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

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Chapter 3. Conflict Resolution in East Asia

3.1 Introduction

In the context of Taiwan’s identity-based conflict, three types of security approaches – military alliance, economic ties, and ad hoc diplomacy – have been identified, each warranting examination regarding their effectiveness in resolving conflicts. These approaches are not isolated; rather, they are often intertwined. From military alliances to ad hoc diplomacy, and from the South China Sea to COVID-19, these security approaches are grounded in theoretical frameworks aimed at building a security network. However, their effectiveness in conflict resolution is not always definitive, as each approach may cause different conflict outcomes. This intractability of traditional conflict resolution approaches motivates both China and Taiwan to engage in public diplomacy as an alternative strategy. This argument stands with the theoretical foundations of threat perception and relational structure. Moreover, a growing body of literature suggests that an East Asian model of conflict resolution, drawing on humanistic, historical, and cultural perspectives, can enrich the understanding and methods of conflict resolution. Therefore, I posit that both China and Taiwan are devoted to public diplomacy with the aim of developing a unique style of conflict resolution tailored to their specific contexts.

This chapter examines two key questions: (1) Has China’s rising aimed to mitigate threat perception? (2) How has Taiwan been a facilitator of conflict resolution in East Asia? Given the different objectives of each side in conflict resolution, the effectiveness of their respective approaches must correspond to their goals. Thus, the conceptual framework seeks to bridge the theoretical foundations of conflict resolution with strategies of public diplomacy. To evaluate the effectiveness of public diplomacy strategy, the primary endeavor is to investigate the underlying motivations and security concerns driving the conflict. Accordingly, I employ threat perception theory to elucidate that both China and Taiwan seek to reduce threat perception and assert their strategic roles in the region. China’s attempt to establish an East Asia regional order devoid of US influence, while Taiwan’s desire to enhance its security position in East Asia is a countermeasure to the One China policy. This inquiry intersects with the emerging discourse on an East Asian model of conflict resolution, exploring the region’s norms, values, and

ideological frameworks shaping conflict and conflict resolution (Brigg and Bleiker 2011). These themes are intrinsically linked, emphasizing the imperative of fortifying and cultivating a sustainable regional conflict resolution paradigm. Consequently, this chapter is structured into the following sections: (1) Theoretical foundations of threat perception and relational structure, and (2) A literature review of the East Asian model of conflict resolution. These sections explain why China and Taiwan employ public diplomacy as a means of conflict resolution in East Asia.

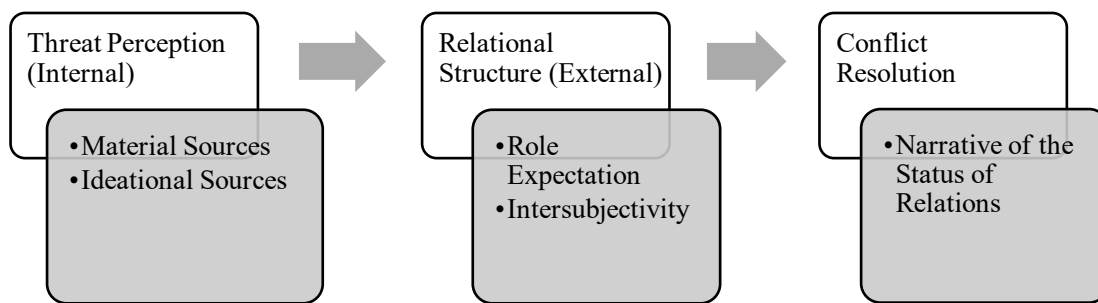
In this dissertation, the terms “conflict” and “conflict resolution” are not confined to armed conflicts or traditional forms of mediation and negotiation. Conflict is defined as the process of interaction between two parties involving the intention to counteract or eliminate the other due to perceived incompatible interests (Bercovitch 2004). Consequently, conflict resolution entails mediating or negotiating these interests. However, a broader understanding of conflict is adopted, encompassing a status of relations between two parties characterized by incompatible interests that pose a threat to domestic or regional security. Therefore, even in the absence of armed conflicts, the relationship between China and Taiwan is deemed a conflict, as both parties have incompatible interests that, if left unaddressed, could jeopardize domestic or regional security. In this sense, conflict resolution can take various forms beyond traditional mediation or negotiation of interests. For example, China employs a public diplomacy strategy as a means of conflict resolution, seeking to alter the status of its relationship with Taiwan by projecting a peaceful rising image; whereas Taiwan utilizes public diplomacy to address its conflict with China within the East Asian context. Both sides employ public diplomacy as a tool for conflict resolution, reflecting the notion that conflict resolution entails efforts beyond merely mitigating violence, but also aims to address underlying disagreements (Stern and Druckman 2000). This theoretical foundation elucidates why both China and Taiwan utilize public diplomacy as a strategy for conflict resolution. Furthermore, the inquiry extends to whether an East Asian model of conflict resolution exists and, if so, how public diplomacy embodies this model for China and Taiwan. The following paragraphs are divided into two sections to apply these two perspectives in addressing the two questions posed in this chapter. Firstly, from the standpoint of threat perception, I examine China’s efforts to project a peaceful rising image and Taiwan’s endeavors to position its security status in East Asia. I argue that the cultural, historical, and humanistic perspectives form the foundation of their conflict resolution efforts.

3.2 Theoretical Foundations of Threat Perception and Relational Structure

Conflict resolution in East Asia is grounded in the constructivist principles of threat perception and the relational structure. A state may assert power through material or ideational means, but the perception of threat arises when the state's role expectations are established intersubjectively. Herein, "threat" refers to a natural anticipation of danger and threat perception involves the acknowledgment of these apprehensions (Cohen 1978). For example, if China dispatches military aircraft to Taiwan's air defense identification zone, the perceived threat lies in the potential invasion of this airspace, affecting Taiwan's physical security. However, if China conducts similar military maneuvers in the South China Sea, although the threat remains the intrusion of airspace, the perception of danger may be less acute for Taiwan due to the geographical distance. Still, Taiwan perceives such actions as threatening due to the relational structure within East Asia. In East Asia, states expect China to assume a stable central role, and their actions are often contingent upon this expectation (Kang 2003). Therefore, when China deploys military assets to the South China Sea, Taiwan perceives it as a threat because China's actions may disrupt the region's stability, jeopardizing Taiwan's security interests. As a result, conflict formation in East Asia is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors.

To evaluate whether a diplomatic policy can effectively serve as a conflict resolution strategy, an analytical framework is established, delineating two determining factors as depicted in Figure 3.1: the internal factor: **threat perception**, and the external factor: **relational structure**. These theoretical foundations provide insight into China's investment in public diplomacy as a means to mitigate the perceived threat associated with its rising power. Conversely, for Taiwan, the imperative to redefine its role in East Asia amid significant social changes over the past two decades has highlighted the importance of public diplomacy as a pivotal diplomatic strategy. Despite differing threat perceptions, both China and Taiwan have been committed to public diplomacy strategies aimed at managing and mitigating perceived threats while adhering to the relational structure. However, the effectiveness of these strategies varies. China's public diplomacy efforts may have failed to adequately mitigate the perceived threat in Taiwan due to conflicting conceptions regarding Taiwan's position within the relational structure. Taiwan's public diplomacy, aimed at asserting itself as distinct from China, introduces its own set of challenges to East Asian stability, particularly concerning the potential escalation of military tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

Figure 3.1 – An Analytical Framework to Evaluate Whether a Diplomatic Policy Serves as a Conflict Resolution Approach



Threat perception involves the process of generating, transmitting, and receiving threat sources, which comprise both material and ideational sources. These sources become forces that create threats (Darwich 2019). Darwich suggests that material force traditionally refers to military power, while ideational force is related to identity. Thus, for a state to generate and transmit threat cues, activities such as military maneuvers or projecting a national identity can potentially result in perceived threats. For others to receive these cues, Cohen states that threat perception is a two-stage process: first, the observation of conflictual cues, and second, the appraisal of whether these cues are threatening or benign (Cohen 1978). In this sense, any change in the current system can trigger threat perception. This connects to the security approaches in East Asia, where increasing military budgets, creating a national identity image, or signing trade agreements can all serve as conflict resolution mechanisms by potentially mediating threat perception. This framework helps explain why China has invested in public diplomacy strategies since the fall of the Soviet Union, a significant systemic change in East Asia. While security alliances are legacies of the previous system, any alteration in security approaches can provoke threat perception. For Taiwan, transforming into a democracy marked a substantial change in its domestic political system. The success of this transformation, in terms of domestic peace development, was facilitated by adherence to established communication rules. However, differing conceptions of sovereignty relative to China have become a significant element of threat perception.

The relational structure is in the discourse of social theory and social constructivism (Harnisch 2011), which emphasizes the exploration of role conceptualization through an intersubjective process. A role is distinct from identity. A state's identity is established by mobilizing material and ideational sources, while a state's behavior results from its defined role.

Thus, the formation of a role is related to the state's identity and behavior (Breuning 2011). If a state intends to mitigate threats perceived by others, it acts according to its role expectations. These role expectations are not only derived from self-identity but emerge through an intersubjective process involving both self and others (Brincat 2011). The intersubjective process is crucial for conflictual parties to determine whether to escalate or de-escalate the conflictual status. Additionally, role expectations are dynamic and evolve with the development of a state's identity. This identity development is co-constitutive with its role (Nabers 2011), providing a basis to evaluate conflict resolution through the relationship between a state's identity formation and role expectations. For example, China views itself as a leader in East Asia and seeks to establish regional order; thus, its public diplomacy efforts aim to shape its role expectations and reduce conflicts with neighboring countries. Conversely, Taiwan, over the past twenty years, has been forming a distinct "Taiwanese" identity, which influences its foreign policy. Hence, Taiwan's public diplomacy aims to redefine its role in East Asia.

Despite sharing the goal of creating collective security, different interpretations of perceived threats and aims to alter strategic roles can lead to increased conflicts. Therefore, for China, it is crucial to convey to neighboring states that the narrative of an East Asian regional order centers on collective security. For Taiwan, it is important to establish an image as a conflict resolver in the region to foster stable development of collective security. While various security approaches exist in East Asia, the following section applies this explanatory framework to military alliances and economic ties, comparing them to public diplomacy. This comparison aims to demonstrate the role of public diplomacy as a conflict resolution strategy for both China and Taiwan.

3.2.1 Contextualizing Alliances and Institutionalization in Threat Perception and Relational Structure

Military alliances and economic ties have developed rapidly in 20th century East Asia. The US alliance partnerships and Asia's economic miracle are linked, contributing to the region's security and conflict resolution dynamics. While alliances may risk inducing power transition wars, strategically aligning or de-aligning can prevent further armed conflicts (Kim 2002). Additionally, increasing economic interdependence and the growth of economic institutions can significantly reduce the risk of militarized conflict (Kahler 2012). Both arguments highlight the effectiveness of these strategies in resolving conflicts.

The material sources of military budget and activities empower a state to fulfill the role expectations of maintaining an alliance network for regional peace. However, regional peace is susceptible to changes in material sources and alliance networks, which can increase perceived threats and alter a state's position within the relational structure. For example, the US hegemony is empowered by its material sources of military alliances and economic ties. Nevertheless, as China and Japan gradually replace the US role in providing military capabilities and trade development (Mauil 2011), East Asia becomes more vulnerable to conflicts. Conflict resolution in this context is often limited to strategic responses, such as state strengthening or countering threats (Myers 2019), which do not necessarily enhance conflict resolution effectiveness. An alternative conflict resolution emerges with Asia's growing economy. Focusing only on militarized conflict overlooks other levels of conflict, such as trade competition (Reuveny 2009). Growing economic ties and interdependence fulfill material and ideational sources and implement the role expectation of providing an economic developmental model but this may generate conflicts due to unparalleled trade relations (Pevehouse 2009). Conflict resolution in this scenario involves building multilateral trade relations or advancing economic institutionalization to develop normative power and prevent armed conflicts. Nonetheless, the issue of unparalleled trade relations remains a conflictual status. Therefore, East Asian states must find alternative methods to maintain peace and stability for collective security. By shaping narratives and images, public diplomacy may make the differences between regional actors more palatable and contribute to conflict resolution.

3.2.2 Contextualizing Public Diplomacy in Threat Perception and Relational Structure

21st century East Asian Security is as complex as its diplomatic approaches. While alliances and economic ties have laid the foundation of material and ideational sources, the evolving state-society relations and the increased role of the public have heightened the importance of security and diplomacy. East Asian security can be managed through diplomacy; as society and the public exert greater influence on state foreign policy, public diplomacy emerges as a crucial approach to maintaining security relations and potentially resolving conflicts. When this approach appropriately addresses threat perception within the relational structure, it effectively serves as a conflict resolution mechanism.

Public diplomacy is to affect the other state's policy by attracting or persuading foreign audiences. Although Vandewalle noted that US public diplomacy could not be credited for

successfully changing Libya's behavior in the context of US-Libya relations (Vandewalle 2015), the primary target of influence is the foreign public and society. The foreign audience plays an important role in shaping state policy and diplomacy. Unlike traditional governmental-level diplomacy, public and societal perceptions of threat, as well as the formation of state self-identity, have become influential in interstate relations. Ross provided an example of US public diplomacy towards China, demonstrating that despite growing strategic and economic competition, continuous interactions occur in bilateral economic and cultural relations (Ross 2015). In this case, US public diplomacy has the potential to transform a rivalry into ongoing social and cultural interaction. Furthermore, public diplomacy can surpass traditional paradigms to be an alternative conflict resolution method. As public diplomacy engages culturally with society, it can turn conflictual statuses into normalized relations (LeoGrande 2015). In terms of threat perception, public diplomacy generates material and ideational sources and projects a national identity image to foreign audiences. This practice of nation branding and building mobilizes these material and ideational sources, demonstrating a state's role expectations or shaping them. For example, the European Union (EU) conducts public diplomacy toward Chinese society to enhance its normative power and strengthen its international role (Song and Ai 2023). By shaping role expectations and focusing on building an image, public diplomacy reduces the reliance on military power and increases interactions with foreign publics. In this sense, public diplomacy serves as a form of conflict resolution, emphasizing the importance of foreign public and civil society roles in diplomacy.

China's relations with Taiwan cannot be described only in political and economic terms but must also consider cultural and social dimensions. Despite sharing similar languages and a common historical Chinese culture, the two sides have been increasing tourism, educational exchanges, and trade and business interactions. The impact of continuous social and cultural interaction on conflict resolution should be evaluated. However, as Taiwan has opened its door to China through growing economic interdependence and sociocultural exchanges, the stronger the Taiwanese identity has become. This Taiwanese identity forms ideational forces that contribute to China's threat perception and affect Taiwanese expectations regarding Taiwan's international role, which is not to be recognized as part of China. This dynamic creates a conflict of identities. Whether public diplomacy can resolve this conflict remains to be examined, but it reveals the importance of contextualizing the issue within local history. The expanding body of research on the East Asian model of conflict resolution provides additional insights into how public diplomacy can assist China and Taiwan in navigating conflicts stemming from their

historical development.

3.3 Approaches to East Asia's Model of Conflict Resolution

The development of conflict resolution in East Asia has embraced historical, cultural, and humanistic perspectives, advocating for an East Asian approach to conflict resolution. Traditional conflict resolution and peace conventions, often dominated by Western paradigms, may not adequately address conflicts in a sensitive and humanistic manner that respects the needs of the people involved. As a result, effective conflict resolution in this context relies on respecting cultural differences, understanding underlying values, and exploring the social interpretation of conflicts (Chan 2011). By considering the social interpretation of conflict and drawing on local knowledge of conflict resolution, a sustainable type of peace can be established (Richmond 2011). Hence, whether China's or Taiwan's public diplomacy can serve as conflict resolution hinges on whether it is grounded in local historical and cultural knowledge to achieve lasting peace.

The East Asian model of conflict resolution is grounded in underlying cultural understandings and norms. Tuschhoff (2016) emphasizes the importance of comprehending East Asian normative ideologies and worldviews as foundational elements for the region's unique approach to conflict resolution. For instance, in Japan, conflict resolution involves a process of accommodating contradictions until they can be resolved, emphasizing values such as consensus, dialogue, and fairness (Wasilewski and Namatame 2011). Similarly, in South Korea, traditional conflict resolution methods are deeply intertwined with daily life, recognizing that simply eliminating the causes of injustice does not necessarily resolve societal conflicts, because emotions and feelings play a central role (Bleiker and Young-ju 2011). These examples from Japan and South Korea illustrate a humanistic view of conflict and conflict resolution, focusing on individuals' feelings and the necessity of consensus for fostering fair and just behaviors within society. A harmonious society, guided by traditional and intersubjectively acknowledged ethics, is ideal in the Confucian approach to conflict resolution (Pan 2011). Consensus-building, attention to human emotions, and adherence to underlying morals and ethics are key characteristics of the East Asian model of conflict resolution.

The conflict in East Asia should be viewed as a continuum of historical events and structures that have evolved. Adopting a perspective informed by local historical and cultural knowledge offers a more integrated understanding of East Asian conflict and therefore a more

holistic approach to conflict resolution in East Asia. Resolving these conflicts, deeply rooted historically and compounded by identity conflicts resulting from social and political changes, requires a non-paradigmatic approach. In the context of the Taiwan–China identity-based conflict, where no regional institution exists to address the dispute, public diplomacy efforts from both sides serve as an underlying mechanism for maintaining social and cultural interactions. Shifting from power struggles to identity conflicts, resolving these disputes necessitates time for mutual trust to develop and for both sides to understand the evolving nature of the conflict (Hamrin and Wang 2004). Developing mutual trust entails more than military coercion; it requires fostering a sense of security conducive to economic, social, and cultural exchanges. While public diplomacy may seem like an informal approach to conflict resolution, its strategy empowers and sustains continuous social interactions. This informal regionalization serves as a preventive mechanism for addressing conflicts, particularly in the context of East Asia's economic prominence coupled with weak political structures (Hettne and Söderbaum 2010). Public diplomacy strategies establish an informal interactive framework that lays the groundwork for economic, social, and cultural relations.

3.4 Summary

Enriching the theoretical framework of threat perception and relational structure with the context of East Asia's model of conflict resolution, this section answers the two questions asked respectively for China and Taiwan. China's careful management of its image in East Asia stems from systemic power change in the 21st century East Asian Security environment. On the other hand, Taiwan's conflictual status with China has shifted from power struggles to identity conflicts due to domestic political and social changes. Therefore, conflict resolution holds different objectives for each side. For China, the goal is to mitigate threat perceptions, while for Taiwan, it is to diminish the possibility of escalating conflicts with China, which could undermine Taiwan's role expectations in East Asia. Despite the traditional pattern of conflict resolution characterizing the Taiwan–China identity-based conflict, the onset of the 21st century has witnessed, on both sides, nationalism fervor and the formation of self-identity, which requires that the traditional pattern of conflict resolution should also be re-evaluated (Ding 2010). This chapter maintains that public diplomacy may provide a pathway for reforming conflict resolution for both China and Taiwan, in tandem with their respective domestic political and social transformations. As a result, the next chapter explores China's and Taiwan's approaches to public diplomacy and their relationship with the framing of the identity conflict.