

Abstract: *Questo articolo tratteggia le molteplici identità ufficiali di Taiwan e la loro evoluzione nel tempo e analizza altresì gli sforzi delle autorità per costruire l'immagine di Paese democratico, liberale e pacifista.*

Nonostante Taiwan possa vantare da almeno tre decenni una 'storia di successo', in quanto democrazia stabile che merita di essere promossa in ambito internazionale, in realtà sono piuttosto le vicende in ambito geopolitico ad amplificare la sua capacità di farsi ascoltare e conoscere nel mondo.

Sebbene parte della percezione nei confronti di Taiwan all'estero dipenda dalla capacità degli organi di comunicazione politica interna, un fattore ancora più importante, che influenza pesantemente la copertura mediatica di Taiwan in ambito internazionale, è direttamente collegato alle tensioni esistenti tra la Repubblica di Cina e la Repubblica Popolare Cinese.

Questo articolo analizza i recenti sforzi compiuti per consolidare il 'marchio Taiwan' a livello internazionale analizzando, in primo luogo, i tentativi del paese per ottenere il permesso di entrare a far parte di organizzazioni internazionali, come l'ONU e l'OMS; in secondo luogo, i tentativi dell'isola di trasmettere il proprio 'modello' quale chiave di successo nella gestione della pandemia del corona virus; in terzo luogo, la rinnovata enfasi posta sul proprio sistema democratico e sulle istituzioni trasparenti e aperte dell'isola.

Introduction


According to the World Trade Organization, Taiwan was the 16th largest exporter and 17th largest importer of merchandise in 2021 (MoEA, 2021). As of December of 2021, it was also one of the largest holders of foreign exchange reserves. Despite its undisputable economic and industrial successes, which have led to the characterization of the island as one of the four 'Asian Tigers' in the 1990s, Taiwan has achieved several worth-mentioning accomplishments, for which it hardly receives any credit. Inhibited by its lack of diplomatic recognition and restricted participation in

international organisations, it can only rely on unconventional means of influence, to make its 'success story' known to the world (Grano 2022).

This article will attempt to showcase Taiwan's nation branding campaigns at the international level and its efforts to make the island known throughout the decades and to promote its achievements; in particular, it will look at how various governmental organs have used the management of the corona pandemic and Taiwan's lack of participation to international fora to highlight similarities and shared values with Western countries, including but not limited to the island's democratic system, transparent government and respect for diversity and human rights. The paper will show how these efforts, under the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration of Tsai Ing-wen 蔡英文 (2016-2024) have been specifically linked to the construction of a national identity, closely associated with democratic and liberal values, marking a distance from China. As stated by Pelaggi (2019: 49) "the shaping of Taiwanese national identity seemed to be the main target in most of the practices adopted in the last decades" when it comes to nation branding and soft power.

The article aims to answer one primary research question. Namely, how is Taiwan able to spin a positive story around itself and influence leaders and public opinions in other countries, given its lack of official diplomatic relations and channels. In other words, which are the main mechanisms and tools used in Taiwan's overall public communication apparatus to build its own national brand, closely associated with norms and values shared with the West?

In search of answers, this article first examines Taiwan's endorsed manifold identities as developing throughout the decades, describing its varying struggles to




shape its image from the early decades in which it lost its seat at the United Nations (UN) in the 1970s until recent times; then the paper carries out an in-depth analysis of two interrelated case studies aimed at boosting the 'Taiwan Brand' internationally by increasing its participation to international organisations such as the UN and the World Health Organisation (WHO), through the use of specific bids and campaigns. The campaigns analysed have been chosen because they have taken place between 2021 and 2023, coinciding with the years of the corona pandemic. Since the international arena has become more aware of Taiwan's plight and engages with it more since 2020, state actors in Taiwan have begun to actively utilise the characteristics they share with Western, democratic regimes to positively brand their nation. The campaigns analysed utilise such narratives by focusing respectively on why Taiwan should be allowed to have more international exchanges, given its positive contributions to the world; and on the island's good management of the pandemic, seen as a good model for other nations. In the recent campaigns we see a shift from the past - especially under various KMT administrations intent on highlighting cultural issues while identifying Taiwan as the preserver of traditional Chinese culture (Rawnsley 2014: 172) - towards more political topics and a conscious attempt in marking a difference from China and its authoritarian system. At the end, the paper details the efforts to create a more viable and long-term strategy to showcase the Taiwan brand, by highlighting how Taiwan's public diplomacy spotlights its democratic and transparent system and participatory institutions. These dimensions will be pursued by analysing presidential speeches, recent media campaigns, newspaper articles and national policies.

In terms of theoretical framework, this paper relates to previous studies on the

concept of 'nation branding'. As stated by Chen and Lee "nation branding can help sell a country's products and promote its place" (2013: 1223). Taiwan as a small island with limited diplomatic capacity suffers some limitations, when it competes with third countries in attracting outside talents, tourists, and foreign investments (Chen and Lee 2013: 1224), to name but a few examples. Likewise, given its lack of participation in international organisations and forums, it needs to find clever ways and meaningful campaigns, able to leave a mark on an international audience and raise awareness of its situation.

The first to propose the concept of nation branding was Ham in 2001, who proposed treating a country like a product. Same as for a product, nation branding needs to build trust in customers and satisfy their needs (Ham 2001). In 2005, Anholt listed six factors that are vital elements for a country brand image: Exports, Governance, Culture and Heritage, People, Tourism, Investment and Immigration.

Definitions of nation branding, even though hotly contested among scholars, regularly mention "discourses and practices located at the intersection of economy, culture and politics" as the basis of such efforts (Kaneva 2012: 4–5). The ultimate goal being the "creation and communication of national identity using tools, techniques, and expertise from the world of corporate brand management" (Aronczyk 2013: 16), in order to highlight a nation's unique characteristics and augment its international competitiveness in several sectors (Aronczyk 2009: 292). Other scholars yet, such as Rawnsley, have written in depth on how Taiwan has used "soft power" and public diplomacy to liaise with the international community, in the absence of formal diplomatic relations with major powers (Rawnsley 2012; 2014) and how different parties in Taiwan have hampered efforts to transmit a unified, coherent nation branding strategy (Rawnsley 2014). Zemanek (2018) has looked at the role of grassroots



initiatives in branding Taiwan using tourist souvenirs, videos, graphic materials and campaigns and shows grassroots actors' complicated relationship with official institutions, policies and discourses.

In terms of methodology, the research framework is based on the literature and data collection from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York, official speeches, inaugural addresses and press-releases by the Office of the President of the Republic of China.

This paper, based on textual analysis such as official speeches and social media campaigns, offers an additional perspective of scholarly studies of nation branding, by focusing on institutional actors, namely the state and other governmental players, such as Taiwanese representative offices and various ministries, as main players in promoting certain purposely crafted frameworks, narratives and messages with the task of contributing to build a positive image around Taiwan, highlighting some of its more recent achievements.

Even though in the realm of public diplomacy less formal actors such as scientists, journalists and bloggers play an important role in shaping a country's image, this paper chooses to focus on governmental actors, as the ones responsible for creating, shaping and driving the analysed campaigns. Finally, it is important to note that the paper focuses on the source/senders of the message rather than on the receivers of it. The task of analysing the reception and effectiveness of the message was too broad a task to carry out by an individual researcher and would have required significantly longer periods of observation.

Taiwan's changing global image: the internationalisation of the Taiwan Issue

Taiwan has come a long way in the


promotion of its national image and construction of a national brand since the 1990s, when the island was known mainly for its booming electronics industry. In the 2000s, Taiwan experienced a shift in its global image. Taiwan's democratization and economic success led to its growing influence in various industries, notably in technology and entertainment.

As a result, Taiwan became more visible on the world stage despite continuing to be excluded from almost all international forums and with limited diplomatic engagement with most countries.

In fact, since its exclusion from the United Nations (1971) and the diplomatic switch in recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on part of the US in 1979, Taiwan (Republic of China, ROC) has faced various diplomatic challenges and struggled to gain international recognition and to maintain official diplomatic partners. Taiwan is a member of some international organizations, but often under alternative names such as "Chinese Taipei" or later, when it joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in the year 2002, as "Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu" (Charnovitz 2006).¹

Throughout the decades, Taiwan's global image has been greatly affected by its relationship with the PRC (Grano 2023b; Tzeng 2023; Tseng 2023). To this day, the island continues to face great diplomatic challenges and hurdles due to China's opposition to the island's de facto independent status.

However, Taiwan's democracy, human rights, and reputation as a progressive country that respects diversity has been growing and increasingly defines its image abroad. In the absence of official diplomatic exchanges, Taiwan has nevertheless been able to leverage support from influential think tanks, experts, and other non-state actors by



spreading a positive message around itself.²

Taiwanese authorities have since many decades realised the delicate balancing-act needed to survive for a ‘de facto’ but not ‘de jure’ state. Starting from the end of the 1980s, the country’s foreign policy and its worldwide presence have integrated different realms: domestic politics, cross-strait relations, and Taiwan-US relations all being integral components. Moreover, administrations from different political parties have been aware of the importance of three things: enhancing unofficial bonds with non-diplomatic allies; further consolidating official ties with diplomatic allies; and, finding ways of participating in international organisations, to avoid further isolation.

Despite being excluded from most official channels for public diplomacy for decades, Taiwan has quietly maintained relationships with a multitude of institutions around the world: top American think tanks, NGOs and parliamentarians, among others—such unofficial relationships are continuously evolving (Abb and Hao, 2018). In recent years, Taiwan’s global image has been shaped by its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Taiwan has been praised for the successful management of the virus, which earned it recognition and respect from the international community. In this sense, nation branding for Taiwan has served the purpose of public diplomacy, in the absence of formal diplomatic exchanges, with the specific intent of spreading a positive message around Taiwan, often connected to its values, shared by Western countries.


In fact, after the Covid Pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Taiwan has seen a boost of international attention, which has been partly driven by China’s more aggressive behaviour towards the island and increasingly bellicose attitude regarding its sovereignty (Ferenczy 2023); secondly, it has

been influenced by the realisation of the potential ripple effects for third parties, when a powerful country invades a smaller one, which happens to be as deeply integrated in global circuits and supply chains, as Taiwan is. This ‘internationalization of the Taiwan Issue’ may at first appear like a negative development for the island - because at no point in recent history since the Military Strait Crises of the 1950s, has the island lived through a phase of such heightened tension (Grano 2023c), and yet it is indeed, from the perspective of Taiwan’s national brand or image, a positive development, that has propelled it to the fore of foreign policies’ decision-making for many countries, most notably the United States. In fact, Taiwan is now the US number one foreign policy concern and many countries that barely a few years ago were not in the least preoccupied with Taiwan, are currently drafting China strategies and including the island (and in many cases thinking of tools to improve relations with it) in their own foreign policies.³ Taiwan’s political values are shared by other liberal democracies around the world and challenge both the PRC and the KMT propaganda, spread during 40 years of authoritarian rule.

The next section will illustrate Taiwan’s efforts to be included in the UN system through formal bids as well as informal campaigns and other forms of behind-the-scenes support for the island.

Taiwan’s efforts to be included in international organisations

After being expelled from the UN in 1971, for more than two decades Taiwan was isolated and excluded from many international organizations – particularly those affiliated with the United Nations. When Lee Teng-Hui 李登輝 became president (1988-2000) and launched his flexible style of “pragmatic diplomacy”,⁴ participation in the UN alongside China (something that Chiang



Ching-Kuo had resolutely refused, mostly out of ideological reasons) became conceivable inside Taiwan. Taiwan relaunched its UN campaign in 1993 and presented several bids between 1993 and 1995 for potential membership as a sovereign state, next to the PRC (Winkler 2012) turning its situation into one similar to that of previous divided nations like the two Germanies or the two Koreas (Wu 2016: 398). Given the lack of success of these bids, Taiwan shifted its focus and sought, starting in 1996, to direct its effort towards emphasising the unfairness surrounding the lack of representation for its population, excluded from participating in UN activities, despite bearing no fault in the matter of the undefined status of the ROC, Taiwan. While this strategy also failed, it was nevertheless continued in the manner of a low-key approach during the first DPP administration under Chen Shui-bian 陳水扁, (2000-2008) only for it to see an abrupt change of tactics in 2007, when the ROC bid at the time asked the UN to process its application for full membership. The statement through which UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon refused to accept the application, which basically stated that in light with the General Assembly Resolution 2758 the UN considers “Taiwan as an integral part of the People’s Republic of China”, started a hefty discussion concerning the legal status of Taiwan (Republic of China).⁵


The issue of membership to international organisations has become increasingly complicated in Taiwan with the two main competing parties - DPP and Kuomintang (KMT) - holding differing views on what forms Taiwan’s (ROC) participation in the UN should take and what is the extent of provocations that the PRC would tolerate. Especially since the era of Tsai Ing-wen (2016-2024), as cross-strait relations have become very tense, the issue of UN participation has been toned down and has mostly taken the shape of less provocative

actions, such as publicity campaigns released from various organs and institutions, like the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York (deLisle 2021).

Since its exclusion, Taiwan has sought in various ways to regain access to the UN under several presidents from Lee Teng-Hui and Chen Shui-bian to Ma Ying-jeou and Tsai Ing-Wen. However, while under Chen this was done through acts such as proposing an eventually unsuccessful referendum to ask Taiwanese whether they would support seeking for UN membership under the name of Taiwan, under Ma and Tsai such actions transitioned towards a more responsible approach of releasing calls for redressing the exclusion of the Taiwanese people from the UN system and its specialised agencies, such as the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) (deLisle 2021).

Therefore, throughout the decades, we see a clear shift from the early strategy, which was based on presenting bids to participate in the UN, focusing on the territorial and sovereignty status of the ROC (or of Taiwan, under Chen), to more recent attempts geared at highlighting Taiwan’s positive and responsible contributions to this interconnected world instead, through campaigns rather than bids, adapted to the changing geopolitical status of the island.

One of these campaigns was launched in September 2021 underscoring the plan to participate in the activities, mechanisms and meetings of the UN as a key partner in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. The campaign was titled: “Give Taiwan a Voice” and was initiated by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York, briefly before the 76th UN General Assembly in September. The goal was to gather international support for Taiwan’s bid



to take part in the UN system. The campaign was articulated by placing special emphasis on the discrepancy between Taiwan's efforts in mitigating the effects of global warming through the implementation of stringent laws and regulations and its exclusion from all platforms, through which Taiwan could share its valuable experience (Grano 2021).

In a tweet on its official Twitter account, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) declared, “The 76th @UN General Assembly opens Sept. 14. Taiwan is shut out on political grounds. Take 3 steps & join the call to give #Taiwan a voice at #UNGA76!”

The campaign was simultaneously launched and promoted via social media, on various embassies' websites⁶ and a short film was released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷ A follow up to the campaign took place in 2023, when MoFA produced a second short film “Global Peace with Taiwan” to support the issue of Taiwan's participation in the UN system. The short film underscores that the country helps to preserve peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and globally, in times of upheaval.⁸ Two things feature prominently in the short clip, Taiwan's geostrategic position at the heart of global supply chains and maritime trade routes, and its crucial role in the semiconductor industry.

The real goals of Taiwan's UN campaigns, be it in the form of short promotional videos or social media publicity, go far beyond the pointless wish that these could ultimately succeed in obtaining membership to the organization. Underlying such efforts are two main aims: to raise international attention to the issue of Taiwan's unfair exclusion; and to be eventually allowed to join at least a few functional UN agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the International Civil Aviation Organisation, by shedding light on its unjust marginalisation through the promotion of the many positive attributes Taiwan can share

with the international community, of which it is already an integral (albeit not officially so) part (Grano 2023d).

Finally, all of the most recent initiatives and campaigns launched aim at showcasing the country's contributions to stimulating global economic recovery and sustainable development in the post-COVID-19 era, particularly given the island's prime position at the heart of supply chains and its participatory approaches to solve global issues; such a campaign will be the focus of the next paragraph.

A successful 'model' in managing the corona pandemic

Riding on the success of its management of the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan in 2020 renewed its efforts to participate in the World Health Assembly (WHA), showcasing the fact that the island was one of the first to manage and keep under control the COVID-19 pandemic, without employing the restrictive and illiberal measures of its authoritarian neighbour, on the other side of the Strait. Taiwan received international praise and was heralded as a model to follow and its experience as useful for other countries around the world. Despite several countries intervening for Taiwan to be allowed to participate in the WHA in Geneva,⁹ the requests were denied.

Taiwan was able to skilfully manage the pandemic thanks to its open and inclusive system; a system in which the public was actively called to participate in the state of emergency and contribute to it. This management was in stark contrast with the rest of the world and certainly with China and its draconian measures. In fact, in the initial phase of global uncertainty several countries (including liberal and democratic ones) reverted to strict ways of controlling their citizens, curtailing their liberties. Therefore, in its efforts to join the WHA,



the Taiwanese government purposely raised awareness to the participatory “New Taiwan Model” (*xin Taiwan moshi* 新台湾模式) of crisis management (Yang, 2022).¹⁰ Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung 陳時中 in his article “Global Health Security—A Call for Taiwan’s Inclusion”,¹¹ emphasised the key role Taiwan performs in global health; the editorial was widely disseminated in international media outlets (Chen 2020).¹²

The country also tried to increase knowledge by coordinating with allied countries and interested parties, organising joint conferences to exchange opinions on the COVID-19 prevention strategies, global health security and Taiwan’s participation in the WHO.

One of the most widely circulated government-sponsored campaigns is the “Health for All – Taiwan Can Help” campaign, meant to illustrate the global civic spirit of the Taiwanese people.

Taiwan also skilfully made use of new opportunities created by the pandemic to raise its visibility by delivering medical equipment under various slogans from “Taiwan Can Help” to “Taiwan Is Helping” (Ministry of Health and Welfare 2020).

It becomes clear that Taiwan has profited and gained advantage from its good management of the COVID 19 pandemic, by turning its story into a model for the rest of the world. However, the island is now in need of building a brand image that goes beyond COVID-19, to remain viable in an after-pandemic world. This is where principles, tenets, beliefs and values such as openness and inclusiveness (and Taiwan’s democratic system) are starting to play a crucial role in its national brand construction and national identity.

The Post-Covid Era and the democratic/progressive values as soft power tools

Public diplomacy is the informal

process by which international actors interact with foreign societies to positively ‘brand’ themselves by communicating desirable qualities (Melissen 2005: 6-10). Political scientist Joseph Nye regards soft power as comprising culture, values and policy success as soft power achievements (Nye 1990). The communicative dimension of soft power, for instance in spreading certain narratives, has been analysed by Roselle, Miskimmon and O’Loughlin (2014: 70-84) and fits well with the scope of the current article, in assessing the success of public diplomacy, based on the shared values that bind Taiwan to the democratic world and at the same time contribute to the creation of a very distinctive ‘Taiwanese’ identity, separate from that of China.

In the Covid and post-Covid era, Taiwan’s national image has been influenced by both domestic and international factors.

At the international level, a more aggressive China and its diminishing attractiveness among Western countries has created a suitable environment for Taiwan to fill the gap, by depicting itself as the ‘responsible actor’ that has successfully overcome the pandemic as a free and liberal society.

At the level of domestic politics, the progressive administration of the DPP under the leadership of Tsai Ing-Wen has facilitated the creation of a national identity and image (especially in the case of younger generations) closely linked to the island’s democratic system and all that this entails such as freedom of opinion, speech, religion, respect and tolerance for diversity. This emphasis on political narratives has risen in importance under the DPP, with the party massively increasing its efforts for Taiwan to be associated with the above-mentioned characteristics in the international discourse; the underlying (not-so-hidden) aim is to emphasize its difference (and its distance) from China’s authoritarian regime and its similarities and shared values with

democratic countries. This becomes evident as in the “Protect Taiwan and Help the World” campaign one of the main hashtags is: “# TaiwanIsNotChina”.

For example, LGBT issues have increasingly occupied a crucial role in aiding to define Taiwan’s image as a progressive country (the first one in Asia) to legalise same-sex marriage (Kuo 2019). In the video produced in September 2021 (see note 6) that trended with the hashtags #UNGA76 #HearTaiwan #WorkingTogether, such liberal features are clearly elucidated, especially in the final slogan: “Free to speak, to learn, to believe, to vote, to love. FREE IN TAIWAN.”


The features of a peace-loving, freedom-oriented democracy are crucial elements in Taiwan’s national branding efforts, directly contrasted with the bellicose behaviour that China has assumed both at the domestic as well as international stage, since 2017. Clearly, these characteristics are such that resonate well with the Western world while in other regions, such messages do not gain much sympathy for Taiwan. In fact, most public diplomacy efforts in Taiwan are geared at acquiring support among Western countries, first and foremost in the US and Europe.

Political speeches and other official communication acts have also been vital in the spread of said values. Speeches by the president, have focused on highlighting Taiwan’s democratic path; mostly held in Chinese, these have been immediately translated into English, with the goal of reaching an international audience.

Likewise, Hsiao Bi-Khim, Taiwan’s Representative to the United States from 2020 to 2023 and future Vice-President starting from May 2024, has given several speeches, generating a high degree of attention with her tweets, focusing on Taiwan’s strength and positive characteristics.

Such values have been deliberately transmitted by the DPP administration since 2016, through various official communications to a domestic as well as international public. In 2019, during her new year discourse, she emphatically stated that there is a fundamental difference between the free and democratic island of Taiwan and its autocratic counterpart on the other side of the strait (Tsai 2019a). On January 2nd, Tsai gave a second speech, in response to a particularly aggressive message released by Xi Jinping in his 2019 revisit of the famous series “Letters to Taiwanese compatriots” (*qiao Taiwan tongbao shu* 告台灣同胞書) (Grano 2023b; 2023c). Trying not to antagonise China, Tsai nevertheless attempted to shift the focus towards Taiwan’s open and democratic political system, highlighting that important decisions regarding any political negotiation with the PRC should be taken with the involvement and consent of the Taiwanese population. Tsai also suggests a ‘Taiwan-first’ (*Taiwan youxian* 臺灣優先) track to economic development that prioritises the wishes and interests of Taiwanese citizens, and is best represented in her ‘New Southbound Policy’ (*xin nanxiang zhengce* 新南向政策) meant to diversify Taiwan’s economic options, reducing its dependence from China, and enhancing cooperation with countries in Southeast Asia, and the Pacific (Tsai 2019b).

In both speeches as well as in the new year’s addresses Tsai gave in the following years, she emphasises the political and economic experience that the Taiwanese have lived through, since the end of the 1980s all the way to the establishment of a fully-fledged vibrant democracy. She does so, by focusing on how the shared past has reinforced the rise of a national ‘Taiwanese identity’, progressively more detached and distinct from that of China. In doing so, she also links Taiwan’s own developmental path and achievements in terms of democratic values to those of other Western countries



and like-minded democracies, where respect for human rights, political opinions, and freedom of expression are the norm. Tsai has established this trend since her inaugural address in 2016 (Tsai 2016)-and then reinforced it in her second address in 2020-when she attempted to create a new common denominator to the question of national identity and cohesion, closely linked to the country's democratic system (Tsai 2020). It is necessary to point out that this is not a new development since democracy, civil liberties and freedom were already very much present in Chen Shui-Bian's 2004 campaign and used to promote Taiwan as different from China (Sullivan and Lowe 2010). What is different nowadays is that the message is more likely to be received by a wide international public, given the mutated geopolitical situation and Taiwan's standing in the world as of 2023.

The creation of ad hoc tv channels that cater to a foreign public like Taiwan Plus are also playing an increasingly important role in conveying positive messages abroad and making Taiwan known for its merits and for the issues that concern the island, rather than merely for its newly acquired fame as "the most dangerous place on earth" (The Most Dangerous Place 2021).

A mutated geopolitical environment

For Western countries supply-chain glitches during the pandemic served as a potent wake-up call to the perils of being overly dependent on China's industrial might; at the same time (and partly because of it) awareness among Western governments and publics is growing in regards to Taiwan's importance for issues such as semiconductors and supply chains' reliability and how the rest of the world depends on stability across the Taiwan Strait (Vest, Kratz and Goujon 2022). Since Trump's trade war in 2016 tensions between China and the US have been rising and, to a certain extent, the situation has become even more tense under

the Biden Administration (Grano 2023a). In Europe and in the US pro-Taiwan voices are becoming more vocal; parliamentary visits to the island and prioritising the Taiwan Issue in their dealings with Beijing have become common deeds for many countries, including small traditionally China-friendly countries like Switzerland, since 2021 (China Global Podcast, June 2023). Such changes have been prompted by a mutated geopolitical environment with an increasing number of European nations, expanding on existing economic ties and cooperation with Taiwan, seen as a reliable partner in resilient supply chains and a like-minded actor for trade and political cooperation. Such changes at the level of Taiwan's national brand have also prompted more concrete actions, which have, so far, been mostly symbolic. For instance, the EU is trying to move along two trajectories: continuing its support for Taiwan's participation in international organisations and trying to push for a bilateral agreement on investments with the island. Finally, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has likewise reinforced the need to address the problem with Taiwan as the potential next big issue of contention, should US-led deterrence efforts fail. There is more and more international support for Taiwan's democratic way of life and for maintaining that any change in the status quo between China and Taiwan needs to be carried out in a peaceful manner and with the consent of both sides.

Conclusions

This article has followed the evolution of Taiwan's nation branding efforts by analysing some of the campaigns launched throughout the past 3 years to rebrand its national image abroad and to raise awareness of its exclusion from international fora, despite important achievements. While the party in power has greatly influenced and determined the narrative that Taiwan's public

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² Much of this success should be credited to the numerous projects and think tanks in which the Taiwanese government has invested, such as Spotlight Taiwan or the projects financed by the Ministry of Education; however, for the purpose of this article, it is more pertinent to study two of the actual campaigns mandated and carried out by the government, to take advantage of the momentum created by the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the renewed wave of sympathy this created around Taiwan, strengthening the image of a peaceful and democratic country.

³ Following a trend that has taken place in numerous Western countries, Switzerland's lower house of parliament on May 2nd 2023, voted in favor of strengthening relations with their counterparts in Taiwan. The motion was passed by the House of Representatives (the lower house) with the aim to boost democracy, promote peace, and generally deepen exchanges between Taiwan and Switzerland; the proponent of the motion is a politician from the left-wing Social Democratic Party, Fabian Molina, who was part of a delegation of parliamentarians that went to Taiwan in January 2023 (Chen 2023). In Eastern Europe and among Baltic states, Lithuania and Czechia are examples of states that have turned into strong supporters of increased engagement with Taiwan.

⁴ Part of this strategy consisted in keeping Taiwan's international existence active, through participation in various international and especially intergovernmental organizations.

⁵ The United States, despite being unhappy with Chen Shui-Bian's bid, considered as a provocation, felt compelled to rectify the statement made by Secretary-General Ban, arguing that "while this assertion is

consistent with the Chinese position, it is not universally held by UN member states, including the United States." (as quote in Tkacic 2007).

⁶ Website of the Permanent Mission of the separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu to the World Trade Organisation in Geneva: https://www.taiwanembassy.org/wto_en/post/1552.html

⁷ Short film titled "To freedom" At: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRSgdmfjn6E>

⁸ The video "Global Peace with Taiwan" is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYaseTPjU1M>; the film is also available on MoFA's official Facebook page, on its Twitter account and on the ministry's *Trending Taiwan* YouTube channel and related social media accounts.

⁹ Taiwan was previously allowed to participate to the WHA with an "observer" status during the era of Ma Ying-jeou as a gesture of goodwill towards the China-friendly KMT administration (2008 – 2016).

¹⁰ The "New Taiwan Model" is a slogan created by the Tsai administration, that stands to indicate the process of: eliminating serious cases of Covid, effectively controlling minor cases and uniting the population to better protect Taiwan.

¹¹ The full text of his article is available here: https://www.roc-taiwan.org/om_en/post/672.html

¹² The campaign to allow Taiwan to have a seat at the WHA of the WHO has a long history that dates back at least to the years of the SARS epidemic in China (in 2003), when the island's exclusion and lack of information sharing left it vulnerable and isolated. During President Chen Shui Bian's time in office the slogan "Give Taiwan a Seat" (*gei Taiwan yixizhidi 給台灣一席之地*) became popular (Office of the President 2007).