to the geographical distances among these countries, many long-standing cultures have developed independently within the region, each forming its own identity rather than a collective regional identity (Fukasaku and Kimura 1998). Dirlik (1999) argued that the modernization of East Asia, from a domestic level to an international level, necessitates an alternative view of East Asia, which considers how East Asia perceives itself, rather than how it is defined by the West. McNicoll (2004) further contended that the geographical understanding of East Asia is an obstacle to realizing the modernization of East Asia's regional integration. Investigating this view from a historical perspective, East Asia could be defined from China's All Under Heaven (天下 TianXia), where neighboring countries historically regarded China as the central power (Zhao 2006), thus shaping the territory of East Asia. Kang (2003) noted that China's view of the region is where Chinese hierarchical stability values have an impact. The Chinese hierarchical view serves as a historical factor shaping the territorial scope of East Asia, which ranges from Japan, Korea, China, to Vietnam. While these different perspectives define East Asia, I argue that they reveal that the nature of conflict in East Asia is identity-based.

This dissertation defines East Asia as a region comprising two sub-regions: Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, reflecting the contemporary realities of East Asia's international politics and economy. Kim (2009) compared East Asia with the European Union, highlighting the challenges East Asia faces in developing regional integration within the context of globalization. Such a comparison reveals that the nature of conflict in modern East Asia is influenced by the presence and impact of the West on East Asian identity formation. Unlike the European Union, East Asia's regional integration standards are not applicable due to different identity trajectories. East Asia was not an internally conceived concept but was externally fostered by the West's presence in the region. It was only at the end of the Cold War that East Asia began to be seen as a unified entity, merging the previously distinct sub-regions from both global and local perspectives (Yahuda 2011). Locally, during and until the end of the Cold War, many East Asian states underwent identity-based, coupled with political, economic, and social transformations (Jones 2013).

This context leads to a core analytical concept of this dissertation: identity-based conflict.

Identity-based conflict refers to conflicts rooted not in material interests alone but in discrepant understandings of collective identity, especially in terms of its formation, politicization, and trajectory to shaping threat perception as well as sense of belonging. Unlike realist paradigms, which often view identity as fixed and self-contained, I adopt a relational and historical understanding of identity as fluid, dynamic, and shaped by lived experiences. Such conceptualization illuminates the connection between identity and security, which has been explored in some studies. For example, Jamal (2000) analyzed how identity can provoke violent contestation in the Palestine-Israel conflict, and Ukeje (2008) examined how identity dynamics enable societal cohesion in West Africa. In East Asia, the Cold War historical experiences, followed by intensive developments in nationalist movements, economic prosperity, and human rights advocacy, have been shaping the nature of identity for the countries in the region. These historical memories and developments are evolving toward purposive norms in domestic security that contribute to regional security. Consolidating the national identity not only serves the domestic security demand but also enables the state to assert a position within the broader East Asian security architecture.

Understanding identity-based conflict is essential to grasping the stakes and strategies of East Asian security. This analytical foundation informs the later discussion of conflict resolution and public diplomacy, which are elaborated respectively in *Chapters 3 and 4*.

Geopolitical security in East Asia raises critical questions about how conflict resolution mechanisms can be designed to effectively support regional development. The complexity of regional institutions and trade agreements, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), illustrates the nature of conflictual relations in East Asia (Cai 2010). These schemes involve various East Asian countries and some Western powers. However, in each of these establishments, Taiwan has been marginalized in many of these regional developments. This leads to the next section exploring the evolution of the status of the field of Taiwan Studies.

### **1.3.2 Taiwan Studies Status**

Sullivan (2011, 706) asked “Is Taiwan Studies in Decline?” and found in the survey that “Taiwan studies is marginalized just as Taiwan is in the world.” This marginalization refers to

Taiwan's diminishing diplomatic status in the international community and its peripheral status in regional development. Sullivan's findings indicated that although there was abundant research on Taiwan, much of it was published in journals focusing on China. The majority of scholarship on Taiwan often adopts a comparative perspective with China, and this pattern is also reflected in the literature on Taiwan's soft power and public diplomacy, which is frequently analyzed in relation to China. This dissertation contributes to Taiwan Studies by centering Taiwan's public diplomacy as a distinct strategic and identity-building practice. Hsiao and Fell (2018) analyzed the state of Taiwan Studies and found that while research on Taiwan was plentiful, it was scattered across various fields. The creation of the *International Journal of Taiwan Studies* in 2016 was an effort to position Taiwan studies as a distinct subject. For example, Simon (2018) has highlighted Taiwan's indigenous research as a novel attempt to make itself relevant to the global discourse by exploring the Austronesian diaspora. This illustrates how Taiwan, like other East Asian states, is undergoing social transformations in identity formation. Furthermore, Fell and Chang (2019) argue that Taiwan studies fill a critical gap in the East Asian curriculum, offering a valuable case study through which to examine regional and global issues of identity, security, and diplomacy. In this context, this dissertation contributes to Taiwan Studies by examining Taiwan's post-Cold War evolution and its increasing use of soft power as a tool for expanding its international space, linking it with broader themes of identity formation, conflict resolution, and public diplomacy in East Asia.

I argue that Taiwan's significant 21<sup>st</sup> century developments – democratization, identity formation, and sovereignization – have reinforced its role as a regional security actor and a key subject of Taiwan Studies. Rigger (2004) notes that Taiwan's democratization marks a milestone for East Asian states. With democratization, Taiwan has been promoting normative values such as human rights, the rule of law, and transparency, which simultaneously foster the reformation of identity as East Asian states undergo similar transformations. However, democratization alone has not resolved Taiwan's challenge in the international space. The limited international recognition of Taiwan's sovereign status, exacerbated by pressure from the People's Republic of China (Glaser and Vitello 2015), has led to strategic efforts to assert its autonomy.

In this context, independence awareness is defined as Taiwan's wish to be a separate and sovereign Taiwanese state in the international community. The domestic debate over unification versus independence has shaped Taiwan's political movements and diplomatic strategies. The



unification agenda, grounded in the historical legacy of the Republic of China (ROC) and promoted by the Nationalist Chinese Political Party, now referred to as KuoMinTang Party (KMT), advocates eventual political integration with the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Qi 2012). In contrast, the independence declaration, supported by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), states that Taiwan is already an independent country and does not have to push for formal independence through legal means (Chen et al. 2024). DPP's "Taiwanization agenda" exemplifies the independence awareness of a clearer identity as a Taiwanese rather than Chinese (Schubert 2011).

The internal political identity movement is further reflected in a term that this dissertation adopts, sovereignization – Taiwan's efforts to assert sovereign status. Sovereignization is not limited to legal declarations, but includes identity narratives, diplomatic campaigns, and domestic reforms aiming at gaining international support for being recognized as a sovereign state (Jacobs 2013). This process is deeply connected to Taiwan's democratization and identity formation over the past two decades (Dunch 2020). Most importantly, Taiwanese society has played an active role in these movements, shaping the domestic debate and international perception of Taiwan's status (Rudakowska et al. 2019).

As Schafferer (2016) stated, Taiwan's post-conflict development has positioned it as one of the most developed states in East Asia in terms of human security, but the obstacles and challenges remain due to China's rising military, political, and economic power in the region. The reality of China's pressure on Taiwan's limited international space cannot be ignored, but Taiwan's strategies to overcome these challenges warrant examination. This examination reveals the interdependence of three domestic developments – democratization, identity formation, and sovereignization, which evolved throughout the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These themes will be explored further in *Chapter 3*, which analyzes Taiwan's conceptual approach to conflict resolution, and in *Chapter 4*, which examines how public diplomacy has become a key tool in that strategy. These conceptual foundations inform the research orientation and objective of this dissertation, which are outlined in the next section.

## **1.4 Research Orientation and Objective**

Five sub-questions, examined in *Chapters 2 to 4*, guide the investigation of the central research question.

*Chapter 2* establishes the explanatory framework of a synthesized view of 21<sup>st</sup> century East Asian security to address the significance of Taiwan's identity-based conflict to regional security. This leads to sub-question 1: How to view Taiwan's role in 21<sup>st</sup> century East Asian security – Is Taiwan a conflict maker or a contributor to regional peace? This chapter first establishes the explanatory framework of 21<sup>st</sup> century East Asian security by synthesizing the security approaches: military alliances, trade agreements, and ad hoc diplomacy, as well as the local historical factors: China's rise, and Taiwan's wish to be recognized as an independent nation. Examining the local historical factors justifies Taiwan's security status in East Asia, intertwined with the identity-based conflict against China. However, applying this synthesized explanatory framework to three conflictual situations that occurred between 2000 and 2020 – the South China Sea dispute, the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), and the COVID-19 pandemic – this chapter argues that Taiwan has been strategizing people-to-people diplomacy to address the identity-based conflict, making Taiwan a contributor to East Asian regional peace.

*Chapter 3* presents the theoretical foundation of conceptualizing conflict resolution in the East Asian context to evaluate whether public diplomacy could serve as a mechanism to address identity-based conflict. This chapter engages with constructivist ideas of threat perception and relational structures based on a comparative perspective between China and Taiwan. This leads to sub-question 2: Has China's rise aimed to mitigate threat perception? And sub-question 3: How has Taiwan been a facilitator of conflict resolution in East Asia? Through mobilizing material and ideational sources from security approaches, the state forms its identity but acts according to its role expectations derived not only from self-identity but also through an intersubjective process involving both self and others. Therefore, despite sharing the goal of creating collective security in East Asia, different interpretations of perceived threats altering strategic roles can lead to increased conflicts. For China, the goal is to mitigate threat perceptions. For Taiwan, the goal is to diminish the possibility of escalating conflicts with China. Nevertheless, this comparison provides a pathway to examine whether Taiwan's public diplomacy serves as a solution to identity-based conflict by mobilizing domestic developments of identity formation, democratization, and sovereignization to change its role expectation in East Asia.

*Chapter 4* bridges the East Asian discourse of conflict resolution with the practice of public diplomacy through comparative studies of China and Taiwan. This chapter posits that both

China and Taiwan perceive conflict resolution as a process of changing their position in the relational structures and mitigating threat perceptions. This leads to sub-question 4: What are China's and Taiwan's historical cultural interpretations of soft power? And sub-question 5: How have China and Taiwan been conducting public diplomacy to resolve identity-based conflict? This chapter affirms that both China's and Taiwan's interpretations of soft power are oriented to address identity-based conflicts through the lens of culture, values, and institutions. This lens reveals the different purposes and the role of actors in China's and Taiwan's public diplomacy strategies. While China aims to mitigate threat perception to determine its power status in the region, it relies on government actors to conduct public diplomacy. Taiwan involves non-government actors, such as civil society, to attain more international recognition and improve its security status in East Asia.

Table 1 outlines the corresponding sub-questions as addressed in each chapter.

Table 1 – Research Orientation and Focus

Chapter	Sub-question	Research Focus
2	How to view Taiwan's role in 21 <sup>st</sup> century East Asian security – Is Taiwan a conflict maker or a contributor to regional peace?	Taiwan's regional security role
3	Has China's rising aimed to mitigate threat perception?	China's behavior in the region
3	How has Taiwan been a facilitator of conflict resolution in East Asia?	Taiwan's identity and security framing
4	What are China's and Taiwan's historical cultural interpretations of soft power?	Cultural lenses on soft power
4	How have China and Taiwan been conducting public diplomacy to resolve identity-based conflict?	Application of public diplomacy strategies

Although some sub-questions may appear closely related, especially those in *Chapters 3* and *4*, each provides a distinct analytical entry point. *Chapter 3* emphasizes the theoretical construction of identity-based conflict and conflict resolution, while *Chapter 4* translates these theoretical insights into the practical domain of public diplomacy strategies. Together, they advance a holistic understanding of Taiwan's identity-based conflict resolution strategies. While this dissertation frequently references China in the context of Taiwan's identity-based conflict, it does not pursue a comparative study. Rather, China is treated as a relational actor shaping Taiwan's public diplomacy strategies and international positioning. These chapters reveal Taiwan's distinct case due to its domestic developments from 2000 to 2020 –

democratization, identity formation, and sovereignization, which are discussed in detail in Sections 1.2 and 1.3. These developments support Taiwan's evolving security status in East Asia and establish the analytical perspective of this dissertation. To investigate these dynamics, this study employs a qualitative methodology that combines document analysis with semi-structured interviews. The methodological rationale and design are detailed in the next section.

## 1.5 Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative research design is employed by combining document analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine Taiwan's public diplomacy between 2000 and 2020. This approach enables a comprehensive perspective that captures both governmental narratives and civil society experiences, allowing for a richer understanding of how Taiwan addresses identity-based conflicts and frames its security through public diplomacy.

The document analysis focuses on Taiwan's annual public diplomacy reports (台灣外交年鑑) published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2000 to 2020. The selection of this period is significant as it aligns with the broader geopolitical and security challenges that shaped East Asia during these two decades, particularly Taiwan's evolving diplomatic strategy in response to regional tensions and its identity-based conflict with China. These reports were selected due to their open access and systematic documentation of Taiwan's diplomatic activities, making them a source for examining policy evolution over two decades. The analysis focused on identifying discursive shifts, actor involvement, and thematic priorities. It revealed two key developments: (1) increasing involvement and empowering the citizens as main actors in public diplomacy and (2) a shift of diplomatic focus to Southeast Asia through the New Southbound Policy (新南向政策) that was introduced in 2016. While these reports are an authoritative source on Taiwan's diplomatic trajectory, they represent the perspective of a single governmental institution. As such, they may not capture broader inter-sectoral dynamics, informal practices, or dissenting viewpoints within the policy-making process, which is acknowledged in *Chapter 9* as one of the limitations in this dissertation.

While policy documents capture the governmental narrative of Taiwan's public diplomacy, they risk reflecting only the institutional perspective. Semi-structured interviews thus complement this by uncovering lived experiences from societal perspectives, ensuring that the analysis does not rely only on state-produced discourse. Respondents were Taiwanese expatriates in China, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia from December 2022 to June 2023, initially recruited through academic networks in Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the

Netherlands, targeting those with study or work experience in China or Southeast Asia. Initial contacts referred others within their networks who had similar experiences, resulting in a diverse group of respondents who could offer their perspectives on Taiwan's public diplomacy efforts and interpretations of identity and security. While the first few respondents had experiences transitioning from China to Southeast Asia around or after the 2016 New Southbound Policy, the majority of respondents expatriated directly to Southeast Asia during this period. In total, 18 interviews were conducted, including two key informant interviews that relied on research notes due to a lack of consent for audio recording. The methodological considerations are examined in greater depth in *Chapter 5*, along with the measures taken to mitigate such bias, including the initial screening criteria and case-based interview questions. The interview questions were guided by the conflictual cases introduced in *Chapter 2*: the South China Sea dispute, the ECFA, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These cases were adopted to frame questions that invited respondents' understanding of conflicts, their observations, and their personal experiences in conflictual events. Incorporating these cases also served as a way to screen respondents for their familiarity with significant geopolitical challenges. Respondents' lived experiences with demonstrated awareness of these conflicts are thus valuable sources to examine the linkage between identity and security. This screening process helped identify interviews that were most relevant for analyzing the relationship between identity and security, as well as public diplomacy and conflict resolution.

The integration of document analysis and semi-structured interviews is central to this dissertation's approach. The document analysis traces the governmental perspectives of Taiwan's foreign relations in East Asia and the evolution of public diplomatic policy, while the interviews provide civil societal perspectives that illustrate how these policies are perceived and experienced. Together, these methods highlight the increasing involvement of people as main actors in public diplomacy and illuminate the regional impact of Taiwan's diplomatic engagement under the New Southbound Policy. By combining these complementary approaches, the dissertation offers a nuanced understanding of Taiwan's public diplomacy strategies and their implications for identity, security, and conflict resolution. The findings from these two methodologies converge in *Chapter 8*, which synthesizes the analysis by answering two guiding questions: (1) How has Taiwan's public diplomacy been democratizing? (2) How have Taiwan's evolving state-society relations mattered to the security context? *Chapter 8* integrates findings to assess the evolution of Taiwan's public diplomacy strategy, particularly the role of civil society in democratizing public diplomacy and shaping security narratives. Taiwan's societal desire to assert sovereignty, along with citizens' claims of Taiwan's identity,

aligns with the theory of promoting democratic values as a soft power in public diplomacy. Moreover, evolving state-society relations, driven by the societal assertion of Taiwan's identity and the emerging awareness of using information communication technology (ICT), have strengthened the connection between societal and national security, which contributes to increasing studies on Taiwan's resilience.

## 1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The Introductory Chapter has introduced the research context, defined key concepts, outlined the research objective, and presented the methodology to be used. The following outlines the structure of the dissertation, providing a description of each chapter.

*Chapter 2, titled East Asian Security and Conflict*, establishes an explanatory framework of 21<sup>st</sup> century East Asian security environment to contextualize Taiwan's conflictual situation with China. The situation has shifted from an internal civil war to an international conflict, driven by the emergence of Taiwan's identity and China's rise. These two variables have become prominent in cross-strait relations and East Asian security discourse. *Chapter 3, titled Conflict Resolution in East Asia*, provides a theoretical framework based on constructivist theories of threat perception and relational structure. This builds the conceptual bridge to public diplomacy. *Chapter 4, titled China's and Taiwan's Public Diplomacy*, connects the conflict resolution framework to public diplomacy practices by comparing China's and Taiwan's approaches. While China has made theoretical attempts to develop soft power, Taiwan boasts abundant soft power resources but has seen limited development. Taiwan's public diplomacy efforts are often overshadowed in the study of East Asia's public diplomacy.

*Chapter 5, titled Research Design and Methodology*, explains the theoretical foundations of the methodology, data collection processes, and data operationalization of key concepts.

*Chapter 6, titled Results – Analysis of Policy Documents*, presents the results of document analysis of 21 Taiwan's annual diplomatic reports from 2000 to 2020. *Chapter 7, titled Results – Semi-structured Interviews*, describes the results of 18 semi-structured interviews conducted from December 2022 to June 2023. *Chapter 8, titled Evaluations of the Results*, discusses and integrates the findings from the document analysis and semi-structured interviews.

*Chapter 9* concludes that Taiwan's public diplomacy from 2000 to 2020 has played a significant role in addressing geopolitical security challenges. Shaped by limited international recognition, domestic democratization, and evolving state-society relations, Taiwan has been involving its citizens in public diplomacy to redefine its security status and foster regional stability.