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THE IDENTITY DILEMMA OF TAIWANESE SOCIETY

ПРОБЛЕМА ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ ТАЙВАНСЬКОГО СУСПІЛЬСТВА

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Abstract. *The issue of Taiwanese identity occupies a considerable place in assessing the Republic of China (Taiwan)'s ability to preserve its political independence. Despite the marked strengthening of Taiwanese self-identification in recent decades, it is still premature to speak of a consolidated nationwide consensus on national identity. A substantial share of Taiwan's society continues to hold a mixed identity. At the same time, for a significant part of the population the label "Taiwanese" functions primarily as a political marker of self-identification, while cultural and historical embeddedness in a broader Chinese context may still persist as a component of self-perception. This article explains the dynamics of the formation of Taiwanese citizens' identity and its current state, the factors that have shaped this process, and the policies pursued by Taiwan's authorities in this sphere in the context of strained relations with the People's Republic of China. The research is grounded on extensive sociological survey data provided by the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University from 1992 to 2025, which reflects the shift from a Sinocentric model to a distinct Taiwanese national consciousness. The authors examine key internal and external factors driving this transformation, including the democratization and "Taiwanization" policies under presidents Lee Teng-hui, Chen Shui-bian, Tsai Ing-wen, and Lai Ching-te, as well as the systemic military and diplomatic pressure from the PRC. Particular attention is devoted to regional linguistic-demographic variations (northern mixed areas vs. southern Hoklo-dominant communities), generational changes, and the impact of regional geopolitical crises, such as the 2019 Hong Kong protests and the COVID-19 pandemic, on consolidating civic nationalism.*

Keywords: *identity, Taiwan, independence, "Taiwanization", PRC, politics, security.*

Анотація. *Проблема тайванської ідентичності займає важливе місце у питанні спроможності Республіки Китай (Тайвань) зберегти свою політичну незалежність. Попри помітне посилення тайванської самоідентифікації в останні десятиліття, говорити про*

усталений загальнонаціональний консенсус щодо національної ідентичності наразі передчасно. У тайванському суспільстві зберігається помітна частка громадян із комбінованою ідентичністю. Водночас для значної частини населення означення “тайванець” функціонує передусім як політичний маркер самоідентифікації, а культурно-історична інтегрованість у ширший китайський контекст може все ще зберігатися як компонент самосприйняття. Ця стаття пояснює динаміку формування ідентичності громадян Тайваню та її сучасний стан, фактори, що впливали на цей процес, політику тайванської влади у цій сфері в контексті напружених відносин з Китайською Народною Республікою. В основу дослідження покладено комплексний аналіз багаторічних соціологічних опитувань Центру вивчення виборів Національного університету Ченчі (NCCU) за період з 1992 по 2025 роки. Автори детально розкривають еволюцію суспільних настроїв від синоцентричної моделі до виразної громадянської національної свідомості, аналізуючи падіння підтримки ідеї об'єднання з КНР до історичного мінімуму та консолідацію електорату навколо збереження статус-кво. Досліджено вплив політики «тайванізації» та «десинізації» культури й освіти, що впроваджувалася за президентства Лі Денхуея, Чень Шуйбяня, Цай Інвень та Лая Цінде. Визначено роль протистояння з КНР та постійної воєнної загрози як ключового зовнішнього фактора викристалізування ідентичності. Окрему увагу приділено регіональним та етнолінгвістичним відмінностям між північними змішаними районами та південними громадами з домінуванням мови хокло, а також впливу демографічних зрушень, зміни поколінь, подій у Гонконгу 2019 року та пандемії COVID-19. Результати дослідження підтверджують формування зрілої громадянської ідентичності, яка виступає психологічним фундаментом національної безпеки острова.

Ключові слова: ідентичність, Тайвань, незалежність, “тайванізація”, КНР, політика, безпека.

Introduction. Identity is a context-dependent politico-philosophical category. Every individual has the right to define their own self-identification. The answer to the question “Who am I?” is shaped by a set of interrelated factors – ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, historical, and others.

Taiwanese identity has historically developed against the backdrop of close cultural and civilizational ties with mainland China. The end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 and the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) rule on the mainland led to the evacuation of the Kuomintang government to Taiwan. Since then, a situation of parallel existence of two political entities has emerged: the Republic of China on the island of Taiwan, which claims to be the successor of the 1911 republic, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), which established control over the mainland.

Proceeding from the assumption of future reintegration of the territory that came under PRC control and the restoration of China's political unity, Taiwan's leadership consistently promoted a state policy model aimed at preserving classical Chinese cultural and linguistic traditions. Due to excessive assimilatory pressure, this strategy had ambivalent consequences for the local population. Over time, as the PRC became internationally established as the sole representative of China and as its military and political capacity increased, Taiwan began gradually distancing itself from the mainland context, placing greater emphasis on developing its own cultural, linguistic, and socio-political distinctiveness. In academic discourse, this policy has been described in terms of “Taiwanization” or “de-Sinicization.”

The impact of external factors related to the PRC, together with corresponding domestic policies over recent decades, has resulted in a notable transformation of Taiwanese citizens' self-identification. A significant part of the population refuses to identify as Chinese, as the designation “Chinese” is increasingly associated with the PRC. The rejection of such self-identification acquires a symbolic dimension, serving to demarcate Taiwan from Beijing and correlating with the desire to preserve independence. At the same time, Taiwan's identity landscape remains complex and heterogeneous. Under conditions of prolonged confrontation with the PRC, the question of identity extends beyond the cultural domain and becomes central to issues of security and the preservation of statehood.

Literature Review. The question of identity in Taiwanese society occupies a central place in

contemporary scholarship on Taiwan's political development. Following the island's democratization, issues of national self-identification, historical memory, language policy, and international status have gained particular salience. Researchers focus on the transformation of identity from a Sinocentric model toward the formation of a distinct Taiwanese nation, as well as on the impact of domestic political reforms and external pressure from the PRC on this process.

In preparing this article, particular use was made of the research produced by the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, which has provided survey data since the early 1990s on Taiwanese public attitudes toward identity and independence.

Bi-Yu Chang (2004) and Yang Zhong (2016) offer detailed analyses of the formation and transformation of Taiwanese national identity. The latter traces these dynamics through numerous public opinion surveys and, in particular, highlights the hybrid character of Taiwanese identity.

Christopher H. Achen and Te-Yu Wang (2017), as well as Chang-Yen Tsai (2007), emphasize the relationship between national identity and electoral behavior. By contrast, Chen Wei-Lin, Lin Ming-Jen, and Yang Tzu-Ting (2023) examine the impact of the 1997 education reform on Taiwanese youths' national consciousness as a component of the policy of "Taiwanization."

Chun-Ying Wu (2020) explores the formation of Taiwanese identity in connection with language policy and the regional demographic distribution of linguistic groups, which have influenced both the emergence and the uneven diffusion of Taiwanese national identity.

Among Ukrainian scholars who study the Taiwan issue in international relations, cross-strait relations between the PRC and Taiwan, Taiwanese nationalism, and identity, the following deserve particular mention: Bilak P., Shevchuk O., Klymchuk I., Zablotskyi V., Honchar B., Taran M., and others.

The purpose of this article is to examine the process and factors shaping the identity of citizens of the Republic of China in the context of crisis-driven relations with the PRC.

Main results of the research. After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) won the civil war, the Kuomintang (KMT), having established control over Taiwan, transferred a mainland Chinese cultural model to the island and introduced Mandarin as the dominant language, although Hokkien had been the everyday language of the majority of the local population. In public memory, the rule of the "mainlanders" was often perceived as even harsher than Japanese colonial rule: prior to Chiang

Kai-shek's arrival, around 30,000 people were killed during the unrest following the February 28 Incident, which was followed by the years of the so-called White Terror (*Sendyka, 2021*).

In its struggle to preserve Taiwan's right to represent China internationally, the authorities of the Republic of China implemented a policy known as the "Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement," aimed at preserving and promoting classical Chinese culture. This initiative served as a response to Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (*Chang, 2004*). However, this approach significantly affected local culture. In 1963, the state restricted the use of Hoklo and Hakka languages on television and radio, reducing their share of programming to below 50 percent. In 1966, schools were authorized to punish students for using their native languages, and in 1972 the Ministry of Education prohibited both students and teachers from speaking Hoklo on school premises, even in private conversations. By the late 1970s, citizens who did not speak Mandarin were excluded from public service (*Wu, 2020*). This assimilationist policy was intended to preserve ties with classical mainland culture under conditions of political separation.

The diplomatic struggle between the PRC and the Republic of China for the right to represent China internationally in the 1970s ended with the victory of the communist mainland government. Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nations – including its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council – and in other leading international organizations, gradually losing diplomatic recognition. As a result, the PRC became the sole official representative of China in international politics.

As the idea of reunifying China became increasingly illusory, amid growing international isolation and domestic demands for political reform, as well as a broader cultural awakening after decades of strict state control over cultural life, the KMT was compelled to revise its approach. In 1981, the Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA) was established, tasked with overseeing Taiwan's cultural development. For the first time, the ethnocultural heritage of Indigenous peoples began to be promoted alongside Chinese culture, although a Sinocentric mindset continued to dominate. This

period is considered a precursor to the later policy of “Taiwanization” (Chang, 2004).

The lifting of martial law in 1987, which had been in place since 1949, formally initiated a process of active localization and democratization. In subsequent years, Taiwanese governments asserted the need to cultivate a distinct Taiwanese culture, placing particular emphasis on local history, geography, and cultural traditions as integral elements of a broader policy of foregrounding the Taiwanese context (Tsai, 2007).

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Taiwan had established itself not only as a global industrial and technological hub but also as an open society with strong public support for Western-style democratic institutions and pronounced resistance to authoritarian practices. As Fredrik Barth observed, the formation of a distinct identity occurs through the establishment of boundaries that differentiate group members from non-members. Gradually, old internal divisions within Taiwan receded, giving way to a new boundary – between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese (Sendyka, 2021). During the presidency of Lee Teng-hui from the KMT, the National Cultural Association (NCA) was founded in 1991 to develop policies promoting Taiwanese self-consciousness. At the same time, the Ministry of the Interior amended the Household Registration Act, replacing the category “ancestral origin” with “place of birth.” This change reflected an official effort to redefine the concept of “Taiwanese” and eliminate unnecessary ethnic distinctions among citizens (Chang, 2004).

In 1997, Taiwan introduced a curriculum reform for junior high schools, launching a new series of social studies textbooks titled *Knowing Taiwan*. The most significant changes concerned history education: students began studying Taiwan’s history separately in their first year, whereas previously the focus had been primarily on Chinese history. The new curriculum substantially expanded material on the island and more clearly distinguished between “Taiwan” and “China.” The reform sparked intense political debates regarding its content and ideological orientation, particularly concerning historical interpretation and national identity (Chen; Lin; Yang, 2023). That same year, Aletheia University established the first department of Taiwanese literature, a move later replicated at other universities (Taipei Times, 2021).

Although Mandarin remains Taiwan’s official language, as in the PRC, the linguistic situation differs markedly from that on the mainland. Beyond differences in accent and the frequent use of other dialects, Mandarin in Taiwan employs traditional Chinese characters rather than simplified ones. Moreover, Taiwanese use the original phonetic system Zhuyin (*Bopomofo*), whereas mainland China adopted Pinyin, a Latin-based romanization system (Sendyka, 2021).

The process of “Taiwanization,” which accelerated in the 1990s, led to a shift away from the previously dominant Sinocentric identity. A discourse of Taiwanese subjectivity and the emergence of a new local distinctiveness gained momentum. These processes also resulted in changes in political elites: in 2000, the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Chen Shui-bian won the presidential election for the first time (Lousche, 2022). He continued the policy of Taiwanization not only culturally but also economically, notably through the “Challenge 2008” National Development Plan, aimed at enhancing Taiwan’s international competitiveness amid the PRC’s growing economic power. The plan consisted of ten major programs of political and financial reform (Ross; Brown, 2023).

In the 2008 elections, the KMT returned to power, and Ma Ying-jeou assumed the presidency (2008–2016). His rhetoric emphasized the Republic of China and the concept of the “greater Chinese nation” (*zhonghua minzu*). This shift reflected the KMT’s ideological evolution after 2004 and its rapprochement with the CCP in opposing “Taiwanese separatism.” Ma framed Taiwan as a region of the Republic of China, whose formal jurisdiction also encompassed mainland China; accordingly, he viewed relations between Taipei and Beijing not as “state-to-state” but as special equal relations at the “region-to-region” level. This approach effectively disregarded two decades of consolidation of Taiwanese identity. The KMT’s logic held that excessive Taiwanization provoked Beijing and fueled separatism; thus, state policy should remain restrained. Under the principle of “no unification, no independence, no use of force,” Ma’s administration did not deny the existence of a distinct Taiwanese civic identity but sought to limit its active institutional promotion (Muyard, 2012).

The subsequent government led by DPP President Tsai Ing-wen, responding to Chinese claims over the island’s democracy, intensified Taiwanization policies, particularly by increasing attention to Indigenous peoples as a means of highlighting Taiwan’s historical and cultural distinctiveness from

the PRC. In 2017, the Act on the Development of Indigenous Languages entered into force, regarded as another important step toward strengthening linguistic diversity on the island in contrast to standardized mainland Mandarin (*Taiwan Today*, 2017). A year earlier, Tsai delivered the first official apology on behalf of the government to Taiwan's Indigenous peoples and expanded support measures, not only through cultural policy but also by addressing inequalities in healthcare access in rural areas, including improved transportation and the development of local medical services, as these communities experience poorer overall health outcomes compared to the majority population (Ross; Brown, 2023).

Public support for deepening Taiwanization was also reflected in the 2002 "511 Parade for Rectifying the Name of Taiwan," which united civic organizations demanding the official use of "Taiwan" as the country's name and seeking UN membership under that designation (Taipei Times, 2002). In 2003, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced a redesigned passport cover featuring the English word "Taiwan" alongside "Republic of China." In 2021, the passport was redesigned again: "Taiwan" was made more prominent, while "Republic of China" was reduced to smaller text encircling the national emblem (TCN, 2025).

In December 2025, President Lai Ching-te, speaking at the forum "The Legacy of Free China and the Challenges of Modern Democracy," recalled a 1972 proposal by political dissident Lei Chen to rename the Republic of China as the "Democratic State of China–Taiwan" and renounce claims to mainland China. Lai stated that the DPP had decided not to change the official name of Taiwan from the Republic of China in order to preserve social unity. He emphasized that the name "Republic of China" is enshrined in the Constitution, which defines Taiwan as a sovereign and independent state; therefore, there is no need for a new declaration of independence (TCN, 2025).

Sociological Research on the Identity of Taiwan's Residents

Against the backdrop of the aforementioned historical processes, scholarly interest in the issue of Taiwanese self-identification began to emerge in the late 1980s. One of the earliest surveys on this topic was conducted in 1989 by the Taiwanese newspaper *The United Daily*. Slightly more than half of respondents identified themselves as "Chinese," while only 16 percent considered themselves "Taiwanese" (Yang, 2016).

However, significant shifts in national identity occurred during the 1990s. The proportion of those identifying as "Chinese" sharply declined to around 10 percent, while the share of those identifying as "Taiwanese" rose to nearly 40 percent. This trend continued into the twenty-first century. In the 2000s, the proportion of respondents stating that they were "Taiwanese" exceeded 60 percent. It should be noted that the number of individuals identifying simultaneously as both "Taiwanese" and "Chinese" also declined markedly (Yang, 2016).

Since 1992, the Election Study Center of National Chengchi University (NCCU) has regularly measured how citizens of Taiwan define their identity. Particularly significant for this analysis is the year 1996, when the share of respondents identifying as "Taiwanese only" rose sharply from 24 percent to 34 percent. This shift coincided with a critical political and security situation: shortly before, Beijing conducted missile tests, during which missiles crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait for the first time since 1949, and in March 1996 Taiwan held its first fully democratic presidential election. The Chinese leadership perceived these elections as a potential step toward formalizing Taiwanese independence and resorted to a show of force in an attempt to influence electoral sentiment. This example clearly demonstrates that Taiwanese identity is shaped not only by internal self-perceptions but also by the external threat posed by the PRC (Sedyka, 2021).

In the following decades, the proportion of individuals identifying as "Taiwanese" continued to grow steadily, while those identifying as "Chinese" declined consistently. The period 2023–2025 is characterized by the consolidation of long-term trends. "Exclusively Taiwanese" identity remains the dominant position in public opinion, encompassing an absolute majority of the population. In 2023, 61.7 percent of citizens identified solely as Taiwanese. In 2024, this figure rose to 63.4 percent, approaching a historical high and indicating the strengthening of national sentiments. Despite a slight decline to 62.0 percent in December 2025, this group continues to define the island's primary sociopolitical trajectory (Election Study Center, 2025).

The second-largest segment consists of individuals with a dual identity ("both Taiwanese and Chinese"). Their trend mirrors that of the first group: after declining to 31.0 percent in 2024, it slightly

rebounded to 31.7 percent in 2025. This share has remained relatively stable within a corridor of 30–33 percent in recent years (*Election Study Center, 2025*).

Meanwhile, identification “exclusively as Chinese” has become marginal. Between 2023 and 2025, this category remained at the level of statistical insignificance – between 2.4 and 2.5 percent. This suggests that the pro-China narrative has effectively lost its societal relevance. Overall, contemporary Taiwan demonstrates a clear consensus: more than 93 percent of residents, in one way or another, associate themselves with Taiwan, leaving the idea of political affiliation with China largely in the past (*Election Study Center, 2025*).

As can be observed, over the past two decades the national identity of the majority of Taiwan’s residents has undoubtedly evolved. However, previous surveys primarily addressed political identification. In a 2014 survey conducted by Taiwan Indicators Survey and the Center for Taiwan Studies at Shanghai University, respondents were asked: “Whom do you consider yourself to be in terms of blood lineage and culture?” More than 50 percent selected the option “member of the Chinese nation,” thereby affirming their ethnic and cultural belonging to the Chinese nation. When combined with those who chose “Chinese” and “both,” the percentage exceeds 80 percent (*Yang, 2016*). These data suggest that a portion of Taiwan’s residents, despite politically identifying as “Taiwanese,” may not reject their Chinese ethnocultural identity and may simultaneously not fully embrace the concept of a distinct and separate Taiwanese ethnocultural identity. This indicates that Taiwan remains a divided society when it comes to the foundational concept of national identity (*Achen; Wang, 2017*).

Beyond self-identification, another key issue in Taiwanese political research concerns public attitudes toward possible unification with the People’s Republic of China. An analysis of sociological data collected by NCCU from 1994 through December 2025 demonstrates a fundamental transformation of Taiwanese public consciousness and a definitive shift away from a pro-China orientation. The most striking trend of the past three decades has been the dramatic decline in support for unification with mainland China, which has effectively lost its electoral base. Whereas in the mid-1990s unification was considered a realistic alternative by a substantial segment of the population, by the end of 2025 the idea of “immediate unification” had become marginal (1.1 percent), and support for “maintaining the status quo with movement toward unification” had fallen to a historic low of 6.1 percent. Overall support for integration with the PRC amounts to less than 8 percent, reflecting a profound crisis of the “One China” ideology among Taiwanese society (*Election Study Center, 2025*).

Instead, the island’s political landscape has consolidated around the desire to preserve sovereignty and democratic governance. The principal beneficiary of this shift has been the pragmatic position of “maintaining the status quo indefinitely,” whose support has more than tripled – from 9.8 percent in 1994 to 33.5 percent in 2025 – making it the dominant societal preference. At the same time, support for independence has steadily strengthened: more than a quarter of the population (approximately 26.3 percent) favor either immediate declaration of independence or gradual movement in that direction. The overall trend clearly illustrates that Taiwanese society is gradually moving away from strategic ambiguity (with the “decide later” category steadily shrinking) toward a clearer choice: distancing itself from Beijing and defending its de facto statehood (*Election Study Center, 2025*).

Factors Shaping a Distinct Taiwanese National Identity

A decisive role in the formation of a distinct Taiwanese political identity has been played by the confrontation with the PRC. Persistent security concerns arising from cross-Straits relations contributed to the emergence of a more state-centered Taiwanese identity, intended to reinforce the island’s political autonomy, while Beijing maintains its territorial claim over Taiwan.

To this day, the identity question is strongly shaped by Taiwan’s ambiguous international status. As of January 2026, the Republic of China is formally recognized as an independent state by only twelve countries, including the Vatican, Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Tuvalu (*Worldpopulationreview.com, 2026*). Taipei has no seat in the United Nations. In practice, however, the picture is more complex: many states – most notably the United States – maintain de facto representative offices in Taiwan and sustain close economic and political ties. Taiwanese passports are widely accepted for international travel and provide reciprocal visa-free arrangements with many countries and the European Union (*Sendyka, 2021*). Nevertheless, the lack of formal recognition and

the gradual disappearance of the very name “Republic of China” from the international arena could not but affect how Taiwan’s citizens perceive themselves. A situation in which the world officially recognizes only one China – the PRC – while Taiwan seeks to preserve its autonomy encourages a shift in identity toward a primarily state-political understanding.

One of the most widespread explanations among both the public and scholars for why the majority of Taiwanese gravitate toward a distinct identity and support the island’s independence is the difference between Taiwan’s political system and that of the PRC. The argument suggests that, if the PRC were as democratic as Taiwan, most people on the island would support unification. The 2014 Taiwan Indicators Survey and Center for Taiwan Studies included the question: “If the PRC had the same political system as Taiwan, would you support unification between Taiwan and the PRC?” More than half of respondents stated that they still would not support such a decision

(Yang, 2016). This supports the assumption that, over a long period of separate statehood, Taiwanese society has developed its own distinct sense of political belonging. It is reasonable to agree that the divergence between political systems in Taipei and Beijing continues to exert significant influence on this negative stance (Brookings.edu, 2022). After decades of confrontation, Taiwanese society has difficulty imagining an alternative state of affairs, which contributes to a largely subconscious rejection of the very idea of unification. Accordingly, the reluctance of most Taiwanese to unify with mainland China makes it a logical step to distance themselves from a Chinese identity, since identifying as Chinese provides the PRC with an argument for unification, including by force.

Culture is one of the fundamental components of national identity, as it provides people with a sense of group belonging. Nearly all cultural traits characteristic of Taiwan can also be traced in the PRC. Indeed, traditional Chinese culture has arguably been preserved better in Taiwan than on the mainland. Yet, as sociological research indicates, shared Chinese culture does not prevent island residents from identifying as Taiwanese. Although, as noted above, around 80 percent in 2014 considered themselves members of the Chinese nation, this did not stop them from politically identifying as Taiwanese. This again points to the external nature of the circumstances that prompted Taiwanese society to revise its identity (Jing; Loden, 2023).

Taiwan’s domestic politics also influences identity formation, because it is linked to the principal political cleavage in Taiwanese society regarding the national future (independence versus possible rapprochement with the PRC). In this context, partisan identification becomes not merely a political choice but an element of self-definition. Through electoral campaigns, political debate, security concerns, and questions of international status, Taiwan’s citizens are repeatedly brought back to the foundational question, “Who are we?” Thus, domestic political competition not only reflects existing identities but also contributes to shaping them (Achen; Wang, 2017). The two major political forces – the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Kuomintang (KMT) – offer different approaches. The former emphasizes Taiwan’s distinctiveness as an independent state; the latter stresses historical and cultural ties with China and, at minimum, does not exclude the possibility of unification in the future.

Ethnic origin may also continue to influence self-identification. Among people of mainlander background, only a minority identify as Taiwanese, maintaining strong ties to Chinese culture, history, and family memory. By contrast, almost none of those of Minnan origin – whose ancestors migrated to the island much earlier and historically shaped local culture and language – identify as Chinese. Although such ethnic “shades” remain visible in the data, generational change, intermarriage, and democratization have increasingly blurred these boundaries, and the core issue has become how citizens envision Taiwan’s future status vis-à-vis China (Achen; Wang, 2017).

Chun-Ying Wu demonstrates that assimilationist processes in the 1950s–1970s affected southern and northern Taiwan differently due to variations in linguistic-demographic structures and everyday language practices. In the south, Hoklo speakers constituted a large and territorially concentrated majority. Even under strict denationalization policies, Hoklo, remaining a living language of daily communication, gradually became a marker of a distinct Taiwanese identity. At the same time, this Hoklo-centered construction of “Taiwaneseness” generated internal tensions: part of the southern population that spoke Hakka distanced itself from a model in which “being Taiwanese” was informally equated with “speaking Hoklo.” Although Hakka were also long-established island residents (with families living in Taiwan prior to 1949), their linguistic and cultural specificity did

not fully fit the dominant discourse. This had empirically observable consequences: according to a 1993 survey, in southern regions the share of Hakka who identified as “Chinese” was noticeably higher than among Hoklo speakers (38.1 percent versus 23.94 percent), indicating a certain alienation from a one-sided linguistic model of Taiwanese identity. In the north, by contrast, the population was more mixed: there was a higher share of Mandarin speakers, more intergroup contact and intermarriage, and Mandarin functioned more strongly as a common language vis-à-vis Hoklo. These differences were also reflected in self-identification: Taiwanese identity was more frequently recorded in the south, whereas Chinese or mixed identities were more common in the north (Wu, 2020).

A study by the Taiwan Indicators Survey and the Center for Taiwan Studies further illustrates differences in how respondents conceptualize Taiwanese identity. Participants were asked: “In your view, which of the following is closest to what it means to be Taiwanese?” Opinions were divided: around 40 percent believed that being Taiwanese means identifying with Taiwanese culture and Taiwan’s history, while about 45 percent argued that being Taiwanese primarily means living and working on the island (Yang, 2016).

The events in Hong Kong in 2019 discredited the “one country, two systems” model, which had long been promoted as a potentially acceptable scenario for Taiwan. The COVID-19 pandemic became another test that highlighted differences between Taiwan and the PRC through the quality of governance. Taiwan’s success in crisis management can be linked to social cohesion and trust in government grounded in the island’s democratic character. The pandemic demonstrated that effective crisis response is possible without total control, undermining claims about the alleged advantages of authoritarian governance (Sedyka, 2021). These developments also strengthened a specifically “Taiwanese” identity among citizens of the Republic of China.

After Tsai Ing-wen came to power, Beijing narrowed formal dialogue with Taipei and intensified the use of coercive instruments. Against this background, the PRC’s growing demonstrative military activity has become an important context in which the identity question is increasingly viewed through the prism of security. Tsai’s reelection in 2020 was accompanied by the highest intensity since 1996 of incidents involving Chinese aircraft entering Taiwan’s air defense identification zone, as well as airspace violations (Sedyka, 2021).

In recent years, the PRC’s Taiwan policy has increasingly been characterized by a combination of diplomatic isolation, military activity, and economic instruments of influence. Beijing consistently insists on the “One China” principle and has intensified international efforts aimed at limiting Taipei’s space for participation. In parallel, the scale of military exercises near the island has grown, including the involvement of air and naval forces, which is interpreted as both deterrence signaling and a demonstration of readiness to uphold its stated position. China’s strategy combines elements of sustained long-term pressure with a desire to control escalation levels, leaving open multiple scenarios for the future development of cross-strait relations.

Conclusions. Based on the data analyzed, we find that the majority of Taiwan’s population refuses to call themselves Chinese when asked about their national identity, which indicates the formation of a mature civic nationalism. For many Taiwanese, the term “Chinese” is effectively synonymous with “a citizen of China,” that is, the People’s Republic of China. Most Taiwanese do not identify with the mainland Chinese state in order to safeguard their independence.

At the same time, it should be noted that Taiwan has not yet reached a full-fledged consensus on national identity, as a substantial group of citizens maintains a “dual” identity, considering themselves both Taiwanese and Chinese. In addition, a significant share of the population may call themselves “Taiwanese” in a political sense while retaining a Chinese cultural and historical sense of belonging.

Against this backdrop, in recent decades Taiwan’s authorities have pursued policies aimed not only at strengthening a state-based national identity but also at fostering a distinct ethnocultural Taiwanese identity, in an effort to overcome the society’s identity divide. The shift in self-identification that intensified from the late 1980s onward has been driven primarily by foreign-policy factors – most notably the existence of “two Chinas,” Taiwan’s relations with Beijing, and its positioning vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

The existence of a democratic system within a deteriorating cross-Straits security environment

shaped by relations with mainland China is not merely part of Taiwan's political agenda; it has also become a long-term psychological reality for the island's residents and, accordingly, a factor that contributes to the strengthening of a distinct Taiwanese identity, as evidenced by sociological research findings.

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