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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 7. Results - Semi-structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted from December 2022 to June 2023, involving eighteen Taiwanese citizens expatriating to China, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. Although respondents received the suggested interview questions in the consent form (see Appendix I), the detailed interview questions were further elaborated as shown in Appendix II. While the interviews offer insights into how Taiwanese expatriates perceive and engage with public diplomacy as well as security, this chapter does not assume a direct correspondence between individual perceptions and the Taiwanese government's strategic intent or diplomatic success. Personal feelings of security reflect how state narratives are interpreted and received in people's everyday lives. These narratives are filtered through respondents' professional and cultural environments and cannot be treated as direct measures of diplomatic effectiveness. Instead, this chapter uses respondents' perspectives as an interpretive entry point into how identity-based security and public diplomacy are internalized at the individual level and reflected within broader civil society. The following sections display the results of the analysis by explaining firstly the coding process, secondly the linkages of the codes in response to the interview questions, and eventually the analysis of findings.

7.1 Coding Process

The coding process was aligned with the data operationalization process in three stages: first, the pre-set codes of the three historical conflictual events and the key concepts to be explored; second, the second stage codes of the level of analysis used by the respondent and words respondents used to relate to the pre-set codes of key concepts; at last, the subcodes of social issues and topics evidenced by the respondents to relate to the key concepts. The overview of the coding process is visualized in Table 7.1. The following section elaborates on these three stages of the coding process.

Table 7.1 – Coding Process

一級主編碼 Pre-set codes	南海, ECFA, COVID-19, 衝突, 和平, 外交 South China Sea, ECFA, COVID-19, Conflict, Peace, Diplomacy
二級主編碼 Second stage codes	關注國內, 關注區域/全球, 威脅, 危機, 安全 domestic view, regional/world view, threat, crisis, security
次編碼 Sub codes	人權議題, 透明原則, 自由原則, 信任感, 安全感, 生計權 issues of human right, principles of transparency, principles of freedom, feelings of trust, feelings of safety, right to life building

First, the pre-set codes were the three events: the South China Sea 南海, ECFA, COVID-19, as well as the three key concepts: conflict 衝突, peace 和平, and diplomacy 外交. These are the first stage codes and throughout the second round of the coding process, I generated the second stage codes based on the level of analysis found in respondents' opinions of the conflictual events as well as the words or phrases respondents used to relate their observations to the concepts of conflict, peace, and diplomacy.

Second, in the second round of the coding process, the codes generated were respondents' levels of analysis: domestic view 關注國內, regional/world view 關注區域/全球, as well as the words or phrases respondents used to further describe the key concepts: threat 威脅, crisis 危機, safety or security 安全. Respondent's opinions shared to describe the conflictual events could be found in two different levels of analyses: domestic and regional or world view. The domestic view was the focus of the conflict's impact on Taiwan's domestic society or the conflict's impact on the country where respondents expatriated. The regional/world view was the focus of the impact on Taiwan's foreign relations with the country where respondents expatriated to or Taiwan's position in East Asia. Respondents' observations and words used to relate their experiences to the key concepts were commonly found in three codes: threat 威脅, crisis 危機, safety or security 安全. The conflict was further interpreted as a crisis, perceived as a threat, and wrecked the safety and sense of security. Under the second stage code, subcodes were found concerning the second stage codes in the details of respondents' memories, observations, views, and opinions.

At last, the sub-codes were issues of human rights 人權議題, principles of transparency 透明原則, principles of freedom 自由原則, feelings of trust 信任感, feelings of safety 安全感, right to life building 生計權.

7.2 Linkages of the Codes: Respondents' Answers to the Interview Questions

Although respondents used different terms to describe such conflict, their accounts converged on three dimensions: peace framed as vulnerability to security, economic dependence on China perceived as a crisis, and cultural or lifestyle changes regarded as a threat. These concerns emerged across multiple levels of analysis, from domestic to regional and world views. From these different levels of analysis, there are linkages of how identity becomes significant in the sense of security. The elements of these linkages are reflected in the sub-codes, which illustrate how identity both shapes and enhances the sense of security. The following paragraphs explain the linkages among the pre-set codes, second-stage codes, and subcodes in each question set given to the respondents. The detailed question set is divided into three themes: the concept of security, approaches to enhance the sense of security, and public diplomatic policy (see Appendix II).

7.2.1 The Concept of Security is Related to Identity

The first question set investigates, from a civil society perspective, the concept of security related to identity. When respondents described the conflictual event they chose, they used words such as threat, crisis, rivalry, competition, stagnation, and danger to define the conflict. Even though there has been no war, respondents still consider the events to be a conflict. Rather, respondents' views of these conflictual events revolve around identity expression. The concept of security derives from the experience where they have felt a threat, a crisis, or a danger to their identity. Some also experience the need to compete against China's prevalent identity and to constantly emphasize their identity as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. In these experiences, it is the violation of respondents' right to life-building that makes respondents define the events as a conflict. The following section elaborates on the concept of security in each conflictual event.

First, the South China Sea issue is not seen as a territorial conflict because respondents questioned Taiwan's motivation to claim the territory. This motivation is not legitimate to enhance Taiwan's security. However, it is still a conflict for Taiwan. Respondents described this event as an identity conflict for Taiwan. Herein, respondents' views can be found in two different perspectives: domestic view and regional or world view. From a domestic view, it is an identity conflict because it is not clear and convincing for whom the territory should be claimed. Respondent AX2 stated, "The KMT thinks that the South China Sea is their territory, but I do not think that the South China Sea is Taiwan's territory (Interview, February 2023)." It caused a conflict within Taiwan that those claiming the sea territory in the South China Sea are not doing it for Taiwan's sake; instead, it is for the political party, which does not respect the expression of identity as Taiwanese. If it is for Taiwan's sake, under what law or policy should Taiwan act accordingly? From a regional or world view, it is also an identity conflict because it is uncertain if Taiwan's claim is in conflict of interest with China and Southeast Asia. Respondent AX1 stated,

"I read that the South China Sea is stated in the Constitution of the Republic of China, but I doubt if this constitution really has its legitimate ruling in Taiwan. If Taiwan puts itself as the Republic of China, then it is an identity competition against the People's Republic of China. This competition caused security concerns for Southeast Asian states. If Taiwan states its identity to be Taiwan, I think it provides a peaceful pathway in this geographic region (Interview, February 2023)."

Therefore, the South China Sea is not a mere territorial conflict among the claimant countries. Rather, it is an identity conflict that derives from within domestic society and its threat perception evaluated by foreign states.

Second, the ECFA is seen as an economic conflict, but while respondents provided more views on claiming economic security, it revolved around identity issues. To be more specific, the ECFA is not seen as opening up space for Taiwan's participation in the regional economy; rather, it is seen as Taiwan's sacrificing its domestic market for China's regional economic dominance. Respondents used more terms to describe this conflict, such as crisis, endangerment, loss, and sacrifice. Herein, respondents' views can be found in two different perspectives: a domestic view and a regional or world

view. From a domestic view, this sacrifice endangers Taiwan's domestic market and the Taiwanese people's right to life-building. Respondent BC3 mentioned,

“In those years when more and more trade agreements were signed between China and Taiwan, my father lost his business because those Chinese companies were on a larger scale, which quickly replaced lots of Taiwan's local businesses. Sadly, these large-scale Chinese companies offered more job opportunities to Chinese people than to Taiwanese people. I do not believe that the ECFA is protecting Taiwan. Rather, it is a crisis for the Taiwanese people. Where is our right to build a life? (Interview, February 2023)”

Moreover, while respondents described the event of ECFA, they all mentioned the Sunflower Movement. “I joined the Sunflower Movement. That was the only way to voice our concerns. It is not just a student movement. It is an identity expression as a whole nation and a protest to the government for their non-transparent process of passing this act in the Legislative Yuan⁹. If the government can do this without respecting its people, how can we trust this government to protect us? (Respondent BE3, Interview, February 2023)” The threat of China is often intertwined with the ruling party at that time (either the KMT or the DPP). During the ECFA and Sunflower Movement, it was the KMT's willingness to open up more employment opportunities for Chinese business and exchange students. Either the new business opportunities or the educational exchange could be a threat to Taiwan's identity and its internal business. From a regional or world view, the ECFA is perceived as an identity crisis because it reduces Taiwan to a sub-market of China, undermining its role as an independent market actor in East Asia and beyond. Respondent BE3 further stated that, “Southeast Asian states would rather appreciate Taiwan directly negotiating trade agreements on equal terms with the Southeast Asian market rather than through China because this again could cloud over Taiwan's position in East Asia (Interview, February 2023).”

Hence, the ECFA is an economic conflict, but can also be contextualized as an identity conflict. Due to the strong relation to the identity of the Taiwanese, the ECFA conflict stems from within domestic society and would endanger Taiwan's security position in East Asia.

⁹ The Legislative Yuan is the supreme legislative organization of Taiwan.

At last, the COVID-19 pandemic is perceived as a conflict arising from discrepancies in shared norms. Respondents described in detail how Taiwan, China, and Southeast Asian states controlled and managed the coronavirus, noting limited opportunities to work in China or with the Chinese in various Southeast Asian states. The lack of human rights protections, freedom, and transparency in China's border control measures raises concerns about trust and safety. For respondents, these values, such as human rights, freedom, and transparent governance, are seen as intrinsic to Taiwan's identity and, therefore, closely tied to its security. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan embodied these principles, which strengthen its security position in East Asia. Respondent CE4 provided details of the border control experienced while traveling between Taiwan and China, as well as Taiwan and Singapore:

“I still needed to work at that time, but all the rules and regulations in China made me feel scared. There were a lot of uncertainties about what was next and my situation. It caused me lots of inconvenience, so I turned to Singapore. Singapore gave me clear guidelines so I could plan my work accordingly. When I traveled back to Taiwan, there were not only clear guidelines but daily news reports of the coronavirus situation, so I felt safe. (Interview, February 2023).”

From a domestic view, Taiwan has successfully contained the COVID-19 outbreak by respecting the needs of those who still had to travel for work and by issuing clear guidelines and government regulations. This reinforces Taiwan's identity within domestic society and advances Taiwan's interaction with foreign states. From a regional and world view, Taiwan's identity as a country that upholds human rights and public trust gives respondents a sense of safety and creates opportunities to expand business ties with Southeast Asia. Respondent CX4 stated,

“It was so much noticed in Malaysia that Taiwan is a safe and healthy country. During COVID-19, lots of people lost their jobs, the economy was in recession, and countries closed down. However, Taiwan was not closed down. I was able to travel between Taiwan and Malaysia, where no one would see me as a danger. Rather, I made up lots of business opportunities because I am a Taiwanese (Interview, March 2023).”

In short, respondents' experiences during the pandemic illustrate how Taiwan's handling of COVID-19 reinforced its identity and, in turn, strengthened both their sense of security and Taiwan's regional standing.

7.2.2 Approaches to Enhance the Sense of Security

The second question set explores respondents' approaches to solving the conflict. It is apparent that respondents, in experiencing these conflictual events, actively seek to enhance their sense of security, which is to establish a clear identity as Taiwanese. Promoting the identity of the Taiwanese clarifies the complexity of these conflictual events and provides opportunities for Taiwan to establish peaceful relations with foreign states. The following section elaborates on these approaches raised by respondents.

First, the South China Sea provides Taiwan with an opportunity to clarify its role in East Asia. Before asserting territorial claims, however, Taiwan must first justify its position to its own domestic audience. From a domestic view, Respondent AX2 pointed out,

“The solution is not to send more military sources to Pratas Islands. Not to mention that many Taiwanese people do not know where Pratas Islands are. It is first to educate our people not only in geographic knowledge but most importantly the legitimacy of claiming the territory (Interview, February 2023).”

From a regional and world view, Respondent CX4 mentioned, “I do not feel awkward to say that I am Taiwanese when the Philippine colleague asked for my opinion about the South China Sea. I said to him that I am a Taiwanese, not a Chinese (Interview, February 2023).” For CX4, this experience reduced the likelihood of conflict and demonstrated how Taiwan's broader identity, which is associated with respect for human rights during COVID-19, could be projected outward to ease regional tensions.

Second, the signing of the ECFA marks a turning point in Taiwan's efforts to articulate a distinct Taiwanese identity. Yet, this process also generates internal conflict, as debates over identity become deeply tied to Taiwan's economic and social policies. From a domestic view, Respondent BE1 shared the difficulties of doing tourism

business in those years when Taiwan accommodated a vast amount of Chinese tourists.

“The difficulty was that only those who accepted Chinese tourists were able to survive, but the problem is that it caused the tourism supply chain to develop only for Chinese tourists. I learned from my customers, those from Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia, that they do not want to travel to Taiwan because of the decreasing quality of Taiwan’s tourism business. However, thanks to the students protesting in the Sunflower Movement, Taiwan’s image as a true, friendly Taiwanese identity is clear on social media. Our government also changed in 2016 and took a different stance (Respondent BE1, Interview, December 2022).”

If the identity of the Taiwanese is established clearly first in domestic society, it facilitates Taiwanese citizens in Southeast Asia to build up peaceful relations. From the regional and world view, Respondent BC3 stated,

“Japanese companies have a good reputation in Vietnam, and this reputation takes a long time to establish. It is so powerful that Vietnamese companies would sign trade agreements with Japan without too much consideration. I see Taiwan is also now having this reputation. Ten years ago, my manager said how difficult it was, and now, in my generation, it is easier. We need a trustworthy image of good Taiwanese people (Interview, February 2023).”

In the respondents’ experiences, a good reputation is so powerful that only an image of friendliness developed over a long time can validate the element of trustworthiness in identity components.

At last, the COVID-19 pandemic is believed to be a successful case for Taiwan, and a clear identity projection would alleviate conflict and achieve peace. In the respondents’ experiences, the comparison of the border control policy in Taiwan and in the countries they traveled to work provides a chance to evaluate the security in their conditions. Most respondents mentioned Taiwan’s successful prevention of the pandemic outbreak was prevalent in Southeast Asia, and this has become a significant element representing the identity of Taiwan. Taiwan didn’t implement the measurement of city lockdown and continued tracking and openly publishing the number of people who tested positive. From a domestic view, there was a transparent policy

communicated by the government to the people, which assured respondents' feelings of safety. From a regional and world view, this successful containment established Taiwan's identity as a trustworthy country. Respondent CE6 stated,

“Singapore at that time also controlled the coronavirus outbreak well, but I must say that I felt the difference. During the COVID-19 crisis, I felt that I, as a Taiwanese, was vivid proof of Taiwan as a trustworthy partner. Thanks to the identity image, I networked with more local people and opened up more opportunities for future collaboration (Interview, June 2023).”

Respondent CE2 pointed out that “Taiwan is a democratic country. This is what Thai people told me about the reason why they feel friendly with Taiwan (Interview, January 2023).” The image of Taiwan's identity is linked to phrases such as – transparent policy, a democratic country that respects human rights and freedom, and the right to life-building – and these became elements in Taiwan's identity components. In respondents' experiences, projecting a Taiwanese identity created greater opportunities to collaborate with local communities in their host countries.

7.2.3 Public Diplomatic Policy

The last question set aims to evaluate, in the process of these approaches, enhancing the sense of security, whether respondents feel empowered by Taiwan's public diplomacy in their interaction and network with Southeast Asians. While none of the respondents consider themselves to represent Taiwan's government in conducting public diplomacy in Southeast Asia, most respondents acknowledge the significance of Taiwan's public diplomacy in the event of the COVID-19 pandemic. From a domestic view, it is the government's open communication on TV and social media with the people that builds up the identity of trustworthiness. From a regional and world view, this identity of trustworthiness has been visible everywhere in the local news and social media in the countries where respondents are expatriated. Respondent CE5 noted the importance of conveying a clear Taiwan image on social media in Vietnam,

“The mask diplomacy was invented during COVID-19 when Taiwan donated the medical facial masks to other countries. My Vietnamese colleagues shared this news with me on social media channel and asked me if I could help them get the

facial masks made in Taiwan because the term – made in Taiwan – stands for good quality (Interview, March 2023).”

Respondent BC3 shared the same opinion,

“Japan has a good reputation, and it is strong evidence for Taiwan that we need to spend some time developing a good reputation with other countries and societies from different cultural backgrounds. Taiwan’s reputation was at its most glorious moment during the COVID-19 crisis. When people still need to work to keep their life and safety, my colleagues in Vietnam believed that working with Taiwan is safe and gives them a chance to life-building (Interview, February 2023).”

Thus, in the respondents’ observations and experiences, promoting the identity of Taiwanese is an important element in their interactions with the locals. As the identity of the Taiwanese has been enriched with elements such as trustworthiness, respect for human rights, democracy, and freedom, these elements constructed a sense of security for the respondents and the locals and, most importantly, enabled them to continue working for their life-building during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Beyond the case of COVID-19, several respondents also reflected on public diplomacy during the ECFA period, particularly the societal response that culminated in the 2014 Sunflower Movement. Participants in the movement used various social media platforms to promote awareness of Taiwan’s identity, offering a notable example of how civil society actors became the main agents of public diplomacy. From a domestic view, the movement voiced society’s demand for greater control over Taiwan’s market. From a regional and world view, it projected the message that the Taiwanese are distinct from the Chinese. As Respondent BC3 observed,

“Actually, I read that there was a lot of research about how Taiwan’s students at that time strategically shared this on Facebook and Instagram. The information on social media is much more powerful than on traditional news channels. The reason is that you need to know to whom you are talking about your story. There are many more audiences on social media (Interview, February 2023).”

Some respondents also highlighted the challenges posed by identity competition between Taiwan and China, noting that such rivalries complicate Taiwan’s public

diplomacy efforts. They emphasized the importance of presenting a clear expression of Taiwanese identity abroad. As Respondent BE3 stated,

“Even though we Taiwanese know that we are Taiwanese, it is not clear to the locals. We live too much in our own world that we think others should just know that. However, this identity expression really was not clear when I first came here. It took me several years to tell the locals that Taiwan is not part of China. Taiwan is different. Taiwan is a democracy (Interview, February 2023).”

These reflections illustrate how, at the societal level, Taiwan’s public diplomacy relies on its citizens to advance identity awareness and project a distinct Taiwanese image in Southeast Asia.

In sum, the interview data provides a civil societal perspective on security and conflict, highlighting the central role of identity. Respondents emphasized that a clear expression of Taiwanese identity helps to resolve conflicts rooted in ambiguity and, crucially, prevents further tensions arising from identity competition with China. This identity expression was central to their interactions with local communities in Southeast Asia, underscoring the consistency with the policy document analysis that Taiwanese citizens act as key agents of public diplomacy. The documents also show that, after 2016, Taiwan redirected its public diplomacy toward Southeast Asia through initiatives in education and youth engagement, a shift echoed by respondents during and after the interviews. From these findings, three insights emerge. First, it is the transparency of the government policy that builds up the people’s trust and empowers the people in a diplomatic context. Second, the tool for engaging in a diplomatic context is social media. The strategic use of social media has been raised by many respondents as its significance in communication with the locals in Southeast Asia. At last, the education system should be noted as the greatest opportunity for cross-cultural understanding and communication. Respondents think it is easier to blend in and interact with the locals by integrating into the local society so as to have communication settings. The following section elaborates on these findings.

7.3 Analysis of Findings

7.3.1 Transparency of Policy

At the time of the interviews, Taiwanese expatriates in Southeast Asian were experiencing the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Many emphasized the importance of policy transparency, particularly regarding border control and public health measures. For respondents, clear and transparent policies were closely tied to fundamental values such as the right to life, freedom of movement, and equality. Border and health measures were understood not only as safeguards for national security but also as instruments shaping Taiwan's foreign relations. For example, Respondent CE6 was relocated to Thailand in November 2019 and experienced three times border control until 2021 when traveling back and forth between Thailand and Taiwan:

“For business travel, there was clear instruction [for where to stay during quarantine] by what passport you hold and by what company you worked for. It was a lot, thanks to the clarity of the policy in Thailand and the company regulations that saved me trouble. The quarantine policy in Taiwan was complicated, but the transparency made us feel safe. Moreover, the transparency of the quarantine policy made us trust Thailand, as well as saved me trouble when entering Thailand.” (Interview, June 2023)

For Taiwanese expatriates, transparency in both local regulations and Taiwan's diplomatic policies enabled them to sustain their professional activities abroad. Just as importantly, it fostered trust from host governments, which in turn facilitated their work and mobility. These reflections should not be taken as direct evidence of policy effectiveness but rather as socially situated perceptions that illuminate how transparency contributes to Taiwan's diplomatic image in practice.

7.3.2 Social Media is Significant in Building a Friendly Image

There has been prevalent content of Chinese information or news on social media platforms in Southeast Asian countries. As social media is quite an effective platform in Southeast Asian countries due to the number of users and the accessibility to the local society, most respondents emphasized the significance of social media in

terms of building a friendly image, when China's image is quite powerful on social media platforms. However, some respondents claimed that the unfriendliness of China stems from the interactions with Chinese people. For example, one respondent claimed, "Most people would not ponder over the information received on social media" (Respondent BX2, Interview, February 2023). Therefore, the image promoted on social media is generally taken as it is, but the perception of these images is generated in actual interactions with the people. For example, Respondent BE3 stated the experience:

"I would not actively think badly of Chinese people because we worked a lot with Chinese customers and Chinese businesspeople. It was generally on social media that I saw some Chinese people asserting their Chinese nationality and often asking for attention to their identity. This attitude and behavior made me so against China, this country, and the people strongly acting this assertion." (Interview, February 2023)

China's public diplomacy may deliver the image on social media, but the effect of establishing an image is hard to convince the Taiwanese of China's friendliness. Although the economic benefits encouraged some Taiwanese to work closely with Chinese people, those who stayed in China working claimed that they would not remain there in the long term because of the strict and authoritarian social system. Respondent CE5 demonstrated this argument by the relocation experience to Vietnam:

"I used to travel back and forth between Taiwan and China. Although people said there seemed to be more economic opportunities in China, I was not inclined to stay there. Despite China's government sparing no effort in building the image of peace and friendliness, I didn't sense this at the societal level. Mainly, there is no transparency and trust that put me off from staying in China to work for a longer time. However, after I moved to Vietnam, I had faith in working here and was not afraid of China's image on Vietnamese social media platforms. Still, as China has been so prevalent on social media, we Taiwanese should not ignore the power of social media." (Interview, March 2023)

While respondents consistently described social media as influential in shaping

Taiwan's public image, these reflections remain subjective and anecdotal. The analysis does not assess actual public opinion or digital sentiment trends, which future research could address using survey methods or social media analytics.

7.3.3 The Educational System Influences the Public's Discussion on Policy

The educational system was noted by the majority of the respondents as a critical momentum for cultivating people to interact with foreign nations. It is not just the foreign language but also the foreign culture and the worldview, which should all be systematized in Taiwan's education. Some respondents argued that in their schooling in Taiwan, the educational approach did not nourish the cultural understanding of foreign languages, but only trained students to choose the only correct answer. Such an educational system would not empower Taiwanese people's interactions with foreign nations. For example, Respondent BX2 shared the view in detail:

“It was the educational style in the elementary school, middle school, and high school that created the conflict with China and within Taiwan, which fostered a yes or no way of accepting foreign culture rather than an inclusive approach to interacting with foreign culture. The identity is important, but the learning of other cultures is also important because that is also a process of forming the identity.”
(Interview, February 2023)

Some respondents shared their observations that some locals experienced an identity conflict with the Taiwanese, but the clearer image of the Taiwanese, which represents trustworthiness, is what bonded the respondents and the locals. The locals may also need to see the Taiwanese image through their educational systems, but the key is whether the Taiwanese have originally been open to learning other cultures.

7.4 Summary

This chapter presents the findings of semi-structured interviews conducted as supplementary data for the results of policy document analysis. The semi-structured interview results reveal how identity is related to security and how Taiwanese people have been involved in practicing public diplomacy. The results of the findings can be inferred from the coding process, and the linkages among the codes explain how

identity components were generated and involved in practicing public diplomacy to serve the purpose of managing the sense of security. In addition, the analysis of the findings discloses three themes: the transparency of policy, the strategic use of social media, and the significance of implementing public diplomacy in an educational context. These three themes not only aligned with the findings in policy document analysis but also supplied the civil societal levels of understanding the relations between identity and security as well as public diplomacy and conflict resolution.

The results of the findings are inferred from the coding process, in which the pre-set codes are the conflictual events – the South China Sea, the ECFA, and COVID-19 – derived from *Chapter 2* to prompt respondents' experiences and opinions on three main concepts – conflict, peace, and diplomacy. The linkage between identity and security is justified by how Taiwan's formation of identity projects to Southeast Asia. This is found in respondents' answers and therefore put as the second stage codes – domestic view, regional/world view. Due to the threat perceived domestically or crisis experienced in foreign states, the awareness of Taiwan's security was raised in respondents' experiences when identity expression is the crux in the interaction and communication setting. Threat, crisis, and security are thus placed in the second stage codes that can be found in either the domestic view or regional/world view. Lastly, in further probing into how identity expression has distilled in the process of enhancing the sense of security in order to mediate the perceived threat and to manage the crisis, I placed them into subcodes – issues of human rights, principles of transparency, principles of freedom, feelings of trust, feelings of safety, right to life building. As found in respondents' experiences, Taiwan's identity components entail the image that Taiwan is a country that respects human rights, which can be found in the government's transparent policy that protects people's freedom. These identity components provide people with the feelings of trust and safety that are derived from when people have the right to continue working to build their lives during conflict and crisis.

The three themes from the analysis of the findings – the transparency of the government policy, the strategic use of social media, and the educational context – correspond to the results of the policy document analysis that the public diplomatic policy shifted its target to Southeast Asia, and the public diplomatic strategy has been

putting Taiwan's citizens as the main actors. First, the transparency of policy could be spotted in respondents' experiences of COVID-19 border control and public health measures in Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries. Although border control restricts the freedom of movement, the transparency of policy enhances the feelings of trust and safety. Second, due to social media's reachability to the local society in these Southeast Asian states, Taiwanese people's and Southeast Asian people's feelings of trust and safety could be increased if Taiwan established a friendly image on social media. At last, the significant momentum of cultivating people to interact with foreign nations lies in the educational system, both in Taiwan and Southeast Asian states. The clearer image of Taiwanese representing trustworthiness bonded the respondents and the locals to avoid identity conflict as being Chinese or Taiwanese. However, Taiwan's identity conflict could be seen not merely in its relations with foreign states but also in domestic society, which forms in the educational system. Taiwan's educational system should empower Taiwanese people's interactions with foreign nations by nourishing the understanding of foreign cultures through learning foreign languages. By doing so, it attributes the trustworthiness of the identity of Taiwan and enhances the image of Taiwan as a contributor to peace.