

Selling Taiwan: A Reconsideration of Taiwan's Public Diplomacy

Gary Rawnsley

Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, UK

Taiwan's diplomatic and foreign policy elites have identified public diplomacy as a way of convincing the international community to pay attention to the island, to sympathise with its predicament, and support its political and strategic agenda. To this end, Taiwan has manufactured and sold its image, and thereby has tried to raise its profile - what I describe as deciding on and communicating a distinct set of narratives that might appeal to global audiences to further its foreign policy ambitions.

This paper will not only evaluate Taiwan's current Public Diplomacy strategy and mechanisms, but will offer an analysis of why international communication is important for Taiwan and how the strategy has developed since the introduction of democratic reforms in the late 1980s. The paper will map the triangulation of international relations, international communications and diplomacy that has transformed how states interact with each other; and which, for middle powers like Taiwan with few formal diplomatic allies, offers a way of circumventing problems in the hard power domain. I will discuss the development of Taiwan's strategy of strategic influence since I published *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda* in 2000, the first comprehensive analysis of Taiwan's international communications mechanisms and the messages they distribute. While the distinctly Cold War framework was appropriate at the time, it is essential to revisit the subject for reasons:

1. The continuing consolidation of Taiwan's democracy presents new sets of challenges that were impossible to identify in 2000.
2. The international environment has changed, with direct links between China and Taiwan, the so-called 'diplomatic truce' across the Taiwan Strait, growing hostility with Japan and the American 'pivot' towards Asia all presenting new structural contexts in which Taiwan's communications must occur.
3. The communication landscape itself has been completely transformed by shifts towards digital, internet-based and dialogical media and social media. Taiwan's public diplomacy must adapt to and operate within a new information sphere.
4. Finally, it is no longer appropriate to discuss Taiwan's international communications within the framework of 'propaganda'; rather theories about the value of public diplomacy and soft power

Panel 11 International Relations

allow us to recognise the work multiple governmental and non-governmental agencies undertake on behalf of the island, while reflecting a more normative approach to international relations.

The paper will situate Taiwan within the growing field of soft power and public diplomacy studies – especially the attempt to de-westernise these concepts to provide a more nuanced and culturally-specific understanding - but will also consider how any discussion of Taiwan's international relations, diplomacy and interaction with the PRC must include discussion of communications, media and methods of persuasion.