

China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan to support its reunification agenda

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ABSTRACT

The political dynamics between China and Taiwan have made China's reunification agenda increasingly difficult to achieve, while also driving public diplomacy as a strategy to influence Taiwanese public opinion. Although several studies have discussed the China-Taiwan relationship, research specifically analyzing how public diplomacy is carried out to support the reunification agenda is still limited. This research aims to assess how China's public diplomacy is carried out towards Taiwan in support of the China-Taiwan reunification efforts and to assess the extent to which these public diplomacy efforts have been successful. This research uses a descriptive-analytical qualitative method with secondary data and applies the three-dimensional public diplomacy framework from Leonard, Stead, and Smewing, as well as the four stages impact hierarchy of public diplomacy achievement. The findings shows that China has succeeded in keeping the reunification discourse alive and promoting Taiwan's public engagement with the reunification agenda, but has not significantly changed public perception. The weakness of China's public diplomacy can be attributed to the dominance of state actors in its implementation, the strengthening of Taiwan's national identity, and the low public trust in the "One Country, Two Systems" framework as the proposed solution for reunification. This study demonstrates that China's public diplomacy still faces significant challenges in building public support for the China-Taiwan reunification agenda.

Keywords:

public diplomacy; China-Taiwan relations; China reunification

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Taiwan and China is currently in a state of ongoing tension. Taiwan with its self-governing democratic system, continues to assert its position as a sovereign entity, while China remains firmly holds to the One China principle, claiming that Taiwan as part of its territory that must be reunified (Ahzani, 2021). China argues that according to the One China principle, Taiwan must accept and recognize its existence as an

inseparable part of China based on China's policy (Chen, 2015). In recent years, tensions have grown as Taiwan's national identity has strengthened, leading to greater resistance against reunification, while pressure from China has also increased (Jiang, 2017). Taiwan also continues to receive support from several countries, particularly the United States, which indirectly strengthens its position through economic cooperation (Jiang, 2017). This dynamic reflects the complexity of the relationship between the two nations, where historical, political, economic, and global security factors continue to play a role in shaping the future direction of China-Taiwan relations.

The conflict between China and Taiwan began after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 (Dittmer, 2017). At that time, two political and military forces competed to determine the future of China. The Kuomintang (KMT), led by Chiang Kai-shek, intended to establish a constitutional republic with a Western-style government. Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Mao Zedong, aimed to launch a communist revolution. Despite ideological differences, the two sides cooperated in fighting against the Japanese occupation of China in the 1930s. After World War II ended, the civil war between them resumed. In 1949, Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing. This led Chiang Kai-shek and KMT to retreat to Taiwan, establishing Taipei as the capital of the Republic of China. Since then, Taiwan has developed as a separate political entity from mainland China, although it is still claimed as part of the PRC's sovereignty (Dittmer, 2017).

China has consistently stated that Taiwan is part of its territory and has also pushed for reunification through various forums and official statements. China's first official statement regarding reunification with Taiwan was made in 1979 through a white paper titled *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan*. In this official statement, China called for negotiations with the KMT leaders and for Taiwan's return to "embrace of the motherland". Later in January 1979, Deng Xiaoping, who was then the de facto leader of China, introduced the concept of *One Country, Two Systems* as a framework to resolve the Taiwan issue. This principle proposed that Taiwan could return to China's sovereignty while maintaining its economic system and autonomy in domestic affairs, while the central Chinese government would manage foreign affairs and defense. In more recent developments, Chinese President Xi Jinping has reaffirmed that reunification with Taiwan is a historical inevitability. In his 2025 New Year's speech, which was published on the official website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, Xi stated that "no one can stop reunification" and emphasized that the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are one inseparable family (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Official Website, 2025). This statement reflects Beijing's consistent position, which continues to reject all forms of Taiwanese independence efforts and affirms that reunification is a national agenda and interest that cannot be interfered.

In pursuing its agenda, China recognizes the limitations of cross-straits formal communication. Therefore, one of the approaches used to achieve reunification is public diplomacy. Gaining the support of the Taiwanese public is also seen as a key factor in Beijing's reunification strategy, making public diplomacy an essential tool in shaping public opinion in Taiwan.

Melissen defines public diplomacy as an effort by an individual or organization to engage in dialogue and communication with foreign publics with the aim of building understanding, influencing perceptions, or shaping a particular image (Melissen, 2005). To achieve these objectives, public diplomacy cannot rely on a single dimension, but must encompass three main dimensions, which are news management, strategic communications, and relationship building (Leonard et al., 2002). Furthermore, Leonard, Stead, and Smewing stated that the success of public diplomacy can be measured through four stages hierarchy

of impacts of public diplomacy achievements: (1) Increasing awareness and familiarity, when foreign audiences start to know, think about, or update their image of a country. (2) Increasing appreciation, where positive perceptions and understanding of the country's perspective on global issues are formed. (3) Engagement, when the public starts to form closer relationships. (4) Influence, when public diplomacy achieves its main goals and encourages international public support for the policies being promoted.

Several previous studies have examined the dimensions of China's public diplomacy. From the perspective of China's strategy to spread its influence, Santoso et al., in their article titled *Praktik Diplomasi Publik Republik Rakyat Cina Sebagai Upaya Dalam Meningkatkan Hubungan Dengan Masyarakat Taiwan* observe how Beijing targets Taiwan's business groups and the Kuomintang elite as key communication partners in its public diplomacy (Santoso et al., 2020). Public diplomacy has also been discussed in Hung's research titled *Rethinking Public Diplomacy: A Study of China Exerting its Influence on Taiwan* in which Hung explains China's comprehensive public diplomacy way of efforts to spread its influence in Taiwan (Hung, 2017). Furthermore, in his article *Independence or Reunification? The Evolving PRC-Taiwan Relations*, Wong highlights the development of China's reunification policy since 1949 and the factors influencing the relationship between China and Taiwan (Wong, 2019). In a related discussion, Moody in his article *The Democratization of Taiwan and the Reunification of China*, shows that Taiwan's democratization presents a challenge to the "One China" narrative due to the rising public aspirations and principles of popular sovereignty (Moody, 1991). From the perspective of instruments and theoretical frameworks, d'Hooghe in *The Rise of China's Public Diplomacy*, notes that China's public diplomacy has evolved into a more open model, involving non-state actors through media, education, and cultural channels (Hooghe, 2007). Meanwhile, Chang and Yang in *Weaponized Interdependence: China's Economic Statecraft and Social Penetration against Taiwan*, highlight China's use of *economic statecraft* and *social penetration* to influence Taiwanese public opinion through economic integration and social exchange programs (Chang & Yang, 2020).

Previous research on China's diplomacy towards Taiwan has primarily focused on the economic aspects of cross-straits relations and the general practice of China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan. Studies that specifically analyze how China's public diplomacy is directed at shaping Taiwanese public opinion, particularly concerning reunification, are still limited. Additionally, no prior studies have measured the extent to which China's public diplomacy has achieved its objectives in the context of reunification.

Based on this, this study aims to analyze how China's public diplomacy is carried out towards Taiwan in support of the China-Taiwan reunification efforts and to assess the extent to which these public diplomacy efforts have been successful. The author will then identify the underlying causes of any weaknesses in the implementation of this public diplomacy. Identification and analysis will be conducted through the two main frameworks of public diplomacy by Leonard, Stead, and Smewing. The three dimensions of public diplomacy will be used as analytical tools to understand how public diplomacy is carried out and to identify the causes of its weaknesses. The four stages hierarchy of impacts of public diplomacy achievements will then be used to measure the extent of success in the implementation of these public diplomacy efforts.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach to analyze China's public diplomacy towards the Taiwanese public in its efforts for reunification. The descriptive approach is used to describe, explain, and provide a systematic and accurate depiction of the phenomena being analyzed, such as strategic communication, news

management, and relationship building related to China's public diplomacy towards Taiwan, as well as the extent to which the success of this public diplomacy has been achieved (Fiantika et al., 2022). In this study, the data used is secondary data in the form of documents and relevant literature compiled in an indirect manner, such as scientific journals, books, government documents, official government websites, and articles related to the topic being researched (Firmansyah et al., 2021).

The primary data collection technique used is literature study, which involves gathering and analyzing literature relevant to the research topic. The data obtained will be analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach, systematically examining the texts and identifying recurring themes, especially in terms of the public diplomacy conducted and its achievements (Safrudin et al., 2023). This analysis process will be conducted inductively, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena occurring. To ensure the validity of the collected data, data triangulation will be applied as a method to evaluate the consistency and validity of the information. The data collection period for this research spans from 2019 to 2024 to ensure the most current developments in China's public diplomacy policies towards Taiwan in the context of reunification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Public diplomacy was officially adopted by China in 2004 with the establishment of the Public Diplomacy Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*gong zhong wai jiao chu*), one year after the SARS epidemic that claimed many lives in China (Nip & Sun, 2022). China has three main focuses and objectives in implementing its public diplomacy. First, China aims to be seen as a country striving to provide a better future for its people. Second, China wants to be perceived as a stable, reliable, and responsible economic partner. Lastly, China aims to build a global perception of being a trustworthy and responsible actor in the international affairs (Kejin, 2015).

The public diplomacy model employed by China to achieve these objectives is notably different from the model used by Western countries (Zhao, 2019). China's public diplomacy has distinct characteristics because it explicitly incorporates Chinese values and national identity. China public diplomacy more emphasis on public relations and media campaigns as tools to shape its image and global influence (Hartig, 2016). Additionally, China's public diplomacy is structured and managed by the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) through the Whole-Nation system (*Ju Guo Ti Zhi*), a system where major policies are set by the central leadership and their implementation is entrusted to relevant political institutions (*Zhongyang Jueding, Ge Fang Quban*). This structure reflects the highly centralized nature of China's public diplomacy, which is party-led. Furthermore, in its diplomatic practices, China consistently promotes what is known as the "China Plan" or initiatives that offer Chinese perspectives and policies as solutions for the international public (Kejin, 2015). With these characteristics and structures, China's public diplomacy is not only aimed at shaping its global image but is also strategically directed to support its domestic and geopolitical interests, including in its relations with Taiwan.

In China-Taiwan relations, one of China's main national interests has consistently been the goal of reunifying with Taiwan. This goal has been a strategic priority for China since the separation and is deeply rooted in its official discourse. As part of this effort, public diplomacy has become one of the main strategies used by the Chinese government. According to Hung, the long-term goal of China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan is to achieve reunification (Hung, 2017). Through this strategy, China tries to shape a positive image among the Taiwanese public, reduce mistrust, and promote the idea that reunification would bring benefits to both sides.

China's Public Diplomacy towards Taiwan through News Management

News management is a key dimension in public diplomacy, referring to the ability of a state or public diplomacy actor to manage information, respond to emerging issues, and frame news coverage to shape public perception in the target country (Leonard et al., 2002). This dimension becomes especially crucial in the context of the Taiwan issue, given its sensitivity, political complexity, and strong associations with its national identity. Thus, information and narrative management serves as one of China's main instruments in conveying its official stance on cross-strait relations and the reunification agenda to both the Taiwanese and international public.

The first step taken by China was to publish an official document of a White Paper titled *The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era* on August 10, 2022. This paper was published by the Taiwan Affairs Office, which is directly under the State Council of China, and was disseminated through various official communication channels, including platforms such as Xinhua News, the official website of the State Council Information Office, and digital media that are accessible to the Taiwanese public. In the White Paper, China reaffirms that Taiwan is an inseparable part of its territory, offering a policy of peaceful reunification through the *One Country, Two Systems* framework (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China Official Website, 2022). This approach is presented as the primary solution that would enable peaceful and stable reunification, free from violence or military conflict. Under this framework, China promises that Taiwan would retain its own social, economic, and administrative systems, along with a high degree of autonomy and guaranteed protection of its citizens' basic rights. The author views this policy solution as an effort to reduce resistance and create the perception that reunification is not coercive but a mutually beneficial form of integration for Taiwan's public.

The second step in China's news management effort is the consistent dissemination of the reunification narratives by state actors during various official events. In 2024, Chen Binhua, spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office, stated that the historical course toward national rejuvenation and reunification could not be stopped. He also reiterated China's stance against separatism and foreign intervention, while expressing support for pro-reunification forces in Taiwan (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2024). Similar narratives have been echoed consistently by President Xi Jinping, including in his 2025 New Year address, which underscored the importance of shared culture and historical unity between the people of Taiwan and the mainland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Official Website, 2025).

The author assesses that through the publication of White Paper and the management of information about reunification in the modern era, China seeks to present itself as a rational country that strives for peaceful solutions, emphasizing diplomacy over confrontational approaches to cross-strait issues. The publication and dissemination of the White Paper, as well as the repeated narrative of peaceful reunification by state actors, is one of China's strategies to manage public narratives and spread political messages that support its national interests. By repeatedly conveying messages of peace, unity, and national rejuvenation, China actively attempts to shape public perceptions and opinions regarding the reunification of China and Taiwan.

China's Public Diplomacy towards Taiwan through Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is a proactive effort to shape the news agenda through various activities designed to systematically and continuously influence public perception. In the context of public diplomacy, strategic communication can be understood as a structured political campaign aimed at achieving specific objectives (Leonard et al., 2002).

China has adopted this proactive communication strategy to shift public opinion in Taiwan regarding reunification. The core message it promotes is that reunification would bring economic, social, and political benefits to Taiwan, while also addressing public fears and reducing resistance that has often framed reunification as a threat. To spread this strategic narrative, China involves the Taiwanese public as the one to spread it. This strategy is carried out through a series of coordinated strategic communication initiatives.

The first strategy involved organizing structured press tours and providing subsidies for Taiwanese journalists. According to a report by Freedom House (2022), in 2021 Beijing initiated trips for Taiwanese journalists working in China to visit Shanxi Province and Yan'an City, two locations of historical significance to the CPC. These trips were organized to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the CPC's founding, where participants were shown the economic development, infrastructure projects, and cross-strait economic cooperation initiatives. After attending this program, some Taiwanese journalists published more favorable reports and opinions about China.

Another strategy used in China's strategic communication towards Taiwan is holding media conferences to shape public opinion. On May 10, 2019, the Chinese government held a "Cross-Strait Media Summit" in Beijing, inviting 70 media leaders from Taiwan. The event was co-organized by Want Want China Times Media Group and the Beijing Newspaper Group, both state-owned media in China (Huang, 2024). During this meeting, Wang Yang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, called on the media from both sides of the Taiwan Strait to promote Chinese culture, strengthen emotional ties, and encourage the peaceful development of cross-strait relations. He also emphasized the importance of upholding national ethics and fulfilling the social responsibility of the media to achieve the "Chinese Dream" and the peaceful reunification of the homeland. This strategy demonstrates how China uses strategic communication by collaborating with media actors to strengthen the influence of the unification narrative in Taiwan's public sphere (Huang, 2024).

China's public diplomacy towards Taiwan through a strategic communication approach reflects a planned and persuasive effort to shape Taiwan's public opinion. Through activities such as press tours and cross-strait media conferences, China seeks to frame the reunification narrative as a positive, rational, and beneficial choice for both sides. This strategy also involves actors from Taiwanese society as message deliverers, highlighting Beijing's awareness of the importance of authenticity and social proximity in effectively delivering political messages.

China's Public Diplomacy toward Taiwan through Relationship Building

The third dimension in public diplomacy is relationship building, which refers to the long-term relationship development aimed at creating understanding, trust, and connectivity between state actors and foreign publics through sustained interaction. This kind of diplomacy goes beyond one-way communication and focuses on two-way exchanges that build shared perspectives through direct experiences, collaboration, and social networks. Instruments of relationship building include activities such as student exchanges, scholarships, joint training programs, cross-cultural seminars, academic conferences, and civil society forums. The main goal of this approach is to build emotional and social bonds as a foundation for broader political cooperation (Leonard et al., 2002).

The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China notes that one of the primary instruments China uses in this dimension with the Taiwanese public is through the Strait Forum (*Haixia Luntan*). First held in 2009, the annual forum was initiated by Beijing in cooperation with the United Front Work Department and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits. From the start, it was designed as a space for cross-strait

cultural and social interaction, inviting a wide range of participants from Taiwan, including politicians, academics, business people, youth leaders, women's groups, and civil society organizations. This broad participation shows China's systematic efforts to reach various Taiwanese society directly, outside of formal or elite-level diplomacy (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China Official Website, 2024).

One of the strategic values of the Strait Forum is its consistency in promoting themes that reflect the long-term goal of cross-strait integration. Between 2021 and 2024, the forum consistently adopted the theme "Expanding People-to-People Exchanges, Deepening Integrated Development" (擴大民間交流, 深化融合發展), which reflects China's public diplomacy orientation to strengthen cross-society connections organically and sustainably. According to the State Council Information Office (2022), the 14th forum in 2022 hosted more than 40 major events, including youth forums, NGO dialogues, cultural exhibitions, vocational training, and creative industry forums. This wide variety of activities shows that China is not just targeting political or academic elites, but also grassroots communities who play a key role in shaping public opinion in Taiwan.

Active participation by the Taiwanese public is a key part of this relationship-building dimension. The forum creates space for two-way communication through open dialogue, including panel discussions, workshops, and Q&A sessions that allow direct exchange of views. Beyond that, it also serves as a platform for promoting China's political narrative on reunification. During the opening of the 14th forum in 2022, President Xi Jinping sent a written message calling on Taiwanese youth in that forum to take part in China's national revival. He highlighted the role of young people in creating a peaceful and beneficial shared future. At the same event, Wang Yang, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), clearly rejected the idea of Taiwan's independence and urged Taiwanese society to actively join the process of cross-strait integration (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China Official Website, 2023). This shows that the Strait Forum is not just about culture, but also a tool for China to share its political message and shape the narrative of peaceful reunification to the Taiwanese public.

The author views the Strait Forum as a significant effort in China's strategy to build relationships and connections between Taiwan's public and China. Furthermore, within the forum, China also explicitly presents its calls for reunification. The Strait Forum can be seen as part of China's long-term diplomatic effort to create social attachment and public legitimacy for the reunification agenda.

Analysis of China's Public Diplomacy Achievements Toward Taiwan on the Reunification Issue

In analyzing the achievements of China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan within the framework of the reunification agenda, the author uses the four stages hierarchy of impacts of public diplomacy achievements developed by Leonard, Stead, and Smewing. The first stage is marked by increased awareness and familiarity of the China-Taiwan reunification issue among the Taiwanese public. The second stage emphasizes the increased public appreciation of China among the Taiwanese. The third stage highlights the engagement of the Taiwanese public with China, while the final stage is assessed based on significant influence over the Taiwanese public regarding the reunification issue.

In the first stage, the author notes that China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan succeeded in raising awareness and familiarity of taiwans public towards the reunification issue. This is reflected in the consistent presence of the reunification issue in Taiwan's political and social discourse, including media coverage, political campaign debates, and

public opinion surveys. The continued presence of this topic shows that reunification remains part of the political consciousness in Taiwan, regardless of whether people support or reject it. In this regard, China has succeeded in keeping the reunification issue alive in Taiwan's public sphere. This achievement is closely linked to China's public diplomacy efforts, particularly through news management. Efforts such as the publication of the White Paper titled *The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era* and speeches by state actors have played a significant role in maintaining the idea of reunification and the One China policy in Taiwan's public discourse.

This achievement in public diplomacy aligns with one of China's short-term public diplomacy goals, which is to maintain the existence of the One China policy (Hung, 2017). The author observes that China's public diplomacy strategy is not designed to directly change Taiwan's political stance on reunification but is structured gradually with the ultimate goal of achieving reunification. One of the initial goals of this strategy is to ensure that the narrative of the One China policy and reunification remains the dominant framework that cannot be ignored, both by the Taiwanese public and the international community. The author sees that China prioritizes the creation of issue salience, ensuring that the reunification issue remains relevant and prominent in public discourse before progressing to the stages of persuasion and political preference change among the Taiwanese public.

For the next stage, author notes that China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan regarding reunification has not fully reached the second stage, which is increasing Taiwanese public appreciation of China on the reunification issue. This stage requires the public to develop trust and see shared views with China on the issue. Despite various efforts, most Taiwanese people still resist changing their opinions about reunification.

Empirically this can be evaluated through public perception survey indicators. Data from the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University shows that Taiwan's national identity has strengthened over the years. The people of Taiwan now view themselves as distinct from China in political, cultural, and social aspects. Furthermore, in other indicator of surveys, the majority of Taiwanese have shown reluctance to accept the *One Country, Two Systems* framework offered by Beijing. This fact demonstrates that China's efforts to create a positive perception regarding reunification have not succeeded. In other words, the perception of reunification still faces challenges, even though China has attempted to promote it as a path toward stability and mutual prosperity through news management and strategic communication.

The author also finds that China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan has reached the third stage, which means involving the Taiwanese public in engagement with China. This stage focuses on building stronger relationships by encouraging exchanges and interactions between people in Taiwan and China. This success is shown in China's efforts like the Strait Forum, where many Taiwanese take part in discussions and cultural activities. These events give people in Taiwan a chance to connect, explore business opportunities, and learn more about China's policies and values.

Nevertheless, the author notes that because the Strait Forum is an annual event and focused on specific moments, the interactions created tend to be temporary and have not yet fully established long-term connections. Further analysis shows that while the forum is effective in creating a space for dialogue, its impact on forming shared values or changing attitudes toward the reunification issue remains limited. It can be said that China's public diplomacy has succeeded in reaching the third stage, in terms of building dialogue engagement through cross-strait programs like the Strait Forum. However, in the long run,

and in terms of its deeper impact on changing Taiwanese public attitudes, it remains a serious challenge for China in implementing its public diplomacy strategy.

In the fourth stage, which involves influencing the Taiwanese public to support China's position on reunification, China's public diplomacy has not achieved this goal. This is evident from a survey conducted by the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University in 2024, which shows that over 80% of Taiwanese prefer to maintain the status quo in their relations with China. This suggests that China's public diplomacy has not managed to sway public opinion toward supporting reunification. Strategies such as media messaging, relationship-building, and public forums have not been strong enough to shift Taiwanese political attitudes. In fact, resistance to reunification appears to be growing, showing that China still faces serious obstacles in pushing its public diplomacy agenda.

Based on the four stages of public diplomacy achievements outlined by Leonard, Stead, and Smewing, it can be concluded that China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan has successfully reached the first and third stages, which to increasing awareness of the issue and involving the public through news management, strategic communication, and cross-strait programs like the Strait Forum. However, in the second stage, which is increasing Taiwanese public appreciation of China, the progress is still lacking as negative views of China remain strong and emotional closeness is still low. As for the fourth stage, which is influencing the public to support reunification, China's public diplomacy has not achieved this goal. As indicated by surveys showing the majority of Taiwanese prefer to maintain the status quo, this reflects the limitations of China's public diplomacy strategy in shaping Taiwanese public opinion regarding the reunification issue.

Weaknesses of China's Public Diplomacy toward Taiwan on the Reunification Issue

This study finds that China's public diplomacy has failed to influence the political attitudes of the Taiwanese public toward the reunification agenda due to weaknesses in how the strategy has been carried out. The author identifies three main factors that contribute to the limited success of China's public diplomacy efforts.

First, the execution of China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan is still heavily dominated by state actors (first track), such as government agencies, state-owned media, and official statements from political elites. The involvement of non-state actors such as civil society, academics, independent journalists, and cultural figures from China remains limited in reaching the Taiwanese public. Activities aimed at engaging the Taiwanese public on the reunification issue, like the *Strait Forum*, typically involve only a small, select group of participants. As a result, these initiatives fail to reach the broader public. The lack of general public involvement gives the impression that China's public diplomacy is narrow in scope and lacks the emotional connection needed to truly resonate with the Taiwanese people.

This factor is closely related to the second reason, which is the strengthening of Taiwanese national identity, which acts as a structural barrier to the success of China's public diplomacy. As Taiwan's democratic system has developed and its national education has strengthened, the identity of being "Taiwanese" has become stronger. This identity not only reflects national pride but also functions as a psychological barrier that limits the influence of political narratives from outside, particularly from China. This is supported by a survey from National Chengchi University, which found that approximately 80% of Taiwanese identify as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. This reflects a sharp identity gap between the two sides, meaning that China's approach, that often based on shared ethnic or cultural ties is no longer effective and may even come across as forced.

Third, the widespread rejection of the *One Country, Two Systems* framework serves as evidence that the Taiwanese public's perception of China remains negative. The author

argues that this stance has been further strengthened after the political crisis in Hong Kong that has adopted this framework. Although China offered this framework as a peaceful solution for reunification, its implementation in Hong Kong demonstrated a mismatch between promises and reality. The Hong Kong case revealed a failure to guarantee civil liberties and autonomy as promised, which reinforced Taiwan's public concerns about the risks of similar outcomes if reunification were to occur.

Considering these three factors, the author concludes that the public diplomacy efforts with the reunification agenda promoted by China have not succeeded in changing the political attitudes of the Taiwanese people. While there have been some successes in raising awareness and familiarity of the issue and engaging the public in cross-strait relations, these efforts have not translated into greater public support for reunification.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, it was found that China's public diplomacy toward Taiwan takes place within three dimensions of public diplomacy according to Leonard, Stead, and Smewing, which are news management, strategic communication and relationship building. In the dimension of news management, China published a white paper on the Taiwan issue and consistently disseminated the narrative of reunification through state actors. In the dimension of strategic communication, China conducted strategic communication involving the participation of the Taiwanese public, by provide subsidies for press trips and held conferences with Taiwanese media. Meanwhile, in the dimension of relationship building, China developed long-term relationships with the Taiwanese public through the annual Strait Forum aimed at engaging the cross-strait mutual understanding.

From these efforts China's public diplomacy has achieved the first stage which to raising awareness of the reunification issue, and the third stage, to encouraging public participation through events like the Strait Forum. However, progress remains limited in the second stage, to building public appreciation for China, and in the fourth stage, in changing political views of Taiwanese people in favor of reunification.

Several weaknesses explain these limited outcomes. First, public diplomacy is dominated by state actors, which has made it less effective in reaching broader Taiwanese society. Second, the strengthening of Taiwanese national identity has created resistance to China's reunification message. Third, growing skepticism toward the One Country, Two Systems model, especially after the political crisis in Hong Kong, has damaged its credibility among Taiwanese public. These challenges help explain why China's efforts in strategic communication, news management, and relationship building have not led to significant shifts in political attitudes. China continues to face major difficulties in creating a long-term public diplomacy strategy that aligns with identity and political aspirations of Taiwanese people. For future research, a comparative study between China's public diplomacy approach toward Taiwan and its efforts in other regions such as Hong Kong could offer broader insights into patterns of success and failure in China's public diplomacy.

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