

# **A New Phase of Informal Diplomacy: The Image of Taiwan in ASEAN Countries**

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## Abstract

Today, China's intransigent intent to reunify with Taiwan has been given a deadline, so tensions across the Taiwan Straits are at an unprecedented level. The Taiwanese government is fully aware of the critical nature of soft power, since its small area and population size limit its hard power. Aiming to strengthen the relationship with its neighbors, including Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) nations, Taiwan faces a twofold problem: it lacks diplomatic relations with ASEAN member states and China, which exerts great regional influence, will stress this to follow its One China principle. One solution for Taiwan might be adjusting its informal diplomacy, including public diplomacy. To attract cooperation from ASEAN citizens, Taiwan promotes its image through official and unofficial networks. How the Taiwanese image is perceived among ASEAN nations is studied with a four dimensional (4D) model of the country image. The goal is to reflect the effectiveness of Taiwan's new phase of informal diplomacy. Results are that Taiwan's image is positive among nations already linked to it. However, Taiwan is not widely popular in the ASEAN community, insofar as many ASEAN citizens are unaware of its existence. Three factors potentially helping to promote the Taiwanese image and boost its popularity in ASEAN nations would be popular culture; the Taiwanese people, especially celebrities; and democratic virtues.

**Keywords:** 4D model of the country image, Informal diplomacy, Taiwan, One China principle.

## Introduction

Today, tensions across the Taiwan Straits are at the highest level. China, who always maintains intransigent intentions to reunify with Taiwan, has pledged to achieve it by 2027. Meanwhile, the U.S., who always plays the Taiwan card, has invited Taiwan to upcoming ‘Summit for Democracy’. The triangular relationship between China, Taiwan, and the U.S. has highlighted the criticality of Taiwan’s both hard and soft power. Taiwan’s hard power is limited by its small size of area and population. According to National Statistics Republic of China (Taiwan), total Taiwanese population, as of March 2022, is 23,268,991 and the size of territory is approximately 36,000 square kilometers (n.d.). Modernizing its military, upgrading weapons, and raising reserve forces are manifestly insufficient. Hence, Taiwan needs recognition and support from global community. In this context, ‘soft power’ is the goal whereas ‘informal diplomacy’ is the means. As a result, Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy (NSP) is designed to expand and strengthen its relationship with “the eighteen countries namely Australia and New Zealand, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of China (Taiwan), 2019, July 4). Since the goals and ideals of NSP coincide with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, ten ASEAN countries are targeted by NSP.

Amidst COVID-19 recession, the outlook for ASEAN market is still good due to its major role in the global manufacturing supply chain and its large number of young populations who can be both supply and demand for Taiwan’s exports. Meanwhile, ASEAN countries will receive investment and technology transfer from Taiwan. Nothing great ever comes easy. With its growing influence in Southeast Asia, China will reaffirm ASEAN countries to adhere to its One China principle. Taiwan has no choice but to create ‘informal relations’ with others. After Republic of China (Taiwan) had lost its membership at the United Nations (UN) to People’s Republic of China (China) in 1971, most countries including the U.S. and ASEAN countries cut diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Since then, Taiwan has been isolated from global platform by One China Principle. On top of that, the overlaps between history and cultures of China and Taiwan have negatively affected Taiwan’s image in many ways. Informal diplomacy, which aims to win hearts and minds of the public in ASEAN countries, is a desideratum for Taiwan. The military tensions between China and Taiwan are at its worst in forty years and it highlights the increasing importance of Taiwan’s informal diplomacy. The tensions have led Taiwan to the new phase of its informal diplomacy where Taiwan must

be more informal and more popular than ever. Therefore, exploring how Taiwan's image is perceived in ASEAN countries will reassure Taiwan whether its informal diplomacy is on the right track. Besides that, it indicates what needs to be done to make Taiwan even more popular.

### Research Purposes

1. To explain the ways Taiwan's image is perceived in seven ASEAN countries
2. To explore some possible ways to improve Taiwan's image in seven ASEAN countries

### Theoretical Framework

**Soft power** is the concept created by Joseph Nye in 1989 and has now been accepted and referred to worldwide. Nye (2004: 6-7) defines it as an attractive power to shape preference and behaviors of others through attraction without any explicit threat or exchange taking place. A country may achieve the outcomes it desires in world politics because other countries want to follow it or have agreed to a system that produces the same effects (Saunders, 2020: 50). The concept of soft power has become particularly important in discussing the impact of national image which attracts and persuades others without exercising military power or economic sanctions (Valaskivi, 2016: 74). Since soft power is one of the major goals for Taiwan's foreign policy, it validates the purposes of this research which aims to assess the effectiveness of Taiwan's image. One of the important tools that Taiwan is using in enhancing its soft power is informal diplomacy.

**Informal diplomacy:** According to Chang and Tai (1996), informal diplomatic activities are official in character for the states that maintain no formal diplomatic relations. However, states with formal diplomatic relations may find it convenient to use these means to advance their political interests in the international community. Since Taiwan has very few diplomatic ties with other countries, it has to rely on informal diplomacy in building and maintaining relationship with others. Informal diplomacy gets credit for sustaining peace in East Asia. Weissmann (2012: 7) criticizes that East Asia lacks required institutions and mechanisms to ensure a durable peace. However, he points out that informality and consensus building are the inherent features of regional culture and politics. Thus, a relative peace exists amidst a history of militarized conflicts. According to National Museum of American Diplomacy, "Informal diplomacy includes public diplomacy which involves government-to-people diplomacy and reaching out to

non-executive branch officials and the broader public, particularly opinion-shapers, in foreign countries, explaining both foreign policy and the national context out of which that policy arises" (2019, June 10). Thus, public diplomacy is considered as a part of informal diplomacy.

**Public diplomacy (PD)** is the way in which foreign policy is conducted through the engagement of foreign public (Dinnie, 2016: 153). According to Leonard (2002: 8-21), the three dimensions of PD comprise news management, strategic communications, and relationship building. They shed light on the 'mediatization' which greatly influence the new era of PD and the importance of country image. The concept of PD is consensual and normative but intertwined with the concept of nation branding. Hart (2018: 221-230) tends to treat PD as a subset of nation branding because he views that a lot of cultural activities including PD focus upon shaping the nations' brand. Although the two concepts are distinct, they aim to cultivate, safeguard, and promote the country image. "Public diplomacy is a process or series of activities; reputation and image are the result" (Ingenhoff, Zhang, Buhmann, White, & Kiousis, 2019: 298). Based on the concepts of national identity, image as attitude, and three-dimensional reputation, the term 'country image' is defined as a subjective stakeholder attitude towards a nation and its state, comprising specific beliefs and general feelings in a functional, a normative, an aesthetic, and an emotional dimension (Buhmann, 2016: 44). In sum, soft power is a goal for Taiwan's foreign policy whereas the informal diplomacy which includes public diplomacy is the way that Taiwan is using to achieve it. Then, the country image is the result which indicates whether Taiwan's soft power is increase or decrease.

**The 4D model of country image** which is used for measuring the country image is based on such terminological framework. The four dimensions are grouped into two components which are cognitive and affective. The cognitive component comprises the functional, the normative, and the aesthetic dimensions whereas the affective component comprises the emotional dimension (Buhmann, 2016: 44). According to Ingenhoff et al (2019: 261-262), 1. the **functional dimension** is the belief about the competitiveness of the country in study in terms of economy, politics, business, and government effectiveness in other dimension like education and innovation. 2. The **normative dimension** is the beliefs about the integrity, norms and values of the country in study 3. The **aesthetic dimension** consists of beliefs regarding the beauty of the country such as culture, cuisine, traditions, and scenery. 4. The **emotional dimension**

works as a summary of cognitive component. It is how a person feels about a country. This model can be applied to a country or a state to check which dimension from the cognitive component has great effect on the affective component in the positive and the negative way. Hence, it provides some implications for the foreign policy of the country or the state. The reviews of the concepts of soft power, PD, and the theory of 4D model of country image stress the necessity of Taiwan's image in the global community where Taiwan is restricted to enter the international organizations and participate the global events. Such restrictions have long caused many negative effects on Taiwan's prosperity and security.

## **Research Methodology**

The purpose of this research is not to confirm the hypothesis, so it does not require as large number of respondents as quantitative approach. It uses qualitative approach which requires much time to converse with each respondent. The issues discussed are subjective, so it is hard to quantify. Moreover, it is complicated, so the researcher and the respondents need to clarify both questions and answers. Besides that, it is perceptible that the issues about the country status of Taiwan are sensitive among Taiwanese and non-Taiwanese people (especially those who relate to China and/or Taiwan in one way or another). The qualitative approach which allows the researcher to notice the reactions and facial expressions from the respondents is selected in lieu of quantitative approach which does not. The purpose is to get honest response from the respondents as much as possible. To construct validity and reliability of the case study evidence, multiple sources of evidence; direct observation, documentation, and expert interviews are used. Following the general analytic strategy, 'theoretical propositions' is used in order to provide guidelines for what to analyze and why. The theory used for this purpose is the 4D model of the country image. The debatable country status of Taiwan and its rare informal relationship with the global superpowers make the case of Taiwan unique. Thus, the case is pre-selected, and designed as an embedded single-case study. At the holistic level, Taiwan's informal diplomacy is the main unit whereas the four embedded units of analysis, which are based on the four dimensions of the 4D model of the country image, exist as entities. Expert sampling is selected among the non-probability sampling strategies. In this strategy, experts are the key informants who are willing to share their special knowledge and experiences about the topic of interest which is 'Taiwan's image in ASEAN countries. They can share both their own perception and the public perception towards Taiwan's image via

semi-structured interviews. The evidence is considered as valid. As shown in Table 1, 'experts' in this study are fourteen natives of ASEAN countries. They are seven males and seven females from seven ASEAN countries namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Table 1** Demographics of Respondents

Respondent's ID	Nationality	Gender	Occupation	Area of Expert	Purpose of Stay
E1	Indonesian	Female	Research Fellow	International Relations	Work
E2	Indonesian	Male	Lecturer	International Relations	Work
E3	Malaysian	Male	Research Fellow	Social Science	Work
E4	Malaysian	Male	Master Degree Student in Social Science	Southeast Asian Studies	Study and Work
E5	Vietnamese	Male	Researcher – PhD. Candidate	Social Science	Study
E6	Vietnamese	Male	Researcher – PhD. Candidate	Social Science	Study
E7	Thai	Female	Lecturer	China and ASEAN Studies	Study and Work
E8	Thai	Female	Lecturer	Social Development	Travel and Work
E9	Burmese	Female	Researcher – PhD. Candidate	Southeast Asian Studies	Study
E10	Burmese	Female	Lecturer	Southeast Asian Studies	Work
E11	Filipino	Male	Research Fellow	Southeast Asian Studies	Work
E12	Filipina	Female	Lecturer	Filipino Language	Travel
E13	Singaporean	Female	Fund Manager	Finance	Travel and Work
E14	Singaporean	Male	Regional Director	Development and Regionalization	Military Training and Work

They are from different professional fields namely; International Relations, Social Science, Southeast Asian Studies, China and ASEAN Studies, Social Development, Filipino language, Finance, Development and Regionalization. All of them have stayed in Taiwan before either as tourists or as one of the following: students, scholars, residents, military trainees, employees. Among the ten targeted ASEAN countries, Cambodia, Brunei, and Laos are excluded here because they have significantly less exchange with Taiwan comparing with the selected seven countries. Although Taiwan aims to strengthen its relations with every ASEAN country, it does not have strong relationship with every ASEAN country equally. Taiwan always differentiates itself from China by referring to its democracy and human rights, so Taiwan tends to be cautious in maintaining relations with non-democratic countries who have close relationship with China like Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei. China has much greater influence in Cambodia and Laos than other ASEAN countries. China is the largest investor in Cambodia and Laos. “Prime minister Hun Sen’s willing embrace of Chinese investment, unlike neighboring countries Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam, has ensured Cambodia is the core of belt and road plans in southeast Asia” (Petersen, 2018: para. 3). Meanwhile, “almost half of Laos’ total public debt is now held by China. The Chinese state-owned company China Southern Power Grid now holds a controlling stake in Laos’ national power grid” (Sims, 2021: para. 1). Without diplomatic ties, Taiwan cannot establish embassy in foreign countries. At its best, Taiwan establishes Taipei Economic and Culture Office (TECO) to promote its image and strengthen its relationship with them. However, Taiwan has not established Economic and Culture Office in Cambodia and Laos yet. Although, in Brunei, it was established in 1996, it was much later than other ASEAN countries except Myanmar<sup>1</sup>. The relations between Brunei and China developed significantly in 2018. “In 2018, Brunei pledged to continue its support for China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China promised to diversify its economy away from a dependence on oil and gas – an ever-more-urgent need, as Brunei’s energy resources are expected to be tapped out in the next 20 years” (Tieuzzi, 2018: para. 3). Besides that, Brunei is the first Asian country that adopted Sharia law and has been

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<sup>1</sup> Myanmar is not a democratic country, but it is included in the study. The reason is that Myanmar impressed Taiwan and the world via its democratic reform in 2011. That was why Taiwan established Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Myanmar in 2015. Moreover, border conflict between Myanmar and China always disrupts their relations which makes Taiwan eager to strengthen relationship with Myanmar.

heavily criticized about its human right violations. On another hand, Taiwan is the first country in Asia that legalizes same-sex marriage which is controversial to Sharia law. Taiwan surely wants to create good relationship with these three countries as well but it takes more time than the rest ASEAN countries. That is why Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei are the secondary target audience for now whereas the selected seven ASEAN countries are the primary target audience for Taiwan's image.

Framework analysis is selected for analyzing the data. It consists of clear five steps: familiarization, thematic analysis, indexing, summarizing, mapping and interpretation. The first step is '*familiarization*' with the data by re-reading interview transcripts for several times and identifying some key themes. The second step is '*thematic analysis*' which is to identify thematic framework from literatures and set up coding scheme. At the third step, the researcher starts '*indexing*' by systematically applying codes to the whole set of data. The fourth step is counting the mentions and '*summarizing*'. The researcher tries to summarize the stories from the respondents and rearrange the data according to the theme. Then the researcher counts the mentions. The last step is '*mapping and interpretation*'. At this stage, the researcher tries to investigate the themes and see if there is any relation among them. After mapping linkages, the researcher can develop explanations for what happens in the case study. Consequently, it leads to the answer of the two research questions.

## Results

The data was collected from August 2019 – April 2021 during the lockdown and social distancing caused by COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the interviews were conducted face to face either offline or online. The experts share not only their perception of Taiwan's image but also their opinion and experience about how the public in their country perceive Taiwan's image. Due to the beauty of the qualitative method, the experts also share positive and negative perception which are categorized based on the 4D model of country image and are labelled as themes as illustrated in Table 2. Their explanation for each theme (code) is categorized accordingly.

**Table 2** Negative and Positive Perception of Taiwan's Image in ASEAN Countries

<b>Cognitive Component</b>			
<b>No.</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>No. of Mentions</b>
<b>1. Aesthetic Dimension</b>			
<b>Negative (-15)</b>			
1	Culture	Culinary - Not yet answer the diet need of religious tourists such as Halal food and vegetarian food (2), Cultural assets – unattractive and unknown (3) History and cultures – indistinct (4)	-9
2	Charismatic People	Insular (3)	-3
3	Scenery	Unattractive and uninteresting (3)	-3
<b>Positive (+71)</b>			
1	Culture	Culinary – bubble tea and delicious food (19) Cultural assets (16), Popular culture (10)	45
2	Charismatic People	Celebrities (15) Well-groomed and Bilingual People (5)	20
3	Scenery	Beautiful natural tourist places namely Jiufen (1), Yelieu (1), Dansui (1), Sheep farm in Taichung (1)	4
4	Preserved Nature	Preserved nature (2)	2
<b>2. Functional Dimension</b>			
<b>Negative (-78)</b>			
1	Foreign- Policy Competence	Less competitive than China's foreign policy (30), Incompetent NSP (28)	-58
2	Economic and Trade Competence	Still depend on China (2) Lacking of Taiwan's brands (5)	-7
3	Tourism Competence	Less competitive than Japan, Hong Kong, and South Korea (2), Lacking of promotion (1), Not a place for shopping (1)	-4
4	Political Stability	Political instability (3)	-3
5	Foreign Students and Workers	Low wage rate for Thai labors (1) Less scholarship than Japan and England (1)	-2
6	Innovation Competence	Low competence in innovation (2)	-2
7	Quality of Life	Higher cost of living (1), Public utility – less competitive than Japan and South Korea (1)	-2

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**Table 2** Negative and Positive Perception of Taiwan's Image in ASEAN Countries  
(continued)

Cognitive Component			
No.	Themes	Codes	No. of Mentions
<b>Positive (+149)</b>			
1	Foreign Students and Workers	Inexpensive and good education system (13), Scholarships (9), Popular among overseas Chinese students (5), Popular destination for workers (7), Job opportunities (6)	40
2	Foreign-policy competence	Effective NSP (21), Strong informal ties with many countries (7), MOFA and TECO (4), Political asylum (2)	34
3	Quality of life	Good quality of life (2), Inexpensive cost of living (5), Social welfare (5), Public Utility (16)	28
4	Economic and trade competence	Economic and trade success (12) Export brands: TSMC and Din Tai Fung (3), Good quality of products (2): shoes (1), bicycle (1), digital camera (1), clothes (1), electronic products (3)	24
5	Tourism competence	Active promotion and tourism-free visa (7) Another tourist destination (12)	19
6	Technologically advanced	Advanced technology (2) and Strong IT sector (1)	3
7	Innovation competence	Revolution (1)	1
<b>3. Normative Dimension</b>			
<b>Negative (-5)</b>			
1	Human right and labor right	Muslim bias (2) Prejudice to the indigenous people in terms of Southeast Asia or people of color (1) Should enforce labor rights protection and fair-wage rate for Thai labors (1)	-4
2	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Environmental disaster caused by Taiwan's Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corp (1)	-1

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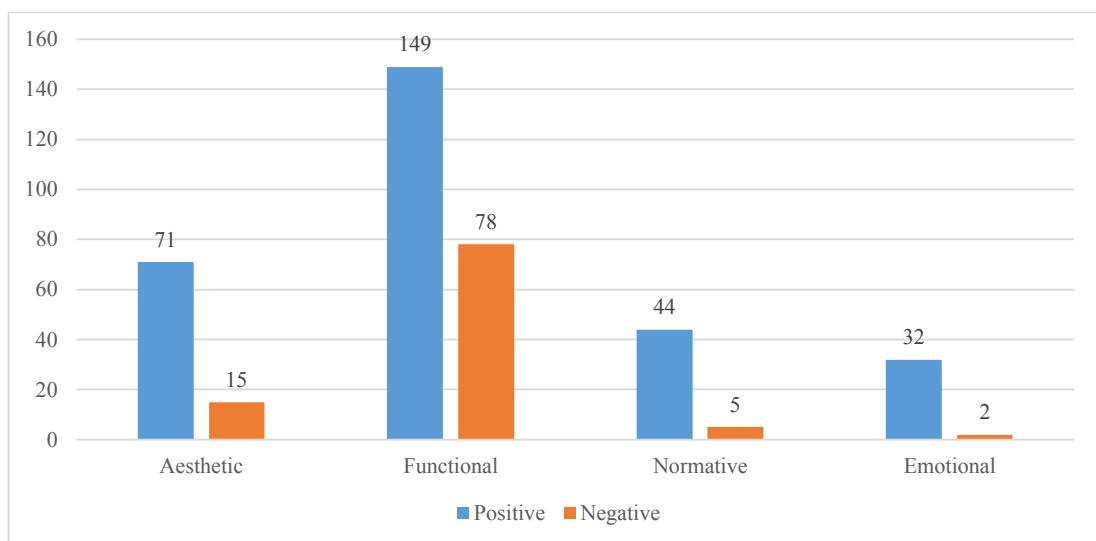
**Table 2** Negative and Positive Perception of Taiwan's Image in ASEAN Countries  
(continued)

Cognitive Component			
No.	Themes	Codes	No. of Mentions
<b>Positive (+44)</b>			
1	Human rights and labor rights	Freedom (8), Muslim-friendly society esp. female Muslim who wears hijab (5), Human rights (4), Labor rights (3)	20
2	Democratic System	Democracy (8)	8
3	Internal Safety and Security	Safe and peaceful society (6)	6
4	Civilization	Civilized and high ethical standard (5)	5
5	Transparency	Transparent (3)	3
6	Environmental Concern	Environmental concern (2)	2
Affective Component			
No.	Themes	Codes	No. of Mentions
<b>1. Emotional Dimension</b>			
<b>Negative (-2)</b>			
1	Fascinating country	Unpopular (2)	-2
<b>Positive (+32)</b>			
1	Admirable Taiwanese people	Like Taiwanese people (2), Courteous (5), Friendly and helpful (9), Nice and sincere (9)	25
2	Admirable Taiwan	Like Taiwan (3), Prefer Taiwan to other places (2)	5
3	General Sympathy	Pity that cannot promote publicly and boldly (1), Used to be popular among Myanmar people (1)	2

## Discussion

### *Less Competitive Foreign Policies*

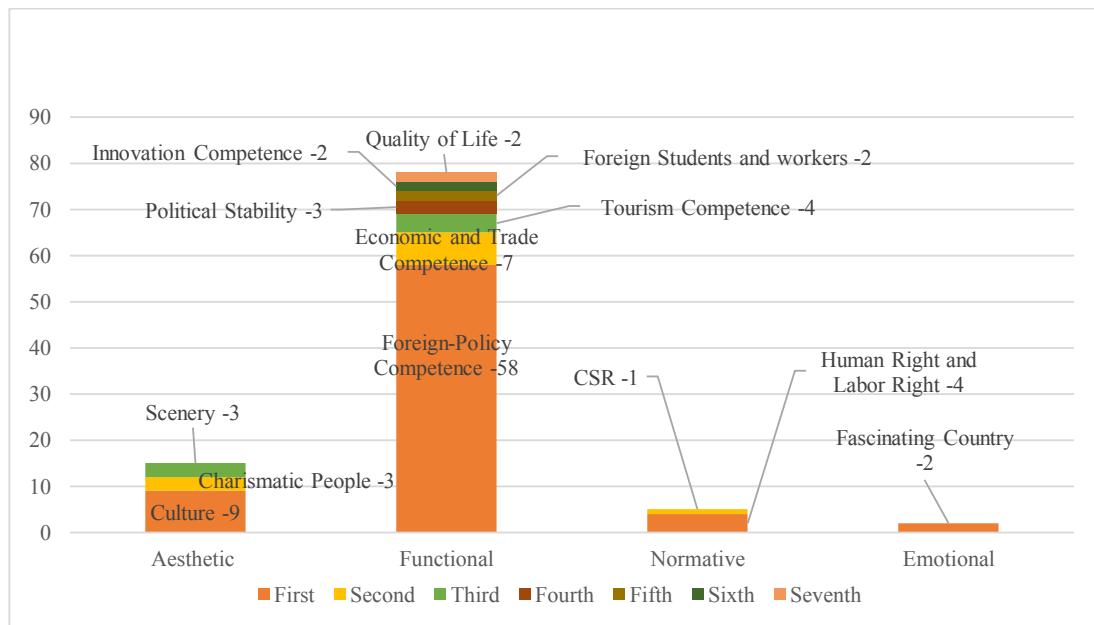
As shown in Figure 1, the positive perception is greater than the negative perception in every dimension. It means that the overall image of Taiwan is good in ASEAN countries. However, such positive perception is from those who have already been linked to Taiwan such as the experts in this research and the Chinese diaspora. As shown in Table 2, 'Foreign-Policy Competence' in the functional dimension is the only theme that gains negative mentions (fifty-eight) more than the positive ones (thirty-four).



**Figure 1** The Comparison of Negative and Positive Perception of Taiwan's Image in ASEAN Countries

**Note:** The resulting frequency is based on the counting mentions within the framework of the 4D Model of the country image. The more the mentions are, the higher the resulting frequency becomes. The resulting frequency does not present scientific significance but it presents the precision. \*Negative means the experts' negative perception of the dimension. \*\*Positive means the experts' positive perception of the dimension.

The experts find that Taiwan's foreign policies and NSP are less competitive than China's because the public in their country does not recognize Taiwan. Many of them believe as what China promotes that Taiwan is a province of China. Many of them cannot differentiate the differences between Taiwan and China. Some of them are confused Thailand with Taiwan. Moreover, they find that Taiwan's economy still relies on China and Taiwan's brands is insufficient to promote Taiwan's image. Thus, 'Economic and Trade Competence' gains seven negative mentions (See Figure 2).

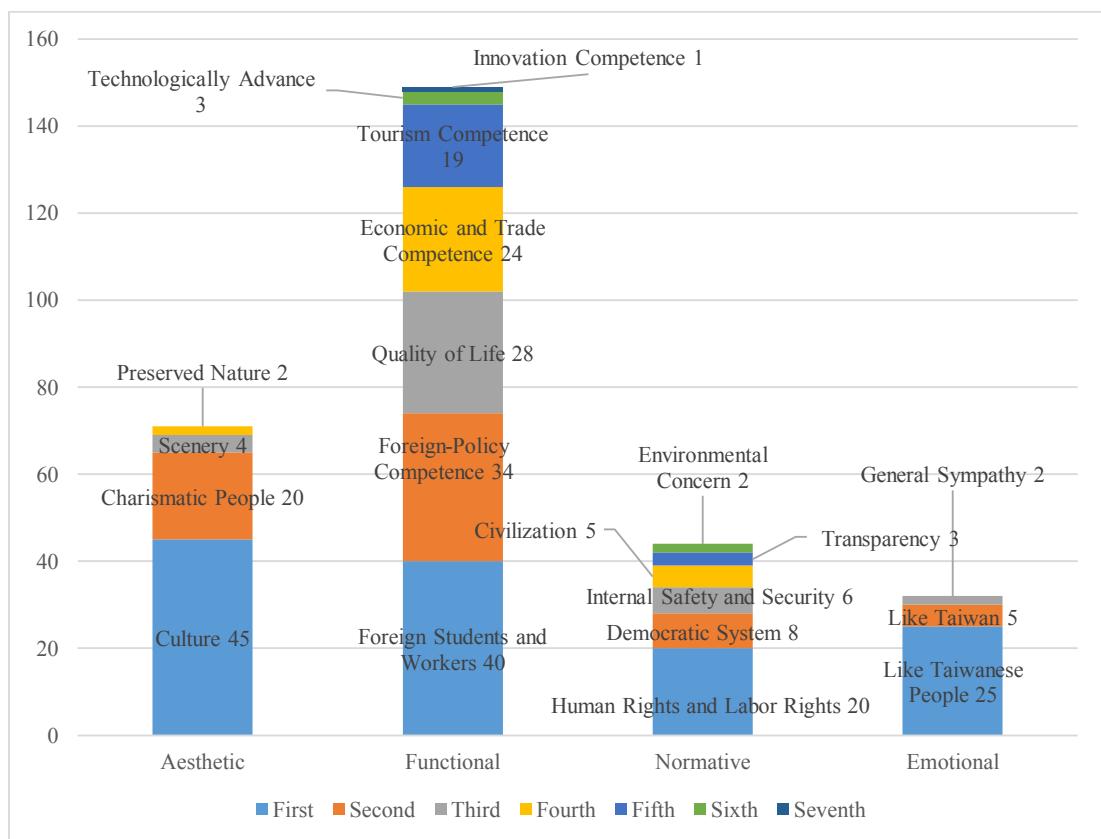


**Figure 2** The Negative Perception of Taiwan's Image in ASEAN Countries

**Note:** The aesthetic and functional dimension are categorized into three and seven themes consecutively whereas the normative and emotional dimension are categorized into two themes and one theme consecutively. First means the theme gains the highest mentions (the most). Second means the second highest, third means the third highest,... and seventh means the seventh highest mentions (the least)

### *Charismatic People Especially Celebrities*

In the emotional dimension, ‘Fascinating Country’ theme gains two negative mentions. The experts find that Taiwan has not been popular in their country yet (See Figure 2). On another hand, the experts have sympathy for Taiwan in terms of being blocked by China in promoting its image and creating diplomatic relations with ASEAN countries so the code gains two positive mentions (See Figure 3). Interestingly, the ‘Admirable Taiwanese People’ theme gains twenty-five positive mentions which is the most in emotional dimension (See Figure 3). In aesthetic dimension, the theme of ‘Charismatic



**Figure 3** The Positive Perception of Taiwan’s Image in ASEAN Countries

**Note:** The realm of aesthetic and functional are categorized into four and seven themes consecutively whereas the realm of normative and emotional are categorized into six and three themes consecutively. First means the theme gains the highest mentions (the most). Second means the second highest, third means the third highest, ... and seventh means the seventh highest mentions (the least)

People' gains twenty positive mentions which is the second most (See Figure 3). Mapping it with the theme of 'Culture' which gains the most mentions at forty-five in this dimension and the theme of 'Foreign students and workers' which gains the most mentions at forty in functional dimension, it suggests that Taiwan has good opportunity in promoting its image via its People-to-People (P2P) exchange (See Figure 3). It can be done via two channels.

The first one is via academic and talent exchange. Taiwan is offering many scholarships and exchange programs to students from ASEAN countries. Since the data shows that the people who are linked to Taiwan will have positive perception of Taiwan's image, the more is the better for Taiwan's informal diplomacy penetration strategy. Some experts find that the scholarships offered by Taiwan are insufficient. The second channel is popular culture. Taiwan's bubble tea, modern buildings like 101 building, and TV series such as Meteor Garden and Night Market are popular in their countries. It shows that the image that impresses ASEAN audience is Taiwan's modernity but Taiwan has not utilized it much. Celebrities always attract attention from media and the public so they can promote the image of Taiwan well. Celebrities are even more important in the new phase of informal diplomacy since they have greater influence than before. For example, "once the South Korean boyband called BTS donated one million dollars to the organization Black Lives Matter, its fans who are large in number and are around the world quickly organized campaign to match the donation and the campaign is successful just within twenty-five hours" (Artz, 2021: para. 1-16). The Table 2 shows that Taiwanese celebrities are popular because the code gains fifteen mentions. It is a pity that this sector is not promoted by Taiwan's government so it becomes less and less competitive after the era of F4 and Meteor Garden. Many Taiwanese celebrities go to work in China and must obey One China principle. The wave of Taiwanese pop culture was swept away by the wave of Korean pop culture. This is more or less affect the popularity of Taiwan in ASEAN countries.

As mentioned earlier that the experts find that many people in their country are confused Taiwan with Thailand or not even know about its existence. On the other hand, many experts are initially linked to Taiwan by Taiwanese TV series and celebrities. However, a lack of the continuation of the export of its pop-cultures has caused many young people in ASEAN countries unaware of Taiwan. The 'continuation' is important for the public perception of Taiwan's image. For example, Digital Minister Audrey Tang's persona really attracts ASEAN audience especially the young ones during the first wave

of covid-19 pandemic, but it just stopped there. He could have promoted Taiwan's image more in ASEAN countries if he creates content that relates with ASEAN audience. To convince the public both in Taiwan and ASEAN countries that the NSP is more effective than the (old) Southbound Policy, Taiwan needs to communicate more with the public in ASEAN countries. The use of popular culture and celebrities can support Taiwan's penetration strategy in reaching out to target audience and increase the subtlety.

### *High Democratic Quality*

In the normative dimension, 'Human Right and Labor Right' theme gains twenty mentions which is the most (See Figure 4). Second to it is 'Democratic System' which gains eight mentions (See Figure 4). It means that Taiwan's democratic quality is high. The high democratic quality is a good image that helps Taiwan in maintaining and strengthening informal relations with the U.S. and its allies. That is why American policy remains unchanged under President Biden in maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits. To prove how strong informal relations between the U.S. and Taiwan is, the U.S. invites Taiwan to join the "Summit for Democracy" in December 2021 where China and Russia are not in the invitation list. Moreover, the democratic quality differentiates Taiwan from China. Another marked contrast between Taiwan and China is a Muslim-friendly society. The policy is quite effective since the code gains five positive mentions (See Table 2). It is known among female Muslim that wearing hijab in China is considered taboo whereas it is not a problem at all in Taiwan. Besides that, Taiwan as the first land in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage likely to win the heart of teenagers in ASEAN countries and it makes Taiwan unique from China and other Asian countries. The issues such as human right, labor right and democracy have always been fragile in ASEAN countries, so this dimension of Taiwan really impresses ASEAN audience.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In the new phase of informal diplomacy, Taiwan's image has become more valuable for Taiwan's security than before. Through their digital equipment, the global audience not only witness what happen in other country but also can be attracted and influenced by the country image. The Hong Kong's democracy protests created positive effects on President Tsai's re-election in January 2020. The image of Taiwan as a democratic land has attracted support not only from Taiwanese people but foreigners as well. The violent civil unrest in Solomon Islands in November 2021 is caused by a

shift in diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China by central government. It reminds every government especially China that the public sentiment should not be overlooked. These cases prove that the public's positive perception of Taiwan's image in Hong Kong and Solomon Islands has supported Taiwan.

Taiwan's informal diplomacy is quite effective since the overall image of Taiwan is good in ASEAN countries. However, there is room for improvement since Taiwan is popular only among those people who are already linked to Taiwan. The fact, that most of the people in ASEAN countries believe in One China principle or do not know about the existence of Taiwan or are confused between Taiwan and Thailand, reflects that Taiwan's foreign policies especially its NSP are less competitive than China's. The major challenge is how to promote Taiwan's image that can create greater awareness to the public in ASEAN countries. Interestingly, the attractive image of Taiwan comes from Taiwanese people especially its celebrities. Unlike South Korea, Taiwan is not interested in exporting its Taiwanese popular cultures even though it has high potential for success. Instead of that, it focuses on semiconductor sector which makes the world depends on Taiwan's chip manufacturing. That is a great success in terms of economic development. However, the disruptive technology, the change in triangular relationships between China, Taiwan, and the U.S., and the rise of China as a potential hegemony have highlighted the fact that Taiwan needs to adapt its strategies. The new phase of Taiwan's informal diplomacy requires it to be 'more informal and more popular.' The result of this research confirms that Taiwan has great potential for its export of popular cultures. Popular culture is the culture that is admired by many people. That is why it is called 'popular culture'. Such qualification of popular culture can attract many people so it will be useful for Taiwan in reaching out to the public in ASEAN countries faster. The success in exporting Taiwan's popular cultures will create spillover effects on tourism and Taiwan's brands which will benefit Taiwan's economic growth. Another outstanding image of Taiwan is its high democratic quality which helps to maintain and strengthen its informal relations with the U.S. and its allies such as Japan and South Korea. Consequently, it benefits Taiwan's national security.

The case of Taiwan is unique. Its status in the global society is vague but its triangular relationships with the two superpowers are so bold and dangerous that can create great impact to the region. These conditions have driven Taiwan to expand its relationship with other nations including ASEAN countries. The research results not only provide useful information for Taiwan to improve its informal diplomacy, which

will result in the greater awareness of its image, but also reflect important message for government in ASEAN countries regarding the balance of their relationship with China and Taiwan and the balance of their relationship with the public in their country.

Thus, the comparative study of the public perception of China's image versus Taiwan's image is recommended for the further study. It will be very interesting since the government in some ASEAN countries have very close relationship with China whereas others prefer Taiwan to China due to the conflicts in South China Sea. The public perception may be different from their government. If so, the study may be useful for the governments in terms of launching foreign policies that can maintain good relationship with not just only the public in foreign countries but also in their own country.

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