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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)

Lin, Y.

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Chapter 6. Results – Analysis of Policy Documents

The data set to be analyzed is the annual reports of diplomatic work from Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2000 to 2020. I conducted content analysis to present the evolution of the diplomatic policy over these twenty years, along with a term list of the rhetoric of peace and conflicts. In this chapter, I present three main findings from this data set: (1) expanding and the restructuring of the contents, (2) change of narrative in relations status, and (3) content evolution of “public diplomacy.”

6.1 Expanding the Restructuring of the Contents

I categorized Taiwan’s diplomatic annual reports into three stages, as summarized in Table 6.1. From 2000 to 2009, the reports took the form of a basic web page with a straightforward table of contents listing only the chapters. Between 2010 and 2014, the format shifted to an e-book, featuring a more elaborate table of contents that included both chapters and sub-chapters, with the reports ranging from 482 pages to 652 pages. From 2015 to 2020, the reports appeared as PDF files, each extending from 732 to 876 pages. Based on this sampling and dataset construction, the subsequent analysis is organized into three sections: (1) changes in the table of contents, (2) a summary of relations in the Asia-Pacific region, and (3) the sub-chapter devoted to “public diplomacy.”

Table 6.1 – Taiwan’s Diplomatic Annual Reports in Three Stages by Format

2000–2005	2006–2015	2016–2020
webpage	E-book Pages 482 to 652	PDF File Pages 732 to 876

These three structural shifts in the format and content organization of the annual reports reflect not just bureaucratic changes in information management but signal a growing attempt by Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to institutionalize a broader, more accessible, and systematic diplomatic narrative. This evolution suggests an effort to align presentation with strategic objectives, particularly in relation to visibility, audience engagement, and international positioning.

6.1.1 Changes of the Chapter Title Describing Relations with Foreign States

In the first stage of the dataset, chapter 3 is entitled 中外關係, which can be translated as Relations of the Republic of China and Foreign States. In the second stage, chapter 2 appears under the title 對外關係, translated as Relations with Foreign States. The same title, 對外關係, is used again for chapter 3 in the third stage. Linguistically, 中 signifies “center” and denotes the Republic of China, 外 means “outside” or “foreign,” and 關係 indicates “relations”. Hence, in the local language and political context, 中外關係 refers to the Republic of China’s relations with foreign states. In contrast, in 對外關係, the character 對 conveys “facing” or “toward,” 外 denotes “foreign,” and 關係 signifies “relations.” Taken together, the phrase is more directly understood as Foreign Relations. The comparative overview of these chapter titles is displayed in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 – Changes of the Chapter Title

2000–2005	2006–2015	2016–2020
第一章 首長外交活動照片	第一章 首長外交活動照	第一章 首長外交活動照片
第二章 外交施政概況	片	第二章 外交施政方針與計畫
第三章 中外關係 (Centre-Outer Relations)	第二章 對外關係 (Outer Relations)	第三章 對外關係 (Outer Relations)
第四章 領事事務	第三章 領事事務	第四章 領事事務
第五章 外交行政	第四章 外交行政	第五章 外交行政
第六章 外交大事日誌	第五章 外交大事日誌	第六章 外交大事日誌

The shift from 中外關係, Republic of China’s Relations with Foreign States, to 對外關係, Foreign Relations, is not merely semantic. It marks a strategic reorientation toward a more neutral, internationally palatable framing of Taiwan’s global engagement. By removing explicit references to China, 中, the terminology subtly distances Taiwan’s diplomatic narrative from China-centric frameworks, thus reinforcing Taiwan’s identity as a distinct international actor.

6.1.2 A Summary of Relations in the Asia-Pacific Region

In the chapter summarizing Taiwan's relations with foreign states, the content was organized by region. There was no dedicated section for East Asia 東亞, but rather for Asia-Pacific 亞太. This section consistently omitted any description of relations with China. Moreover, between 2000 and 2013, the Asia-Pacific section explicitly stated that it excluded China, whereas from 2014 to 2020, it no longer mentioned China but instead specified the inclusion of 我國, which literally translates to “my country.” Table 6.3 provides excerpts of these descriptions from the dataset. The Asia-Pacific region was defined in the reports as follows: “[...]...亞太地區一般以地緣及政治因素加以區分，大致 分為東北亞、東南亞、南亞、澳紐與南太平洋 4 個區域。” It is literally translated as “The Asia-Pacific is generally divided according to geopolitical factors into four regions: (a) Northeast Asia, (b) Southeast Asia, (c) South Asia, (d) Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific.”

Table 6.3 – Summary of Relations in the Asia-Pacific Region

2000–2013	2014–2020
[...]...亞太地區除中國大陸外.....	[...]...亞太地區.....包含我國在內.....
[...]...Asia-Pacific region except Mainland China.....	[...]...Asia-Pacific Region.....Including my country.....

Moreover, the order of the states in the Asia-Pacific region has changed and can be categorized into three stages, as seen in Table 6.4. From 2000 to 2007, the order of the states in Northeast and Southeast Asia was Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Brunei. From 2008 to 2015, it was changed and inter-situated with other Oceanic states: the order was then Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. From 2016 to 2020, it was the same order as in the previous stage, but one more state was mentioned, Myanmar. At last, in 2020, Myanmar was even re-ordered between Malaysia and the Philippines.

Table 6.4 – Order of the States in Asia-Pacific

Years	2000–2007	2008–2015	2016–2020
Listed order	Japan South Korea Thailand Indonesia Singapore Philippines Malaysia Vietnam Brunei	Brunei Indonesia Japan South Korea Malaysia Philippines Singapore Thailand Vietnam	Brunei Indonesia Japan South Korea Malaysia Philippines Singapore Thailand Vietnam Myanmar

The redefinition of the Asia-Pacific region, particularly the omission of China and inclusion of 我國, my country, reveals a subtle but meaningful recalibration of Taiwan’s regional identity. By categorizing itself within the Asia-Pacific rather than in reference to China, Taiwan signals its aspiration to be seen as a proactive regional player rather than a subordinate geopolitical entity. This reflects an implicit conflict resolution strategy, which is to disengage discursively from the disputed cross-strait relations narratives and to re-direct attention to cooperative regionalism.

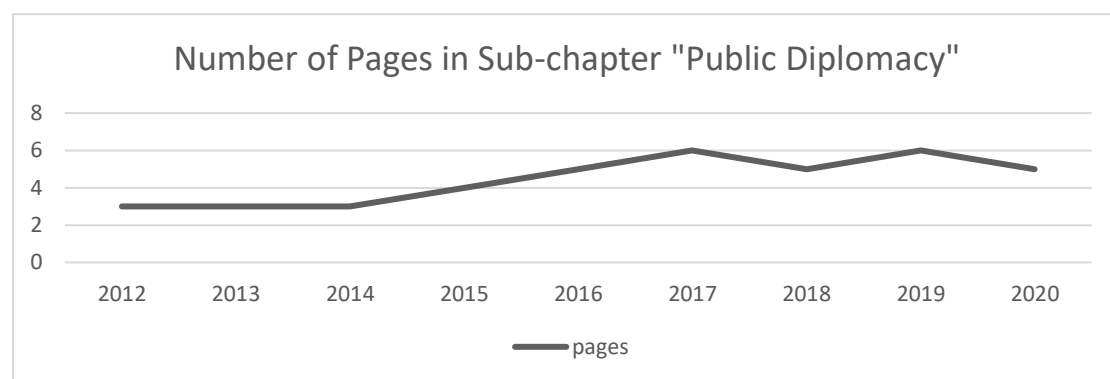
6.1.3 The Sub-chapter Devoted to “Public Diplomacy”

In Taiwan, public diplomacy is translated as 公眾外交. In the dataset, it did not appear in the table of contents between 2000 and 2011. Beginning in 2012, however, a dedicated sub-chapter on public diplomacy was introduced under the chapter “對外關係,” which is translated as “Relations with Foreign States.” Between 2012 and 2015, this sub-chapter was grouped together with 國際傳播 and 國際文教, terms referring to “International Communication” and “International Culture and Education.” From 2016 onward, the title was streamlined to 國際傳播與公眾外交, a phrase that means “International Communication and Public Diplomacy.” Table 6.5 shows this development in chapter structure, while Figure 6.1 illustrates the expansion of content, which grew from three pages in 2012 to five pages by 2020.

Table 6.5 – Table of Contents Including Public Diplomacy

2012–2015	2016–2020
第一章 首長外交活動照片	第一章 首長外交活動照片
第二章 對外關係	第二章 外交施政方針與計畫
第四節 國際傳播、公眾外交及國際文教	第三章 對外關係
第三章 領事事務	第四節 國際傳播與公眾外交
第四章 外交行政	第四章 領事事務
第五章 外交大事日誌	第五章 外交行政
	第六章 外交大事日誌

Figure 6.1 – Number of Pages in Sub-chapter of Public Diplomacy from 2012 to 2020



The formal inclusion and rebranding of 公眾外交, Public Diplomacy, in the report structure, particularly its increasing prominence and association with communication, reflects more than a discursive trend. It evidences a strategic shift toward soft power and people-to-people engagement as pillars of Taiwan's external policy. This institutional recognition of public diplomacy demonstrates the state's adaptation to the constraints of formal diplomacy by emphasizing legitimacy through societal outreach, cultural affinity, and global narrative-building.

6.2 Change of Narrative of Relations Status

The evolution of the narrative of relations in the Asia-Pacific region can be divided into four stages⁸: 2001 敦睦, 2002–2005 和平, 2007–2013 友好敦睦, 2016–2020 友好協調, as displayed in Table 6.6. The term 敦睦 conveys the idea of harmony, while 和平 denotes peace. 友好 carries the sense of friendliness, and 協調 emphasizes

⁸ The result of 2011 was not displayed, because a technical issue prevented the file from reading in text format. Due to the technical difficulty, the result of this year was discarded.

coordination. This progression of terminology reflects a rhetorical shift from a more passive emphasis on harmony to a more active and cooperative tone that stresses coordination and mutual benefit. The transition from “harmony” to “coordination” may indicate the increasing institutionalization of Taiwan’s regional diplomacy and an effort to move from symbolic reassurance toward concrete partnership-building.

Table 6.6 – Result of DocuSky System Analysis

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
2010	2012	2013	2014	2015
2016	2017	2018	2019	2020

Table 6.7 displays a further analysis by applying the spectrum of peace and conflict (Figure 5.1 Spectrum of Peace and Conflict, in *Chapter 5*), in which the top section represents peace, whereas the bottom section represents conflict. Although peace-related terms are mentioned from 2001 to 2020, conflict-related terms are stated in the time period of 2008–2016.

Table 6.7 – Result of Narrative of Relation Status Evolution

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Peace		敦睦	和平	和平	和平	和平	友好	友好	友好 敦睦	敦睦
Conflict	獨立								獨立	獨立
Year	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Peace	敦睦	和平 敦睦	友好			友好	協調	友好	協調	友好 協調
Conflict	獨立	獨立	獨立	獨立	獨立	獨立				

This coexistence of peace and conflict vocabulary suggests that Taiwan’s diplomatic strategy during this period was marked by both reassurance and caution. It reflects a dual imperative, which is to assert peaceful intentions while simultaneously acknowledging rising regional tensions particularly related to its contested sovereignty. The inclusion of conflict terms during these years may also reflect the pressures of growing cross-strait tensions and regional disputes, necessitating a more complex diplomatic vocabulary.

6.3 Content Evolution of Public Diplomacy

From 2012 to 2020, there has been a fixed chapter entitled Public Diplomacy. Table 6.8 presents the sentiment of the description in public diplomacy, which is more toward peace, coordination, and cooperation. This trend reflects a deliberate shift in tone and priorities rather than merely rhetorical rebranding. By emphasizing “coordination,” the Ministry of Foreign Affairs articulates a diplomacy that seeks legitimacy through cooperation rather than confrontation, and through people-to-people engagement rather than formal recognition.

Table 6.8 – DocuSky Result of Public Diplomacy Narrative

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
統一	和平 協調 統一 復興	協調	協調	協調
2017	2018	2019	2020	
協調	協調	協調	協調	

Table 6.9 displays the top section to be peace-related terms, 協調, coordination, and it is mainly the rhetoric in public diplomacy, whereas the conflict sentiments only appear in 2012 and 2013. The result of public diplomacy narrative evolution is similar to the result of the narrative of summary of relations with foreign states (as in previous paragraphs). From 2008 to 2016, there was more sentiment toward 統一 unification, and 復興 revival, which are categorized into the conflict spectrum. However, since 2014, there has been mainly and only the term 協調 coordination, in the rhetoric of public diplomacy. This shift from references to “復興 revival” and “統一 unification” to a persistent emphasis on coordination marks a rhetorical turn away from assertive nationalism toward pragmatic coexistence. It signals that Taiwan’s public diplomacy is evolving as part of a broader conflict resolution strategy that highlights soft power and relationship-building.

Table 6.9 – Result of Narrative Evolution

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Peace		和平、協調	協調	協調	協調
Conflict	統一	統一、復興			
Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Peace	協調	協調	協調	協調	
Conflict					

I applied content analysis in this sub-chapter and argued three main findings of public diplomacy evolution: (1) from informing people to strengthening people's support and involvement, (2) disseminating public diplomacy in the educational context, and (3) the New Southbound Policy.

6.3.1 From Informing People to Strengthening People's Support and Involvement

The first key finding concerns the rhetorical evolution of Taiwan's public diplomacy. This shift highlights a strategy that increasingly positions ordinary citizens as active participants in public diplomacy. Table 6.10, titled 'Rhetoric of Public Diplomacy from Informing to Involving,' illustrates this trajectory. When public diplomacy was first introduced as a core strategy in the 2012 diplomatic report, it was framed as a means of satisfying the people's right to know. By 2014, the emphasis had moved toward making people understand and gaining popular support. In the period from 2015 to 2020, the rhetoric was refined further, stressing the consolidation of both understanding and support as central objectives of public diplomacy.

Table 6.10 – Rhetoric of Public Diplomacy from Informing to Involving

2012–2013	滿足民眾對外交施政”知”的權利 Satisfy the people's right to know
2014	使民眾了解外交施政 爭取全民對外拓展關係的支持 Make people understand and to gain people's support
2015–2020	強化國人對我國外交事務的了解與支持 Strengthen people's understanding and support

This increasing emphasis on citizen involvement represents more than rhetorical expansion; it reflects a shift toward a participatory model of diplomacy. Public diplomacy becomes a site of identity production, where Taiwanese citizens are not just informed of policy but enlisted as representatives of the national image abroad. This suggests that Taiwan's citizens have become increasingly involved as the actors practicing public diplomacy, which is further investigated in semi-structured interviews with Taiwanese citizens abroad.

In addition, the involvement of Taiwan's people in the public diplomacy strategy has turned more active, and so has the adaptation of foreign affairs, regional topics, and

international issues, as shown in the conduct of public diplomacy. It is stated in these reports how Taiwan's public diplomacy strategy is resorted to dealing with foreign policy. The adaptation of the foreign affairs topics can be defined in three stages: 2012, 2013–2015, and 2016–2020 (as seen in Table 6.11). In 2012, it was stated that one of the public diplomacy strategies is to collect and analyze information on China's policy, and to update to react to foreign states' concerns about China. In 2013–2015, it was mentioned that public diplomacy strategy is to connect with significant foreign affairs such as 東海和平倡議 East China Sea peaceful initiative, 釣魚台 Senkaku Islands dispute and peaceful solution, 南海主權 South China Sea sovereignty, 經貿外交 economic and trade diplomacy, 青年國際接軌 Youth International Mobility. The term applied to describe the diplomatic policy at this stage is 活路外交 Flexible Diplomacy. In 2016–2020, there is a significant element of the New Southbound Policy highlighted to build stronger ties with Southeast Asian states at this stage. Beyond the New Southbound Policy, the public diplomacy strategy broadened its scope to include civil society dimensions, such as economics, trade, investment, driver's licenses exchanges, and youth mobility schemes. The diplomatic approach during this period was labeled 踏實外交 Steadfast Diplomacy.

Table 6.11 – Rhetoric of Public Diplomacy Strategy in Adaptation of the Foreign Affairs Topics

2012	適時將政府大陸政策、兩岸關係重要措施與作法及首長有關大陸政策之談話等資訊提供駐外館處參考，以利適時向駐在國各界說明
2013–2015	東海和平倡議 釣魚台 南海主權 經貿外交 青年國際接軌 活路外交
2016–2020	新南向政策 援外國際合作 友邦經貿投資商機 推動國際參與 國人免簽證待遇免試申換駕照 青年打工 踏實外交

These developments indicate that public diplomacy has become Taiwan's preferred mechanism for shaping international narratives through shared societal values and civic engagement. Especially under the New Southbound Policy, the state deliberately promotes soft channels of influence through education, cultural diplomacy, and digital outreach, which bypass official recognition barriers but reinforce Taiwan's de facto international presence.

Besides involving people in and connecting to foreign affairs topics, in each year from 2012 to 2020, there is a key emphasis on three goals: 數位化 digitalization, 連

接社群媒體 the use of social media, and 提升政策的網路能見度 the promotion of awareness of policy stance online. For example, the implementation of public diplomacy is to establish a website and social media, such as YouTube, and promote awareness online about the current foreign policy content. Information about the policy stance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was printed and sent to not only all levels of government authorities but also civil society, private and public universities, middle schools, as well as domestic or foreign libraries. This digital turn reveals Taiwan's pivot toward network-based diplomacy. The use of online platforms to engage with civil society and foreign audiences suggests a long-term strategy to cultivate soft legitimacy across borders, particularly where formal diplomatic ties are absent.

6.3.2 Disseminating Public Diplomacy in the Educational Context

The educational context was highlighted in three main practices of public diplomacy: Cultural Exchange: Taiwan Library 台灣書院, Youth Mobility Scheme 青年打工度假, Teen Diplomatic Envoys 外交小尖兵. This systematic dissemination reflects a strategic intent to embed Taiwan's international positioning within the everyday cultural and educational experiences of young people. Education becomes a key site for constructing legitimacy and for projecting Taiwan's soft power identity across borders.

Cultural Exchange: Taiwan Library 台灣書院

From 2012 to 2015, it stated that there was an establishment of the Taiwan Library in New York, Los Angeles, and Houston. In 2016–2020, the set-up of the Taiwan Library is to promote Taiwan's rich soft power and expand cultural diplomacy, together with civil society organizations of arts, to introduce in-depth Taiwan's particular culture, humanities, and arts.

These libraries function as long-term cultural outposts that present Taiwan's uniqueness in international contexts. Unlike formal diplomatic missions, which face constraints of recognition, Taiwan Libraries operate as symbols of cultural legitimacy and serve as soft tools for conflict de-escalation through familiarity and cultural literacy.

Youth Mobility Scheme 青年打工度假

The Youth Mobility Scheme entails bilateral agreements between Taiwan and other countries for young students working abroad for a fixed period to learn, to share, and to exchange cultural values. This program targets university students or recent graduates aged between 18 and 30 years old. The development of this scheme is clearly stated in the public diplomacy strategy from initiation to expansion. In 2013, an official website for this theme was established to assist the younger generation's expansion of international vision and to increase self-value and competence. In 2014, this scheme was expanded by a level-up administration, such as cross-sectoral collaboration from different ministries, to approach the Youth Mobility Scheme. From 2015 to 2020, each year in the annual report of public diplomacy about the Youth Mobility Scheme, there was a significant increase in the number of countries that signed the agreement of the Youth Mobility Scheme and the number of Taiwan's young people participating in this scheme.

The scheme signals a shift in diplomatic practice by positioning youth as cultural ambassadors. It reflects a longer-term strategy of identity diffusion through person-to-person engagement, especially in countries that do not formally recognize Taiwan. This complements Taiwan's broader conflict-avoidance strategy by replacing hard power visibility with grassroots legitimacy.

Teen Diplomatic Envoys 外交小尖兵

Teen Diplomatic Envoys is a program co-promoted between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, targeting high school students, with the aim of promoting high school students' cultural exchange experience. This program has been mentioned every year in the annual report since 2012. From 2012 to 2015, this was to promote young students' participation in diplomatic affairs. Since 2016, the aim has been to increase the domestic people's understanding of current diplomatic circumstances and to gain recognition and support, so the target is not only on domestic schools but also on civil societies. Another finding in this program is that it is connected to the New Southbound Policy. Since 2016, Teen Diplomatic Envoys have shifted the

target countries to Southeast Asian states (Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines, and even New Zealand and Australia) rather than the US and the UK, as in 2012–2015.

This geographic pivot reflects a deeper realignment in Taiwan's diplomatic priorities, which is to shift away toward a regional soft power strategy centered in Southeast Asia. Educational diplomacy becomes a channel not only for goodwill but for preemptive conflict reduction through mutual familiarity.

6.3.3 New Southbound Policy 新南向政策

In the Teen Diplomacy Envoys program, the New Southbound Policy has been in place since 2017. There has been a highlight of the New Southbound Policy in the educational context, as well as the conduct of the New Southbound Policy in public diplomacy in the general context. The New Southbound Policy is to focus on strengthening the bond between Taiwan and Southeast Asian states. Contextualizing New Southbound Policy to Public Diplomacy is creating opportunities for cooperation and collaboration in the agricultural industry, a university students exchange program, and a business network. For example, in 2017, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs worked together with an agriculture committee to visit Indonesia and the Philippines. It is to help establish collaboration in agriculture among agricultural universities, international organizations, and local agricultural economic production lines. The same activities were implemented in 2018, but in Vietnam and Malaysia, followed by 2019 in Thailand and India. In 2020, the visit to the southbound countries was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The New Southbound Policy stands out not just as a regional shift but as a diplomatic reframing. From security concerns about China to proactive engagement with neighbouring states, Taiwan aims to reinforce its position through soft cooperation. By anchoring public diplomacy in agricultural, educational, and cultural collaboration, Taiwan redefines regional influence in ways that lower geopolitical tensions while enhancing its de facto international presence.

6.4 Summary

This section used qualitative content analysis to present the data findings of Taiwan's diplomatic reports from 2000 to 2020, particularly in the content chapters of "Summary of Relations with Foreign States" and "Public Diplomacy". As a result, the naming and structure of the chapters in the report's content had evolved over twenty years and revealed the gradual shaping of Taiwan's narrative of foreign relations. Moreover, positioning public diplomacy as a key diplomatic strategy could be seen in expanding the content and gradually structuring the report into themes of educational and cultural contexts. Taiwan's public diplomacy strategy could be seen in increasingly involving Taiwan's people and the New Southbound Policy was the item for the change in both contents of "Summary of Relations with Foreign States" and "Public Diplomacy." To sum up, Taiwan's movements of identity formation, sovereignization, and democratization could be seen in the findings of policy documents for the change of narrative on relations with foreign states and for the increasingly diversifying public diplomacy strategy. These shifts do not merely reflect changes in document formatting and elaboration but signal a deliberate strategic evolution toward conflict avoidance and identity-based legitimacy through people-centered diplomacy.