



Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales  
Grado en Relaciones Internacionales

Trabajo Fin de Grado

# **Chinese soft power efforts to shape the future of Taiwan and the Taiwanese response to these threats**

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只要功夫深，铁杵磨成针

“As Long as You Work Hard Enough,  
an Iron Pestle Can Be Ground Down to a Needle”.

Li Bai (李白, 701—762)

## Abstract

In recent years, the relationship between China and Taiwan has deteriorated to a great extent. China's aim to reunify with Taiwan in the short term has led them to introduce soft power mechanisms to try to change the future of cross-strait relations to their benefit. For the same part, Taiwan has tried to respond effectively to these pressures from Beijing, which has triggered a conflict fought on ideals, rather than a conflict fought on the battlefield. This paper explores the soft power policies that China has put forward and the extent to which they have been successful in achieving their own aims, followed by an analysis of the Taiwanese response to these threats and their efficacy in countering the Asian giant, approaching it from both the government and its people.

**Keywords:** soft power, China, Taiwan, Chinese Communist Party, People's Republic of China, Republic of China, economic dependence, media influence, cultural expansion, Taiwanese identity, public diplomacy.

## Resumen

En los últimos años, la relación entre China y Taiwán se ha deteriorado significativamente. El objetivo de China de reunificar Taiwán a corto plazo los ha llevado a ambos a introducir herramientas de poder blando para intentar cambiar el futuro de las relaciones a través del estrecho de Taiwán en su propio beneficio. Del mismo modo, Taiwán ha intentado responder a estas presiones por parte de Pekín de manera eficaz, lo que ha desencadenado un conflicto librado en ideales y no en el campo de batalla. Este trabajo analiza las políticas de poder blando que China ha llevado a cabo y el grado en que han logrado sus objetivos, seguido de un análisis de la respuesta taiwanesa a estas amenazas y su eficacia para contrarrestar al gigante asiático, abordado tanto desde el propio gobierno como por su gente.

**Palabras clave:** poder blando, China, Taiwán, Partido Comunista Chino, República Popular China, República de China, dependencia económica, influencia mediática, expansión cultural, identidad taiwanesa, diplomacia pública.

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## Table of acronyms

**Table 1.** Table of Acronyms.

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>CCP</b>	Chinese Communist Party	5
<b>DPP</b>	Democratic Progressive Party	10
<b>KMT</b>	Kuomintang	8
<b>MOE</b>	Ministry of Education (Taiwan)	46
<b>MoFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Taiwan)	42
<b>NSB</b>	National Security Bureau (Taiwan)	48
<b>PLA</b>	People’s Liberation Army	11
<b>ROC</b>	Republic of China	8
<b>PRC</b>	People’s Republic of China	8
<b>TAO</b>	Taiwan Affairs Office (China)	33
<b>TECRO</b>	Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office	44

# 1. Introduction

The relationship between China and Taiwan has been tense and complicated since the end of the Chinese Civil War, when the two different governments of China emerged. Since that moment, both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) have argued to be the legitimate governments of China. Taking advantage of its superiority in economic and military terms, China has tried to build up a web of ideas and policies to convince both Taiwan and the international community of its legitimacy over the island. This has left Taiwan in a delicate position, where countering the Asian giant via soft power appears to be the only solution to tackle Chinese efforts in changing the future of Taiwan. For this reason, a conflict that has been portrayed mainly considering hard power also needs to assess whether soft power is taking a big part in the development of the current cross-strait relations.

With the purpose of analysing the effectiveness of soft power policies taken by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Taiwanese response to these threats, some previous context on the China-Taiwan conflict will be given to define the main points of divergence between the two countries, as well as a summary on Chinese public diplomacy and their growing interest in the use of soft power over the past decade. Then, the main theories of international relations related to this issue will be presented, along with concepts that are key to understanding the ongoing conflict, such as soft power, public diplomacy, or state.

Once the objectives and hypotheses of this project as well as the methodology to be used have been defined, soft power strategies taken by the CCP to shape the image and perception of Taiwan as a country will be analysed, both in Taiwan itself and in the international sphere as a whole. It will be then suggested whether these strategies are effective or not, and the flaws that they present when changing perceptions on the future of Taiwan. A second part of the analysis will be dedicated to the policies taken by Taiwan over the years to counteract this Chinese threat to the integrity of their territory, and the challenges China faces because of it. Some concluding remarks will be given to argue whether these soft power policies play a big role in the conflict, or rather they are merely symbolic, considering the extent to which hard power policies are being carried out.

## 2. Purpose and motivation

In a place where hard power seems to be taking a more prominent role year after year, military strategies seem to get in the limelight, often overlooking other subtle measures that equally have a role in shifting people's perceptions and views towards the conflict. Therefore, the main purpose of this project is to analyse the extent to which soft power strategies taken by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) play a key role in the shaping of the China-Taiwan conflict. Along the same lines, this thesis seeks to understand how Taiwan reacts to these threats from mainland China in a way that its recognition and support both internally and abroad is in constant change.

More precisely, it is to grasp whether soft power policies in place are or will be effective according to what the CCP aims to obtain, both in Taiwan itself and the international community as a whole. Mainland China has consistently used strategies of soft power over the past years and aims to continue changing its image internationally and in Taiwan specifically. In the process of becoming a global superpower, the international impact of China, being the world's second economy in terms of GDP and one that is more concerned about its investment in military terms each year (World Bank, 2023), should not be overlooked. In fact, according to the Global Soft Power Index in 2022, "China has seen its best performance ever, with the nation brand recording improvements across all pillars in the Index, [...] and moving up from 8<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> in the overall ranking" (Brand Finance, 2022).

However, China is also faced with many challenges when it comes to the use of soft power outside its borders. In fact, China's image in the Western world has deteriorated over the course of the past years, especially given the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, their neutrality to conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine War, and their abuses of human rights in places such as Tibet and Xinjiang. As an example, a study conducted in 2022 by the Pew Research Center concluded that 82% of Americans in the US had an unfavourable view of China (Clancy et al., 2022). This raises questions of whether the international community will be ready to change its perceptions of Taiwan as a sovereign state. Besides, soft power policies in Taiwan itself may be challenged considering Taiwan's recent economic success and prosperity, especially due to a growing Taiwanese identity that seems to be developing away from China's interests.

In this sense, this will also be analysed taking into account the Taiwanese response as a factor in altering the CCP's objectives, aiming to reflect Taiwan's efforts in counteracting the Asian giant with their own use of soft power. Being a significantly less important actor of international relations, it could be argued that their use of soft power counts as a crucial strategy to present themselves as a sovereign country and distance themselves from mainland China. For this reason, it is necessary to tackle whether these policies are enough to counteract China, or if in the opposite case, China's superiority will be successful in achieving its ultimate aim of controlling and annexing Taiwan.

For these reasons, it is relevant to analyse how the conflict is shaped by the use of tactics that do not involve military power and instead, focus more on techniques that take time to appear effective but create real change. Cross-strait relations today seem to be taking a more critical stance, with threats of a military invasion in the spotlight. This is especially concerning after Russia decided to invade Ukraine in February 2022, which raised questions on whether China would be willing to do the same about Taiwan (Culver & Lin, 2022). However, if a military conflict were to begin, soft power strategies would still need to be assessed to determine how much of the conflict could have been affected by them prior to an escalation of events. More globally, the aim is to perceive whether soft power efforts by China are enough in a place where hard power seems to prevail.

The personal motivation behind this project originates from a personal interest in the Asian region, especially in China and Taiwan as part of the Sinophone world. Since the beginning of my degree, I have immersed myself in the study of the dynamics and culture of these countries, focusing on learning Mandarin Chinese alongside. The issue of the China-Taiwan conflict has captivated my attention in recent years, especially following recent developments in the conflict, and thanks to meeting Chinese and Taiwanese people who have made me want to conduct more research on the topic. For these reasons, my personal goal with this dissertation is to deepen my understanding of an area which such fascinating history and culture.

### 3. State of the Art

#### 3.1. Evolution of the China-Taiwan conflict until today

The Republic of China (ROC), commonly referred to as Taiwan, has been independently governed since the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in mainland China in 1949. Over the course of the past decades, cross-strait relations have been increasingly tense between the two, suggesting the differences between them and preventing the conflict from being concluded any time soon. While the PRC views Taiwan as a province of its own and ultimately bound to be reunified with China, the ROC is determined to maintain its status quo, independent from the mainland.

The origin of this dispute lies in the events that led to the creation of the PRC. From 1945 to 1949, China was immersed in a civil war between the Nationalists, that is the Kuomintang (KMT), under Chiang Kai-shek, and the Communists under Mao Zedong. This Chinese civil war was triggered after the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War, in which both the Kuomintang and the Communists aimed to control the previously occupied territories by Japan. At that time, the Kuomintang was effectively the governing power in China. However, tensions escalated around the country and the offensives of the Communist Party allowed them to gain more territory to the point of taking Beijing in early 1949. The Kuomintang withdrew from the region and relocated their capital a few times to the remaining areas that were not controlled by the Communists. However, the forces under Mao Zedong kept on advancing, resulting in a complete Nationalist collapse and the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949. By December 10<sup>th</sup>, the Nationalists had already fled mainland China and relocated themselves to the island of Formosa, which was under Nationalist control after the defeat of Japan in World War II (Britannica, 2022). Since then, the ROC, which had been founded in 1912 in China, started to govern the territory that we know as Taiwan today.

##### 3.1.1. The Taiwan Strait Crises

There have been three main crises in the strait up to this day. The First Taiwan Strait Crisis (1954-1955) was the first armed conflict between the PRC and the ROC after the end of the Chinese civil war. The crisis was triggered by the Chinese invasion of a set of

islands administered by Taiwan, which resulted in a brief confrontation between the two, and brought about an international response, mainly from the US. The United States, as an ally and supporter of the ROC, agreed to sign a Mutual Defence Treaty with Taiwan that secured support for Taipei in case of an attack from Beijing (CSIS, 2023). Mainland China then decided to withdraw military forces and even suggested negotiations with the US. However, three years later these growing tensions led to the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis (1958). The PRC, taking advantage of the fact that the US was dealing with other issues at the time, bombarded Kinmen and Matsu islands for the second time. The United States, worried about a potential loss of these islands, re-supplied the ROC garrisons and eased the crisis (Office of the Historian, 2023).

Almost four decades later, China decided to go one step further starting the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-1996). China deployed troops in areas near Taiwan and conducted military exercises such as missile tests. The tension was really high, and the US immediately got involved in sending carrier battle groups to monitor China's activity. In a growing fear of a communist invasion of the ROC, both sides agreed to cease the escalation of events (Qimao, 1996). Although the PRC's military presence ended, a lot of concerns regarding the relationship of China with both Taiwan and the US were raised, leaving cross-strait disputes still unresolved to this day.

For the government of Beijing, Taiwan is and always has been a part of China, and thus it should be integrated within the PRC with a province status. Indeed, the preamble of the Constitution of China (1982) mentions the duty of reunification with Taiwan. Mainland China believes in the "One-China Principle" adopted in 1979, by which China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity are safeguarded. According to this principle, the reunification of China must be in the form of "one country, two systems". They also claim the use of peaceful means to annex Taiwan, even if they do not dismiss using force when necessary. According to the Taiwan Affairs Office, China would "actively promote people-to-people contacts and economic and cultural exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits, and start direct trade, postal, air and shipping services" to try to unify Taiwan within their territory.

On the other hand, the ROC led by the Kuomintang also sought reunification with the mainland under Nationalist rule. However, they rejected the "one country, two systems" proposition, as Taiwan suggested that the goal for "one China" would come in the future, but not for the moment. They stated very clearly that the PRC and the ROC were two

separate sovereign states (Qimao, 1996). However, to Taiwan’s displeasure, international recognition of the ROC was considerably reduced as more and more countries recognised the PRC, implicitly agreeing with the conception of Taiwan as part of China. In fact, in 1979 the US formally established diplomatic relations with the PRC, although they still maintained unofficial relations with the ROC and reaffirmed their commitment to Taiwan’s security issues in the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) (CSIS, 2023).

### 3.1.2. The current situation

It was indeed in 1996 when the first direct presidential election was conducted in the Republic of China. Since then, the two main parties of Taiwan have disputed the governance of the island: the already-known Kuomintang (KMT), which is said to be more inclined towards Chinese unification; and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), a party which is known for its advocacy of Taiwanese nationalism and identity, and which Beijing regards as more problematic. It is important to note that the ROC was ranked in 2022 as the 10<sup>th</sup> strongest democracy in the world according to the Economist Intelligence Unit’s 2022 Democracy Index. Figure 1 shows a historic view of all the democratic elections held in Taiwan since 1996, highlighting the parties that have governed the island over the years.

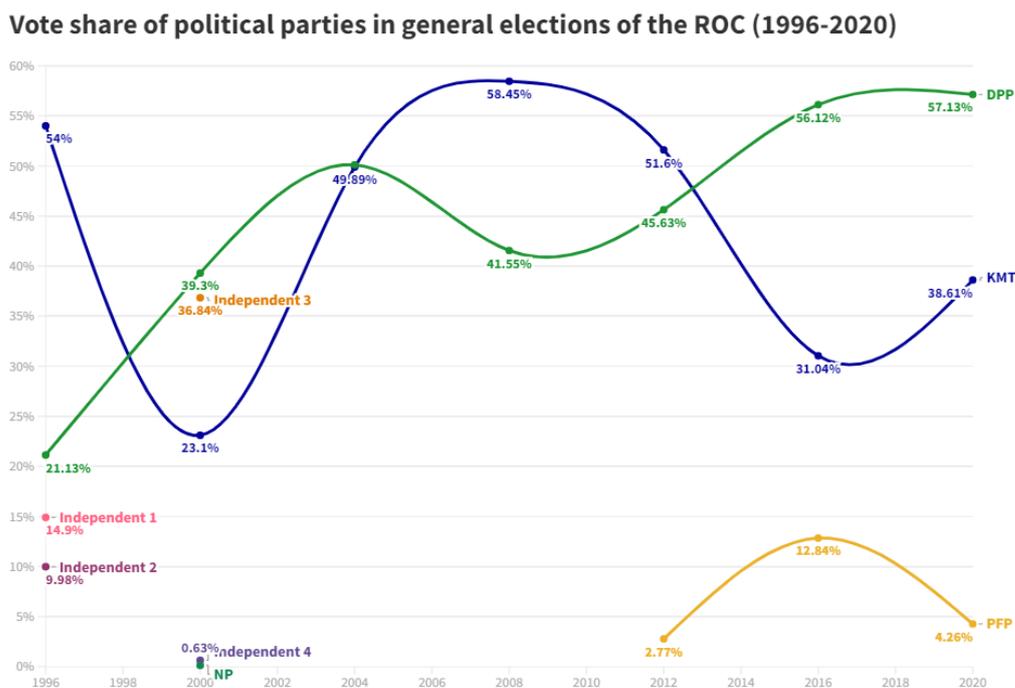


Figure 1. Own preparation based on figures from the Taiwan’s Central Election Commission (2023).

Taiwan has moved away from the initial idea of reunifying with the mainland that the Kuomintang had in mind, and instead has pushed for maintaining its status quo. Even Lee Teng-hui, KMT's president from 1996 to 2000, promoted a narrative that sought to shift away from any connection to the mainland. This idea was further developed in the 2000 and 2004 elections, the first time in Taiwanese history that a non-KMT leader was elected. DPP's president Chen Shui-bian clearly acknowledged the existence of two separate states (CSIS, 2023). For the next two terms, from 2008 to 2016, KMT's president Ma Ying-jeou eased the tensions between the PRC and the ROC, carrying out policies and negotiations that enhanced cooperation with the mainland (Matsuda, 2015). However, it is important to note the extent to which these warmer ties are pro-Chinese unification. In fact, recent polls show that Taiwanese identity has grown apart from the Chinese over the years, posing a new challenge for China when it comes to their reunification. The "one country, two systems" model resonates less and less with the Taiwanese people, especially after the recent Hong Kong protests for freedom. This convincing response of the Taiwanese state and civil society to counteract China's effort to take control will be explored thoroughly in the second part of the analysis (see 7.2).

Since 2016, and to China's discontent, Taiwan has been governed by the DPP. Since Tsai Ing-wen's election that year, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has increased its operations around Taiwan, including patrols of fighter jets or surveillance aircraft, and shows of force through the strait. Cyberattacks from China seem to be common as well. When it comes to non-military means to pressure Taiwan, the PRC suspended a cross-strait communication mechanism with Taiwan in 2016 and restricted tourism to the island. Besides, China pressures global corporations to regard Taiwan as a province of China, menaces countries who engage in relations with the island, and spreads misinformation to manipulate Taiwanese democratic elections (CFR, 2022). These measures which do not involve military pressure will be explored in depth in the analysis (see 7.1). It is important to note that under the mandate of Donald Trump, the US strengthened its relations with Taiwan, providing its military with more arms than any other recent US administration (CFR, 2022).

Likewise, the Biden administration has also sought to deepen the ties between the US and Taiwan. On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, the speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, marking the first US visit in 25 years. The tensions in the Taiwan Strait escalated quickly and triggered a furious response from China, in what many

experts have regarded as the start of the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis. Following this US visit, the PRC carried out live-fire exercises in areas close to Taiwan, sent out drones to Kinmen Island, and flew four missiles over the main island of Taiwan. The display and threat of military force were not limited to entering Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone, but also to innumerable crossings of the Taiwan Strait median line. China also reprimanded the US by cancelling important negotiations between the two superpowers and provoking a social media sensation (Delury et al., 2022). The events of August 2022 have definitely increased the risk of an armed conflict in a way it had not been seen for decades. Zhang (2022) highlights that China will need to use soft power together with hard power if they want to resolve the issue, also noting that the Chinese conception of “peaceful means” differs from the Western perspective of excluding coercion and including democracy.

### Timeline of the China-Taiwan conflict

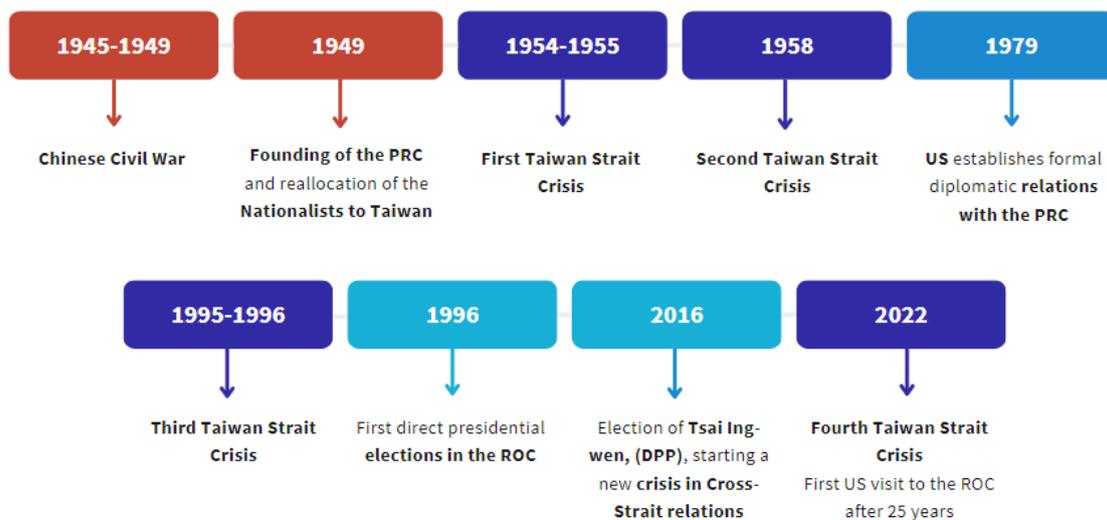


Figure 2. Own elaboration with data presented throughout this dissertation.

Taking all this into consideration, there seems to be a disagreement on whether a military conflict could happen in Taiwan in the short term. On the one hand, China’s military capabilities have improved considerably over the years, thus the military superiority of the PLA cannot be denied. However, the potential involvement of the US in the issue could deter the Chinese from escalating the conflict to the point of confronting the main two global superpowers in warfare. Some experts believe that Taiwan could be invaded in the next decade, while others argue the armed conflict could be postponed until 2049, the year when Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream aims to be achieved (CFR, 2022).

This Chinese Dream seeks to restore China's greatest status, for which one of its key goals is to unify Taiwan under the PRC's rule. Besides, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has opened the discussion again and has led to different opinions concerning Taiwan. On the one hand, it is said that China could start mimicking the steps of Russia in the hope for control of Taiwan. On the other hand, the challenges that the Russian forces have had to deal with in a war that has been going on for a year now, which they thought they could win easily, could deter the Chinese from making the same moves with Taiwan (CFR, 2022).

At the end of the day, the China-Taiwan conflict is a very complex situation that highlights the differences between the two territories and exposes the influence that an intricate common historical past takes its toll on both societies up to this day. The result is a dilemma in which “de facto separate political entities constitute a potential military flashpoint that not only threatens the well-being of the two societies but also threatens the stability of East Asia more broadly” (CSIS, 2023).

### 3.2. The CCP's use of soft power

China is a nation with a lot of historical and cultural significance and is home to one of the most ancient civilizations of all time. Their language, traditions, food, people, and many other characteristics make the country attractive to a lot of cultures around the globe. This is an amazing opportunity for the Chinese to portray an image of a diverse and rich country internationally, and to build a good reputation abroad. Besides, their rapid economic development has positioned themselves as the second power in the world in terms of GDP (only after the US), gathering a lot of media attention and captivating developing countries across continents. Taking this into account, it could be assumed that the CCP's use of public diplomacy has been very much efficient in promoting China's soft power. However, China has also faced many challenges to present itself in a globalised world where a Western discourse has been and still is hegemonic and predominant.

Over the great part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China was isolated from the international world and its image abroad was a carbon copy of its domestic politics. After the huge economic reform of the 80s under Deng Xiaoping, China opened itself to the world and started to

get interested in the Western notion of selling an image to be positively perceived abroad. However, in many parts of the world, especially in the US and Europe, this rise of China was seen as a threat. A “China threat theory” then emerged under the narrative that China menaced the global order, and the West had to do something to counter it. For the CCP, this came as a challenge to promote a public diplomacy strategy that could prevent the country’s rise to power to be deemed as a threat, but rather be regarded as a positive occurrence (Wang, 2008).

From the beginning of his mandate in 2003, President Hu Jintao acknowledged the importance of portraying a positive image abroad. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Chinese Diplomatic Envoys Stationed Abroad in 2004, he stressed the importance of aiming for “a good-neighbourly and friendly surrounding environment, an environment for equal and mutually beneficial cooperation, and an objective and friendly publicity environment” (Hu, 2004). This was motivated by his policy of “China’s peaceful rise”, which aimed to convince the international community that the rise of China was not a threat. Three years later, at the 17<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress, Hu states that China needs “to enhance culture as part of the soft power of [their] country to better guarantee the people’s basic cultural rights and interests” (Hu, 2007). This is the first time that the highest Chinese authority advocated for the use of soft power, a term that would resonate in Chinese politics for the rest of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Wang, 2008).

One of the weaknesses of Chinese public diplomacy is the fact that the diplomacy system is not centralised and instead, it is divided into many departments, which makes long-term decisions and strategies a much more difficult task. Moreover, their media has long been restricted by the government, complicating its reach and positive perception abroad. Xi Jinping’s government has acknowledged this weakness and has pushed for Chinese global media, especially in developing countries where Chinese economic power is gaining more and more influence each year. According to Beijing’s Global Media Influence Report by Freedom House, the period from 2019 to the end of 2021 saw a rise in the intensity of China’s media influence efforts in 18 countries out of the 30 examined. Taiwan was indeed the one who faced the most intense efforts, but also the most resilient in its response. This propaganda by the CCP extends to messages that endorse the comparative advantages of China, such as their economic and technological success, the attractiveness of Chinese culture, or the provision of medical aid during the pandemic. More and more news outlets and audio-visual media are being translated into English and

other languages and being promoted overseas. Another difficulty they encounter is the fact that the hegemonic discourse that has been long ingrained internationally is that of the West, making it difficult for a Chinese society with concepts and ideologies that are fundamentally different to be perceived as attractive.

There are also some misconceptions that the CCP needs to address accordingly. The Chinese hold a misleading view of their international image. They think that gaining a positive international image will be achieved through the show of their national strength, which is specifically what concerns the West. They put their focus on economic expansion and success while neglecting other forms of soft power that could make them be perceived as a positive actor on the world stage (Wang, 2008). Moreover, they hold the view that China deserves respect for its historical past while ignoring that the West gives more importance to the current times. In this sense, their authoritarian government generally triggers a negative response from most of the Western world.

However, China's use of soft power has increasingly improved over the last few years, especially in developing countries. In 2014, Xi Jinping stated, "we should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's messages to the world" (Xi, 2014). Xi's focus on development with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is considered one of his main uses of soft power internationally, as it promotes peaceful cooperation between countries all around the world. Chinese investment in developing areas of Africa or Latin America has also triggered an international response from actors such as the US or the EU. Moreover, China counts with more than 500 Confucius Institutes across all continents, in charge of promoting the Chinese language and culture overseas. According to the Vice-Minister of Education of China, the number of Mandarin language learners has increased exponentially this last decade, reaching an estimated 25 million students (Tian, 2021). The CCP also boosts the reception of international students mainly using government-subsidised scholarships (CFR, 2018).

According to the Global Soft Power Index of 2022, China's nation brand has gone up to the 4<sup>th</sup> highest position globally. Out of all indicators, China is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in business and trade, 2<sup>nd</sup> in terms of influence, and 4<sup>th</sup> for familiarity. It has also gained some of its reputation back after the Covid-19 crisis, which considerably damaged China's image in the rest of the world. This has successfully been achieved through vaccine diplomacy and the supply of medical equipment to countries in need. China also hosted the Beijing 2022

Winter Olympics, which boosted China’s soft power. The PRC is also a leader in science and innovative technology, portraying an image of a developed nation with a duty to encourage progress in the world (Brand Finance, 2022).

**China’s performance in each of the pillars of the 2022 Soft Power Index**  
compared to the best performer in each of the categories



Figure 3. Own preparation based on figures from the 2022 Soft Power Index by Brand Finance (2022).

At the end of the day, China is very good at making itself heard around the world, which is already considered the first step for an effective soft power strategy. Countries all over the world are more and more attentive to China’s moves and follow their news. In the developing world, China’s image and reputation are much more positive than in regions like North America or Europe. For this reason, if they want to focus on appealing more to the Western developed world, they still need some more work on cultural elements of soft power that can help them be perceived much more positively.

## 4. Theoretical framework

In order to analyse the soft power policies taken by China and their impact on Taiwan over the past years, key concepts and theories to be used throughout the dissertation will be presented adequately below. Firstly, it will be explored how traditional theories of International Relations can be related to the topic of research, exploring the extent to which we can apply a realist or liberal theory to the analysis. The difficulty in asserting whether one or the other is more relevant to the analysis lies in the fact that soft power can be applied both to a realist and a liberal conception of international relations. Secondly, the definitions and evolution of the main concepts used for the analysis will be presented, giving a special focus to the concept of “soft power” and “state”, as they are key to analyse both the foreign policy strategies of China and Taiwan.

On the one hand, realism as an international relations theory focuses on the role of the state as a main actor participating in a constant seek for power with a tendency for conflict and competitiveness. The ultimate goal, as realists put it, is to maintain or aim for each state’s national interests. Already influenced by Thucydides’ writings in the ancient world and taking the Hobbesian notion of constant war and the Machiavellian concern for promoting national security (Antunes et al., 2018), modern realism was finally theorised under political scientist Hans Morgenthau in his book *Politics Among Nations* (1948). At the same time, realism happened to be the main theory used to explain the interaction between states after the end of World War II (Bell, 2022).

Morgenthau introduces the six principles of political realism in his book. Firstly, he believes there are objective laws that have their roots in nature, such as the balance of power that has been seen in history since ancient times. Likewise, there is the concept of interest defined as power, by which statesmen are going to act according to principles of success and power, rather than being driven by morality. He also defines this idea of interest as being the essence of politics no matter what the circumstances might be, and the importance of prudence to judge the actions carried out by the states (Morgenthau, 2005, p.4-18).

On the other hand, liberalism as a traditional theory of international relations defends the idea that states are not always in constant competitiveness towards each other and can instead focus on cooperation between them to achieve common goals. This theory focuses a lot on the rejection of war and the use of other means such as diplomatic cooperation

between states to achieve each other's objectives. This departs from the idea that interstate violent behaviour threatens individual liberty, a fundamental concept for classic liberalism, which was mainly proposed by philosopher John Locke, and further developed by authors such as Stuart Mill.

One of the core Liberal assumptions proposed by Professor Moravcsik states that "the behaviour of states – and hence levels of international conflict and cooperation – reflect the nature and configuration of state preferences" (Moravcsik, 1992). Ultimately, the focus is on state purpose and not on state power. Liberals believe that in search for this state's purposes, policy interdependence will in turn create societies that can focus on the same goals and cooperate with each other (Moravcsik, 1997). This goes against realists' idea of power politics determining the strategy a state should follow. Besides, Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, famous for their contribution to the theory of the international liberal order, distinguish five characteristics of a structural liberal order. These include security co-binding (creating institutions that mitigate the dynamics of anarchy), penetrated reciprocal hegemony (enhancing shared decision-making between different powers), semi-sovereign and partial great powers (the existence of states not aiming to be great powers), economic openness (participating in trade and creating more interdependence), and civic identity (enhancing integration between different groups) (Deudney & Ikenberry, 1999).

According to Joseph Nye, soft power does not contradict realism. Indeed, in his book *Future for Power* in 2011, he explains how "soft power is not an idealist or liberal form, it is simply a form of power, one way of getting the desired outcomes" (Nye, 2011, p.82, cited by Bedoya et al., 2016, p.540). It is true that, when thinking about realism, there is a tendency to imply that only traditional means of exercising power, that is the so-called "hard power", are the means used by states in the pursuit of their national interests. However, realism does not specify the means of achieving this power. Quite the opposite, all forms of getting power, however peaceful their means may be, are valid as long as they all aim to preserve their own interests. This is why soft power, even if it might appear inoffensive at first glance, is just another way to exert power and thus, shares the same ultimate goals hard power strategies do.

However, soft power is indeed based on some liberal values, so it could also be argued that to some extent the concept is closer to the liberalism theory of international relations. Joseph Nye in the introduction of his work on soft power agreed that "today, the direct

use of force for economic gain is generally too costly and dangerous for modern great powers” (Nye, 1990, p.159). This is a point in common with liberalism, which rejects the idea of war and advocates for other sorts of means to achieve one’s goals, mainly through international cooperation. In this case, soft power strategies, although manifested in many different ways, can be used to promote international dialogue and cooperation between states with the goal of fostering strengthened relations overseas and maintaining a positive image to the world. Even if this is then used as a means to preserve their national interests and their seek for power, it implies nevertheless that cooperation is possible between states to reach common grounds.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the primary theory used will be that of realism, as both China and Taiwan have very clear national interests to preserve that put them in constant competition against each other. It is true though that Taiwan’s advocacy for liberal democracy and values and its interest in fostering good relations with the Western world may appear as behaviours that could be more easily explained using the liberalism theory. Conversely, even after the process of liberalization under Deng Xiaoping started in 1978, China still approaches politics from a very realist point of view, treating everything as a threat and lacking democratic values.

#### 4.1. Concept of soft power

Many definitions have been proposed to explain the concept of soft power in our current world. In an attempt to conceptualise this type of power, it could be said that soft power refers to all sorts of power exerted in a non-coercive way, often recurring to attraction or persuasion techniques that can go unnoticed.

This concept of soft power was introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990. In a Post-Cold War context, the uncertainty over a new global shift in international politics and a growing interconnectivity between states made new forms of power emerge. Nye emphasized how power was losing its importance in terms of military force and instead, new factors such as technology, education or economic growth were becoming increasingly more important in the new world era (Nye, 1990). He then predicted how states would need to adapt to a context in which controlling the political environment and getting countries to do what one wants required more than just military power and coercion (Nye, 1990).

These would be the so-called new power resources, necessary to conduct successful soft power policies. He explains the existence of a second aspect of power, which could be explained as a way of exerting power that shifts away from traditional means. As he put it:

“This second aspect of power – which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants – might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants”. (Nye, 1990).

It is important to stress how the emergence of this soft power does not mean that traditional ways of exercising power, commonly referred to as “hard power”, become obsolete. Quite the opposite, hard power in a world where interconnectivity between states is closer than it has ever been still proves to be a forceful and successful means to influence power dynamics in the world. However, hard power needs to be integrated with soft power if the state in question seeks to maintain its position of power over time. The message is simple: soft power holds an important position in shaping global politics, even if it is sometimes overlooked, and it is the state’s duty to implement such non-coercive policies in a way that aligns with its foreign policy strategy.

Even if soft power emerged as a predominantly US-based concept, it would rapidly spread worldwide. Its emergence as a global concept internationally led Joseph Nye to further conceptualise the term and propose the following definition in 2008:

“Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country’s soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies” (Nye, 2008).

Indeed, over the past decades, states all around the world have given much more importance to soft power and have included it as part of their foreign policy strategy. As a matter of fact, countries that invest in having a favourable perception overseas tend to achieve their aims in a more straightforward way, unlike countries that have not yet adapted to the new international context and still mainly rely on hard power resources.

Even if this concept has been integrated into the vocabulary of the Chinese, it is deeply rooted in Western values, hence a Western way of understanding politics. Chinese traditional understanding of power is always related to morality, while for the West it is

just a means of achieving one's means, where morality and power are separated. But for China, power comes from morality (Wang, 2008). This is key to understanding how China has had to change to accommodate these Western concepts, which could explain the reason why the country fell behind in the use of soft power when in other regions like North America and Europe, the use of soft power was already widely spread.

There are diverse tools to exert soft power, but one of the most relevant ones is the use of public diplomacy. In fact, both public diplomacy and soft power are closely interrelated. While soft power potentially emerges from the resources a culture has, its values and customs, public diplomacy is merely the instrument that the government in question uses to mobilise these resources and transform them in effective soft power (Nye, 2008). The end goal is to attract the publics abroad, so governments need to be aware of their country's strengths and weaknesses to promote an image that resonates with the public they aim to influence and inspire their positive attitudes. This is why an effective public diplomacy strategy is important for achieving said goals.

Likewise, there is no such word in Chinese to mean public diplomacy as we define it in the West. The closest word would be "waixuan" (外宣), which literally translates as external propaganda and refers to the promotion of the Chinese image abroad (Wang, 2008). For the Chinese, "propaganda" does not have a negative connotation, however, in order to portray it abroad in a predominantly Western-centred world, the government faces many challenges to be perceived positively.

There are many categories that could count as tools to exert soft power. According to the Soft Power Index, conducted by Brand Finance each year in a total of 120 countries, soft power is based on seven pillars which contribute to the perception of nation brands around the world. These include business and trade, governance, international relations, culture and heritage, media and communication, education and science, and people and values (Brand Finance, 2022). Table 2 shows some examples of soft power resources for each of the categories outlined. According to the index, effective soft power includes familiarity, reputation, and influence as key dimensions. These relate to how much of the country in question is known, how attractive it is to the world, and how global its impact is across nations (Thomson, 2022).

Table 1. The 7 pillars of the Soft Power Index. Own preparation based on information from the 2022 Soft Power Index by Brand Finance (2022).

<b>Business &amp; Trade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to do business with</li> <li>• A strong and stable economy</li> <li>• Products and brands the world loves</li> <li>• Future growth potential</li> </ul>
<b>Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internationally admired leaders</li> <li>• Politically stable and well-governed</li> <li>• High ethical standards and low corruption</li> <li>• Safe and secure</li> <li>• Respects law and human rights</li> </ul>
<b>International Relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential in diplomatic circles</li> <li>• Helpful to other countries in need</li> <li>• Acts to protect the environment</li> <li>• Good relations with other countries</li> </ul>
<b>Culture &amp; Heritage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential in arts and entertainment</li> <li>• Food the world loves</li> <li>• A great place to visit</li> <li>• Rich heritage</li> <li>• An appealing lifestyle</li> <li>• Leaders in sports</li> </ul>
<b>Media &amp; Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to communicate with</li> <li>• Affairs I follow closely</li> <li>• Influential media</li> <li>• Trustworthy media</li> </ul>
<b>Education &amp; Science</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A leader in science</li> <li>• Strong educational system</li> <li>• Innovative technology and tech companies</li> </ul>
<b>People &amp; Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generous</li> <li>• Fun</li> <li>• Friendly</li> <li>• Trustworthy</li> <li>• Tolerant and inclusive</li> </ul>

In this project, China-Taiwan's relationship will be studied from the lens of soft power being a form of power causing real impact when used accordingly, and as a valuable tool to shape the conflict. Indeed, both China's and Taiwan's foreign policies give a lot of importance to these non-coercive means and include soft power in their strategies to present themselves to the world, as well as to influence the perceptions of each other. The categories of soft power that the study will focus on are business and trade, governance, international relations, culture and heritage, and media and communication.

## 4.2. Concept of state

It is also imperative to provide a definition of what being a state means to understand the dynamics between China and Taiwan. Why is China considered a state and Taiwan is not in many cases?

The precedents to the concept of state can be traced to ancient Greece, which defines it as “a population of a fixed area that shares a common language, culture, and history” (Britannica, 2022). This concept would consequently evolve with time, but there is no formal definition of what it is to be a state until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As fundamental units of the modern international system and primary subjects of international law, any territory needs to meet four criteria in order to be considered a state. These criteria of statehood were outlined in the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, a treaty signed as part of the Seventh International Conference of American States. These rights and duties are now the base set for the recognition of states as such in international law and are used by the UN when assessing the membership of countries. Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention states the four attributes of statehood as follows:

1. A defined territory. There is no state without land or territory of its own, and there are no restrictions to its size or geographical form.
2. A permanent population. There is no state without inhabitants to it, and there are no restrictions on the size of its population or its density.
3. An independent government. There is no state without formal administration and authority of some kind and each state should be able to exercise its sovereignty, whether that government provides a wide range of societal needs or not.
4. Ability to enter into relations with other states. This idea has lost some strength given the rise of all sorts of actors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that can establish relations with states, such is the case of international organisations.

Article 5 of the Convention focuses on international recognition and affirms that “the political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states”. Hence, each state has the right to defend its integrity and independence. Besides, the recognition of a state means that “the state which recognises it accepts the personality of the other with all the rights and duties determined by international law” (Montevideo Convention, Article 6). In fact, international recognition has proved to be an important requirement when talking about what really makes a state. This is because, under international law, asserting that the other actor is indeed a state is formally claiming that the four criteria of statehood have been fulfilled (Britannica, 2022).

Taiwan has a territory, a population, and a government authority, but it has not formally declared itself independent. Effectively, it is a self-governing territory that maintains what it is referred to as its status quo. Moreover, its limited international recognition is caused by the One China Principle, which establishes that no country can recognise both the ROC and the PRC at the same time given that they both advocate to be the only legitimate China. The PRC's size and economic development have made more and more countries around the world recognise the mainland as the sovereign China to the detriment of the small island of Taiwan, especially after the ROC was expelled from the UN in 1971 and the US established formal relations with the PRC in 1979. The process of democratisation in Taiwan raised questions on Taiwanese national identity, which was considered a plausible claim to independence, but Taiwan is well aware that proclaiming itself independent would not solve the problem of recognition overseas (Winkler, 2011).

## 5. Research goals and questions

As it has been previously mentioned, the main objective of this dissertation is to analyse the efficacy and importance of soft power policies carried out by the Chinese government regarding Taiwan and to equally present the challenges faced by the Taiwanese response to these threats. In order to answer these questions, the analysis will be conducted in two general lines. In terms of Chinese soft power efforts, analysis of policies and their reach will be analysed, both in Taiwan and internationally. Secondly, in terms of a Taiwanese response to the threats, an analysis of soft power efforts from the successive Taiwanese governments and its people will be presented.

Regarding the first part of the analysis, the main questions that arise are: how has Chinese soft power influenced the China-Taiwan conflict? Have Chinese soft power efforts been effective in transforming the conflict? More specifically, it will be looked at the difference between strategies followed in Taiwan, and internationally. In terms of Taiwan, the objective will be to determine how Taiwanese people can be influenced by soft power policies taken by the CCP, taking into account factors such as economic superiority and interaction, shaping of the media, or cultural strategies. It will be aimed to answer the following questions: are efforts being made to change Taiwanese public opinion? Has Taiwan changed or is bound to change its perception of China following the use of these soft power strategies? In terms of the international community, the goal is to determine how the CCP's foreign policy makes the international community change its perception of Taiwan, would that be via expanding the One China Policy or using their economic and global superiority as means of power. Therefore, the main questions to be answered are the following: has the international community changed or is bound to change its perception and stance towards Taiwan? Is the One China Policy approach resonating in other countries?

For the second part of the analysis, the focus will be on determining whether the Taiwanese response has created a real impact to counter the efforts of Mainland China in Taiwanese society and overseas. This will look into the policies taken by Taiwanese governments over the past decade and their reach. Another interesting point to include in the equation would be to argue whether a Taiwanese identity is growing apart from the traditional "Chinese identity" and thus, challenging the efforts of the CCP a lot more. Questions will be answered along the lines of: have Taiwanese responses been effective

to counter Chinese persuasion? Does Taiwan feel like China has something to offer them? Is the creation of a Taiwanese identity affecting in any capacity how Chinese policies are regarded on the island?

More globally, it will be deduced whether soft power strategies are merely symbolic in this conflict, or they actually play a big role in its shaping. This is especially interesting to analyse given the lack of research into elements of soft power in Cross-Strait relations and their emphasis on hard power. Besides, in light of the evidence presented, inferring or predicting what this combination of hard and soft power could mean for the development of the conflict in the near future may lay the foundations for future research in the area.

In this sense, the main hypotheses to be presented are the following ones:

1. Soft power policies carried out by the PRC are causing limited impact due to the continuous use of hard power in Taiwan. This is true both in Taiwan and internationally, where there is a growing negative image of China that overcomes part of the effectiveness of said policies.
2. The Taiwanese response resonates more and more with the Taiwanese people due to a growing separate Taiwanese identity reinforced after the crisis in Hong Kong, but less and less with the international community due to China gaining more and more power in the international sphere.

## 6. Methodology

In order to proceed with this analysis, a deductive methodology will be used. This will be based on extensive research and documentation about soft power and public diplomacy policies of the PRC regarding Taiwan, as well as the Taiwanese response in terms of soft power and its public opinion. Both primary and secondary sources will be used to sustain the analysis.

As primary sources, there will be a focus on documents or statements retrieved from official organisations both in China and Taiwan, such as the embassies of the PRC or Taiwan's Affairs Office; as well as official reports from organisations and companies such as Freedom House, Brand Finance, or the Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation. In terms of secondary sources, reports, essays, news articles, and other research-based projects will be used to provide the necessary information about the issue in its entirety.

Qualitative tools will be mainly used, especially assessing the effectiveness of the soft power policies taken by the PRC, and also to tackle the emergence of a Taiwanese identity. However, quantitative data like surveys and reports will be sporadically used to prove and justify the conclusions reached by the qualitative tools.

The first part of the analysis (7.1) will follow the following structure: first, some historical context will be given to show the evolution of soft power policies regarding Taiwan carried by the PRC over the years, followed by the explanation of the current policies both in Taiwan (7.1.1) and overseas (7.1.2). Finally, it will be analysed the extent to which these policies have been effective or not in the shape of the future for Taiwan.

For the second part of the analysis (7.2), it will be divided into the state response (7.2.1) and the civil society response (7.2.2). Firstly, some historical context will also be given with regard to Taiwanese responses to soft power threats from the PRC. Then, for the state response, the counteractive soft power policies and their effectiveness will be adequately discussed. For the civil society response, the analysis will focus on current perceptions of the PRC in Taiwan, and the effects of the growth of a Taiwanese identity in the territory as potential threats to the efficacy of the CCP's soft power objectives in Taiwan.

## 7. Analysis

Cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan are asymmetrical in nature, marked by a constant reminder of China's superiority in economic and military terms. On the one hand, China seeks to bring Taiwanese people closer to its pro-unification narrative and to convince the international community of its legitimacy over Taiwan. On the other hand, Taiwan finds itself in a position where hard power cannot be used to counter the Asian giant, therefore soft power seems to be the most reasonable strategy to counter these threats of menacing its status quo. The result is a battle fought on the minds of people, on the capacity to exert an influence, not only on each other but also on third actors, and preventing the escalation of a military conflict in the near future. As a matter of fact, DeLisle (2010) explains the differences and similarities between the Chinese and Taiwanese use of soft power. While China exerts soft power in a way that is dissuasive for vulnerable states in responding to another state's hard power, Taiwan uses soft power as a defence mechanism aimed at protecting themselves from the big threat that the mainland poses to them. However, both rely deeply on their ideals, values and culture to broaden their influence and reach their foreign policy goals.

### 7.1. Chinese soft power efforts regarding Taiwan

Taiwan is a main topic for the CCP when it comes to setting its soft power agenda. As DeLisle states, "Taiwan is both the immediate target of some PRC uses of soft power and the indirect object of others, primarily those seeking to undermine other states' support for conferral of state-like status on the ROC" (DeLisle, 2010). For this reason, it is important to analyse soft power efforts in Taiwan itself and internationally separately.

The Chinese government follows a very clear narrative with the One China Principle at the core of its public diplomacy strategy. They state that (1) territorial integrity is to always be safeguarded and no Chinese territory can ever separate from the mainland, (2) Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, (3) the Chinese government can resort to any means to safeguard their sovereignty, and that (4) reunification with Taiwan is part of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Pamment et al, 2019). One of the main critiques attributed to Xi Jinping in the pursuit of this plan of "rejuvenating" the nation is the fact that he has set a deadline for its completion. This is something no previous

Chinese leader has ever been determined to do, presenting consistent and growing pressure on the CCP and its policy aims. In fact, previous leaders have alluded to this concept of bringing the power of ancient China back to modern times, but always without having a countdown that deters them from taking the time it is necessary for the achievement of their goals. It remains yet to be seen how Xi Jinping faces this challenge that aims to be accomplished by 2049, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. In this case, it could be argued that the set of a timeline can help bring about more policies in a faster and more efficient way, given that they need to achieve this one goal within a specific time frame. However, soft power policies take considerable time to be measured and analyse the impact they are causing, hence an ambitious plan like the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” could fail if this is not considered. This is especially true when applying persistent pressure that can make the government act hastily and without further thinking. Therefore, soft power measures by the CCP will follow this narrative.

The table below illustrates who the main Chinese actors in the deployment of this soft power strategy are, followed by a brief explanation of their function and capabilities to shape the future of Taiwan.

#### Main Chinese actors in the deployment of their soft power strategy towards Taiwan

 <p><b>Xi Jinping</b> President since 2013</p> <p>His key goal is the "rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation" and reinforces his commitment to the One China Policy</p>	 <p><b>State Council Information Office</b> SCIO</p> <p>China's public diplomacy apparatus. Monitors media, external communications and censorship</p>	 <p><b>Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council</b> TAO</p> <p>Implements policy regarding Taiwan matters (trade policy, media, cultural events, exchange programmes, international conferences...)</p>
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Figure 4. Own elaboration based on information from the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (2019).

### 7.1.1. In Taiwan

China has two main goals when using soft power to handle cross-strait relations. On the one hand, they aim to diminish a growing strong Taiwanese identity that menaces the unification with China. On the other hand, they seek to convince Taiwan of the benefits that a unification would bring to both societies. According to Kalimuddin, M. & Anderson D.A. (2018), the main modes used by China to achieve its strategic aims in its soft power strategy are: (1) promoting social integration, (2) reinforcing a common identity, (3) deepening economic interdependence, and (4) showing support for Taiwan's interests. These four ideas are implemented by a series of soft power tools that come from diverse sources of power. In this part of the analysis, the focus will be on business and trade (economic), culture and heritage (cultural), and media and communication (informational).

- **Business and trade**

Economically, China has used a combination of hard and soft power, that is smart power, to increase its influence on Taiwan. This process by which the Chinese government has utilised all resources available to drive actors into their sphere of economic influence is referred to by academic Wu Jieh-min (2016) as the "China Factor". In fact, China has built a lot of economic interdependence over the years aimed to convince Taiwan of the prosperity they could further achieve if they unified under the CCP's rule. Since 2004, Taiwan's main trading partner for exports is China, accounting for 27.7% of total exports, compared to 14.6% from the US in 2020 (OEC, 2023). Regarding imports, China has also become Taiwan's largest trading partner since 2013, overcoming Japan, and reaching 23.5% of total imports in 2020 (OEC, 2023). China has also become the most popular investment location for Taiwanese businesses since restrictions were lifted in 1991 (Huang, 2016). This shows Taiwan's complete dependence on the mainland for the development of its economy, which as a result serves as a comparative advantage for China in the use of its economic soft power to persuade Taiwan of the prosperity they could achieve together.

### Trade value for the most common export partners of the ROC (2009-2020)

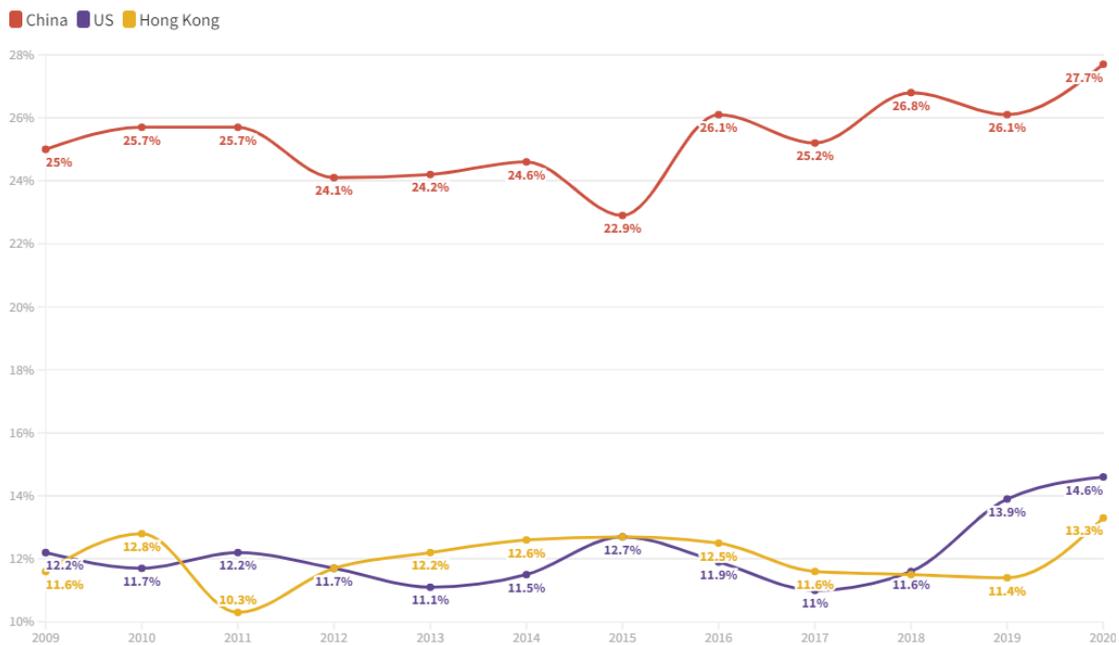


Figure 5. Own elaboration based on data from the OEC (2023).

### Trade value for the most common import partners of the ROC (2010-2020)



Figure 6. Own elaboration based on data from the OEC (2023).

The PRC believes that a good use of smart power in the economic sphere is key to changing the situation of Taiwan to their benefit. This is because having a strong economic influence can drive much of the situation where one wants. For example, by signing the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) in 2010, cross-strait relations were strengthened, indirectly leaning towards China. Since then, many more

economic agreements have been made, in addition to facilities for Taiwanese enterprises to do business in China and offering humanitarian aid when Taiwan needed it (Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018).

In addition, the CCP has created government-business networks across the strait to enhance cooperation with Taiwan at an international level and for Taiwanese companies to be more inclined to associate with China. Some examples include the Straits Forum, which aimed to reinforce economic interaction and cultural integration between the actors, the Cross-Strait CEO Summit, which targeted businesses from both sides, and other local Taiwanese business associations in China (Huang, 2016). China also sponsors multi-day economic workshops and expositions on the mainland to enhance the movement of Taiwanese people across the strait (Pamment et al., 2019). Even if the PRC has argued that these cooperations are more favourable to Taiwan, China believes this would serve as a means of making Taiwanese society more prone to working together with the mainland.

- **Culture and heritage**

Regarding culture, Chinese culture has been predominantly based on traditional Chinese and Confucian values, which have recently become key in the soft power strategy of China. In fact, Mao Zedong, the founder of the PRC in 1949, emphasized the power of ideas as key in the development of the new communist China (DeLisle, 2010). Since then, culture and values have been at the core of soft power-related issues and have been given sufficient attention over the years. The main strength of the CCP when it comes to cultural soft power is the fact that Chinese and Taiwanese people share a common history and culture. Even if Taiwanese identity has shifted somehow in recent years, it still retains a decent amount of influence on the island, considering they have similar traditions, language, and philosophy.

Using soft power to address that Taiwan shares a common history with China is key for the CCP, which has many times argued how the Taiwanese and the Chinese are “brothers who are still connected by [their] flesh even if [their] bones are broken, [they] are a family in which blood is thicker than water” (Xi, 2015). These shoutouts are directed to appeal to the largest number of Taiwanese people possible. Along the same lines, historical symbols like the fact that both Communists and Nationalists had to fight against the Japanese are examples of the unity of both peoples that are used to mobilise Taiwanese

public opinion to the CCP's benefit (Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018). This is China's legitimization to promote a pan-Chinese identity. In practice, the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) of the PRC is in charge of directing programmes and exchanges to develop closer ties with the island (Pamment et al., 2019).

In order to enhance these exchanges with people from both sides of the strait, the CCP facilitates trips to the mainland, both for tourism and academic opportunities. In 2008, direct flights between Taiwan and the mainland were resumed after 50 years of no official communication from both sides of the strait. This was the official establishment of the PRC's policy on the "Three Direct Links", first introduced in 1979, which aimed for direct links in mail, transport and trade between Taiwan and the mainland. The justification was "to make it easier for family members, relatives and friends of compatriots on both sides of the Straits to visit each other, to communicate, travel, and develop economic, cultural and other ties" (Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, 2003).

Besides, the PRC is targeting young people in Taiwan, which are the segment that is more sceptical about China, to finance study trips and exchanges in the mainland. This has increased the number of Taiwanese students studying in China, reaching 12,000 in 2021 (Global Times, 2021). Finally, the CCP has also pushed for more integration of Taiwanese people with Chinese citizens by offering them more opportunities to live and work on the mainland, in an attempt of building ties between people from both sides of the strait. For example, they have given Taiwanese people the opportunity to apply for the National Outstanding Young Scientists Fund or participate in the "Made in China 2025" plan (Pamment et al., 2019). This has increased the formation of Chinese-Taiwanese families, which can serve the CCP as successful examples of couples who share common values together (Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018).

- **Media and communication**

"Entering the Island, Entering the Household, and Entering the Mind" (Hu, 2004). This was former President Hu Jintao's principle of the CCP's unification propaganda towards Taiwan (Huang, 2016). Under this principle, the Chinese government has extended its influence on Taiwanese media companies, aiming to manipulate them with economic means so as to portray favourable images and news of China that have an impact on Taiwanese society. In fact, China's media influence efforts have been regarded

as “very high” in the 2022 barometer of the Freedom House concerning Beijing’s Global Media Influence. This has been regarded by many international organisations as an immediate threat to Taiwan’s media freedom, especially after the economic ties with the mainland have been strengthened over the years.

Huang, J-N. (2016) proposes a theoretical framework that explains how this influence is exercised and argues that “a media company outside China will exercise self-censorship on topics considered sensitive in China when it becomes commercially tied with the Chinese market” (Huang, 2016). Effectively, it is an extension of the China factor to media in Taiwan. In this context, the CCP aims to exercise its influence in three different steps: at the international level, enhancing the economic dependence of Taiwan on China; at the sectorial level, inducing local collaborators of Beijing in Taiwan; and at the corporate level, pressuring Taiwanese media companies to change the contents to be published (Huang, 2016). This enhances the promotion of a pro-Chinese unification narrative under which content on the reunification with the mainland, the weaknesses of the current democratic system of Taiwan, or disinformation related to the DPP<sup>1</sup> is included. Another example of how the Chinese government makes use of soft power to promote this pro-China narrative is the recruitment of Taiwanese pro-unification influencers, which are given monthly salaries to spread misinformation on social media (Freedom House, 2022).

A clear example of this media pressure exercised on Taiwanese companies is the case of the Want Want China Times Media Group, one of the largest media companies in Taiwan. This group started its investment in China in the 90s, producing most of its revenues there. Since then, the company has been accused multiple times of collaborating with the Chinese government to promote a pro-Chinese unification narrative, and even its owner has not kept a secret that his intentions are to enhance cross-Strait relations and portray favourable views of China on the island. For instance, the Want Want-owned China Times, one of the main newspapers in Taiwan, is clearly lined up with the Chinese government’s stances on the conflict, practices self-censorship on a normal basis and serves as embedded media marketing for China (Wu, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> This is because the DDP is regarded by the CCP as a bigger threat than the traditional KMT due to its inclination towards independence.

The relative success of this Chinese strategy could not have been as effective if it had not been for the economic dependence of Taiwan on the mainland. For this reason, Taiwanese media capitalists stand at a crossroads, where collaborating with China could satisfy their financial goals at the expense of their freedom of broadcasting what they want. The result is an asymmetric relationship where China can blackmail Taiwan to comply with their directives if they do not want to lose the financial benefits they have agreed upon.

As we have seen in this section, the policies carried out by the PRC want to persuade Taiwan of the importance of working together for the future of the island, eventually leading to reunification. These policies aim to reach both the government and civil society, the latter being the main focus of China in terms of soft power. It could be argued that this strategy of combining hard and soft power has been effective in areas related to the economy or the media at the state level, however, the cultural efforts to change the perception of Taiwanese society with regard to China might be limited due to a growing Taiwanese identity that will be discussed in the second part of the analysis.

Indeed, convincing Taiwan of the benefits of a unification with China has become a difficult task for the CCP, considering that Taiwan itself has a very successful economy and a state based on democratic values. Moreover, many journalists from Chinese newspapers like the Global Times or China Daily have stated that some Taiwanese citizens are very ignorant about the mainland, in part due to what they regard as a strategy from the ruling party DPP to cut off ties. They make harsh comments on Taiwanese politics and believe that not being able to effectively communicate with each other makes it hard to reach a common ground. This has limited China's success in communicating the advantages of a possible unification with the island, even if economic interdependence and other soft power mechanisms have proved to be useful to anchor Taiwan and complicate the maintenance of its status quo. The truth is that governments might have the capacity of changing their views depending on the party that is elected, yet society will continue to show tendencies that distance them from China, making the efficacy of said soft power efforts much more reduced.

### 7.1.2. Overseas

If the PRC wants to legitimate its interferences in Taiwan, it needs some kind of approval in the international scheme as well. While the CCP's strategies in Taiwan aim to shape the perceptions of Taiwanese people with regard to China, Chinese soft power overseas seeks to convince the international community of the One China Principle and their belonging of Taiwan. At the end of the day, the CCP's main goal is to establish an effective foreign policy that can lead to a complete isolationism of Taiwan internationally. This section explores how the international community may be bound to change its perception of Taiwan after Chinese soft power strategies overseas are deployed. It will focus mainly on the importance of China's economic presence, its influence on developing countries through the media, and the way in which they conduct international relations. These relate to business and trade, international relations, and media and communication categories of the Soft Power Index.

- **Business and trade**

Without a doubt, China's successful rapid economic development has been the main source of soft power for the CCP. It has allowed them to portray an image of a successful country, with a great part of the developing world aspiring to pursue a similar path to that of China. This is a sort of economic diplomacy aimed to approach the international community in a way that they can exert a real influence on their perceptions towards Taiwan. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Project or huge infrastructure and capital investment in Latin America and Africa have convinced many countries to cut ties with the ROC and start doing business with the PRC. At the end of the day, these countries have realised that what China could offer them overcomes that of Taiwan, even if politically they do not necessarily align with the CCP.

In the case of Latin America, countries such as the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua or Panama have switched positions in favour of China and to the detriment of Taiwan given the offered financial incentives by the CCP, most notably loans and infrastructure investments. Honduras and Paraguay, for instance, have faced increasing pressure from China to cut ties with Taiwan in exchange for vaccine doses for Covid-19 (Roy, 2022). For Africa, the situation is even more favourable to China because very few countries recognise Taiwan. This is because the PRC, right after African countries got their independence, made sure to give them economic incentives to choose them over the ROC.

China became Africa's largest trade partner in 2009 and has doubled its exports to Africa since then. Between 2000 and 2014, Chinese financing surpassed \$86 billion and has invested heavily in infrastructure and agricultural plantations, making China a well-perceived country in the continent and boosting the relations between them (Albert, 2017).

In developed economies, Chinese blackmailing to cut ties with Taiwan has also had economic consequences. The clearest example is Lithuania, which made the decision to open a representative office of the ROC with the official name of a "Taiwanese" institution as opposed to a "Taipei" institution, which was regarded as a provocation by the PRC. With China already having applied market restrictions, stopping trade negotiations, and refusing to acquire Lithuanian exports, the bilateral trade relationship further deteriorated. The hope for Beijing of involving the whole EU in the issue has not worked very well, as both the EU and the US have openly supported Lithuania's decision. However, the issue of increased economic presence and influence, even if it is normally directed towards developing economies, means that advanced economies cannot get away from China's economic diplomacy very easily either.

- **International relations**

Chinese power in the international sphere has limited Taiwan's capability to counter the policies carried out by the Asian giant. The policy of the One China Principle has persuaded countries around the world to recognise the PRC as the legitimate China over time. As the PRC has made itself more open to the world and a more important actor in the international sphere, Taiwan has suffered from less and less recognition overseas. This has been targeted and not casual, in fact, China has sought to implement policies that can blackmail countries that still recognise Taiwan as the legitimate Chinese government to shift their positions. A clear example is Panama, which switched diplomatic relations to the PRC in 2017 after having supported the ROC up until that date (Cook et al., 2022).

Additionally, Taiwan is isolated from a great part of international organizations around the world due to China's diplomatic pressure. In fact, the veto power from China prevents Taiwan from being a member of the United Nations (UN) or the World Health Organization (WHO), for example. These diplomatic pressures have been very successful mechanisms for China's external relations, to project an image to the world where Taiwan is relegated as being merely a province of its own, rather than a state with full capacity to get on the international scene.

- **Media and communication**

The PRC also exercises a lot of influence on the media to contribute to less coverage of Taiwan internationally, mainly through their embassies overseas. For example, in 2021, the Chinese embassy in Kuwait pressured the Arab Times to delete a published interview with Taiwan's foreign minister, and the Chinese embassy in India instructed media outlets on how to talk about Taiwan. In Spain, China aimed to compare Taiwan's situation with the separatist movement of Catalonia in an attempt to seek more support. In Latin American countries such as Brazil and Peru, Chinese diplomats pressured the media to make statements about Taiwan that were favourable to China. China also disseminated disinformation campaigns in the US aimed to alter the discourse of US-Taiwan relations (Cook et al., 2022). These are just some examples to the extent to which the PRC makes efforts to persuade the international community of their One China policy.

These efforts have had an uneven impact in different countries according to Beijing's Global Media Influence report by Freedom House. Adhering to the examples used, Kuwait, Spain and Peru have been found to be vulnerable countries regarding Beijing's discourse; while India, Brazil and the US have had a resilient response. This shows that their effectiveness is not generalised, but it does have a real impact in some countries that seem to be more vulnerable (Cook et al., 2022).

Overall, it is difficult to quantify the impact that these soft power policies are having when hard power is being used by the PRC so consistently and in such a threatening way. As for effective tactics, it goes without saying that China's diplomatic efforts to isolate Taiwan internationally have been effective, as they have convinced many countries to recognise the PRC over the ROC. However, when it comes to how these strategies are perceived overseas, it is important to look at the bigger picture and consider the perceptions of countries towards China. This is one of the limitations of China's use of soft power. In fact, their deployment of soft power is geographically uneven, with makes a great part of the world not believe the claims it holds towards Taiwan. This is especially true in most of the Western world, where China's image is perceived negatively, especially after the handling of the Covid-19 crisis. The graph below shows public opinion towards China from 14 advanced economies in a study by the Pew Research Center. In 9 out of the 14 countries surveyed, the percentage of people holding negative

views towards China has increased to its highest point to date. There is also an overall loss of confidence in China’s President Xi Jinping, although China wins in most countries in terms of being regarded as the world’s leading economic power (Silver et al., 2020).

**View of China from people in advanced economies**

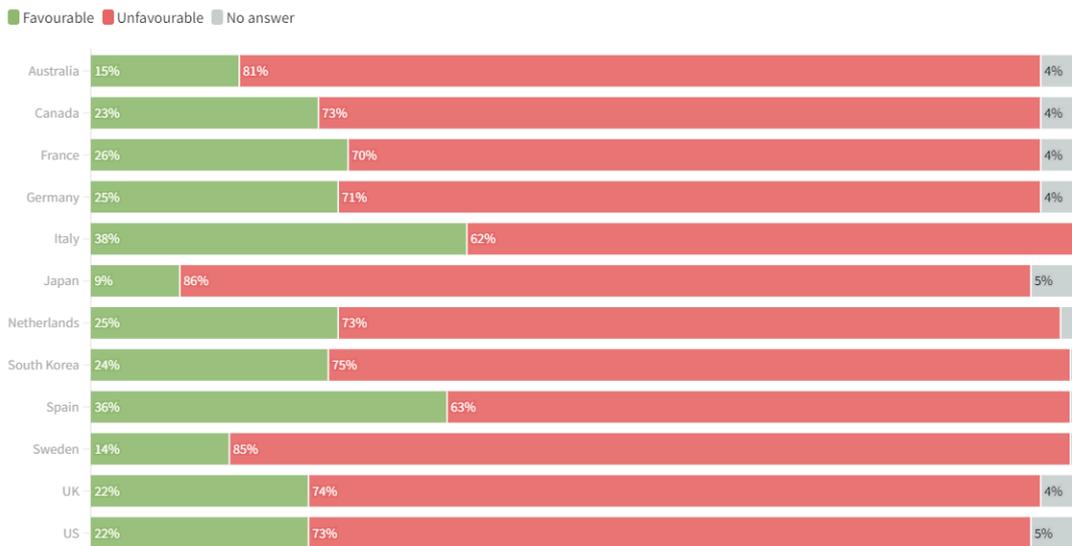


Figure 7. Own elaboration with data from the Pew Research Center (2020).

For the developing world, however, the situation is drastically different. China’s image has improved considerably, given the efforts of the PRC to invest and provide aid to these developing countries, as well as the model of rapid development that motivates them to follow the example of the Asian giant in their economies. This gives China an opportunity to further develop soft power skills in these developing countries, which generally tend to be more vulnerable to foreign influences as well.

**View of China's influence from people in developing economies**

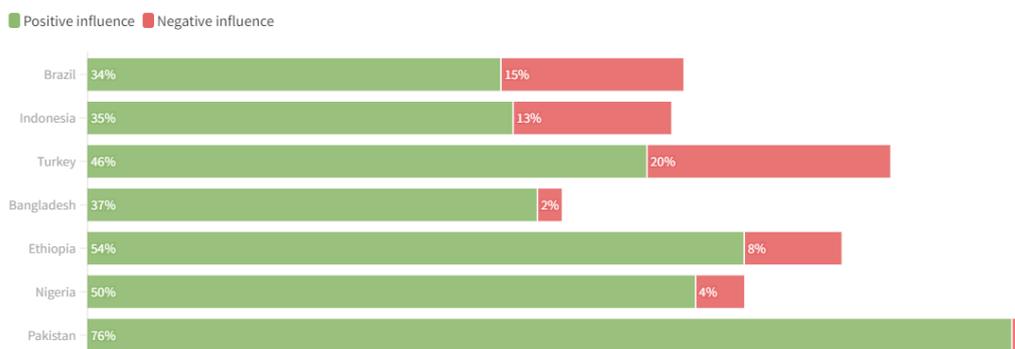


Figure 8. Own elaboration with data from the 2022 Soft Power Index by Brand Finance (2022).

Hence, it can be concluded that the factor of international public opinion should also be considered, observing the great difference between what public opinion is like in the

West and what it is like in the developing world. This allows not falling into generalisations that can be misleading when assessing the impact of pro-Chinese reunification narratives internationally.

Having considered both the PRC's efforts in Taiwan and overseas to shape the future of cross-strait relations, it can be concluded that China has increased its efforts to utilise soft power in ways that could alter Taiwan's destiny. However, up until now, it could be argued that the impact of these soft power policies has been limited by the use of hard power in relations to both sides of the strait. The CCP should reflect on the message it aims to convey through the portrayal of two contradictory images when soft or hard power is used. In fact, soft power efforts often portray an image of friendliness towards Taiwan to try and convince them via peaceful means of what they could achieve with reunification. At the same time, an image of strength and superiority over the island is shown via hard power means that appeals to coercive measures to bring the two societies back together. The result is a contradiction and inconsistency with the policies carried out, which leads to considering that the point of soft power is missed. This leaves hard power standing out over soft power, ultimately dismissing said friendly image by both Taiwan and the international community. Not only this but analysing the Taiwanese response to these policies also challenges the effectiveness of soft power use by the PRC and the extent to which it is making a real impact.

## 7.2. The Taiwanese response to counter China

In the current times, Taiwan has grown apart from China in ways that an attempt to bring both societies back together seems to be more dystopian than ever. Nonetheless, the reality of China exercising real pressure on the island is undoubted, and soft power for Taiwan comes as a relevant tool to balance their power. This is because they cannot compete with China via hard power means, hence Taiwan resorts to soft power strategies to make up for what it lacks. Taiwan seeks support abroad, especially from traditional allies like the US or the rest of the Western world, but they also implement policies that aim to spread a message to the world along the lines of the good functioning of their state

and their immense opportunities. Moreover, the emphasis of Taiwan on soft power is merely defensive, aimed to achieve a security that hard power cannot assure them.

Additionally, the Taiwanese response not only does it come from the state and its policies, but also from its people. Taiwanese people are a voice that needs to be heard when dealing with the Taiwan-China conflict, as it is an ongoing issue that has shaped its public opinion for decades. In fact, Taiwan is now further from China than it has ever been. Recent trends have shown the battle of the Taiwanese people about Chinese soft power efforts aiming at shaping their future, which has triggered an awakening of a Taiwanese identity that has consequently had an effect and shift on the state response over time. It could be argued that this is one of the most valuable things that Taiwan has developed to project an image of distancing from the mainland.

### 7.2.1. The state's response

This section explores how the government of Taiwan has responded to this use of soft power by the CCP to change the dynamics of the island. It looks at the successive governments of Taiwan over the years and highlights the strengths of Taiwanese soft power, as well as the limitations it encounters when dealing with Chinese pressure. As it can be inferred, Taiwan has long been hoping to use soft power to seek legitimacy abroad. As a result, two main narratives have been employed: the pro-reunification view, in which Mainland China and Taiwan are part of the Chinese nation but the ROC is the governing power of the country and they both share a common identity; and the pro-independence view, in which Taiwan is a separate country from Mainland China and there is an inherent distinct Taiwanese identity (Pamment et al., 2019). This last narrative has taken on much more relevance in the past years, as Taiwan has realised that unification with the mainland under its governance is highly unlikely.

The table below shows who the main actors in Taiwan to counter Chinese pressures are, followed by a brief explanation of their function and capabilities in its strategy against the PRC.

## Main Taiwanese actors to counter China and deploy their soft power strategy

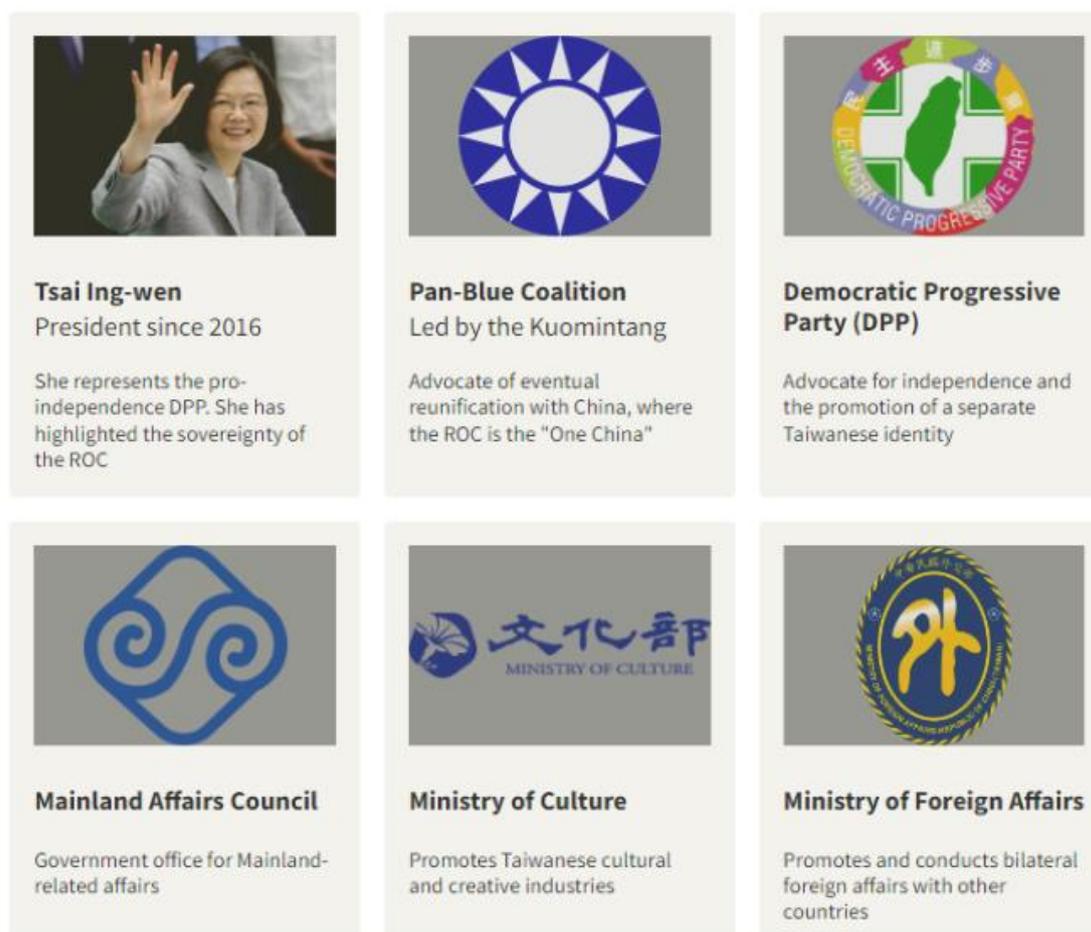


Figure 9. Own elaboration based on information from the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (2019).

Both the KMT and the DPP have emphasised the importance of using soft power in their foreign policy strategy, however, the narratives used have been fundamentally different for both parties. On the one hand, the KMT, generally believed to be more permissive towards Beijing, has used a calmer tone when addressing their policies, mainly focused on cultural elements as the basis for their soft power efforts. On the other hand, DPP governments have used a much more provocative style and highlighted themes such as democracy as their main assets for a soft power strategy abroad, which has infuriated China much more. An exception is Lee Teng-hui, who governed the island up until the year 2000 under the KMT using a more distinctive approach between the “two states” (Rawnsley, 2014).

According to Rawnsley (2014), one of the deficiencies of the Taiwanese system is that there is no consensus within government departments about how to approach this issue. All functions are allocated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the

Ministry of Culture, which changes in strategy depending on the party that is governing the island at the time. For example, while KMT governments have focused on promoting traditional Chinese culture as an asset of their soft power, for example by making exhibitions on Chinese calligraphy, DPP governments have focused more on the promotion of an intrinsically Taiwanese culture (Rawnsley, 2014).

In this case, the sections that will be presented in this analysis relate to business and trade, governance and international relations, culture and heritage, and media and communication. It will explore what the state has communicated over time in relation to the threat posed by mainland China, highlighting some fundamental differences between the two main parties of Taiwan, the KMT and the DPP.

- **Business and trade**

The immense volume of the Chinese economy is effectively shadowing that of Taiwan; however, the island's economy is thriving, with countless opportunities to expand its market and promote investment in the area. In fact, despite Taiwan's small population in comparison to China's, with only a bit more than 23 million inhabitants, Taiwan's economy is ranked 21<sup>st</sup> in the world in terms of GDP at 858.97 billion USD. In addition, real GDP growth as of October 2022 was at 2.8%, considerably higher than most of the developed world, but of course lower than China's. Taiwan's economic success does not actually come as a surprise, as the island was a model for the East Asian Model of rapid industrialization back in the 70s (DeLisle, 2010).

There are some indicators that show the strengths of the Taiwanese economy in relation to China's. Firstly, Taiwan ranks 29<sup>th</sup> in GDP per capita (36.83 thousand USD per capita), almost three times better than the 70<sup>th</sup> position of China (13.63 thousand USD per capita), which proves the high standards of living of Taiwanese people and its prosperous economy (IMF, 2022). Secondly, the BERI report in 2022 ranked Taiwan as the 3<sup>rd</sup> best investment destination globally, ahead of China at the 6<sup>th</sup> position. In addition, Taiwan is a leader in microchips, which are indispensable in today's world, accounting for 63% of its global production. In fact, out of the 20 most valuable semiconductor brands, three of them are Taiwanese. TSMC, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> in the world only after Intel, has shown a 5% positive brand value change while Intel saw a decrease in value of 10%, earning the title of the strongest semiconductor brand globally (Brand Finance, 2023). The other two, Mediatek, and Ase Technology, both have very good projections for an

increase in their brand values. The success of Taiwan in an industry that is thriving in an era of relevance of leading technology presents innumerable advantages to Taiwan's future outlook that can be exploited to their benefit. Besides, Taiwan's high development in sectors such as 5G, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and renewable energies is key in the current world context as well.

The image that the world retains of Taiwan is that of a strong and stable economy with easy access to its market and good opportunities to do business. Besides, it is an island with very good projections in terms of potential future growth, which incentivises countries to invest in Taiwan and spread positive views on the island via word of mouth. Definitely, Taiwan's economic success is a good source of soft power that needs to be further considered even if it has some limitations, such as the size of the Chinese economy covering up Taiwan's success or the fact that Taiwan's history and the current context are not very well-known overseas.

To be more specific, a strategy that has been sustained by successive governments, especially by the DPP, is to increase economic ties with allies like the US or Japan, instead of further deepening economic dependency towards China. For example, from the 2000s, Taiwan signed free trade agreements with its diplomatic allies in Central America, and with New Zealand and Singapore in 2013. It signed an investment agreement with Japan in 2011 and negotiated the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with the US to increase those economic ties (Huang, 2016).

- **Governance and International Relations**

Something that the PRC lacks that the ROC can use to its own advantage is the fact that they have one of the best democratic regimes in the world. In fact, according to the Democracy Index 2022 by the Economist Intelligence Unit, Taiwan has positioned itself as the top full democracy in Asia for the third consecutive year, ranking the 10<sup>th</sup> best in the world (EIU, 2022). Taiwanese governments can emphasise their belief in democratic and cosmopolitan values and their support on human rights. These have been key soft power means to the promotion of effective Taiwanese public diplomacy to the world and is in fact what makes Taiwan theoretically have far more soft power capacity than the PRC (Rawnsley, 2014). In fact, when Joseph Nye introduced the concept of soft power, he highlighted the importance of democratic values as intrinsic to one's soft power strategy in the sense that "soft power is a staple of daily democratic politics" (Nye, 2008).

One of the main limitations of Taiwanese soft power is the fact that they do not hold formal diplomatic relations with most of the developed world. As of March 2023, only 14 states maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, most of them microstates in the Pacific and the Caribbean area, plus some countries in Latin America (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROC, 2023). This limited recognition has also been reduced over the past few years as more states turned to China to the detriment of Taiwan, such is the case of Panama or the Dominican Republic. Even though the pressure of the Asian giant is determinant of Taiwan's external relations, the island still maintains very good official non-diplomatic relations with a great part of the world, especially in the Western world and the Southeast Asian region. In fact, Taiwan has been able to establish more than 90 Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Offices (TECRO) and other representative offices abroad, which operate similarly to consulates and embassies without having the status of being so. These deal with all foreign affairs of Taiwan and promote the island to countries where there is limited knowledge about the island.

#### Diplomatic relations between the ROC and other states (2023)

■ Formal relations ■ Informal relations ■ No relations ■ China & Taiwan

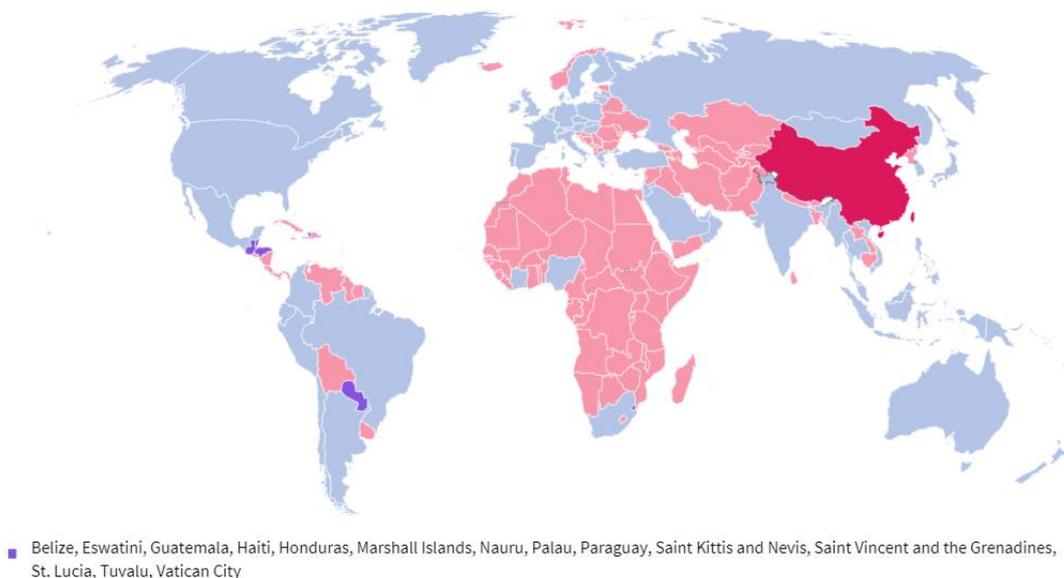


Figure 10. Own preparation with data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (Taiwan) (2023).

Its greatest ally is considered to be the US, which has recently reiterated its solid commitment and engagement with Taiwan and support to the island in case of an invasion (U.S. Department of State, 2022), even if it does not formally recognise its independence from China. The US has also urged China to enhance dialogue in the strait and stop using military, diplomatic, and economic pressure over Taiwan. Besides, both the US and the

EU have expressed their concerns about the isolationism of Taiwan in international organizations. In a resolution of the European Parliament in September 2022, the EU has shown their positions regarding a peaceful dialogue for cross-strait relations, praising Taiwan's response to the Covid-19 crisis, and asking for more active participation of the island in international organizations such as the WHO and Interpol.

As a matter of fact, maintaining good relations with important actors internationally has been key to Taiwan's soft power strategy, aimed at convincing the world that China's pressure on the island is unmeasured. They are also good at presenting their competitive advantages to the detriment of China. The main advantage that they can use as a means of exercising soft power is the spread of a message of democracy and belief in democratic values. By emphasising these claims, Taiwan must continue convincing the international community of its legitimacy as a sovereign state, working towards maintaining the strategic alliances they have with the US, the EU, and other Asian states in order to increase its relevance in the international sphere. Not only should they preserve and enhance their bilateral relations with other states, but they should also build closer ties with international institutions that can give Taiwan a stronger voice in international affairs.

- **Culture and heritage**

During the presidency of the DPP from 2000 to 2008, former President Chen Shui-bian highlighted "a distinct Taiwanese identity with deep historic roots in aboriginal cultures and early Western influences and increasingly tied to separate sovereignty that made the people on the island fundamentally distinct from the Chinese across the Strait" (DeLisle, 2010). With the current DPP government under Tsai Ing-wen, this idea has been strengthened further. However, the government has to face pro-Beijing and pro-reunification political parties and civil society groups that menace the position of the party in power. There is also the issue of increasing familial and cultural ties between both sides of the strait (Pamment et al., 2019). This does not seem like a big threat to the Taiwanese government, as Taiwanese people themselves seem to have a big sense of Taiwanese identity.

Moreover, the different TECROs around the world, in charge of maintaining good relations with other countries, have different programmes to promote Taiwan and its culture. Among others, both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Ministry of Education (MOE) launch yearly scholarships to go to Taiwan to study degrees, master's

programmes, PhDs, or Mandarin Chinese courses in associate Taiwanese universities. Regarding direct flights with the mainland, the DPP seems to be quite sceptical of these measures and has used Covid-19 as an excuse not to resume as many flights as there were scheduled between both sides of the strait. The real reason behind this is that the green party believes more communication with the mainland is a threat to the Taiwanese status quo.

- **Media and communication**

Taiwan's response against China's efforts of influencing its media has been forceful and consistent, showing very high local resilience and response according to Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022 report by the Freedom House, scoring 74 points out of 85. Moreover, it is important to note that Taiwan's media freedom ranks among the best in Asia. According to Freedom on the Net 2022, Taiwan is given 79 points out of 100 on their scale. Overall, there are no obstacles to accessing information and no significant limits on content, although it ranks a bit lower on violations of user rights. The main concerns regarding the freedom of Taiwanese media are indeed these efforts from the Chinese government to influence its media, as well as policymaking and the bases of its democracy (Freedom House, 2022).

The current DPP government has successfully brought about new laws that aim to respond to this growing influence of China in Taiwanese media, even if there was some criticism from the party in the opposition, the KMT. In this sense, there is a legal framework that aims to tackle disinformation campaigns by the CCP, efforts of China to use soft power to interfere in elections and other methods to weaken Taiwan's political stability. There has also been an effort from the government to further educate Taiwan's population by adding media and online literacy programmes to the Taiwanese school curriculum to raise awareness of China's interference in their internal affairs (Datt & Huang, 2022).

Although media is not generally restricted and filtered in Taiwan, the current government has aimed for greater limitations of content on Chinese platforms such as iQIYI, a streaming video platform owned by Baidu. Indeed, in August 2020, a new law was passed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs forbidding Taiwanese companies to offer services linked to video streaming coming from Chinese entities or individuals, particularly iQIYI and Tencent. In May 2022, the National Communications Commission

of the ROC introduced a new framework for the regulation of these OTT platforms so that these Chinese companies could comply with stricter rules on the content distributed (Freedom House, 2022). This comes as a result of Chinese platforms that are made contingent on the CCP and spread misinformation that can wrongfully influence Taiwanese society. Western technology platforms have also participated in restrictions of content to favour China. In 2021, a DPP parliamentarian accused Facebook of following CCP's standards, urging the National Security Bureau (NSB) of the ROC to confirm these allegations. Besides, under the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area, which sets cross-strait relations, government approval to own media properties in Taiwan is needed and CCP advertisements are banned. Besides, the NSB actively tracks social media to detect Chinese propaganda (Freedom House, 2022).

The current DPP government has pushed for more protection of Taiwanese media to avoid a deterioration of its media, but some other things could be done to protect the island from a growing pro-China narrative that comes from Beijing. This could be achieved by strengthening local institutions to protect the media against mainly economic pressures. Indeed, some further regulations on the implications of economic dependency in the media need to be considered if Taipei aims for a more forceful response.

The plurality of Taiwanese politics could be argued to be both their best strength and their worst weakness. On the one hand, democracy is a powerful means of exerting soft power, which can convince societies around the world of their legitimacy over the island, getting more support against China. On the other hand, however, the discrepancies between the two main ruling parties of Taiwan, the KMT and the DPP, have prevented Taiwan from uniting into the same cause given their different positions about the mainland. From the enhanced cooperation preached by the KMT to the isolationist policy of the DPP in relation to China, the two blocks fundamentally have different opinions whose policies shift in practice according to the party that is governing at the time.

This is an issue that the CCP in mainland China does not have to deal with, which to an extent allows them to get more benefits because they follow a coherent soft power strategy regarding Taiwan, not determined by political preferences but according to a same goal. Thus, it could be argued that if Taiwan wants to portray a more effective soft

power strategy to counter China's aims for reunification, Taiwanese governments need to unite to establish clearer objectives for Taiwan's soft power strategy. This could focus on less political views on the status quo of Taiwan, such as the promotion of its culture and knowledge of the island overseas, which is its national brand. This could enhance further cooperation from both sides of the political spectrum, increasing awareness of Taiwan's situation, and resonating more with people around the world. Inside its borders, the state could focus on promoting this national identity and culture that the Taiwanese are more and more proud of each year, which could respond even more effectively to the soft power strategies and public diplomacy of the CCP.

### 7.2.2. The civil society's response

With regard to civil society, it is believed to be a useful mechanism to promote an image of credibility that is difficult to attain within the institutional framework. In fact, in many cases, public opinion has proved to be one of the most effective tools to counter actors in the pursuit of goals that are contrary to those of the general public. This is one of the main setbacks for China when employing an effective soft power policy, as the opinions of Taiwanese people regarding the mainland are mostly negative towards the PRC.

Regarding Taiwan, the CCP might be underestimating its capacity to shape the future of the island. According to data from the Pew Research Center, at the end of 2019, nearly double the amount of people in Taiwan hold more favourable attitudes towards the US than mainland China, 68% to 35% respectively. In terms of demographics, supporters of the DPP, younger generations, and those who identify solely as Taiwanese tend to hold more positive views towards the US to the detriment of China. Besides, closer economic ties with the mainland seem to be more widely accepted, while closer political ties are much less wanted.

## Attitudes of Taiwanese people towards the US and mainland China

■ US ■ China

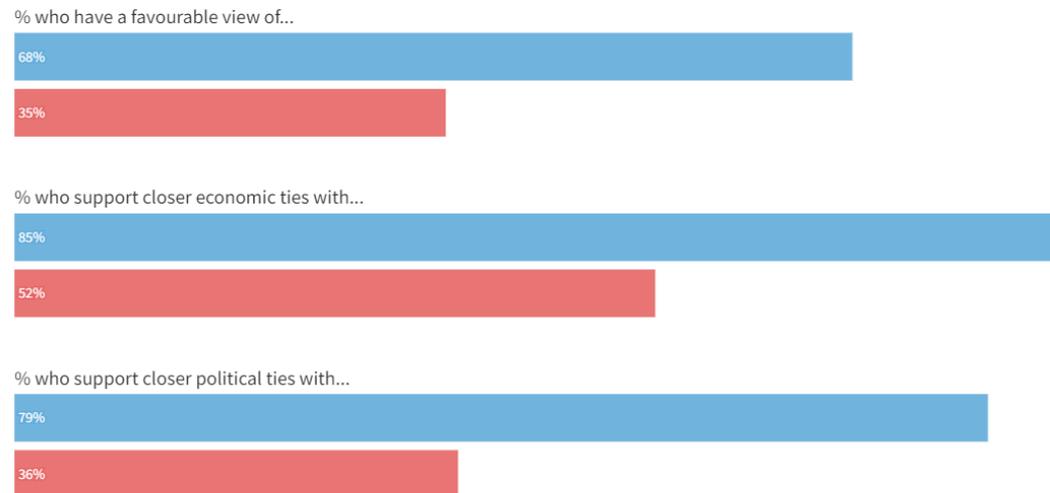


Figure 11. Own preparation with data from a survey conducted in 2019 by the Pew Research Center (2020).

Taiwanese society has already responded to the growth of Chinese influence on the island by participating in a series of protests such as the anti-media monopoly movement of 2012, or the anti-Services Trade Agreement (STA) protest of 2013, which led to the “Sunflower Movement” of 2014, ending with the suspension of said agreement after more than 10,000 people claimed that these would make Taiwan more vulnerable to China’s political aims (Wu, 2016). Non-governmental bodies like Taiwan’s Youth Ambassador Programme have increased collaboration between countries that still hold diplomatic relations with Taiwan, bringing university students together. Another example is “Say Taiwan!” programme, which promotes tourism to the island in exchange for social media coverage (Rawnsley, 2014).

Indeed, Taiwanese civil society is developing creative strategies to go against Beijing’s influence such as monitoring Chinese-funded activities in Taiwan, supporting press freedom, tracking disinformation, and countering fake news with fact-checking (Datt & Huang, 2022), to which Taiwanese journalists have also collaborated in bringing about a forceful response. With the war on Ukraine in 2022, public opposition towards CCP propaganda grew even bigger, and almost 3 in every 4 people in Taiwan stated that more news media regulations are needed to counter Chinese media interference. Some groups also hold workshops that aim to teach Taiwanese people to detect media disinformation and manipulation from the CCP (Datt & Huang, 2022). They have also protested against CCP influence through media in mass demonstrations and legislative

advocacy (Cook et al., 2022). Therefore, civil society has definitely become aware of the threat that China poses on the island, especially in terms of media influence, and wants to do something to counter this presence.

Figure 12 below shows the evolution of Taiwanese public opinion with regard to the future of the territory. As it can be inferred from the data provided by the Election Study Center of National Chengchi University, 88.6% of Taiwanese citizens in 2022 want to maintain their current status quo. However, this large majority holds discrepancies when it comes to what this support of the status quo means in the long term. 28.7% of citizens believe the future of Taiwan should be (1) decided at a later rate, 28.5% aim to maintain their (2) status quo indefinitely, 25.4% believe the country should aim for (3) independence in the long run, and only 6% think that the ultimate aim is to (4) achieve unification with the mainland. The other two options, which aim for a rapid change in Taiwan’s situation, seem to be less popular. 4.6% of the population want the (5) independence of Taiwan as soon as possible, while only 1.2% believe in (6) unification as soon as possible.

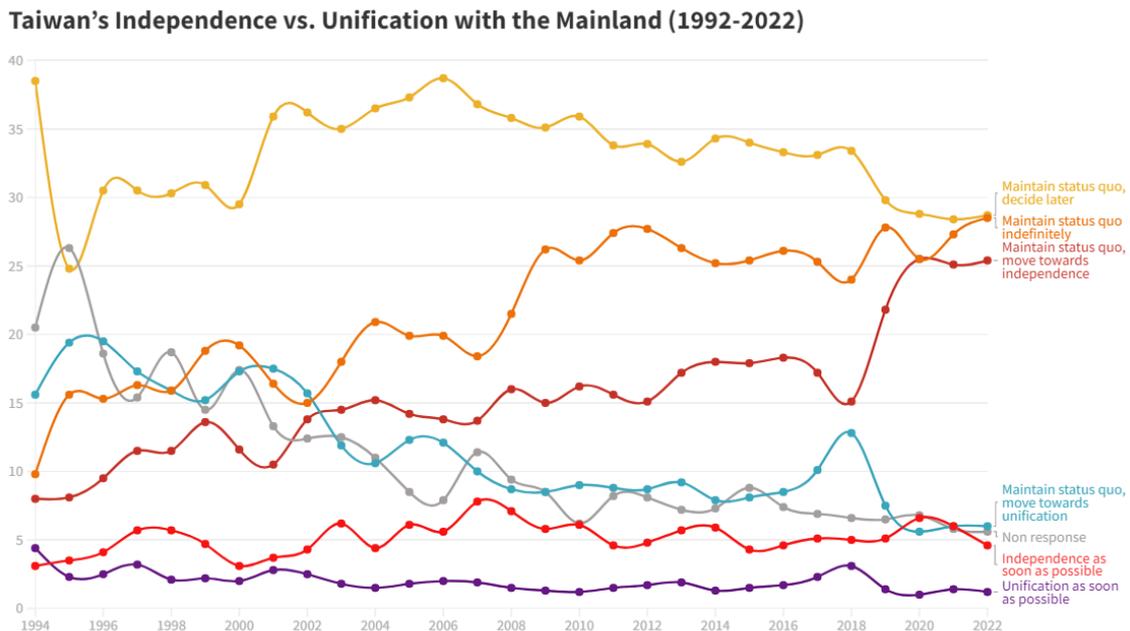


Figure 12. Own preparation based on data from the Election Study Center, National Chengchi University (2022).

The current figures have evolved over the years. The decision to (1) maintain the status quo and decide later seems to have been quite popular since 1994. Both (2) maintaining the status quo indefinitely and (3) moving towards independence in the long run have increased in popularity over the past decades, considering they started in 1994

only at 9.8% and 8% respectively. The biggest push for (3) maintaining the status quo and moving towards independence happened in 2019 and 2020 when it peaked at 25.5%. Inversely, (4) maintaining the status quo and moving towards unification has lost great popularity over the years, considering it was at 19.5% in 1996. Both (5) independence and (6) unification as soon as possible have followed a similar steady course over the years, independence being above the latter and especially popular in 2007 (7.8%) and 2008 (7.1 %). Rapid unification was the most popular in 1994 at 4.4%. Since then, it has progressively gone down to the point of reaching only 1% in 2020.

This shows that, in general terms, a large majority of Taiwanese society is against unification with the mainland, which is what China tries to portray as best for Taiwan in the deployment of its soft power strategy. This disassociation of the Taiwanese with the PRC is very well reflected in the growing Taiwanese identity that has steadily grown over the period from 1992 to 2022, showing a clear evolution in Figure 13 below.

**Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese (1992-2022)**

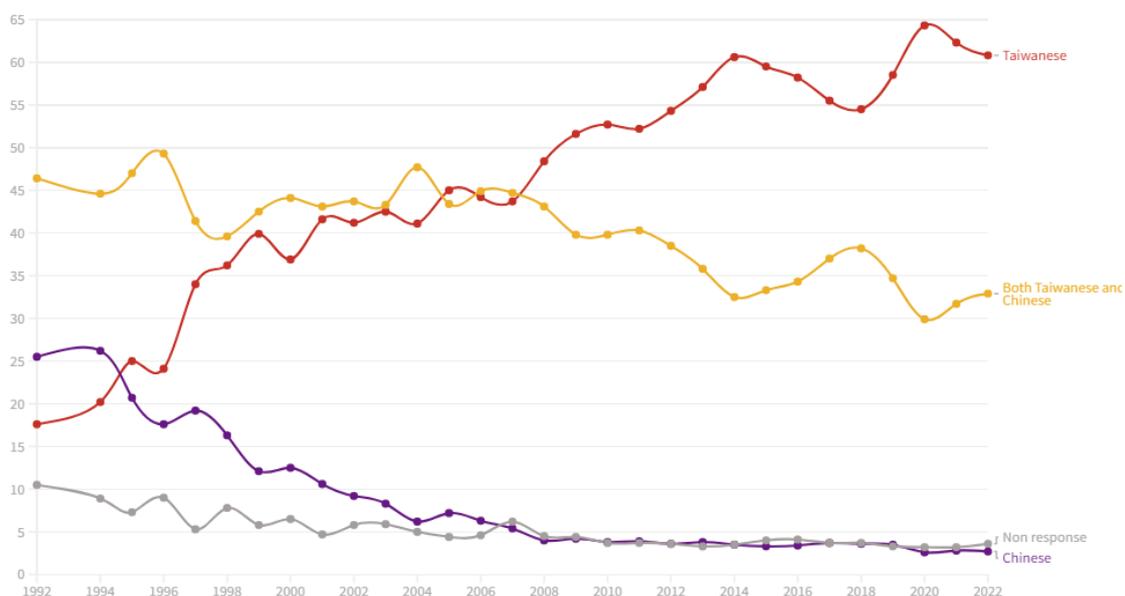


Figure 13. Own preparation based on data from the Election Study Center, National Chengchi University (2022).

From 1992 to 2008, identifying as both Taiwanese and Chinese was the most common opinion in Taiwan, with data oscillating from 41.4% to 49.3%, when it reached its peak in 1996. Since then, this dual identity representation has steadily decreased to the point of reaching its lowest in 2020 at 29.9%. In 2022, this number slightly increased to 32.9%. Since 2008, the emergence of a singular Taiwanese identity has gained more and more popularity in a way that is proportionally inverse to identifying both as Taiwanese and

Chinese. Indeed, in 1992, the number of people identifying as only Taiwanese was at its lowest at 17.6%. There was a significant increase of almost 10 percentage points from 1996 to 1997, which helped the Taiwanese identity be the most popular one for the first time in 2005. Since then, Taiwanese identity has considerably grown with some ups and downs. It registered its highest point in 2020 at 64.3%, and it has slightly decreased to 60.8% in 2022. Regarding a Chinese identity, one in four people (25.5%) in 1992 considered themselves Chinese, a number that has rapidly decreased over the past decades. In 2022, only 2.7% of Taiwanese citizens considered themselves Chinese.

It remains to be seen how these figures change in the following years, considering that both in 2021 and 2022 there has been a little shift in the identity of the Taiwanese. However, even with this slight change, more than 6 in 10 people in Taiwan at the moment identify as only Taiwanese, which threatens China and its eagerness to control the population of the ROC. This is definitely one of the biggest obstacles they face when carrying out their strategy of soft power, both in the region and internationally, and has contributed to the limited success of pro-China policies. These trends can indeed be explained by the fact that Taiwan is now a more stable and mature democracy that believes in some values that the PRC does not, that is, a discontentment with Chinese political culture. Besides, there is a generation gap in which the new younger Taiwanese generations have fewer connections to the mainland, which deters them from holding positive views on the other side of the strait (Pamment et al., 2019).

When it comes to limitations of the Taiwanese civil society response, one of the main obstacles of many Taiwanese people is the fear of Chinese reprisals when expressing freely how they feel about the China-Taiwan conflict. For instance, journalists or online activists who need to travel to China may be discouraged to publish any content deemed sensitive by the CCP to avoid being prosecuted in the mainland. Others have had to publicly apologise after pressures from Beijing for referring to Taiwan as a country (Freedom House, 2022). At the end of the day, even if self-censor is not practised in most cases, there is some kind of threat there that prevents Taiwanese people from expressing their views on the issue in the freest way possible. However, Taiwanese people are well aware that China is pushing its influence in the media sector, and they are able to discern the CCP's aims to manipulate Taiwanese media, especially younger generations. At the end of the day, Taiwanese identity seems to be growing despite Chinese aims to influence even more the daily lives of Taiwanese society.

## 8. Conclusions and proposals

Throughout the present dissertation, it has been analysed how Chinese soft power regarding Taiwan has impacted the island and the correspondent Taiwanese response to these threats posed by China. It has been concluded that both China and Taiwan have a good interest in using soft power to address the conflict, whether that be dissuasive in the case of China or defensive in the case of Taiwan. For both, their strategies have limitations and present numerous challenges for the future of cross-strait relations.

For the PRC, Chinese soft power has some advantages that could help them achieve their goals regarding Taiwan, especially their economic superiority. Their push for economic interdependence has provoked a real impact to some extent, although in other areas such as culture the enhancement of shared values has not deterred the Taiwanese from creating a separate Taiwanese identity that grows every year. Increasing media influence pressures could have been more impactful if it were not for the highly resilient response of the Taiwanese, which has proved to be very effective in countering the growing efforts of China. In the same way, China has not been successful at communicating and convincing Taiwanese society of the benefits of eventual reunification with the mainland, which is especially concerning when looking at the deadline of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”. However, in terms of international isolationism, China has been successful at deterring Taiwan from holding formal diplomatic relations with many countries, which in turn has complicated its participation in international organisations. The role of its economic presence in the global sphere is somewhat effective in developing countries, however, for most of the Western world Chinese claims do not resonate with them.

In fact, Chinese soft power lacks a lot of the incentives that make the country be perceived positively around the world, such as popular culture or civil society. This takes its toll on the CCP’s efforts to change the minds of the people and convince them of their legitimacy over Taiwan. In Taiwan, both the government and the people perceive China as a threat, rather than someone to collaborate with and further strengthen cross-strait relations. Abroad, China is perceived as a threat to the West, and as a model for economic development and success in the developing world. Even if the latter generally holds positive views towards the Asian giant, such mentioned aspects of being culturally close still need to be addressed. We cannot deny that the predominant American soft power

reached its peak some time ago, and so its impact is less than it used to be, however, Chinese soft power has not yet substituted that position to the point of being considered successful in the same way. The difference between one and the other might rely on the fact that the Chinese use of hard power is deterring the Taiwanese and the rest of the world from holding positive views of the Asian giant, which is effectively reducing the efficacy of soft power used regarding Taiwan. The first hypothesis can hence be confirmed and conclude that the CCP's use of soft power is limited in great part due to the continuous use of hard power in the handling of cross-strait relations.

As for Taiwan, even with the asset of their good economic projections and media response, a lot of work still needs to be done to create a shared soft power policy that does not differentiate between governments, and instead pushes for a unified response against China and further knowledge and solidarity with their country overseas. Taiwan has many strengths to exploit in its soft power strategy, the main one being the democratic values they believe in which have made them have very good relations with most of the Western world. Besides, enhancing their Taiwanese identity has proved to be essential to distance themselves from China in ways that had never been seen before as public opinion polls have shown. The Taiwanese have also shown their resilient and forceful responses against media influence and growing economic dependence, which suggests that the Chinese might have overestimated their abilities. Therefore, the second hypothesis can be confirmed as Taiwanese identity and response against China seems to be more resilient than ever. For assessing whether it impacts less the international community, it can be concluded that even if the reality is that Taiwan's isolationism is shadowing its performance in many areas, the sentiment of many countries around the globe is to support Taiwan over Chinese claims.

The current question poses an enormous challenge to Taiwan: to what extent is the island determined to say no to China's financial benefits of economic cooperation with them if that means that their freedom to do what they want is forever limited? This is what the successive governments of the ROC have had to measure by themselves and will need to keep on mulling over the future of the conflict. If one lesson has been learnt from the Asian giant is that there is no such a symmetrical relationship with China. The PRC has immense power and will never stop yearning for more power because ambition is always more dissatisfied with what it does not have than satisfied with what it does.

Like Li Bai in his quote “as long as you work hard enough, an iron pestle can be ground to a needle”, China is perseverant and believes that keeping on working towards its goals will drive it to ultimate success. Whether they achieve it or not, one thing is for sure: cross-strait relations require dialogue and further negotiations to reach a common ground for both Taiwan and China that can bring about peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding of each other. The combination of hard and soft power will be key to analysing how the conflict will develop in future terms, which could serve as future research lines. Until then, soft power will keep having an essential role in shaping the future of the relations between the “two Chinas”, fighting an ideological battle that once caused the separation of a society that was united, but which has grown apart to the point of probably being too late to reunite today.

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