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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 9. Conclusions**

This dissertation aimed to answer the central research question: Is public diplomacy a factor that can contribute to solving the conflict between China and Taiwan regarding the status of Taiwan? By examining Taiwan's case from 2000 to 2020, it offers an original contribution to the understanding of identity-based conflict resolution through the strategic deployment of public diplomacy. The findings demonstrate Taiwan's domestic transformations – most notably democratization, identity formation, and sovereignization – have shaped a distinctive approach to public diplomacy. These developments enabled Taiwan to utilize public diplomacy not only as a tool of external communication but also as a means of redefining its geopolitical security status and mitigating identity-based tensions in the region. Through both methodologies of document analysis and semi-structured interviews, this dissertation illustrates how evolving state-society relations in Taiwan have influenced the design and practice of public diplomacy. The findings provide a nuanced perspective on the dynamic relationship between identity and security in East Asia.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section reflects on the key insights generated from each chapter, emphasizing how they connect with broader theoretical implications. The second section considers methodological reflections and research limitations. The final section identifies directions for future research, highlighting how the case of Taiwan opens new avenues for studying the intersections of identity, security, and conflict resolution.

### **9.1 Reflection on Key Themes and Broader Theoretical Implications**

By synthesizing the case study with broader theoretical perspectives, the dissertation advances two main contributions. First, it deepens understanding of the theoretical relationship between identity and security in international relations by showing how identity contestation can be managed not only through hard power but also through public diplomacy strategies. Second, it highlights the role of public diplomacy as a form of conflict mitigation, extending its relevance beyond image-building to include identity clarification and societal reassurance. In particular, the findings suggest that Taiwan has developed a distinctive model of civic-embedded

public diplomacy (CEPD). This model is characterized by state-led initiatives that are co-produced with civil society actors and designed to serve both domestic and international audiences. Domestically, CEPD reassures Taiwanese society of its distinct identity and democratic values; internationally, it persuades foreign audiences by projecting Taiwan as a responsible and rights-respecting actor in the region. Table 9.1 summarizes the key themes and illustrates their connections to broader theoretical contributions. The following sections elaborate on these themes, linking empirical findings from Taiwan to wider debates in international relations and security studies.

Table 9.1 – Summary of Key Themes, Linkages, and Theoretical Contributions.

<b>Key Themes</b>	<b>Linkages</b>	<b>Theoretical Contribution</b>	<b>This Dissertation's Findings</b>
Identity and Security	Identity influences perceptions of security so identity-based conflicts require ideational approaches	It expands security studies by recognizing identity as a factor influencing regional stability; in addition, it shifts the focus from traditional security to ideational security.	Taiwan's public diplomacy fosters the citizens' perception of security by promoting a clear national identity emphasizing democracy, human rights, and freedom.
Public Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution	Public diplomacy is a tool for addressing identity-based conflicts so involving the civil society should be examined for their role in diplomatic engagement	It demonstrates how public diplomacy can serve as a mechanism for conflict resolution, complementing state government's practices	Taiwan's people-centric public diplomacy, projecting through social media and engaging with Southeast Asian in educational context, enhances reputational security and thus regional security.

### 9.1.1 The Theoretical Relationship between Identity and Security

A key theme emerging from this research is that identity-based conflict, exemplified by Taiwan's position relative to China, demands alternative approaches to conflict resolution beyond traditional military or economic measures. As shown in *Chapter 2*, East Asia's security environment during the early 21st century highlighted the need for strategies aimed at mediating threat perceptions. Building on this, *Chapter*

3 situates Taiwan's public diplomacy within the theoretical framework of conflict resolution, emphasizing its role in justifying the state's security position in the region. The findings of this dissertation highlight that Taiwan's efforts in public diplomacy are shifting the focus to people-to-people exchanges. These efforts mitigate identity tensions by fostering trust among people from different cultural backgrounds, ultimately enhancing Taiwan's security status. Moreover, Taiwanese citizens, in the process of presenting their identity to Southeast Asians, foster a collective understanding of security. The sense of security is not only generated within Taiwanese people but also interconnected between Taiwanese and Southeast Asians when Taiwan projects a clear identity with elements of respect for human rights, democracy, and freedom. These identity linkages are further reinforced through CEPD, in which citizens themselves become active in addressing security narratives across borders. This expands the theoretical discourse on conflict resolution by presenting how ideational sources that comprise a clear identity and people-centric strategies contribute to regional stability. This complements existing security frameworks focusing on material capabilities in the military and economy by incorporating perceptions of security at both the state government and civil society levels.

### **9.1.2 The Theoretical Relationship between Public Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution**

Taiwan's approach to public diplomacy enriches the conceptual evolution of public diplomacy by positioning it not just as a tool for statecraft but as a mechanism for civil society's demand for identity expression. As explored in *Chapter 4*, Taiwan's inviting civil society's participation contrasts with China's central government approach. This difference highlights how domestic political systems shape public diplomacy practices and emphasizes the relations between Taiwan's development of democratization and public diplomacy. This dissertation's findings demonstrate Taiwan's democratized approach by empowering citizens as the main actors in conducting public diplomacy. Moreover, Taiwan's evolving state-society relations, thanks to the role of social media and digital communication technology, have become an important element in promoting a people-centric public diplomacy. Social media platforms create spaces for Taiwan to connect with Southeast Asians. In addition, language plays a crucial role in enabling communication between Taiwan and Southeast

Asia. With the development of social media and digital technology, Taiwan enhances its geopolitical security status by strengthening its reputation, which is not only an awareness of the government but also a sense of safety and confidence for Taiwanese citizens. Taiwan's model enriches the interdisciplinary discussion of public diplomacy by linking insights from political science to communication studies and illustrating public diplomacy strategies from international, governmental, and individual security concerns. This can be described as CEPD: it shows that public diplomacy in contested-status settings is not only top-down statecraft but also an inclusive practice, enacted by citizens, NGOs, and digital networks. CEPD broadens the notion of conflict resolution. Rather than securing immediate settlement, it manages identity-based tensions by reinforcing legitimacy, building reputational security, and creating conditions that may gradually enable conflict transformation.

### **9.1.3 Broader Theoretical Implications**

By situating these themes within broader theoretical implications, this dissertation highlights the importance of integrating cultural and ideational factors into security studies. The research findings expand traditional security frameworks that emphasize material capabilities by recognizing identity as both a source of conflict and a pathway to resolution. As this dissertation argues, conflict is not fixed, but contingent, dynamic, and managed through ideational processes. The key to the changes lies in mobilizing and developing identity components through a people-centric approach. Digital media further facilitates these processes by cultivating trust across borders and advancing a collective understanding of security. Building on Friedberg's argument for East Asia's potential rivalry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (1993) and Rawnsley's conceptualization of China's and Taiwan's soft power (2012), this dissertation offers original contributions to Taiwan's studies by bridging security studies' emphasis on rivalry with diplomacy studies' attention to soft power, through CEPD as a mediating practice. Within security studies, Taiwan's public diplomacy exemplifies how ideational resources, such as cultural narratives and people-to-people exchanges, can mitigate security risks in a contested geopolitical landscape. In terms of diplomacy studies, Taiwan's democratized approach to public diplomacy—integrating civil society actors and leveraging digital communication platforms—highlights the evolving role of soft power strategies in global politics. Conceptualized as CEPD, Taiwan's approach

demonstrates how public diplomacy functions simultaneously as a form of identity diplomacy, a tool of strategic repositioning, and a mechanism of conflict management, broadening both diplomacy studies and security studies. These insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of diplomacy as a dynamic process rather than a state-centric model. This reframing invites scholars to treat diplomacy not only as instrumental communication but as a site of security-making.

## **9.2 Reflection on Methodology and Limitations**

The methodology employed in this dissertation combines policy document analysis and semi-structured interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of Taiwan's public diplomacy practices. The integration of these methodologies allowed for an in-depth analysis of both official narratives and lived experiences, yielding insights into the dynamics of identity and security. First, the document analysis provided a historical and policy-oriented perspective, tracing the evolution of Taiwan's public diplomacy strategies over two decades. Second, the semi-structured interviews complemented this by capturing diverse viewpoints from the civil society perspectives, offering nuanced understandings of public diplomacy's practical applications and its linkage to security. This approach points out the interdisciplinary nature, enabling the research to address multi-layered questions that require both state-government and civil society levels of analysis.

While this dissertation offers insights, it is essential to recognize the limitations. First, relying only on the annual reports of diplomatic policy not only generates a biased view but also restricts the variety of other document types, such as publications from other ministries, non-governmental organizations, or media outlets that could have provided a more comprehensive view of official narratives of public diplomacy. This document analysis, nevertheless, aligns with the research objective to examine Taiwan's internal identity formation and its link to shaping its security position in East Asia. Second, although the restriction of document analysis is complemented by the semi-structured interviews, the diversity of interview participants was limited to only Taiwanese citizens in a few countries in Southeast Asia. Despite a narrow perspective of the civil society level in understanding of security and interpretations of diplomatic engagements, it corresponds to the research aim of exploring public diplomacy and its

relation to conflict resolution. A further limitation is the lack of systematic counter-analysis of alternative or dissenting narratives, whether within Taiwan's domestic discourse or in the reception of its diplomacy abroad. While glimpses of such perspectives emerge in the empirical material, they were not the central focus of this dissertation. This boundary reflects the dissertation's objective to prioritize Taiwan's own diplomatic narratives and civil society engagements, though future research could extend this analysis by examining contested receptions more directly.

Finally, the examination of language's role in public diplomacy reveals a gap between the data analyzed in this dissertation and its theoretical implications. While language is a critical factor in fostering effective communication, this dissertation instead focuses on the strategic use of social media. With the development and awareness of utilizing ICT, it facilitates a two-way model of communication that builds trust among different nations. This finding contributes to emerging scholarly discourses on digital diplomacy and the role of ICT in fostering reputation security.

By addressing the limitations of this research methodology, this dissertation provides a balanced evaluation of its contributions to existing scholarly discourse. Despite these challenges, they pave the way for future research to expand beyond the limitations. The next section elaborates on the potential for future research.

### **9.3 Suggestions for Future Research**

This dissertation has provided new insights into the intersection of identity, security, and public diplomacy in East Asia, using Taiwan's case as a focal point. While it has answered the overarching research question, it has also raised new questions and highlighted areas for further exploration. First, a key research orientation is the measurement of the effectiveness of Taiwan's public diplomacy strategies. This dissertation analyzed the content and evolution of public diplomacy initiatives but did not assess their measurable impact on regional or international perceptions of Taiwan's identity and security status. Future studies could adopt complementary quantitative methods, such as public opinion surveys or social media sentiment analysis, to evaluate the influence of specific programs like the New Southbound Policy on target audiences. Such approaches would not only broaden the methodological base but also allow for systematic counter-analysis of alternative narratives. Second, as addressed in the

research limitations, the role of language in public diplomacy emerged as a critical but underexplored theme in this dissertation. Investigating how Taiwan's domestic language policies, particularly those aimed at Southeast Asian immigrants and students, shape its international relations could provide valuable insights into the link between linguistic strategy and identity-building. Comparative studies examining similar efforts in other multilingual or culturally diverse states might enrich this line of inquiry. Third, future research could expand the geographic and temporal scope of analysis. This dissertation concentrated on Taiwan's strategies from 2000 to 2020 and its relations with Southeast Asia; subsequent studies might examine Taiwan's engagement with other regions or during earlier or more recent periods. Such studies could test the generalizability of this dissertation's findings and uncover additional dimensions of Taiwan's public diplomacy. Finally, beyond Taiwan, future research could advance the theoretical framework of CEPD by applying it to other de facto states navigating contested sovereignty. This could refine our understanding of public diplomacy not only as a communication tool but also as a practice of conflict management, identity negotiation, and security-making. By addressing these avenues, future research can build on the conceptual framework established in this dissertation, furthering our understanding of public diplomacy as a conflict resolution tool and its implications for regional and global security.