

Introduction: *Global Taiwan Brief* Special Issue by the US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group

Shelley Rigger

Securing Taiwan's Black Gold: A Crude Analysis

Captain Merlin Boone

The Classroom as a Policy Laboratory: Soft Power, Local Community Engagement, and the US-Taiwan Education Initiative

Richard J. Haddock

The Coalescing of a Taiwanese American Identity and Its Impact on US Policy Considerations and Reporting

Christine Lin

Taiwan Plus and Its Soft Power Capabilities

Adrienne Wu and Chiaoning Su

Introduction: *Global Taiwan Brief* Special Issue by the US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group

By: Shelley Rigger

Dr. Shelley Rigger is the vice president for academic affairs, dean of faculty, and Brown Professor of East Asian Politics at Davidson College, as well as a member of the Global Taiwan Institute's Advisory Board.

In 2011, I published a book entitled *Why Taiwan Matters*. More than a decade later, one might well ask, does Taiwan still matter? And if so, why?

Based on the essays in this collection and the US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group that gave rise to them, the answer to the first question is undoubtedly yes: Taiwan still matters. The essays that follow provide powerful answers as to why.

The US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group was conceived in conversations at the Institute of East Asian Studies (IEAS) at the University of California Berkeley. Scholars and administrators at the IEAS saw a need to cultivate Taiwan expertise among younger academics and other professionals. While earlier generations of China specialists included many who studied in Taiwan, more recent students of Chinese language have been able to study in the People's Republic of China (PRC), and many miss out on the opportunity to experience Taiwan deeply. One result is a community of China specialists who see Taiwan primarily through Beijing's preferred lens. While they may be skeptical of that lens, it is hard for them to develop a truly independent sense of Taiwan—one that is neither PRC-centric nor US-centric. The goal of the US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group is to equip a new generation with the knowledge and access to develop their own understanding of the island and its people.

One target audience for the program is scholars and policymakers who work in China-related fields. But as the program developed, we also realized its potential value to non-China specialists whose professional expertise is in fields where Taiwan has won global recognition. One reason Taiwan matters is its remarkable achievements in important fields from manufacturing and technology to public health and medical care to public communication and information management. The US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group includes young professionals from many fields who are interested in learning about Taiwan's suc-

The Global Taiwan Brief is a bi-weekly publication released every other Wednesday and provides insight into the latest news on Taiwan.

Editor-in-Chief

Russell Hsiao

Associate Editor

John Dotson

Staff Editor

Marshall Reid

The views and opinions expressed in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Global Taiwan Institute.

To view web sources cited in the published papers (underlined in printed text), visit <https://global-taiwan.org/issues/vol-8-issue-17/>.

Global Taiwan Institute
1836 Jefferson Place NW,
Washington DC 20036
contact@globaltaiwan.org

To subscribe, visit
<http://globaltaiwan.org/subscribe/>.

cesses and applying lessons from Taiwan to their work in the United States.

Another important feature of the US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group program is its commitment to transcending the view that Taiwan matters only as an economic player or geopolitical hotspot. Our participants are interested in learning about Taiwan *for its own sake*, as the subject of its own history rather than as an object of others' ambitions. Their projects and interactions center Taiwanese people and prioritize the interests and aspirations of Taiwanese themselves, although they do not ignore or minimize the external challenges facing Taiwan.

In sum, the US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group starts with the idea that Taiwan still matters. It matters because it is home to some 23 million souls, each of whom matters in the way that all human beings do. It matters too because it is a community that has strived for decades to construct a shared public life marked by democratic self-government that allows all voices to be heard and all perspectives to be considered. And finally, Taiwan matters because of what it both contributes and represents to the world. Its extraordinary economic success contributes to prosperity, comfort, and connection throughout the world. Its embrace of democracy stands as proof that democratic politics can grow in cultural and political environments many assume to be hostile to representative government. And its effervescent society shows that a community can both honor its traditions and embrace change. The US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group explores each of these dimensions. The essays in this collection are just a sampling of what our group has achieved.

Securing Taiwan's Black Gold: A Crude Analysis

By: Captain Merlin Boone

Captain Merlin Boone (US Army) is an instructor of international affairs at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York.

[Taiwan's energy security](#) is at a critical inflection point. According to the Taiwan Bureau of Energy's (BOE, 經濟部能源局) [2022 Energy Statistics Handbook](#), the country relies on imported energy sources for 96.86 percent of its energy needs. In recognition of this strategic dependency, the country has made great strides in growing the capacity of its renewable energy sector. In the long term, this coal-replacement strategy will improve both

energy supply access and sustainability. In turn, this will directly reduce Taiwan's reliance on imported energy and enhance its energy security.

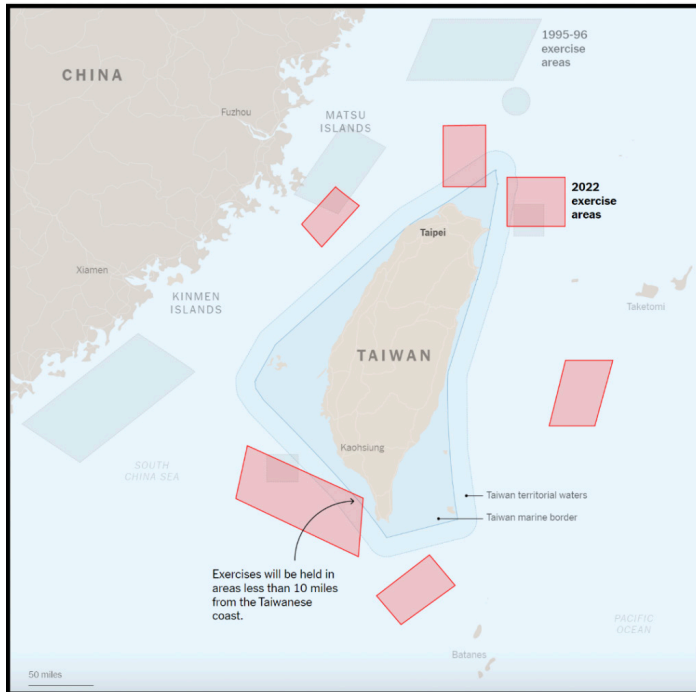
Despite these [improvements in diversifying the sources of electricity generation](#), Taiwan still faces extreme challenges in the [oil industry](#). Petroleum products are the primary source of energy for Taiwan's transport sector, a major energy source for the industrial sector, and a crucial input for many other non-energy processes. Both Taiwan's civilian and military segments require these petroleum products to function—whether driving, flying, or sailing. [1] However, Taiwan is [99.75 percent reliant on imported petroleum](#) and does not have strike-resistant storage facilities or a single Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) base. Instead, the responsibility for managing Taiwan's petroleum reserves is delegated to the civilian-led oil industry. This stands in stark contrast to the [SPR systems employed by Japan, South Korea, and the United States](#), which are managed by government agencies. Given rising geopolitical tensions and recurring Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) blockade drills, Taiwan must take immediate action to strengthen and secure its oil sector.

How can Taiwan best protect its oil industry? How can Taiwan build resiliency and ensure strategic oil reserves for both military and civilian use? This two-part article series will seek to answer these questions by critically analyzing Taiwan's oil supply chain, identifying its key vulnerabilities, and offering policy recommendations. Drawing on [supply chain modeling from the American Petroleum Institute](#), this analysis examines Taiwan's oil industry through six linked elements: 1) production; 2) transportation (shipping/pipelines); 3) short-term storage; 4) refining capacity; 5) terminal capacity; and 6) point of use. This first article (of a two-part series) examines Taiwan's crude oil supply chain during the first three phases of production, transportation, and short-term storage.

Oil Supply Chain Overview

[Taiwan's Petroleum Administration Act](#) (石油管理法) and [Measure Governing Oil in Emergency Management](#) (緊急時期石油處置辦法) are the primary regulations governing Taiwan's oil industry and strategic reserves. [2] In general, the island's oil industry is led by two companies: the publicly held CPC Corporation Taiwan (台灣中油股份有限公司) and the privately held Formosa Petrochemical Corporation of Formosa Plastics Group (FPCC, 台塑石化股份有限公司). The CPC dominates the Taiwan economy, with an [overall market share of 77.5 percent](#) (79.6 percent of gasoline consumption, 77.2 percent of diesel,

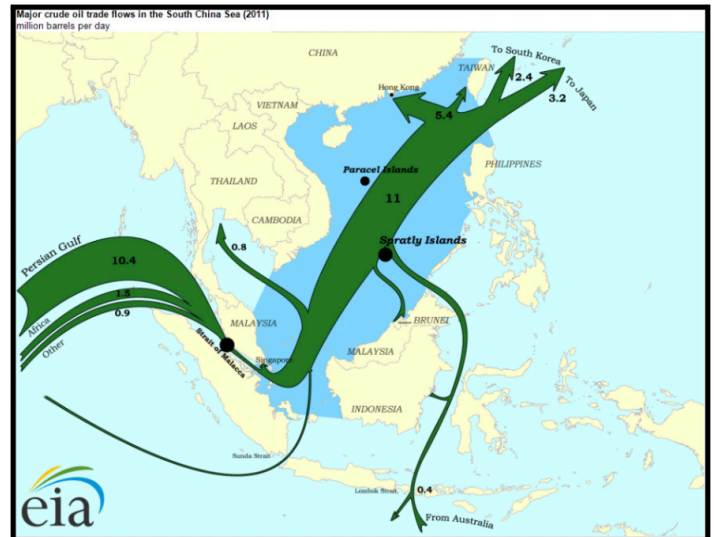
nerable to Chinese PLAN operations. Examining a recent [report from *The New York Times*](#), it is apparent that Chinese blockade efforts are focused on the main oil importing ports, Keelung and Kaohsiung—with these ports being explicitly targeted during PLAN drills.



Graphic: A map of Chinese military drills conducted in August 2022. Two of the areas of activity were in close proximity to Keelung and Kaohsiung. (Graphic Source: [New York Times](#))

The government must consider the development of oil industry infrastructure on Taiwan's east coast. The eastern coastline, while ravaged by extreme weather events and rougher waters, is further outside the zone of PLAN operations. This development proposal calls for increasing the number of ports, berths, and facilities specialized for transporting petroleum. While these locations may incur upfront operating losses, they will be critical for ensuring short- and medium-term access to crude oil imports.

At first glance, this proposal may seem extreme. However, in comparison, all of Japan's oil infrastructure is located on its eastern-exposed or central side. Although Japan's archipelagic geography is different, its [five petroleum ports](#) (Chiba, Yokohama, Yokkaichi, Mizushima, and Osaka) are all oriented to the east or south. As a result of this orientation, crude oil shipping from the Middle East already [transits around the east coast of Taiwan to reach Japan's ports](#). While this proposal does not directly counter a PLAN blockade, it does significantly increase the potential for sustainable access to oil imports. Given that Taiwan is wholly reliant on crude energy imports, this ensured access for oil tank



Graphic: A 2011 map showing crude oil trade flows in the Indo-Pacific. (Graphic Source: [US Energy Information Administration](#))

ers is critical to Taiwan's energy security.

Phase Three: Short-Term Storage

Short-term storage facilities hold crude oil at production sites, transportation hubs, ports of call, and refineries. These facilities are critical to managing the supply of crude oil.

Taiwan has short-term storage facilities at its primary oil-related ports of call: Keelung, Mailiao, and Kaohsiung. From the port, crude oil is transported to Taiwan's Taoyuan Refinery, Mailiao Refinery, or Dalin Refinery. A relatively small portion of crude oil is also transferred to CPC or FPCC strategic petroleum reserve long-term holding tanks. However, there is not publicly available information about the SPR transfers. Drawing on information from CPC and FPCC, each refinery maintains its own short-term storage facilities:

- The [Taoyuan Refinery](#) (桃園煉油廠) sources its crude oil from the Shalun fuel depot. The Shalun Fuel Depot has 15 large tanks at full operational capacity and can hold 10.69 million barrels of crude oil.
- The [Mailiao Refinery](#) (麥寮煉油廠) has 28 above-ground tanks. At full operational capacity, the refinery can hold 22.89 million barrels of crude oil.
- The [Dalin Refinery](#) (大林煉油廠) has developed offshore mooring pontoons, wharves, and facilities to facilitate short-term transfer and storage of crude oil.

Based on the *Petroleum Administration Act*, aggregate storage facilities are only required to store 60 days of crude oil (roughly

64 million barrels across all storage facilities for both companies). Given the potential for a long-term economic blockade focused on the east coast, this supply may be insufficient. Additionally, these refineries and their coastal tanks are proximate to the Taiwan Strait and thus are vulnerable to PLA and PLAN artillery and missile attacks. Finally, these commercial, short-term storage tanks are not designed for impact protection.

The government of Taiwan should consider: 1) developing national underground SPR bases within the Central Mountain Range; and 2) hardening existing short-term storage structures. Existing Chinese missile technology, such as the [DF-15C ballistic missile](#), has both the range and the capability to penetrate over 25m of concrete, but cannot penetrate dense mountain terrain. For comparison, the island nation of [Japan manages 10 national oil storage bases, while South Korea manages eight national oil storage bases](#). Although both options are expensive, Taiwan requires secured large-scale facilities to hold crude oil.

In comparison, Japan's government owns nearly [30 percent of the storage capacity](#) (including both short-term and long-term) in the country. These national oil storage facilities for crude oil and other refined petroleum products are spread across a variety of holding facilities, including underground rock caverns, in-ground tanks, and above-ground tanks. Similarly, South Korea's government, in combination with international joint oil stockpilers, holds approximately 35 percent of the oil supply in national storage facilities geographically spread throughout the country. The United States' SPR crude oil storage capacity is based [primarily underground in salt caverns](#). Taiwan must consider how to protect its crude oil reserves in the event of an emergency or military conflict.

Taiwan must address these critical energy security shortcomings to ensure sustainable access to petroleum for its transportation and industrial sectors. A failure to ensure oil access may lead to second-order failures for both civilian and military use. It is critical that Taiwan seriously considers enhancing the resiliency of its crude oil supply chain.

The second article of this series, forthcoming in October 2023, will examine Taiwan's latter three phases of oil processing (i.e., refinement, terminal storage, and final point of use).

The main point: Taiwan must take action to build resiliency and strengthen its oil supply chain. Taiwan should address critical weaknesses in crude oil transportation and short-term storage in order to ensure sustainable access to petroleum in times of crisis.

[1] There are not yet viable alternatives to petroleum-based fuels for Taiwan's military equipment. This includes all types of aerial vehicles, ground vehicles, seaborne vessels, and maintenance and operations supplies.

[2] In the case of Taiwan, oil is defined as petroleum crude oil, bituminous crude oil, and petroleum.

[3] Please see the [Taiwan's Petroleum Administration Act](#) (石油管理法) for additional information on financing and the sources of the Petroleum Fund.

The Classroom as a Policy Laboratory: Soft Power, Local Community Engagement, and the US-Taiwan Education Initiative

By: Richard J. Haddock

Richard J. Haddock is currently a PhD student in public policy and public administration at the George Washington University (GW), with a focus on digital democracy and e-governance in Taiwan and South Korea.

In late May, I worked with five middle school classrooms spread across three Maryland public schools to conduct a crisis simulation with a foreign policy expert to discuss the current political, economic, and security situation surrounding the Taiwan Strait. [1] The students—representing various nations with equity in Taiwan Strait affairs—generated a range of policy options to avoid a potential military conflict over Taiwan. During the heated debate, students discussed topics such as the state of Taiwan's missile defense system and combat readiness, semiconductor supply chains, and collective security responses from regional and global powers, including the United States, Japan, and Australia. There was only one conclusion that was mutually agreed upon by all delegates: a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait would be catastrophic, not just for those directly involved, but indeed to the region and the world. Despite their youth, the seventh and eighth grade students who participated in the exercise ended up raising many of the same questions and points as policy practitioners and thinkers in Washington, DC, Taipei, and Beijing regarding Taiwan Strait peace and security.

By tapping into the imaginative power of K-12 classrooms, we can prepare future leaders to think and act globally at an earlier stage. This cannot be done overnight, however; developing curricula and educational materials takes time, resources, and expertise. For example, the simulation described above took my

team of faculty members, instructional experts, and graduate researchers a full year of iterative design and review. Education is also highly varied across the United States, given that curriculum standards are set at the local rather than national level. For their part, the United States and Taiwan [launched](#) the US-Taiwan Education Initiative in 2020 to bolster area studies and language education and exchanges, but is this enough? What are the observable and potential impacts of the Initiative with regards to US-Taiwan relations, education, and soft power objectives? What are the implementation gaps of the Initiative? This article considers these questions and offers recommendations based on my experiences as an education outreach administrator.



Image: Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu (second from left) and then-AIT Director Brent Christensen at the signing ceremony for the memorandum of understanding establishing the US-Taiwan Education Initiative (December 3, 2020). (Image source: [MOFA/Taiwan Times](#))

A Critical Partner Noticeably Absent: Taiwan (not) in the US Curriculum

Innovative educational experiences in the K-12 space, illustrated by the simulation above, contribute to the long-term US Department of Education goal of cultivating a well-informed and globally minded citizenry. At the same time, there are many challenges to expanding international language and area studies education in the United States—such as funding, educator training and recruitment, availability of learning resources, and decentralized curriculum design or standards. Taiwan studies is especially underserved and underrepresented in US curricula: from [an open-source review](#) I independently conducted in which I gathered and surveyed publicly available US state social studies standards, only nine US states and the District of Columbia mention Taiwan in either middle or high school social studies standards (compared to 41 states that explicitly mention China). If Taiwan is mentioned or taught, it is often suggested as

little more than a case study, and is rarely—if ever—presented as a standalone module of instruction.

A similarly bleak picture exists for Mandarin Chinese language learning in the United States. According to the most recent [National K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey](#) from the American Councils for International Education, only 2.13 percent of K-12 students are enrolled in Chinese language classes, and 13 states have fewer than 10 schools with Chinese language programs. At the undergraduate and graduate level, the Modern Language Association [found](#) that there has been a 21 percent decline in the number of college and university students studying Mandarin Chinese between 2016 and 2020.

With these trends in mind, it may not be surprising that [two-thirds of Americans](#) still cannot correctly identify Taiwan on a map of Asia, even as the island has featured more prominently in US media in recent years. To put it plainly, Americans are not learning enough (or at all) about Taiwan. That such a critical economic, technological, political, and security partner to the United States hardly appears in curricula reflects a critical shortcoming in the US education system, undermining its ability to train future leaders for careers in foreign affairs research and practice.

The US-Taiwan Education Initiative: A Joint Soft Power Platform

This is where the US-Taiwan Education Initiative has stepped in as a valuable platform and resource for educational and cultural exchange between both sides. Established in December 2020 as a collaboration between the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO), the Initiative builds on decades of robust educational and cultural exchanges between the United States and Taiwan to expand bidirectional language training and engagement at all learning levels. In the United States, there is a growing need for Mandarin Chinese language-capable scholars, policymakers, and leaders. This need has grown particularly acute following the [closure](#) of nearly all of the 118 US-based Confucius Institutes amid increasingly strained relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). At the same time, there is a greater convergence of US-Taiwan political, economic, and security interests. In Taiwan, the [Bilingual 2030](#) policy is a key government effort to cultivate a wide range of skills and expertise among its domestic workforce, including English language proficiency, in order to strengthen the global competitiveness of Taiwanese firms and consolidate Taiwan's position as a hub for multinational companies and non-profit organizations.

So far, the Initiative is off to a very productive start. According to the Initiative's latest [fact sheet](#), Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 中華民國外交部) has committed over USD \$1.8 million on US-Taiwan exchange programs since 2020 in support of the Initiative. Both sides have agreed to co-sponsor several fellowships and scholarships to send American students to study Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan, including the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program. The United States has also increased funding to Fulbright Taiwan to expand the number of language teachers and assistants exchanged between the two sides. The Initiative has also contributed to new linkages between US and Taiwanese colleges and universities. Under the auspices of the [Taiwan Huayu BEST](#) program, 41 US universities have established new exchange partnerships with 17 universities in Taiwan. Last but not least, the Initiative is also developing K-12 education opportunities. Since 2020, there have been at least 12 memoranda of understanding (MOUs) signed between US states and Taiwan, eight of which place particular emphasis on K-12 education exchange and promotion. For instance, one MOU builds on a 2021 teacher exchange program in which Mandarin Chinese language instructors from Taiwan are sent to local primary and secondary schools in [West Virginia](#).

In addition to facilitating more linkages between US and Taiwan societies through education, the Initiative is a unique platform for joint coordination between public sector agencies. The Initiative is managed by an intergovernmental working group that meets quarterly to assess progress and conduct strategic planning. According to interviews with interlocutors, the working group is one of the few regularly occurring forms of [high-level dialogue](#) between US and Taiwan officials. Among the agencies and organizations participating in the working group are: the US Department of State, the US Department of Education, AIT, Taiwan's National Security Council (NDC, 國家安全會議), MOFA, the Ministry of Education (MOE, 教育部), and the National Development Council (NDC, 國家發展委員會). Routinizing communication between these agencies will enhance mutual understanding of institutional processes and values between both sides.

Implementation Gaps: Doing a Lot without Doing Much

Despite these gains in educational exchanges across national and subnational levels, interviews with Initiative stakeholders—as well as personal experiences as an area studies education outreach administrator—suggest that the Initiative has fallen short in two key areas: inclusion of input from the communities of policy impact, and fully leveraging K-12 and education-adjacent organizations in both countries. Essentially, the Initiative is

not bringing enough stakeholders to the decision-making and implementation tables.

Regarding decision-making, interviews with interlocutors have found that the Initiative lacks a feedback mechanism. As a result, the working group has limited recourse to collect and act on voices from impact community members, such as students, educators, state curriculum coordinators, school administrators, study abroad advisors, and education non-profits—frankly, anyone for whom the Initiative's programs are designed. This means that there may be a disconnect between decisions made within working group meetings and the on-the-ground education conditions faced by learning communities in both the United States and Taiwan. The result is that the Initiative tends to deliver programs designed to cater to top-line education metrics rather than educational needs in classrooms. This is not all bad—the investments both sides have made in expanding language and area studies fellowships are crucial to expanding education opportunities—but one worry is that the Initiative will make large investments that generate metrics but otherwise do not result in significant gains towards either side reaching their respective policy goals (e.g., more Mandarin Chinese-equipped policymakers in the United States, or achieving the Bilingual 2030 policy in Taiwan). In other words, the Initiative runs the risk of doing a lot without doing much.

The Initiative can address this gap in a number of ways. Specifically, it could invite impact community members to provide briefings and testimonies at each working group meeting, coordinate fact-finding missions and site visits where working group members can visit local schools and districts, and design and publish an annual policy impact evaluation with input from local communities and individuals that have benefitted from the Initiative.

The lack of community input in Initiative decisions also indicates that the Initiative is not fully leveraging US and Taiwan education stakeholders, which limits the social reach of the Initiative. Rather than solely focusing on schools or generating MOUs (which are still important), the United States and Taiwan should also consider how the Initiative can contribute to their respective *education ecosystems*, such as identifying gaps in language, area studies, and workforce skills development. Many non-profit organizations, professional associations, and volunteer groups are involved in educational attainment and social development. Public officials on both sides have recognized the potential of such partnerships—US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Ethan Rosenzweig [submitted](#) a letter in March 2023 to the Council of Chief State Schools encouraging greater coopera-

tion between K-12 schools and Taiwan, and Taiwan Representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭美琴) [attended](#) the 2023 NAFSA Annual Expo in Washington, DC.

However, there needs to be greater effort to connect local and national educational organizations directly. In the United States, for example, the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia and scholarly projects such as the [Primary Sources on Taiwan](#) generate academic resources for language and area studies, as well as training opportunities for educators and students alike. In Taiwan, the [Taiwan Sports Forward Association](#) (社團法人台灣運動好事協會) uses sports diplomacy to support the equitable educational and social welfare attainment for underserved communities such as underprivileged young girls. The United States and Taiwan can use the Initiative as a platform to connect these kinds of organizations together to share professional expertise and academic resources, and to open avenues for collaboration between local and community stakeholders on both sides. Local-level engagement is critical for the grassroots development of shared values, which could in turn lead to more favorable soft power outcomes and conditions. As one civil society leader I interviewed noted, the United States is not the only potential English language destination for Taiwan, so why choose an education partner on the other side of the world? The answer should be: to cultivate and deepen shared values.

An Important Source of Soft Power: The Classroom

Mutual understanding and development of shared values is essential to soft power projection and impact. According to pre-eminent soft power and public diplomacy scholar Joseph Nye, public diplomacy programs are effective when they are “two-way streets” in which both sides listen and talk: “[W]e need to understand better what is going on in the minds of others and what values we share.” [2] Many of those values are first developed in schools, and further tested, strengthened, and re-forged through study abroad, language and area studies, and immersive educational experiences. The policy takeaway for the US-Taiwan Education Initiative is that K-12 classrooms are powerful laboratories for policy experimentation, local community engagement, and the creation of shared values. In this way, soft power impact begins in the classroom.

The main point: Since its launch in 2020, the US-Taiwan Education Initiative has facilitated impressive growth in US-Taiwan language and area studies exchange. At the same time, however, the Initiative falls short in terms of engaging local learning communities and educational development organizations. By tapping into the imaginative power of educational communities

at the local level, the Initiative can deepen shared values, enhance soft power impact, and make lasting contributions to the educational ecosystems in the United States and Taiwan.

[1] The Taiwan Strait crisis simulation background guide will be made publicly available on the George Washington University East Asia National Resource Center website: <https://nrc.elliott.gwu.edu/>.

[2] Joseph S. Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25097996>.

The Coalescing of a Taiwanese American Identity and Its Impact on US Policy Considerations and Reporting

By: Christine Lin

Christine Lin is an attorney at the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, University of California College of the Law, San Francisco and a non-resident visiting scholar at George Washington University’s Sigur Center for Asian Studies.

In recent years the US media has increasingly reported on Taiwan, often in terms of drawing parallels with the war in Ukraine—to include speculating whether China will invade, and publicizing the role of Taiwan’s semiconductor industry. Simultaneously, US-Taiwan relations have reached significant milestones, including Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#) encouraging other United Nations members to support Taiwan’s participation in the international system; House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s August 2022 [visit to the island](#); the United States [announcing](#) a USD \$345 million military aid package for Taiwan; and US President Joseph Biden [signing into law](#) a bill approving the first stage of a US-Taiwan trade agreement. Journalists have also begun to offer more nuance when discussing Taiwan, rather than simply referring to Taiwan as a “[renegade province](#)” of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). There is more [coverage](#) of both Taiwanese and Taiwanese American viewpoints, including issues connected to the 2020 US Census and Pew Research Center reports (*see further discussion below*), which helps to highlight the complexities of Taiwanese identity and history. In light of these shifting tides, has a distinct Taiwanese American identity coalesced? If so, what effect has it had on US media reporting on Taiwan? What impact does the Taiwanese American voice have on US-Taiwan relations and policy considerations?

To answer these questions, I launched a survey in both [English](#) and [Mandarin](#) to better understand what factors influence Taiwanese Americans to self-identify as such. [1] I also examined trends in US-Taiwan relations and policies to determine whether they correlate with recognition of a Taiwanese American sense of identity. This article presents my preliminary findings from the first 685 survey respondents, 71 percent of whom were born in Taiwan, 27 percent in the United States, and 2 percent elsewhere. [2] Respondents' birth years spanned from 1930 to 2011. 58 percent spoke Tâi-gí as their predominant language at home, followed by 36 percent who spoke Mandarin, 14 percent who spoke English, 4 percent who spoke Hakka, and less than 1 percent who spoke an Indigenous language. [3] Outside the home, English was the predominant language spoken by 51 percent of respondents, followed by Mandarin (29 percent) and Tâi-gí (18 percent).

84 percent of the respondents indicated they have always identified as Taiwanese American. US citizenship was the top reason selected for embracing American identity, followed by adherence to American culture, immigrating to the United States, education in the United States, American values, and obtaining English-language proficiency. The top factors cited for embracing Taiwanese identity included a belief in the Taiwanese right to self-determination, Taiwanese food, birthplace in Taiwan, ancestral lineage in Taiwan prior to 1949, and Taiwanese cultural practices.

Those who have not always identified as Taiwanese American noted factors such as the following contributed to their identity evolution: becoming a naturalized US citizen; joining community groups such as the Taiwanese American Professionals, Taiwanese American Citizens League (TACL), and Taiwanese Association of America; increased education and understanding about family, geopolitical, and Taiwanese history; and spending time in the PRC and experiencing firsthand the cultural differences between that country and Taiwan. Some of these individuals now claim a Taiwanese identity—even in cases where their family members arrived in Taiwan with the Nationalists (Kuomintang, 國民黨), and accordingly identify as Chinese.

In addition to being Taiwanese American, approximately 25 percent of respondents also identified as Chinese American. [4] Proficiency in the Mandarin language; familiarity with Chinese food, cultural practices, and traditions; and being raised with Confucian values were the top factors attributed to their Chinese identity. To a lesser extent, respondents who also identify as Chinese indicated that having family who fled mainland China with the Nationalists, and having at least one parent who



Image: Taiwanese Americans in New York hold a demonstration to welcome Taiwan Vice President Lai during his transit stop through the city (August 12, 2023). (Image source: [CNA](#))

identifies as Chinese, influenced their sense of Chinese identity.

The top factor noted as a unique challenge for those solely identifying as Taiwanese American is the conflation of Taiwanese with Chinese. These individuals view being Taiwanese as completely distinct from Chinese heritage and ethnicity, with different burdens and values rooted in Taiwan's unique history, as well as its civic identity as a democracy. A common sentiment amongst Taiwanese Americans is the feeling of being a minority within a minority. Respondents linked this feeling to several factors: Taiwan lacks broad international recognition, and does not have a seat at the United Nations; the US Census omits Taiwanese as a racial category; and some may dismiss the notion that a separate Taiwanese identity exists, insisting that it is synonymous with the Chinese identity. Other challenges experienced by Taiwanese Americans include: cross-Strait issues; misinformation about Taiwan; the difficulty in preserving Indigenous languages, Hakka, and Tâi-gí; the many nuances of the term "Taiwanese;" conflating Taiwanese with Thai; and struggles with identity issues.

Historically, the US government has conflated the Republic of China (ROC) and the PRC, and has issued identity documents with erroneous place of birth (POB) information to some Taiwan-born individuals. For example, the US government [has issued naturalization certificates](#) and passports to some individuals born in Taiwan with their POB listed as "China," "People's Republic of China," or "Taiwan, China." This has resulted in some US-born children being issued birth certificates with their parents' birthplace inaccurately listed as "China."

Some individuals with US identity documents issued with China as their POB without their consent felt they had no choice but to accept being Chinese American to maintain consistency with

their documentation. Some checked the “Chinese” box for race on the US Census because “Taiwanese” was—and still is not—a pre-populated option, despite advocacy from TACL and other Taiwanese American groups. Instead, Taiwanese must check the “Other” box and take the additional step to write in “Taiwanese.”

TACL’s [“Write-In Taiwanese”](#) campaigns, which began with the 1990 US Census, have empowered some individuals to cease identifying as Chinese in favor of Taiwanese. Advocacy by the Formosan Association for Public Affairs (FAPA) also resulted in the State Department clarifying that while the United States recognizes the PRC as the sole government of China, applicants born in Taiwan may choose whether their POB is “China” or “Taiwan,” but that it is inappropriate to use “Taiwan, China,” “Taiwan, Republic of China,” or “Taiwan ROC.”

In April 2021, Pew published [reports](#) on Asian American communities, aggregating data for “Taiwanese” with “Chinese.” The Taiwanese American community responded by requesting that Pew apologize and re-publicize its findings separating Taiwanese from Chinese. Pew issued a subsequent [report](#) claiming that determining the number of Taiwanese living in the United States is not a straightforward matter. In a 2023 [report](#), Pew maintained that measuring the identity of Taiwanese Americans is a “challenging endeavor,” and their surveys only classify respondents as Taiwanese American if they hold it as a singular identity (and not, by contrast, if they also self-identify as Chinese or another identity). This method also undercounts and underrepresents the Taiwanese American population. However, while long overdue and imperfect, Pew’s more recent reports nevertheless acknowledge Taiwanese American as a separate identity from Chinese American.

As revealed by US Census data, the US State Department’s recognition of China or Taiwan as a legitimate POB for people born in Taiwan, and the responses to my survey, some individuals in the United States with ties to Taiwan consider themselves singularly Taiwanese American or Chinese American, while others embrace both identities. For some, their journey to identifying as Taiwanese American has evolved over the years, alongside changes in US policy and support from the Taiwanese American community.

The coalescing around a Taiwanese American identity has raised the profile of the community and seems to influence how the US media portrays Taiwanese Americans and issues related to Taiwan. As more Taiwanese Americans reject being othered or being subsumed under another identity imposed upon them,

there appears to be increased recognition in the United States of Taiwan’s contributions to the international community. Bipartisan support for Taiwan has also garnered attention, raising the visibility of the island and the importance of strengthening relations between the United States and Taiwan.

The main point: Factors impacting why people self-identify as Taiwanese American and what it means to each individual may vary, but there appears to be a convergence around Taiwanese American as an identity—despite the existence of different ancestral lineages among those hailing from Taiwan. As illustrated by FAPA’s advocacy regarding Taiwan as a POB, TACL’s “Write-in Taiwanese” census campaign, and the Taiwanese American community’s response to Pew surveys, the Taiwanese American voice is critical in uplifting their identity and in changing the narrative on US policy positions.

[1] Both surveys will remain open for the foreseeable future.

[2] The data from both surveys (239 Mandarin and 446 English) are on file with the author and are presented in the aggregate. Special thanks to Michael Lin for his assistance in data analysis.

[3] Tâi-gí (臺語) is often referred to as Taiwanese or Hokkien.

[4] Note that the English survey asks if an individual also identifies as “Chinese,” but the Mandarin survey asks if they identify as *huaren* (華人, ethnically Chinese). 24.9 percent of English survey respondents also identified as Chinese, and 29.6 percent of Mandarin respondents identified as ethnically Chinese.

Taiwan Plus and Its Soft Power Capabilities

By: Adrienne Wu and Chiaoning Su

Adrienne Wu is a research associate at Global Taiwan Institute (GTI) and the host of Taiwan Salon, GTI’s cultural policy and soft power podcast.

Chiaoning Su is an associate professor in communication, journalism, and public relations at Oakland University.

Considering that Western media often unwittingly views Taiwan through Beijing’s lens—even a recent [BBC article parroted](#) the classic Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) narrative of Taiwan being a “[breakaway province](#)”—many hoped that Taiwan Plus would be a chance for Taiwan to finally [take control over its own story](#). Launched in [2021](#), the English-language news platform was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture (MOC, 文化部) in order to “[highlight to the world the island’s diver-](#)

[sity, democratic achievements and aspiration to contribute to the international community.](#)” With the onslaught of CCP unit-ed front-produced propaganda designed to reframe the world through Beijing’s views, Taiwan Plus could potentially be Taiwan’s response, allowing the island to showcase its contrasting democratic credentials.

Democratic values are a central component of Taiwanese soft power. For instance, former Vice President Annette Lu (呂秀蓮) defined Taiwanese soft power as consisting of [“human rights, democracy, peace, love, and high technology.”](#) Multiple scholars, including [Gary Rawnsley](#) and [Ryan Hass](#), have also highlighted the importance of Taiwan’s democratic values in its soft power attraction. Taiwan Plus has the opportunity to demonstrate Taiwan’s commitment to democracy, not only by covering stories that depict Taiwan’s vibrant civil society, but also by showing their own commitment to maintaining a free press. During the launch of Taiwan Plus, former CEO Joanne Tsai (蔡秋安) stated that, [“Taiwan is not perfect. We will not attempt to beautify its flaws or cover them up.”](#) During the same event, Tsai stressed that Taiwan Plus was not a political entity or party apparatus, arguing that the Taiwanese public would object to their tax dollars being used to fund such an operation.

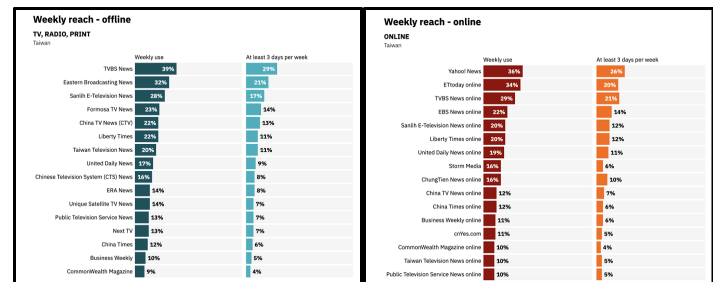
If Taiwan Plus truly wants to shape Taiwan’s image on the international stage, then it will be essential for the platform to build up credibility with its audience. In doing so, it can help to showcase Taiwan’s ongoing commitment to its democratic values—ultimately reinforcing the projection of Taiwanese soft power in both the content of the platform *and* its practices.

The Origins of Taiwan Plus and Its Governmental Ties

Taiwan’s current media environment, like many facets of Taiwanese society, developed in response to the strict authoritarian controls imposed by the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨). [Established by the Republic of China \(ROC\) in 1924 and later relocated to Taiwan in 1949](#), the Central News Agency (CNA, 中央通訊社) was the only permitted source of news during the early years of Chiang Kai-Shek’s (蔣介石) rule in Taiwan. [1] Even as other news agencies were gradually permitted to operate, the KMT continued to control news media both directly and indirectly—either by controlling news agencies directly or by giving control of the agencies to loyal party members. [2] Other controls, such as licensing restrictions and martial law, restricted the development of new media and deterred journalists from publishing anything that opposed the government. Under the control of the Executive Yuan, the Government Information Office (GIO, 行政院新聞局) officially took charge of publication, motion

picture affairs, television, and radio broadcasting in 1973. [3]

Restrictions on media only began to loosen as Taiwan began to democratize, which ultimately resulted in [an explosion of independent media in the 1990s](#). Two new free-broadcasting TV stations were established during these years; Formosa Television in 1997, and Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS, 公共電視) in 1998. [4] A 2023 Digital News Report conducted by Reuters Institute and the University of Oxford [found](#) that PTS was among the most trusted news sources in Taiwan. This finding was [corroborated](#) by Reporters Without Borders, who declared that PTS [“scores as the most trusted channel in Taiwan despite its small budget and low audience.”](#) Despite [PTS’ trust score of 55 percent](#)—on par with *Business Weekly* and far above the overall nationwide trust score of 28 percent—PTS’ weekly reach is only 13 percent offline and 10 percent online.



Graphic: The weekly reach of offline and online Taiwanese news sources. (Graphic source: Reuters)

Taiwan’s subsequent rejection of regulation has led to other difficulties in the media environment. As noted in a [previous *Global Taiwan Brief* article](#), business conglomerates with interests in China control large proportions of Taiwan’s media landscape. Additionally, former Taiwanese journalist Li Wei-Ping noted in [a recent event](#) that obstacles facing Taiwan’s present media landscape include: the lack of robust journalism practices and mechanisms to assure truthfulness and accountability; a low trust in Taiwanese media; and the opaqueness of social media algorithms. While the deregulation of Taiwanese media has led to a flourishing news environment, the commercialization of news comes with other factors that potentially undermine journalistic integrity. For instance, companies’ business interests contribute to skewed reporting, while [social media algorithms reward sensationalist stories](#).

The concept of Taiwan Plus was first mentioned in a [governmental report](#) in 2020. With a four-year funding allocation of NTD \$5.8 billion (USD \$181 million), this innovative platform was intended to enhance Taiwan’s place in the global communication network, increase its international visibility, cultivate a

distinct Taiwanese perspective in storytelling, and discover and encourage local talents to actively participate in international media production. Nevertheless, Taiwan Plus experienced significant growing pains in its early stages due to changes in leadership and management.

Initially, PTS was commissioned to execute the project. However, in July 2020, several [board members](#) raised their concerns about incomplete official procedures and the potential misuse of public media as a propaganda tool. This divergence of opinions resulted in the resignation of [several PTS management members](#). In May 2020, the Ministry of Culture (MOC, 文化部) announced that CNA had been contracted to manage the project and officially branded the channel as [Taiwan Plus](#). Nevertheless, in June 2022, with the conclusion of the CNA contract, [PTS](#) won the bid to begin running Taiwan Plus. Thus, controversy and tension during the initial phases made it difficult for Taiwan Plus to establish its legitimacy.

Recommendations for Building Credibility

Building a Reputation

As a relative newcomer to the industry, Taiwan Plus already faces an uphill battle in gaining credibility due to a lack of brand recognition. Based on 2021 [findings](#) by the Reuters Institute and the University of Oxford, respondents from the United States, the United Kingdom, India, and Brazil were more likely to trust news sources that they were already familiar with, and “trust” was often used as a shorthand for familiarity, likeability, and reputation. Viewed from this perspective, Taiwan Plus’ partnership with the highly trusted PTS should bolster its reputation with the Taiwanese public. Additionally, as a new, well-funded initiative—in comparison, PTS only received [NTD \\$900 million \(USD \\$30 million\)](#) in government funding—Taiwan Plus could potentially amplify PTS’ reach and impact.

Some legislators have raised [concerns that Taiwan Plus might have a negative effect on PTS’ reputation](#). For instance, during a 2022 debate, KMT Legislator Lin Yi-hua (林奕華) [chastised](#) then-Minister of Culture Lee Yung-te (李永得) for “extending the hand of the government into the media” (你把政府的手伸入到媒體裡面去!). Due to these concerns, Taiwan Plus’ first contract was with CNA rather than PTS, as was originally planned. Considering PTS’ high trust rankings in the [aforementioned 2023 report](#), it does not appear that an association with Taiwan Plus has had any negative impact on PTS thus far.

Still, the benefits that PTS can bring regarding brand recognition may only materialize if audiences are already familiar with

PTS. Even with PTS’ support, Taiwan Plus will likely have a hard time winning over international audiences, particularly due to its largely online presence. Reuters and the University of Oxford [found](#) that respondents would seek out online news from brands they already knew, and had difficulty trusting and differentiating online news from unfamiliar sources. As a result, Taiwan Plus’ usage of social media platforms such as [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#) could be both useful and detrimental for its branding—wading into social media allows Taiwan Plus to gain viewers who are not seeking out Taiwan Plus’ content specifically, but that content will have to compete alongside other sources of information.

The influx of foreign correspondents from legacy media news sources is another potential source of competition for Taiwan Plus. In 2020, [restrictive measures from Beijing and Washington](#) led many foreign correspondents to leave China, [with many settling in Taiwan](#). For global audiences, internationally known media outlets such as BBC, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times* are more familiar, and thus more trustworthy. However, trusted international sources could also benefit Taiwan Plus by acting as a yardstick for reporting that is unbiased by the Taiwanese government. As international readers try to determine if Taiwan Plus is biased towards the government, comparing the network’s reporting to articles from other free media outlets can help readers determine its level of impartiality.

Reducing Government Intervention and Increasing Transparency

Government intervention (or at the very least, perceived intervention) has been the main point of concern when it comes to Taiwan Plus’ credibility. Currently under the [Government Procurement Act](#) (政府採購法), the MOC must periodically hold a bidding process to determine which organization will be in charge of Taiwan Plus’ contract. During the time that CNA controlled Taiwan Plus’ contract, CNA attempted to make a clear distinction between the two agencies by giving Taiwan Plus a [“separate staff, budget and editorial decisions from CNA.”](#) However, CNA still provided administrative support to Taiwan Plus, and the two were not regarded as separate legal entities. Considering that CNA is a state-owned agency and PTS is an independent public service broadcaster, Taiwan Plus’ move from CNA to PTS would potentially lessen government involvement and make Taiwan Plus more independent.

Additionally, PTS is protected by law from government interference under the [Public Television Act](#) (公共電視法). While Taiwan Plus was not initially included in the *Public Television Act*,

the act was [modified in May](#) to include Taiwan Plus—giving it extra protection from government interference and putting an end to the practice of having organizations bid for its contract. Under the [Public Television Act](#), PTS and Taiwan Plus receive funding from the government, interest, and contributions from the public, among other sources. However, eventually Taiwan Plus could be funded (or mostly funded) by licensing fees collected from individual households, the same way that the [BBC](#) and [Japan Broadcasting Corporation \(NHK\)](#) get their funding.

Although Taiwan Plus' source of funding has drawn criticism, [transparency](#)—including transparency about funding sources—is an important factor in trying to produce independent media. Providing insight into the methods that Taiwan Plus uses could be another way of being transparent. For example, [a study conducted by the University of Texas' Center for Media Engagement](#) found that explaining the process behind stories that were printed in newspapers was an effective way of gaining the trust of their readers. In addition to clearly disclosing their finances, disclosing other parts of the process and [linking biographies of their reporters online](#) could help to further establish Taiwan Plus' credibility.

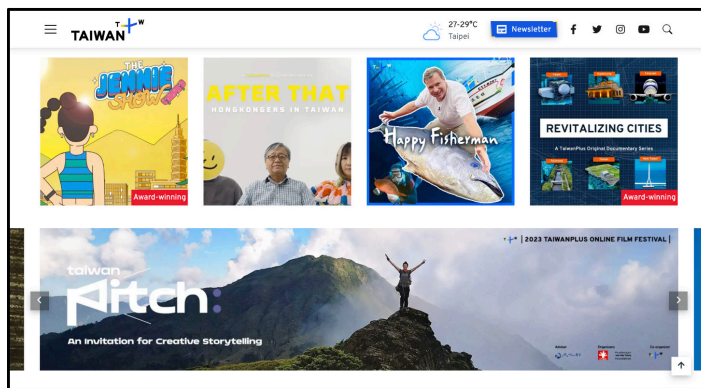


Image: A screenshot of Taiwan Plus' website depicting some of the featured programs. (Source: Screenshot taken by author.)

Sourcing a Variety of Perspectives

Along with transparency, prioritizing diversity is another way in which Taiwan Plus can improve trust in its platform. Studies have found that [partisanship is often linked to distrust](#), and [a report by the Aspen Institute](#) found that diversity was important when both reporting news and when assembling a news staff. A cursory look at Taiwan Plus' current range of programs shows a variety of different perspectives: [The Jennie Show](#) (shown in the above screenshot) follows the story of a Taiwanese American girl living in Taiwan, while [After That](#) (also shown in the screenshot) consists of interviews with Hongkongers living in Taiwan.

Additionally, [They Chose to Stay](#), which follows the stories of foreigners who decided to settle in Taiwan, is an excellent way of giving foreign audiences a relatable lens through which to view Taiwan. As Taiwan Plus grows, hopefully even more viewpoints—including perspectives that are critical of Taiwan—will continue to be represented through its programs, especially [as Taiwan Plus expands its TV channel to the United States](#).

The main point: For Taiwan Plus to be a successful counter to the CCP's propaganda efforts, it needs to generate credibility with international audiences by building a reputation for robust journalism, providing transparency, and giving a platform to a variety of perspectives. Moreover, the process of building credibility can showcase Taiwan's ongoing commitment to its liberal democratic values—ultimately reinforcing the projection of Taiwanese soft power in both the content of the platform *and* its practices.

The authors of this piece would like to thank Ya-Hui Chiu Summer Fellow Jonah Landsman for his research assistance.

[1] Winberg Chai, "[The Transformation of the Mass Media in Taiwan since 1950: Introduction](#)," *Asian Affairs* 27, no. 3 (2000): 133-140.

[2] Jens Damm, "[Politics and Media](#)," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Taiwan*, ed. Gunter Schubert (New York: Routledge, 2016): 184-197.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*