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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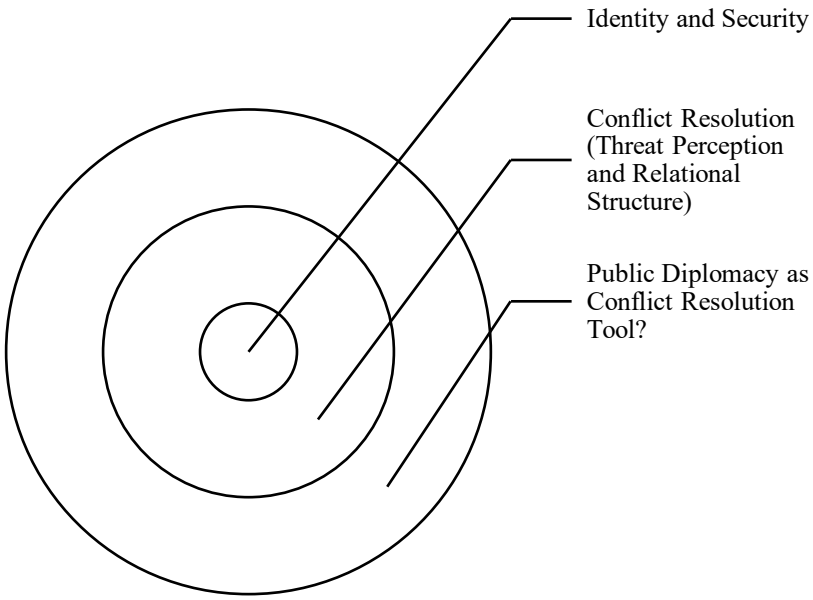
Chapter 4. China's and Taiwan's Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter delineated the respective aims of conflict resolution for China and Taiwan, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of threat perception and relational structure, alongside an evolving body of East Asian historical conflict resolution models. This chapter seeks to apply this theoretical framework of conflict resolution to the practice of public diplomacy and to enrich the discourse on conflict resolution in Taiwan's context of public diplomacy efforts. The question in this chapter therefore goes to the exploration of China's and Taiwan's interpretations and strategies of public diplomacy: How have China and Taiwan strategized public diplomacy to resolve the identity-based conflict? By connecting the discourse of conflict resolution with the practice of public diplomacy, it is the understanding of soft power that explains how China and Taiwan strategized public diplomacy as a resolution to identity-based conflict. This analysis posits that both China and Taiwan perceive conflict resolution as a process of changing their position in the relational structures and mitigating threat perceptions. For example, Taiwan aims to shape its strategic role and economic significance within East Asia, whereas China endeavors to project a peaceful image to reduce tensions regarding its hard power in the region. In both instances, the role of the state within the region's relational structure is linked to state identity. As illustrated in Figure 4.1, titled 'Conceptual Framework', identity is significant to security dynamics, and hence conflict resolution is to resolve the issue stemming from identity and security concerns. To ensure stability and peace, the maintenance of identity within the regional structure, coupled with a secure regional environment, is important for state interactions. These interactions, facilitated through diplomatic activities, encompass trade, investment, business, tourism, culture, and education, among other forms of civil societal exchange. It is through these exchanges that both China and Taiwan exert soft power to shape their identity images and narrate their relational status within the region. In determining this relational status, state government or any delegated agencies, authorities, or institutions engage in public diplomacy to employ soft power, thereby shaping identity and relational narratives – a method posited here as a form of conflict

resolution. Therefore, this chapter is structured to address two key questions: (1) What are China's and Taiwan's historical cultural interpretations of soft power? (2) How have China and Taiwan been conducting public diplomacy to resolve identity-based conflict?

Figure 4.1 – Conceptual Framework



4.2 Historical Cultural Interpretations of Soft Power

Nye argued that a successful state needs both hard and soft power to coerce others and shape long-term attitudes (Nye 2004). Ding emphasized that long-term attitudes and preferences are crucial to peace, as opposed to realists' focus on short-term interests (Ding 2008). These long-term attitudes relate to threat perception, which concerns whether a state is perceived as friendly or hostile. This perception influences the state's relational status with other states and the overall relational structure within the region. Preferences of other states arise from intersubjective civil societal interactions, such as educational exchange, tourism, and business. When Nye coined the word soft power, he proposed its components rely on three resources: culture, political values, and foreign policy (Nye et al. 2009). Rather than focusing only on resources, Li suggested examining a state's capabilities to exert soft power, thereby highlighting how culture, values, and institutions were integrated into soft power (Li 2009). This perspective explains why the Chinese government has significantly invested in soft power since 2000. Despite various analyses of China's soft power resources, Rawnsley argued that

de-westernizing the concept of soft power helps understand not only China's but also Taiwan's use of soft power and public diplomacy practices (Rawnsley 2012). The de-westernization approach emphasizes local contextualization, specifically how China and Taiwan respectively bring culture, values, and eventually institutions into the use of soft power. In the context of how culture matters to domestic or international politics, Carbo-Catalan and Roig-Sanz noted that collective identity, created through a series of cultural practices such as exploring historical patterns of relations, cooperation, and interactions, can elucidate the dynamics of power and power shifts (Carbó-Catalan and Roig-Sanz 2022). For example, China has sent research ships to the South China Sea to gather evidence of Chinese historical rights in the maritime territory [6]. By demonstrating that 鄭和 Zheng He, the Chinese mariner, and explorer of the fifteenth century, left traces in the South China Sea, China aims to reinforce its claimed historical rights and consolidate the "Chineseness" image for both domestic and foreign audiences. This national image cultivates cultural values around the practice of establishing historical rights. These values are then generated and re-generated through civil society or institutionalized in written expressions. For instance, Sola and McMartin analyzed European values in literary prize-winning works and argued that both political institutions and cultural interactions impact diplomacy (Solà and McMartin 2022). Similarly, China's Confucius Institutes were established as cultural institutions promoting Chinese culture to foreign audiences, although their effectiveness in soft power diplomacy has been contested (Zhou and Luk 2016). The following section explores how culture, values, and institutions have been integrated into the concept of soft power in the contexts of China and Taiwan, moving beyond Nye's traditional framework of soft power resources.

4.2.1 China's Interpretation of Soft Power in Culture, Values, and Institutions

China's interpretation of soft power, characterized by its integration of culture, values, and institutions, reveals significant insights. Over the past two decades, extensive research has focused on China's soft power resources (Nye et al. 2009), its application of soft power (Nye 2012), and its soft use of hard power (deLisle 2010).

[6] Laura Zhou, South China Sea: Beijing's new research ship expected to explore contested waters, South China Morning Post, 23 May 2023: https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3221579/south-china-sea-beijings-new-research-ship-expected-explore-contested-waters

The evolving debate has centered on explaining China's rise (Paruk 2014). In this section, I engage with the discourse of China's rise through the lens of how China brought culture, values, and institutions into its use of soft power.

Zhao (2006) proposed a Chinese view of international relations, referred to as Tian-Xia, or "All-under-heaven". This view envisions a world society in harmony, where communication and cooperation are ensured by commonly agreed institutions. Continuous communication and cooperation are seen as more effective for resolving international or intercultural conflicts. Since then, this concept has undergone various theoretical developments within China. Zhao (2009) argued that this view is rooted in a historical form of Chinese universalism, representing Chinese knowledge, philosophy, and culture. DeLisle (2010) discovered that Chinese soft power elements with Chinese culture still existed in China's Reformation period. For example, the Confucian concept of managing relations with nations beyond China's borders by attracting and transforming them with Chinese civilization and values was still evident. Pan (2019) expanded on this idea by highlighting the Chinese quest for harmony, which can be achieved through the Confucian approach to conflict resolution. However, the evolution of this Chinese theoretical worldview has raised concerns about China's quest for national identity and the justification of its rising to power as a pursuit of national interest. Contrary to Zhao's argument for a Chinese utopia of global governance, some critics argue that the Tian-Xia system is not fundamentally different from mainstream International Relations theory but represents another hegemonic construction (Cho and Hwang 2020). Hwang (2021a) contended that China's potential hegemonic construction of its strategic use must be carefully examined to avoid threatening others only to claim a certain status. Therefore, in exploring China's efforts to establish its theory of world relations, it becomes evident that these efforts strategically support the discourse of China's rise through its interpretations of Chinese culture. Such theoretical efforts aim to assert China's cultural dominance strategically.

Deng and Zhang (2009) argued that China's current cultural power does not match its economic power, attributing this disparity to a superiority-inferiority complex that developed historically throughout the 19th century when Western powers introduced new political values to China, thereby altering China's worldview. This complex reflects the failure of China's historical civilization values to enter the global

cultural arena. Hence, the drive to export its cultural power is not merely an economic concern but also an effort to project its political values and assert its status in the international order. Kivimaki (2014) contended that China does not need to demonstrate the superiority of its political ideas, because major powers in today's international order seek complementarity and mutual gains rather than dominance. Paruk (2014) categorized China's active participation in international organizations into three forms of soft power utilization: multilateralism, economic diplomacy, and good-neighbor policy. These three forms reflect China's aim to attract foreign audiences with its economic development model, build reciprocal relations with neighboring states, and establish its position and image as a peacefully rising power. These aims and efforts have been particularly evident since 習近平 Xi JinPing became the president of the CCP in 2013, with initiatives such as the "China Dream" and the "Asia-Pacific Dream". However, Callahan (2015) observed that the discourse surrounding the "China Dream" primarily addresses a values crisis within Chinese society, thereby influencing domestic audiences more than international ones. Berndzen (2017) argued that while China's economic development model may have attracted Asia-Pacific nations, the region's reliance on economic ties has not been sufficient to overcome concerns about China's behavior in territorial disputes and the perceived lack of political values, casting doubts on whether its soft power has successfully built peaceful relations with the world.

While Zhao (2009) proposed the Tian-Xia system, he supported the Chinese philosophical worldview of establishing a world institute, arguing that the world is constituted as a global unity and that this is a fundamental concept of political philosophy, which aims to address all global problems as problems of the world. Zhao criticized the UN, stating that it is not a world institution but only a platform for nations to negotiate their interests. However, the concept of a world institution remains idealistic, and we have yet to see its establishment or effect. Instead, China has been promoting its cultural and political values by establishing Confucius Institutes worldwide since 2004. It is noteworthy that China set up these Confucius Institutes in the early 21st century, just a few decades after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) aimed to eradicate Confucianism, viewing it as an outdated value that hindered national development. Paradise (2009) argued that it is too early to determine the positive impact of these Confucius Institutes due to negative views on China's influence around its

disputed political values and contradictory behavior in geopolitical matters, suggesting that this projection of soft power may be more targeted at its people. Yang (2010) supported this argument, asserting that the Confucius Institutes are a project for China's higher education system to transform from a recipient to a sender of knowledge. However, this project has faced challenges due to disputed relations with overseas partner universities. When these universities raised concerns about the political or social science content taught, the rights and responsibilities typically remained within the Confucius Institute rather than reflecting an equal collaboration. Furthermore, some critics have noted that the management of Confucius Institutes often fails to align with their intended purpose. A Chinese scholar argued that the content and discourse within the Confucius Institutes have been excessively commercialized, focusing on market-oriented language rather than promoting cultural exchange or education cooperation (You 2012). If the teaching language prioritizes selling a product over sharing the culture, it may undermine the goal of building China's image and promoting its culture and values to the world. Hence, China's aim of establishing a world institute, or the Confucius Institutes faces significant challenges in effectively measuring the impact of its soft power.

As a result, I argue that examining China's soft power necessitates viewing it through the lens of how China incorporates culture, values, and institutions into its soft power strategy. This perspective highlights the significance of China's substantial investment in cultivating soft power as part of its broader nation-building project. Rather than revisiting the historical trajectory already outlined in Chapter 2, it is important to note how past experiences of values crises and perceptions of inferiority have shaped China's reliance on soft power as a means of projecting stability and legitimacy. In contrast, Taiwan's developments of democratization and identity formation since the 1990s have led it to increasingly employ soft power to assert sovereignization and differentiate itself from China.

4.2.2 Taiwan's Interpretation of Soft Power in Culture, Values, and Institutions

Much of the discourse on Taiwan's soft power over the past two decades has adopted a comparative perspective between China and Taiwan, highlighting the distinctive case of Taiwan. This comparative approach concerning the discourse of soft

power should be contextualized with the local historical development, particularly the regime competition between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the CCP. Given this historical background, most arguments focus on how Taiwan should strategize its soft power, considering its abundant cultural resources. These resources are primarily linked to Taiwan's democratization since the end of martial law in 1987. Furthermore, with democratization, the legitimacy of the KMT has been questioned, specifically whether Taiwan represents the Republic of China or the Taiwanese people who have long inhabited the island (Lin 2004). This legitimacy issue, combined with the Taiwanese people's quest for sovereignty, has propelled Taiwan's sovereignization movement. Taiwan's sovereignty is a critical issue in cross-strait security relations, centering on the debate over whether the KMT governs the Republic of China or the island of Taiwan (Cheng 2008). Lastly, democratization and sovereignization have been integral to Taiwan's identity formation. This identity formation has significantly influenced Taiwan's political sphere and the security dynamics of cross-strait relations (Chen 2013). Therefore, Taiwan's political agenda of democratization, sovereignization, and identity formation justifies its strategic use of soft power. By examining how Taiwan brings culture, values, and institutions into its soft power strategy, it becomes evident that these three developments – democratization, sovereignization, and identity formation – are distinct yet interconnected elements of Taiwan's soft power approach.

Wang and Lu (2008) explored the comparative perspectives of China's and Taiwan's conceptions of soft power resources, finding that China emphasizes traditional Chinese culture and its economic development model, whereas Taiwan focuses on identity, democracy, economic development, and traditional Chinese culture. DeLisle (2010) stated that Taiwan's soft power campaign was a competition against China, as both are descendants of Chinese culture and are keen to engage with the US audience. Rawnsley (2014) argued that Taiwan's soft power campaign's emphasis on representing traditional Chinese culture would not yield significant soft power benefits. During Taiwan's soft power campaign, President Ma Ying-jeou 馬英九, leader of the KMT party, was in office from 2008 to 2016. His predecessor, Chen Shui-bian of the DPP, served from 2000 to 2008 and was considered a milestone figure for Taiwanese self-determination. Despite these administrations, no substantial effort was made to promote Taiwan's culture effectively within the soft power campaign, as Taiwan was also

navigating the complex process of identity formation. The lack of a clear representation of Taiwan's culture, while simultaneously presenting traditional Chinese culture, led to widespread discontent, culminating in the 2014 Sunflower Movement. The 2014 Sunflower Movement arose from a conflict of national identity exacerbated by increasingly close economic ties with China. Many argued that the movement was a strong assertion of Taiwan's unique identity (Pan 2015). Taiwan's incorporation of traditional Chinese culture into its soft power strategy sparked identity-based conflicts both domestically and in cross-strait relations. Nevertheless, the democratic values inherent in Taiwan's political system should not be overlooked for their significant impact on its soft power.

As Taiwan transformed into a democracy, its political values diverged significantly from the historical regime legitimacy competition between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the CCP. Democratic values should become Taiwan's primary soft power resources to compensate for its lack of international status, a consequence of this historical competition. Rawnsley (2012) suggested that Taiwan's soft power campaign should involve non-state actors, allowing them the freedom to operate outside of political interest and serving as strong symbols of Taiwan's inclusive democracy. Moreover, as China's international image is tarnished by its controversial human rights approach toward the Uyghurs, Taiwan's democratic values and its progressive stance on human rights – such as the legalization of same-sex marriage – should set it on a distinct soft power path. Hwang (2021b) argued that, in contrast to China's attempt to establish a Chinese School of International Relations theory, Taiwan has voluntarily accepted Western International Relations theory, but Taiwan should prioritize its needs and foreign relations interests based on its unique context and modernization trajectory. While theoretical frameworks may provide a foundation for Taiwan's soft power campaign, the reality is that Taiwan's soft power is influenced by its identity-based conflict with China and its domestic challenges of identity formation, democratization, and sovereignization. Therefore, neither Western International Relations theory nor Chinese International Relations theory can comprehensively address Taiwan's issue. Instead, Taiwan should forge its path, informed by its historical trajectory and the current domestic and international context.

Fell (2012) stated that the fragility of Taiwan's domestic consensus on external

relations is influenced by China's pressure for unification, yet it is significant for Taiwan's security and the peace of cross-strait relations. Taiwan aims to increase its participation in the international community and strategically position itself to safeguard national interests, particularly identity and security. Fell (2017) further argued that the social movements in Taiwan have influenced the political environment, highlighting that voices from civil society have shaped the discourse on identity and security. Hsu (2017) observed that various sectors of civil society were united during the 2014 Sunflower Movement, driven by concerns over cross-strait relations with China. Despite these developments, Taiwan's institutional incorporation of soft power remains underdeveloped. Taiwan's progress in identity formation, sovereignization, and democratization throughout the first two decades of the 21st century has overshadowed its efforts to institutionalize soft power. Otmazgin (2022) interviewed several Taiwanese government officers in 2017 and found no structured institutional framework for soft power policy at that time, while Taiwan might still be in the transitional phase of planning how to leverage its soft power resources effectively in foreign policy. Additionally, he observed that Taiwanese society's ethnolinguistics and ethnic diversity share similarities with Southeast Asian nations such as Singapore and Malaysia. From this perspective, some sources indicate that Taiwan's soft power discourse has increasingly engaged with the New Southbound Policy, initiated in 2016 by President Tsai Ing-wen, 蔡英文, the leader of the DPP party, whose term spanned from 2016 to 2024. The New Southbound Policy aims to redefine Taiwan's role in regional development and create political, economic, and cultural values for its engagement in the region (Yang and Chiang 2019). Lee (2023) pointed out that the policy faces challenges, including how China will respond to the new relationship between Taiwan and Southeast Asian states, as well as the internal challenge of consolidating interests from various social actors into this policy. Although Taiwan's institutional promotion of soft power remains less evident, the New Southbound Policy may represent a significant milestone in the government's soft power strategy.

To sum up, comparing both China's and Taiwan's historical context of soft power reveals that the utilization of soft power is closely tied to each side's domestic political agenda. As both nations have undergone stages of stabilizing their regimes, their respective domestic political agendas play a pivotal role in shaping their diplomatic

policies, because they strive to establish their national identities that define their positions in the region. Notably, since the beginning of the 21st century, China has maintained the dominance of the Chinese Communist Party over its territory, while Taiwan has transformed into a democracy. This comparative perspective between China's and Taiwan's interpretations of soft power highlights the different roles of actors involved in soft power projection. In China, the government's role is dominant in promoting soft power, whereas in Taiwan, the government's role is not as strong as the civil society. As public diplomacy is to exert soft power, the role of actors involved in public diplomacy becomes crucial in understanding how soft power is utilized and promoted. The following section delves into an exploration of both China's and Taiwan's practice of public diplomacy.

4.3 The Practice of Public Diplomacy

As both China and Taiwan's soft power interpretations were influenced by their domestic political agendas, the purpose of their public diplomacy diverged. For China, it is to mitigate the threat perception surrounding its rising to economic and military power. For Taiwan, it is to attain more international recognition for increasing its national security status as seen in Table 4.1. Their disparate purposes and the roles of actors set the distinct trajectories for their public diplomacy strategies.

Table 4.1 – Different Purposes and Roles of Actors in China and in Taiwan

	Purpose	Roles of Actors
China	To mitigate the threat perception for determining its power status	Government
Taiwan	To attain more international recognition for improving its security status	Government, non-state actors (such as civil society)

While China primarily relies on government actors to conduct public diplomacy, Taiwan's approach involves a less dominant role for the government and allows for greater involvement of civil society. This contrast is evident in media outlets, where China aggressively promotes state-owned news and information to shape its image, whereas Taiwan leverages diverse private and social media platforms to engage both domestic and foreign audiences. Melissen (2007) introduced the concept of "new public diplomacy", which acknowledges the expanding role of non-governmental organizations and the use of new technologies to foster greater exchange, collaboration, and dialogue. Promoting dialogues among different actors, Storie (2017) proposed the significance of cultivation strategy in practicing public diplomacy. Cultivating the communication between the actors and the audiences, Sullivan and Lee (2018) emphasized the significance of communication tools particularly the strategic use of media. More elaborations on the analysis of cultivation strategy and communication tools will be in *Chapter 8* with a particular focus on the original data collected in this dissertation.

These perspectives offer insights into the objectives of public diplomacy for both China and Taiwan, in particular, the roles of the actors involved. The following section investigates both China's and Taiwan's practices of public diplomacy.

4.3.1 China's Practice of Public Diplomacy

In 2003, Hu JinTao, the former secretary-general of the CCP, articulated China's commitment to a peaceful rise, emphasizing the use of soft power to cultivate a friendly image of China on the global stage. This vision aligned with China's development of its theory of international relations, which aimed to harmonize foreign relations through soft power, resolving conflicts, and promoting cooperation. However, when Xi JinPing

assumed the position of secretary-general of the CCP in 2012, public diplomacy was elevated to a strategic foreign policy tool aimed not only at mitigating perceptions of China's rising but also at enhancing its power status. China's public diplomacy has thus been questioned for whether the use matches the goal. Sarnelli (2017) examined a Chinese TV program, UpClose, as a case study arguing that its content primarily served to legitimize the government's authority and target Chinese citizens living abroad, rather than effectively mediating the threat perceptions of non-Chinese speaking foreign audiences. Byrne (2019) suggested that China's public diplomacy with Indo-Pacific political leaders aimed to gain discursive power, shaping narratives of power status, and altering regional orders to serve national interests. Sun (2021) noted a desire for discursive power in Chinese officials' statements, emphasizing the expansion and strengthening of the government's policies and diplomatic practices. Furthermore, China's BRI highlighted the importance of public diplomacy in building reciprocal relations with participating countries. However, D'Hooghe (2021) argued that under President Xi JinPing's leadership, China's public diplomacy has become more politically focused, shifting from promoting Chinese culture to advocating China's political-economic models; for example, the Wolf Warrior diplomacy, "戰狼外交 Zhan Lang Wai Jiao," was a salient change of China's style of public diplomacy. The "Wolf Warrior diplomacy" is Chinese diplomats criticizing the US and sometimes other countries on social media platforms. Mattingly and Sundquist (2022) suggested that this confrontational approach undermined China's efforts to establish a peaceful rising image, as it contradicted the principles of generosity and friendship inherent in public diplomacy. Kim and Melissen (2022) highlighted the ineffectiveness of China's public diplomacy in resolving major geopolitical crises such as the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missile standoff with South Korea and tensions with Taiwan. Despite the aspirations of the Chinese school of International Relations theory to build a harmonious world society through soft power, China's practice of public diplomacy appears to deviate from this goal, raising concerns about its effectiveness and alignment with broader foreign policy objectives.

4.3.2 Taiwan's Practice of Public Diplomacy

As Taiwan has since the turn of the 21st century been going through movements of identity formation, sovereignization, and democratization, democratic values have

emerged as significant elements of its soft power attracting foreign audiences, but Taiwan has been struggling to effectively export this soft power. Rawnsley (2017) aptly summarized Taiwan's situation as "soft power rich but public diplomacy poor," attributing this deficiency to bureaucratic barriers within government sectors. He proposed collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture to strategically utilize culture as a featured element channeling soft power. While the concept of Taiwanese culture develops alongside the formation of Taiwanese identity, the external communication tools highlighted by Rawnsley remain strategically relevant. Tsatsou (2018) studied Taiwan's use of Facebook during the 2014 Sunflower Movement and illustrated how digital platforms enabled citizen actors to shape domestic political agendas and coordinate offline activities. This involvement of non-state actors distinguishes Taiwan from China's government-dominated public diplomacy landscape. Rawnsley (2020) noted Taiwan's growing capacity for managing security threats through public diplomacy but emphasized the need to enhance popular familiarity to garner sympathy and support. He highlighted Taiwan's desire to participate in the World Health Assembly (WHA) as a case study, suggesting that effective communication strategies showcasing Taiwan's advanced healthcare systems and medical technology could yield diplomatic benefits. Alexander (2020) underscored the ethical value of Taiwan's participation in the WHA is a reflection of its internal self-identity. This premise suggests that Taiwan's societal issues and civic activism, such as the 2014 Sunflower Movement facilitated by democratization, influence its practice of public diplomacy. Chen and Fell (2021) enriched Taiwan's public diplomacy context with the case of TongZhi Diplomacy, which aims not to normalize queer individuals abroad but to normalize Taiwan's international status through its queer community. In essence, Taiwan's internal movements of identity formation, sovereignization, and democratization profoundly influence its external communication strategies, necessitating strategic utilization of public diplomacy to gain greater international recognition and enhance security status.

4.4 Summary

This chapter explored China's and Taiwan's strategies of public diplomacy in terms of how they have been seen as a form of conflict resolution to resolve the identity-based conflict. The 20th century conflict history, primarily characterized by the

competition between the KMT and the CCP, has had a profound impact on the security environment in the 21st century. Consequently, unconventional approaches such as public diplomacy are crucial for resolving these conflicts. To bridge the theoretical foundation of conflict resolution with the practice of public diplomacy, this chapter first examined the historical cultural interpretations of soft power in China and Taiwan. These interpretations elucidated why both nations have turned to soft power to address identity-based conflicts. Secondly, the focus shifted to how these interpretations are manifested in the practice of public diplomacy. China's public diplomacy endeavors to mitigate threat perceptions and assert its power status globally, whereas Taiwan's public diplomacy, despite facing challenges in external communication strategies, seeks to garner more international recognition to enhance its security status. Taiwan's challenges of communication strategies will be elaborated in *Chapter 8* with a focus on the original data collected in this dissertation.