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The Formation of National Identity in Conditions of Existential Threat: The Cases of Ukraine and Taiwan

Abstract: Despite the distance, Ukraine and Taiwan share parallels in the domain of geopolitical struggle and identity issues. Both are experiencing an ongoing process of national identity strengthening and redefinition. External factors, such as Russia's 2014 occupation of Crimea and the subsequent 2022 invasion of Ukraine and China's increasing pressure on Taiwan, have shaped both Ukrainian and Taiwanese identities and people's attitudes. On the one hand, this paper explores the transformation of Ukrainian identity in the wake of Russian aggression, focusing on how the invasion has influenced the strengthening of civic attachment among Ukrainians. On the other hand, we explore the development of Taiwanese identity in the context of growing distinctions from mainland China, primarily focusing on Taiwan's ongoing democratization process and developing a self-confident national identity distinct from the mainland. The rise of Taiwanese identity coincided with growing sympathy for Taiwan's independence. Additionally, we consider the evolving nature of civic and national identities, emphasizing their fluidity and adaptability in response to political and social complexity.

Keywords: *Ukraine, Taiwan, national identity, conflict, Russian-Ukrainian war, China, Russia*

Introduction

Both Ukraine and Taiwan have gone through the process of democratization in the last few decades. Taiwan's transformation from single-party authoritarianism to multiparty democracy has been considered one of the best examples of third-wave democratization (Tsang, 1993). Ukraine's struggle for democracy and Europeanization was the most dramatic and complex among post-Soviet states.

Ukraine and Taiwan intersect the 'spheres of influence' of 'big powers' and geopolitical competitions. Both countries are neighbors of much larger authoritarian states and are at the cutting edge of threats since Russia's and China's targeting to dominate and conquer their

smaller neighbors. Over the past decade, China and Russia have experienced authoritarian regressions, bringing aggressive foreign policies as regime consolidation factors.

Russia and China are trying to gain the status of 'superpower,' which is reflected in their foreign policy. What unites Russian and Chinese foreign policy determinacy is that their geopolitical ambitions arise from internal insecurity. Not only do 'big brothers' influence smaller countries, but Ukraine and Taiwan play a crucial role in the political development and possibilities of keeping power for the authoritarian regimes of Russia and China. For Putin's regime, aggressive foreign policy was chosen to keep power and mobilize support inside the country. China makes no secret of its ambition to annex Taiwan and has long worked to sabotage Taiwan's sovereignty. The prevention of Taiwan's independence is critical to the legitimacy of the Chinese communist regime. In the event of any further slowdowns in economic growth, China's government could face an internal crisis, which could provoke an aggressive move toward Taiwan.

Last, a point-making comparison between Ukraine and Taiwan is possible because of those countries' importance and special role in domestic politics, political imagination, and identity issues in Russia and China. We can observe the ongoing process of strengthening national identity and redefining it in both Ukraine and Taiwan. Since 2014, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has provoked serious changes in Ukrainians' attitudes, memory of politics, and national identity.

Questions of national identity and territorial sovereignty bind the relations between mainland China and Taiwan. Taiwan is divided between those who advocate Taiwanese independence and others who support peaceful relations or even unification with China. The number of people opting for the last option has declined.

Theoretical background

The discursive construction of identity and its social representation has received much attention in the social and political sciences over the last few decades. Perhaps the most appropriate to this study perspective, which provides a fundamental way of thinking about identity, is social constructivism – the assumption that identity is neither a given nor a fixed one. In short, identity is socially constructed at several levels, and one of the most important is through relationships to the dominant ideologies, widespread social practices, and underlying power structures drawn together as discourse. "Both social and discourse practices frame, and in many ways define, the way individuals and groups present themselves to others, negotiate roles, and conceptualize themselves" (De Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006, p. 14)

Identity is not something we 'have' but emerges through interactional social and political practices, including language use in contexts. "Since identity is continuously and constantly produced and reproduced, sketched and designed, and often co-constructed by 'self' and 'other,' we should strive to demonstrate how identities are (re)produced through language

(and other media) and how they come into existence through social interaction" (De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006, p. 22).

Identity conflicts are contingent upon specific issues for their substance, while issue conflicts, such as language and relation to the past, derive their meaning from the discourse surrounding identity (Wodak et al., 1999). Identities are constantly undergoing change, adaptation, and construction, especially during significant social and political transformations. Rather than viewing national and cultural identities in Ukraine as fixed and objective, adopting a constructivist approach entails defining them as collective representations of political, social, and cultural boundaries. These identities are not merely characteristics of the self but also aspects of societal practices encompassing domination and resistance.

A critical consideration is that identity may be perceived in terms of multiplicity. Hence, we should not speak of a static identity but multiple 'identities' that can combine and interrelate. At times, these identities overlap without essential conflict, while they are in contention in other cases. The process of self-definition leading to a sense of affiliation with a particular group or society is central to national identity. Self-definition invariably involves distinguishing between the image of self and 'others.' We should heed Benedict Anderson's (1983) assertion that a nation is an imagined community. He argued that identities are constructed through imagination, allowing individuals to envision themselves as part of an invisible cultural whole. Anderson also highlighted the potency of symbols, which create a profound sense of unity within a given community. In addition to symbols, past and historical narratives play a pivotal role in imagining nations, always grounded in their respective societies' concrete social and cultural practices. Tom Edensor's work (2002) on national identity and popular culture offers a framework for understanding how national identities can be constructed and reinforced through popular culture by disseminating symbols, narratives, and practices emphasizing a shared sense of belonging.

To comprehend the meanings and functions of identity in specific societies, distinguishing between cultural, ethnic, and national identities is crucial. Ethnic identity pertains to using ethnicity as a foundation for individual self-identification. Belonging to an ethnic group often involves attitudes, perceptions, and emotions that are fleeting and subject to change. In the words of Anthony Smith (1991), it allows the use of ethnicity "'instrumentally' to further individual or collective interests, particularly of competing elites who need to mobilize large populations to support their goals in the power struggle" (p. 20).

National identity constitutes a shared identity rooted in belonging to the same nation. Smith (1991) states that 'national identity' and 'nation' are complex constructs, signifying a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share a historic culture and homeland, and "drawn on elements of other kinds of collective identity, which explains how national identity can be combined with other types of identity, such as class, religious, or ethnic identity" (p. 14). Smith outlines five fundamental features of national identity as a collective phenomenon: shared historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mainstream public culture, a common economy, and common legal rights

and duties for all members. National identity involves a political community, shared social institutions, common social practices, and rights and duties.

Stuart Hall (1990) contends that a nation is constructed and established through discourse, primarily via the common narratives of national culture and history. Our cultural identities, as Hall (1990, p. 223) suggests, reflect common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, providing stable and continuous frames of reference and meaning amidst the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history—consequently, historical memories, whether based on actual historical events or relevant myths, strengthen national identity.

Ukraine: Post-colonial and post-imperial interdependence

The issue of identity was one of the most divisive elements in post-Soviet Russian and Ukrainian societies, a perpetual source of conflict that influenced their relations and foreign policy (White & Feklyunina, 2014). The current Russian-Ukrainian conflict can be analyzed due to the unfinished disintegration of the Soviet Union in the 1990s (D'Anieri, 2019). At the same time, one of the most visible consequences of events in Ukraine in 2013–2014 was a dramatic change in Ukrainian national identity (Kulyk, 2016).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 started the next stage of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which had been ongoing since 2014. The full-scale war has not only had a fundamental impact on the fate of Ukraine and Russia in terms of security and economy but has also become a catalyst for profound changes in the redefinition of self-perception and identity issues.

It is a common view that national identity is a sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group. But what are the bases underpinning such belonging? It is slightly easier to describe the limit of ethnicity in a homogeneous society with clear ethnic and linguistic boundaries. In that case, it is challenging to draw such a border for mixed families, bilingual users of Russian and Ukrainian, etc. It became an even more complex problem in the case of civic identity, built mainly based on political choice and identity determined by different value sets, worldviews, and political stances – what we can observe in Ukraine, particularly after the 'Euromaidan Revolution' and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war.

Three primary dimensions can be identified when examining the concept of national identity: content, contestation, and intensity. The content of national identity involves the meanings attached to a collective identity, encompassing cultural, historical, and civic elements. Contestation pertains to the degree of consensus within a group regarding its self-conception, highlighting the cohesiveness or lack thereof in-group identity. Intensity reflects the strength of unity members feel due to shared collective traits.

Indeed, Ukrainian society was divided for many years about different issues, with the differences rooted in history, cultural orientations, and aspirations for the future. But the main question is: What was the main basis for this division? Can we sufficiently explain turbulence events in Ukraine before 2022 based on the regional division model with references

to linguistic and ethnic split? It would be an enormous simplification, as some politicians and even scholars tried to explain dramatic events in Ukraine as internal conflicts based on the serious differences between the eastern and western parts of the country. Rather, as Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2014) claims, „national identities in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands have shifted and crystallized in response to dramatic political events, while internal as well as external political actors have made use of conflicting memories and antagonistic historical symbols" (p. 250). Highly urbanized and Russified eastern and partly southern Ukraine had strong cultural and economic links with Russia. Border identities are often defined as 'situational ethnicities,' argues Kuzio (1998), and a particular period may determine which of a person's collective identities or multiple loyalties are promoted. "'Situational ethnicity' implies that identities are not fixed but blurred, possibly in a state of flux, dependent upon prevailing economic and geopolitical circumstances" (p. 12). It means individuals can commute between dominant identities, depending on the situation, especially in border regions and during periods of significant transformation (Kuzio, 1998, p. 148).

Analyzing post-imperial and post-colonial elements in Ukrainian discussions about identity can provide a useful analytical framework for understanding the current war and the general specifics of nation-building in the post-Soviet era. Postcoloniality is a discursive construct, "a set of subjective judgments bound up with the very constitutive nature and meaning of national identity" (Smith, 1998, p. 8).

Independence provided ground for developing the Ukrainian language and culture, but it did not eliminate the dominance of the Russian language, media, and culture in many spheres. As Mykola Riabchuk (2012) wrote, "It did not liberate it from the inertial power of the imperial discourse and did not annihilate its ability of self-preservation and self-recreation with the help of neo-colonist practices and institutions." He continued, "We are dealing with deep social deformations caused by long-term colonial dominance" (p. 23).

Many in Russia still deny the existence of Ukrainians as a separate nation. Vladimir Putin (2021) has long claimed that Russians and Ukrainians comprise "one people" and permanently denies the existence of an independent Ukraine. It is widely spread the narrative that Ukraine never existed as a state, the Ukrainian language is a kind of 'joke' dialect of Russian, Ukrainians are a 'non-historical nation,' and it was 'invented' at the beginning of the 20th century by the Habsburg Empire to destroy the Russian Empire.

The idea of Russia as a great power is central to Russian political imagery. This idea stands at the heart of Russian identity and mandates a dominant role among the other significant players worldwide. Russia presents itself as a unique civilization intent on challenging the US domination in the world and the values that animate Western society (Laruelle, 2015; D`Anieri, 2019). For Russia, foreign policy is deeply connected with unsolved national identity issues. Russia used its compatriots' policy and historical narratives as a way to justify the occupation of Crimea and military aggression against Ukraine in 2022. The Russian propaganda actively used Soviet mythology and narratives of the Cold War to frame the current events in Ukraine (Polegkyi, 2016).

As Brubaker (1994) argues, a state becomes an "external national homeland" when its political elites decide that its compatriots, who live in other states on an ethnic basis, are members of the same nation. They claim that these compatriots "belong" to the state and assert that the "homeland" state must monitor their condition and protect and promote their interests abroad. The "Russian world" idea has become an ideological concept of Russian foreign policy towards former Soviet republics (Polegkyi, 2011). The Russian language and culture are the first cornerstones of the existence of the "Russian world" as an entity. It comes from the idea (Ostrovsky & Schedrovitsky, 1999) that those who speak Russian in their everyday lives should also think Russian, and as a result, they should act Russian. Thus, Russian is the common language, and its users have a common destiny. From a geopolitical perspective, the Russian political elite perceives the Russian language as a tool for holding the Russian world together. Due to increasing domestic threats to his rule, Putin turned to foreign policy to mobilize the population and legitimize his leadership. The Kremlin used the threat of the West invading Russia's vital interests in the post-Soviet space to rally the country around its assertive foreign policy (Laruelle, 2015).

History and its narrative serve as potent tools in pursuing political objectives, wielding a profound influence on identity matters. Russia's aggressive military campaign against Ukraine has been coupled with a relentless 'memory war,' strategically delving into Ukraine's political subjectivity and sovereignty, particularly at pivotal junctures within the twentieth-century timeline (Fedor et al., 2017). The legacy of victory in 1945 is a crucial linchpin in Moscow's arsenal, enabling the continued portrayal of Russia as a formidable power and substantiating claims to a distinctive position and role within Europe. Defending and preserving the national past is the bedrock of fostering national cohesion, serving as a historical reference and a potent tool to consolidate contemporary political ambitions.

The contemporary understanding of ethnic and national identities in Ukraine is increasingly characterized by fluidity and adaptability, acknowledging that individuals may embrace multiple identities simultaneously. With Ukrainians, Russians, and numerous other ethnic groups coexisting within its borders, Ukraine has historically been a diverse country. This diversity, often accompanied by tensions, has resulted in a complex tapestry of identities. However, the invasion acted as a catalyst for greater unity and shared civic attachment among Ukrainians, but it also led to the radicalization of ethnocultural components.

Consolidation of Ukrainian identity during the Russo-Ukrainian War

The invasion of Russia in 2022 ignited a sense of solidarity among Ukrainians of all backgrounds. Defending their sovereignty and territorial integrity became a unifying cause that transcended ethnic, linguistic, and even political differences. Ukrainians rallied together, forming a more robust national identity based on shared civic values and a commitment to preserving their country. This evolution stems from multifaceted factors, notably the

profound impact of a forceful incursion and the deliberate annihilation of Ukraine's civilian population by Russia.

According to the Democratic Initiative Foundation (DIF) surveys (2023), most Ukrainians (almost 89%) are proud of their citizenship at the end of 2023. Most of them are in the Western (95%), Central (90%), and Southern (89%) macro-regions, and somewhat less in the East of Ukraine (76%). If a referendum on Ukraine's state independence were to be held today, most Ukrainians (82%) would support Ukraine's sovereignty. The highest number of those supporting independence is in the West of our country (94%). In the South and East, 68% and 70%, respectively. Those who are against constitute 3% of the country, with less than 1% in the West and about 7% in the East.

Figure 1. To what extent are you proud or not proud to be a citizen of Ukraine?
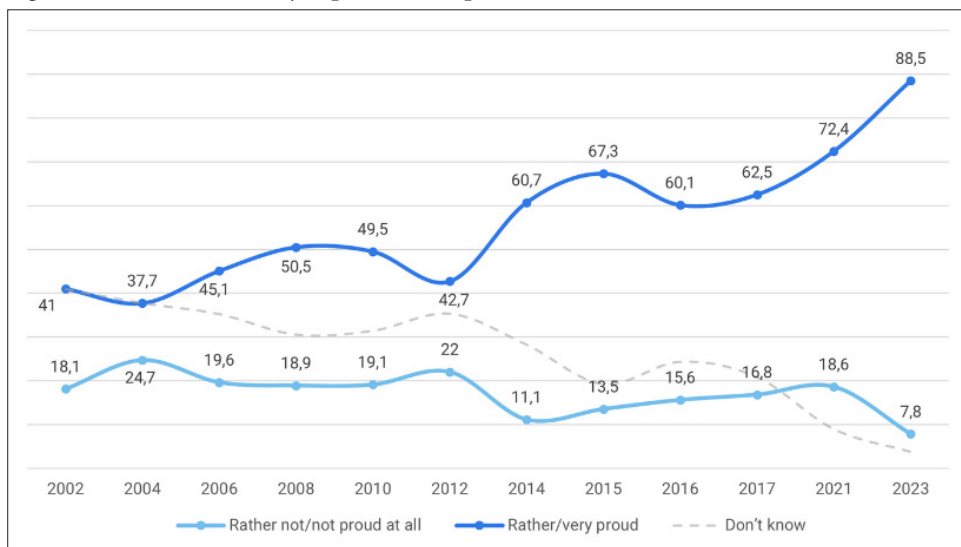
Source: DIF (2023).

Volodymyr Kulyk`s (2023) analysis demonstrates considerable changes in three dimensions of Ukrainian national identity: historical memory, language use, and the degree of contestation within the national community. His analysis of public opinion polls and focus groups shows that in the wake of foreign aggressions, national identity became more salient to Ukrainians and acquired a more radical meaning. It is important to understand that the source of this resistance comes from the majority of Ukrainians' civic identification with Ukraine and loyalty to the Ukrainian state, regardless of the language they speak or their ethnic heritage.

Ukrainians responded to the invasion by reasserting their cultural identity. This included a revival of the Ukrainian language and a renewed emphasis on the country's historical narratives. After the Russian invasion in 2022, laws under President Volodymyr Zelensky

mandated knowledge of the Ukrainian language and history for citizenship. They restricted the use of Russian in public life and placenames.

Moreover, the passage of decommunization laws in 2015, targeting Soviet symbols and memory, underscores the ongoing efforts to redefine Ukrainian identity. The stronger Russia asserts a denial of Ukrainian self-perceptions, the more pronounced and defiant the Ukrainian national identity becomes. In this context, Russia's actions inadvertently become a significant catalyst for consolidating Ukrainian national identity, promoting a more unified resistance to Russian influence.

Russian aggression destroyed one of the fundamental myths of Soviet times about the 'brotherhood of the Russian and Ukrainian nations.' The results of a public opinion poll conducted by the Razumkov Centre (2023) show that about a quarter (27%) of respondents agreed with the statement ("Ukrainians and Russians have always been and remain fraternal nations") in 2017; in 2023, it was shared by only 4%. The share of those who believe that Ukrainians and Russians used to be fraternal nations but are no longer like that has not changed statistically since 2017 (50% and 48%, respectively), but the share of those who hold the opinion that Ukrainians and Russians had never been fraternal nations increased significantly (from 16% to 43%).

There is a tendency to a decrease in the level of cultural closeness with the residents of Russia – it dropped (on a scale from 0 to 10) from 6.8 points in 2006 to 3.5 points in 2021 and to 1.4 points in 2023 (which is the lowest indicator among all the compared countries). Compared to 2006, the perceived cultural closeness with residents of Belarus also decreased (from 6.0 to 4.6 points in 2021 and 2.0 points in 2023), while with residents of countries bordering on Ukraine in the West (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova), it increased. The indicator of closeness with Poland is the highest (6.1 points, while in 2006 it was 3.7 points). This tendency is manifested not only among ethnic Ukrainians but also among ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. Say, ethnic Russians' self-assessment of cultural closeness with the residents of Russia dropped from 8.6 points in 2006 to 5.6 points in 2021 and to 3.1 points in 2023 (although it remains higher than among ethnic Ukrainians – 1.3 points).

Additionally, most Ukrainians (DIF 2023) – 69% – consider the collapse of the USSR a positive historical event. This opinion is most widespread among residents of the West of Ukraine (91%). In the South of our country, this opinion is somewhat less common (42%), but there is no massive nostalgia for the USSR there either (23%), while in this macro-region, there is the highest number of those who have not decided on the answer (35%).

It was a widespread stereotype about differences between 'Western' and 'Eastern' Ukraine, which was heavily used by Russian propaganda in previous years. Let's compare the results obtained in 2023 with 2006 (Razumkov Centre 2023). We can see that in the Eastern, Southern, and Central regions, the self-assessment of cultural closeness with the western regions (Galicia) of the country increased. For example, in 2006, the Southerners assessed their closeness in terms of character, customs, and traditions with Galicians at 4.3

points, while the closeness with the residents of Russia was 7.3 points; the Easterners were, respectively, 4.7 and 7.6 points. However, in 2023, the assessment of closeness with Galicia increased in the East from 4.7 to 6.2 points, in the South from 4.3 to 6.7 points, and in the center from 6.2 to 7.0 points.

At the same time, the perceived closeness to residents of Crimea and Donbas in the country in 2023 was lower than in 2006. We can observe a decrease in the perceived proximity to Donbas (in the East – from 8.4 to 6.5 points; in the South – from 7.4 to 6.3 points; in the Centre – from 6.9 to 5.7 points) and Crimea (in the East – from 7.4 to 6.6 points, in the South – from 7.9 to 7.1 points, in the Centre – from 6.9 to 6.5 points).

Colonial legacies and language issues in Ukraine

With its complex linguistic landscape and historical background, Ukraine presents a unique case for exploring the intricacies of language dynamics. While conventional nationalist frameworks have been utilized to understand the language situation in Ukraine, this paper advocates for employing a post-colonial lens. A post-colonial perspective considers the historical and sociopolitical complexities, shedding light on the impact of colonial histories and power structures on language dynamics.

The language issue was a hot topic during all years of Ukrainian independence and is closely linked with constructing national identity (Arel 2017–2018). The importance of the language issue in Ukraine is still defined by the historical legacy of the Ukrainians' suppressed position under imperial conditions (both Tsarists and Soviets). Historically, Ukraine has been subject to linguistic and cultural assimilation attempts by external powers. The Soviet era's Russification policies made the Russian language dominant, marginalizing the Ukrainian language and suppressing its use in public domains (Shevel, 2014). These historical power dynamics have significantly influenced the contemporary language situation in Ukraine.

The durable 'Russification' of Ukrainian society during the Soviet time created the situation that the Ukrainian language was marginalized and, even after 1991, was, in fact, in a subordinate position. The division of society is often drawn along linguistic lines, but in Ukraine, language doesn't directly indicate ethnicity. Many people speak both Russian and Ukrainian, or mixtures of the two – 'Surzhyk.' Politicians always played the 'language card' for their political goals, emphasizing the regional confrontation and the status of the Russian language. As Zhurzhenko (2002) argues, "It is not language differences that create tensions and conflicts, but rather various political forces that articulate these differences and formulate the positions of the language groups" (p. 13). Consequently, it created additional societal tensions and provoked a discourse of hostility and exclusion. Similarly, Volodymyr Kulyk (2016) argues that disagreement on the content of national identity "had much to do with political elites' effort to mobilize the respective constituencies for the defense of their alleged interests" (p. 593).

The Russian invasion changed the linguistic preferences of Ukrainians as well. According to the sociological group "Rating" (2023), in 2023, almost 60% of respondents usually communicate at home in Ukrainian, about 30% in Ukrainian and Russian, and only 9% in Russian. Since March 2022, the use of Russian in everyday life has been noticeably decreasing. For 82% of respondents, Ukrainian is their mother tongue, and for 16%, it is Russian. IDPs and refugees abroad more often use both languages for communication or speak Russian. Nevertheless, more than 70% of IDPs and refugees consider Ukrainian their mother tongue. This dynamic is a consequence of both the effect of symbolic rejection and, in part, the impossibility of conducting public opinion research in the occupied and front-line territories of the South and East.

This trend was already visible in 2014. The Euromaidan protests, in which Ukrainian and Russian speakers participated, showed that Ukraine's language issue is not a dividing line (Pop-Eleches & Robertson, 2018). According to the poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS 2014), among the participants of the 'Euromaidan' protest, more than half were Ukrainian-speaking, as many as 27% spoke Russian, and 18% spoke both. There were, of course, groups of people of Russian origin and Russian speakers who perceive the country as divided by regional differences and believe that Ukrainian nationalists are the ones who are increasing tension in the country. At the same time, according to the survey carried out in March 2014 in all regions of Ukraine (including Crimea and Donbas) conducted by the International Republican Institute (2014), only 12% of the population (definitely yes, 5%, rather yes, 7%) answered yes to the question "Do you feel that Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine are under pressure or threat because of their language?".

KIIS (2023) asked in May 2023 whether, according to respondents, Russian-speaking citizens are subjected to systematic oppression and persecution. The absolute majority of Ukrainians – 84% – continue to adhere to the view that there are no problems with the use of the Russian language in Ukraine and that Russian-speaking citizens are not oppressed and persecuted (in May 2022, the indicator was 93%). Among those who communicate mainly or only in Russian at home, 81% believe that there is no oppression or persecution, and only 13% believe that such oppression takes place.

After 2014, changes occurred in the state regulation of various cultural aspects: decommunization processes have mainly been aligned with de-russification. Only after the Russian invasion in 2022 can we observe some common ground in society on this topic, but still, there is no complete consensus in Ukrainian society about the role of Russian culture. According to the study of the Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF 2022), there is a broad consensus in Ukrainian society that banning Russian cultural products (in the form of performances by Russian artists and broadcasts of Russian films) is necessary to protect Ukraine. This opinion prevails in all regions (from 53% in the East to 75% in the West), with only the South showing roughly equal shares of those who agree and disagree. Before the full-scale Russian invasion, a significant proportion of Ukrainians actively engaged with Russian cultural content. More than 40% of respondents engaged with this content often

or very often—almost 30% involved with such content rarely, and 17% very infrequently. Only 10% of respondents reported never or rarely engaging with Russian cultural content. Russian-speaking Ukrainians (54%) tend to consume such content more frequently than the Ukrainian-speaking ones (35%).

China-Taiwan complexity and post-colonial conditions in Taiwan

A cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy concerning Taiwan lies in promoting the "One China" policy on the international stage. In practical terms, this policy aims to diplomatically isolate Taiwan by pressuring foreign nations to sever official ties with the island. Additionally, China prioritizes the development of robust military capabilities specifically designed to deter the United States from providing further military support to Taiwan. Furthermore, China leverages its extensive economic ties with Taiwan in an attempt to exert influence and pressure Taiwanese business leaders to advocate for unification with China within the Taiwanese government.

However, Taiwan's ongoing efforts to forge a distinct national identity significantly challenge the core assumptions underpinning Chinese elite perspectives. The possibility of separate Taiwanese and Chinese identities compels a reevaluation of fundamental questions regarding national identity within China (Jacobs & Kang, 2018). These questions include: how is "China" defined in a scenario where Taiwan is a separate state? Can one be both culturally Chinese and politically Taiwanese? Who has the authority to decide on these matters – the people of Taiwan alone or a broader Chinese population? The mechanism for such decisions also remains unclear. By actively pursuing a distinct national identity, Taiwan compels China to confront the complexities of its national identity and its relationship with the island nation.

Growing differences between Taiwan and mainland China are most important in two main areas: political system differences – Taiwan's ongoing democratization process – and the development of a self-confident Taiwan national identity distinct from mainland China's. As Fell (2005) argues, national identity issues rather than a socioeconomic cleavage separate political parties in Taiwan. Alan Wachman's (1994) central argument regarding Taiwanese national identity revolves around the idea that the lack of a unified national identity didn't hinder Taiwan's democratization process.

Taiwan's political trajectory and relationship with mainland China have significantly impacted its evolving identity (Schubert & Damm, 2012). The island's history marks a crucial point, beginning with its cession to the Japanese Empire in 1895 following the Qing Empire's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War. The subsequent Japanese occupation from 1895 to 1945 created a distinct Taiwanese experience, setting Taiwan apart from mainland China.

In 1949, Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) forces fled to Taiwan after being defeated by the Communists in the Chinese Civil War. The shift from Japan to China under Kuomintang (KMT) rule transitioned Taiwan from one occupying power to another.

Taiwan was reduced to an instrumental role serving the geopolitical goals of each regime as a trading outpost, an area of territorial expansion, or a bastion for military counterattack against mainland China.

The authoritarian repression-filled KMT era of rule from 1947 to 1987 became known as the White Terror period in Taiwanese history. The so-called 228 Incident, a violent KMT suppression of an anti-government uprising on February 28, 1947, epitomizes the conflict between the KMT and Taiwan-born citizens. This change brought about conflict and heightened the sense of being Taiwanese, exacerbated by the discrimination and harsh treatment of Taiwanese by mainland arrivals.

The KMT's efforts to enforce a 'traditional' Chinese culture through the 'Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement' further aimed to redefine Taiwanese identity by banning the Japanese language. During this period, they also featured a re-Sinicization program enforcing Mandarin, a language barely spoken, as the national language. The KMT mandated that Mandarin be the primary medium of education on the island, even though the island's inhabitants themselves spoke mostly Taiwanese while their second language, to the chagrin of KMT officials, was often Japanese.

In recent decades, the merging of *waishengren* (those arriving post-World War II and the Chinese Civil War cessation in 1949) with *benshengren* (those with pre-1945 roots in Taiwan) through intermarriage, family settlement, and residence has increasingly blurred the lines between these groups. Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kaishek's son and successor as president, initiated reforms to include more native Taiwanese in the political sphere. Taiwan's democratization in 1986 has accelerated the development of a new and more inclusive national identity on the island. Following his tenure, Lee Teng-hui, the first Taiwanese-born president, provided an opportunity to address the systematic discrimination faced by native Taiwanese since the arrival of *waishengren* in 1945.

During democratization, Taiwanese nationalism aimed to secure self-determination for *Benshengren,* who was excluded from the existing KMT power structure. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) championed this cause, leveraging ethnic Taiwanese identity. When the DPP emerged in 2000, a "Taiwanese subjectivity" discourse had already grown. The DPP's strategy evolved, emphasizing the Taiwanese people's right to determine their fate rather than outright independence.

After her election to office in 2016, President Tsai Ing-wen's administration further reinforced a civic Taiwanese nationalism, appealing broadly to the public, irrespective of their ethnic identification. The administration introduced the term "Republic of China, Taiwan" to symbolize a distinct Taiwanese identity. Election results and survey data underscore that the majority of people in Taiwan embrace this unique Taiwanese identity, setting them apart from the mainland.

Taiwanese national identity was established through linguistic inclusiveness. In June 2017, Taiwan passed the Indigenous Languages Development Act, which declared Taiwan's indigenous languages as national languages and allowed for their use in official documents
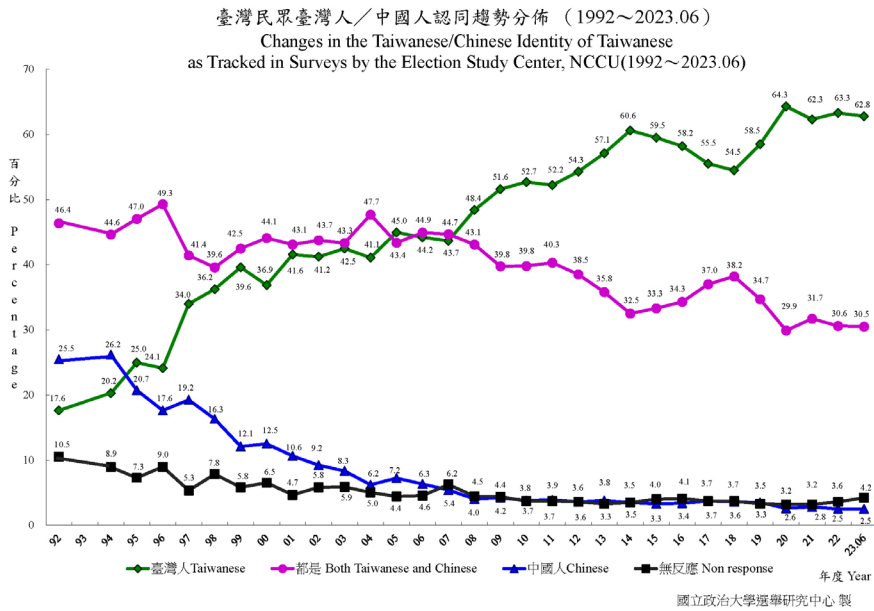
and legal affairs. In addition to Chinese, Taiwanese, Hakka, and Aboriginal languages, speakers from different local communities also use them. While many people in Taiwan grew up speaking Taiwanese at home, they spoke Mandarin at school and work. In December 2018, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan passed the National Languages Development Act, giving Taiwanese and Hakka national status. This law shows the government's efforts to promote linguistic diversity and eliminate language-based discrimination. In Taiwan, the resurgence of Indigenous identity, particularly for individuals with mixed Han Chinese and Indigenous heritage, has gained considerable traction. This intricate and flexible sense of indigeneity is intricately tied to the state's acknowledgment of the political and cultural identity of the Indigenous population.

Over the years, more residents of Taiwan have gradually formed their own 'Taiwanese identity,' in contrast to 'Chinese identity,' which is rooted in Mainland China and shared history. A more significant proportion of people would choose Taiwan as a new independent country, and support for unification with China is gradually losing ground (Hughes, 2011). The changing dynamics are reflected in recent sociological data, shedding light on the preferences and perceptions of Taiwan's residents regarding their national identity and relationship with China.

The majority of the population of Taiwan no longer identifies themselves as 'Chinese,' *Zhongguo ren*, or even both 'Taiwanese and Chinese.' Instead, most people in Taiwan now only identify themselves as 'Taiwanese.' As we can see from Table 1 below, since 2007, there has been a stable tendency for Taiwanese identification over any other. In 1992, the majority of people in Taiwan still considered themselves 'Chinese' (25.5%) or 'both Taiwanese and Chinese' (46.4%), and only 13.6% considered themselves 'Taiwanese.' But in 2023, an absolute majority considered themselves as 'Taiwanese' (62.8%) or 'both Taiwanese and Chinese (30.5%), and only 2.5% as 'Chinese.'

What has shifted among most people in Taiwan about their national identity is the political/state aspect of their identity, not the ethno-cultural aspect. As Zhong (2016) argues, "When most people in Taiwan say they are Taiwanese instead of Chinese, they are simply identifying themselves as nationals of Taiwan as a sovereign state and rejecting being nationals or citizens of the People's Republic of China" (p. 2).

Figure 2. Taiwanese / Chinese Identity(1992/06–2023/06)

臺灣民眾臺灣人／中國人認同趨勢分佈 （1992～2023.06）
Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese Identity of Taiwanese
as Tracked in Surveys by the Election Study Center, NCCU(1992～2023.06)


國立政治大學選舉研究中心 製

Source: Election Study Center (2023).

These findings have irritated and alarmed the Chinese government and people on the mainland. Most people in Taiwan accept their Chinese cultural identity, even though they do not identify as 'Chinese' (*zhongguoren*). The traditional Chinese culture is better preserved in Taiwan than in mainland China, as Taiwan has never experienced massive and systematic destruction of traditional Chinese culture like the one experienced in mainland China during the Cultural Revolution.

In the minds of most people in Taiwan, mainland China no doubt remains the most serious external threat to the island's security or its very existence. Surveys show the changes in Taiwanese people's unification and independence stances between 1994 and 2023. The number of independence-inclined people in Taiwan has increased over the past two decades. The struggle between these two identities has evolved beyond the mere discourse over Taiwan's sovereignty; it has matured into the central political fault line within society, encapsulated by the dichotomy of 'unification vs. independence.'

Figure 3. Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland(1994/12–2023/06)
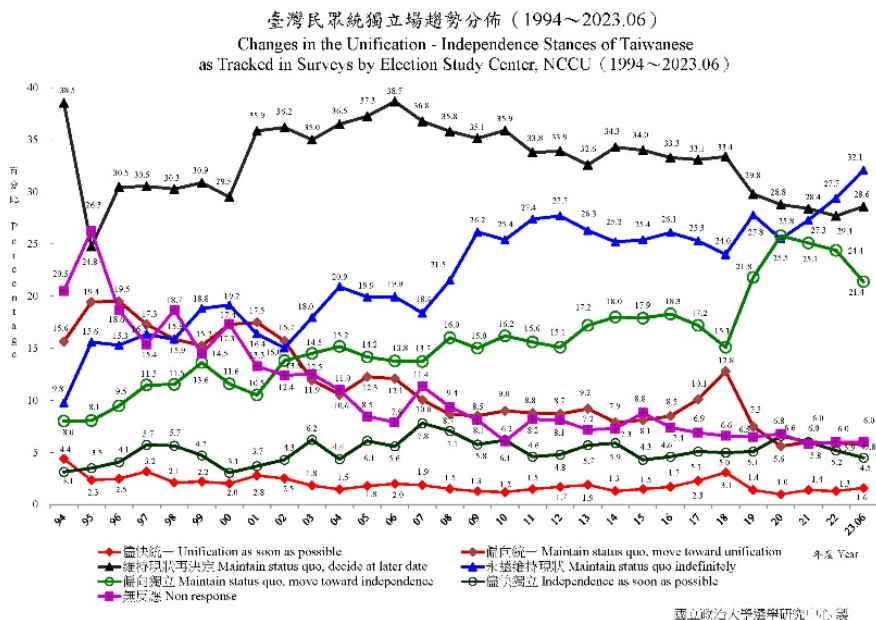
Source: Election Study Center (2023).

While some might argue that growing Chinese pressure might lead Taiwan to capitulate to Chinese coercion, Chong, Huang, and Wu (2023) revealed that compared to attitudes before 2016, citizens in 2020 were much more likely to support balancing and resistance against China, reducing economic engagement with China while increasing alliances with the US and Japan against China. War in Ukraine has cast a shadow over Taiwanese society, leading to a noticeable increase in the sense of threat (Tsung-Han Wu, 2023).

Since the commencement of the Tsai presidency in 2016, Taiwan's pursuit of a distinct national identity has become increasingly conspicuous, particularly within its realm of memory politics. As argued by Preker (2018, p. 70), "The Tsai government's transitional justice approach, which primarily aims at evaluating the 228-Incident and the "White Terror" it entailed, helps the DPP and its allies to delegitimize the KMT as well as to dispose of the Chiangs and their political legacy. In this context, the term qu-Jiang-hua is roughly translated as "de-Chiang-ization."

In 2017, the Taiwanese Legislative Yuan enacted the Act on Promoting Transitional Justice, a significant legislative stride. This act culminated in the establishment of an independent commission tasked with investigating crimes committed during the authoritarian Kuomintang rule and spearheading the removal of symbols that venerate Taiwan's autocratic past. Simultaneously, Taiwanese society has engaged in protracted debates concerning the

appropriate handling of statues dedicated to the country's former leader, Chiang Kai-shek. This discourse reflects the ongoing contemplation within Taiwanese society regarding historical representation and national narratives.

On a historical front, Taiwan has witnessed a notable shift that increasingly aligns with pro-Japanese sentiment. This shift is discernible in the emphasis on new historical interpretations. The ostensibly benevolent era of Japanese rule over the island is often romanticized and strategically juxtaposed against the Chinese historical legacy. This revisionist perspective reshapes the prevailing narratives under KMT, contributing to a nuanced understanding of Taiwan's history and identity. Notably, the current DPP-led pro-independence government, similarly to the previous KMT regime, selectively endorses some aspects of Taiwan's collective memory.

Conclusions

External factors, such as Russia's invasion in 2022 and increasing pressure from China on Taiwan, have shaped both Ukrainian and Taiwanese identities. The ongoing transformations manifest the intrinsic link between citizens' perceptions of external threats and their emergent national belonging and identity reevaluation. As such, in times of perceived national peril, individuals strengthen their bond with their nation and critically reassess the essence of this association.

Information operations, political warfare, cultural and economic pressures are pivotal tools wielded by Russia and China to influence their smaller neighbors. These methods are paralleled by ideational and emotional factors to mobilize their populations, emphasizing their strategies' centrality of identity, memory politics, and historical legacy.

Taiwan and Ukraine, before 2022, share perilous geopolitical positions influenced by similar assertions from their larger neighbors. Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping view Ukraine and Taiwan as integral territories of their states, disputing their sovereignty. Furthermore, both leaders contend that Ukraine and Taiwan lack genuine autonomy, portraying them as pawns of Western hegemony. Thus, their reclamation is framed as fulfilling historical destinies and as crucial strikes against 'Western' influence.

One of the most significant changes in Ukrainian identity as a result of Russia's invasion is the strengthening of civic attachment among people from various ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds. This reaction demonstrates the intensity of Ukrainian national identity, as citizens united to defend their vision of an independent and democratic nation. "And the more Russia insisted that Ukraine was not what Ukrainians thought their country was, the more consolidated a distinct Ukrainian national identity took hold, and the more stringent Ukrainian resistance to Russian manipulation became. One could argue that the most consequential promoter of consolidating Ukrainian national identity was Russia itself." (Clint et al., 2023, p. 91) Adopting a post-colonial perspective to understand Ukraine's identity and language situation is imperative for a comprehensive analysis. This approach

acknowledges the historical power dynamics and colonial legacies that have shaped language policies, memory, and identities.

Taiwanese identity has undergone significant reinterpretations, particularly highlighted during the democratization surge in the 1990s and more markedly since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) assumed power in 2016. This period marked a shift from a Chinese-centric view focusing on cultural roots to emphasizing Taiwanese civic and political belonging as a cornerstone of identity. Nowadays, the majority of Taiwanese people do not identify themselves with the mainland Chinese state, even though they still associate themselves with the Chinese nation. Externally, pressure from mainland China in response to the democratization of Taiwan considerably impacted the development of Taiwanese identity. The majority of Taiwanese believe that reunification with the mainland poses a severe threat to Taiwan's civic society and democratic institutions. According to Zhong (2016, p. 8), changes in state boundaries, a desire for independence from mainland China, and recognition of Taiwan as a sovereign state – rather than distinctive cultural reconstruction inside Taiwan – are factors related to the shift in Taiwanese national identity.

In both cases, national identity is enforced under pressure from outside rather than within. However, what differentiates the situation is that Ukraine is a clear nation-state, while Taiwan appears to be a state-nation. For Taiwanese people, there seems to be a split between their political/state self-identity as Taiwanese and their internal ethno-cultural identity as Chinese. Taiwanese identity rose in parallel with sympathy for Taiwan's independence. The two attitudes reinforced each other, with powerful implications for Taiwan's politics (Achen & Wang, 2017, p. 10). Most Taiwanese people have developed a new sense of statehood separate from mainland China but are still developing a uniquely Taiwanese identity. As argued by Tsung-Han Wu (2023, p. 47), "In the face of repeated threats and coercion, many Taiwanese have not only rejected a Chinese identity but also deepened their sense of Taiwanese national identity, perceiving themselves as part of a political community aligned with the territorial boundaries of the state. Perhaps paradoxically, rather than stifling Taiwanese identity, the PRC's coercion has played a role in helping to shape the emergence of Taiwanese identity."

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