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**Civil Society and Taiwan's International Space
and Global Discourse: The Cases of Reporters
Without Borders and the Taiwan Association for
Human Rights**

**公民社會與台灣的國際空間和全球話語：以無國界記
者與台灣人權促進會為例**

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the role civil society groups play in expanding Taiwan's international space. Specifically, it examines two case studies to determine whether and how Taiwanese citizens can use non-governmental organizations to influence intergovernmental organizations from which they're excluded. The first case study is advocacy done by the Taipei bureau of Reporters Without Borders to influence the United Nations. The second case study is advocacy done by the Taiwan Association for Human Rights to influence the European Union. These case studies confirm the hypothesis, that Taiwanese citizens can and do influence international institutions through NGOs. Furthermore, this influence via non-governmental organizations contributes to behavioral outcomes in geopolitical forums that benefit Taiwan's interests and national security, mainly by ensuring ideological comradery with other democracies like the United States and buttressing international human rights norms that China seeks to bowdlerize.

摘要：

本文考察臺灣民間社會團體在擴大台灣國際空間中所扮演的角色。具體而言，本文透過兩個案例研究，以確定台灣公民是否以及如何利用非政府組織影響他們被排除在外的政府間組織。第一個案例研究是無國界記者臺北辦公處，為影響聯合國所做的提倡宣傳。第二個案例研究是台灣人權促進會，為影響歐盟所做的主張宣傳。這些案例研究證實了以下的假設：「台灣公民可以並且確實透過非政府組織影響國際組織」。此外，非政府組織的影響有助於臺灣地緣政治的行為結果，利於臺灣國家利益與國家安全。而其做法主要為確保與美國等其他民主國家的共同民主價值與情誼，以及保護中國企圖拆除的國際人權準則。



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List of interviews

Interview 1

Interviewee name: Cédric Alviani

Interviewee position: Reporters Without Borders Taipei bureau chief

Interviewee nationality: France

Method: In person

Location: Reporters Without Borders Taipei bureau

Length: 31:44

Date: 03/26/2019

Purpose: To better understand Reporters Without Borders' (RSF's) motivation for opening its Taipei branch and to better understand the unique inner workings of that branch.

Interview 2

Interviewee name: Anonymous A

Interviewee position: Reporters Without Borders Taipei bureau full-time staffer

Interviewee nationality: Republic of China (Taiwan)

Method: In person

Location: Reporters Without Borders Taipei bureau

Length: 22:06

Date: 03/26/2019

Purpose: To better understand how Taiwanese citizens can influence intergovernmental organizations through the work they do as full-time employees at international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as RSF.

Interview 3

Interviewee name: Anonymous B

Interviewee position: Former intern at Reporters Without Borders Taipei bureau

Interviewee nationality: Republic of China (Taiwan)

Method: Skype

Length: 10:54

Date: 04/26/2019

Purpose: To better understand how Taiwanese citizens can influence intergovernmental organizations through the work they do as part-time interns at international NGOs such as RSF.

Interview 4

Interviewee name: Paul Coppin

Interview position: Head of legal desk at Reporters Without Borders

Method: Skype

Length: 20:14

Date: 04/26/2019

Purpose: To better understand how a case study piece of advocacy made its way from RSF's Taipei office to its Paris office to the United Nations (UN).

Interview 5

Interviewee name: E-ling Chiu (邱伊翎)

Interviewee position: Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary general

Interviewee nationality: Republic of China (Taiwan)

Method: In person

Location: Taiwan Association for Human Rights headquarters in Taipei

Length: 30:18

Date: 04/25/2019

Purpose: To better understand the activities of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR), including international interaction such as a case study of advocacy to the European Union (EU).

Interview 6

Interview name: Hsin-yi Lin (林欣怡)

Interviewee position: Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty executive director

Interviewee nationality: Republic of China (Taiwan)

Method: In person

Location: Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty headquarters in Taipei

Length: 35:37

Date: 05/14/2019

Purpose: To better understand the advantages and challenges of Taiwanese civil society in general.

Interview 7

Interviewee name: Yeh-chung Lu (盧業中)

Interviewee position: Associate Professor in Diplomacy at National Chengchi University, Vice-President of Taiwan Foundation for Democracy

Interviewee nationality: Republic of China (Taiwan)

Method: In person

Location: National Chengchi University

Length: 20:44

Date: 05/15/2019

Purpose: To seek advice on measuring the variable of interest in this thesis: Taiwanese citizens' effect on intergovernmental organizations through NGOs.

Interview 8

Interviewee name: Seong-Phil Hong

Interviewee position: United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
chair-rapporteur

Method: email

Length: 433 words

Date: 05/06/2019-05/07/2019

Purpose: To confirm that the UN received and was brought to action by the advocacy analyzed in a case study of this thesis.

Interview 9

Interviewee name: Anonymous C

Interview position: European Union official

Method: Phone call

Length: 23:22

Date: 05/17/2019

Purpose: To confirm that the EU received and was brought to action by the advocacy analyzed in a case study of this thesis.



Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Taiwan's political evolution since Chiang Kai-shek's forces fled to the island in 1949 has seen a shift from stringent authoritarianism to liberal democracy. Taiwan's civil society subsequently evolved from an underground resistance movement to a vibrant and public ecosystem of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that address issues ranging from human rights to the environment. When Chiang's Kuomintang (KMT) forces established control over the island after fleeing the Chinese civil war, they maintained the name Republic of China and vowed to one day retake mainland China from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). To this end, the KMT instituted an authoritarian system of government that emphasized Chinese identity formation, strictly controlled flows of information, and prevented the mobilization of opposition protest movements. Due to heavy-handed repression often used by the KMT to maintain control, this period, lasting from roughly 1949 to 1987, came to be referred to as the "White Terror" period of Taiwanese history. During the White Terror period, Taiwan's civil society mainly comprised dissident social movements, both at home and abroad, which advocated liberal political reforms and often also a Taiwanese national identity.

In April 1975, Chiang Kai-shek died, passing the reins of power to his eldest son, Chiang Ching-kuo, who began to slowly loosen the government's authoritarian grip. Under his leadership, dissidents and the media were granted more leeway, and increased numbers of native Taiwanese (as opposed to those who arrived to Taiwan after fleeing the Chinese civil war) were allowed to enter the government. In July 1987, about half a year before Chiang Ching-kuo's death, martial law in Taiwan was lifted,

paving the way for democratic reforms. His successor, Lee Teng-hui, took part in the country's first presidential election and became the first democratically-elected president of Taiwan. Since Lee's election victory, Taiwan's democracy has successfully facilitated three peaceful transitions of power over five elections. These elections not only ushered in pro-independence politicians, but also included a KMT candidate, Ma Ying-jeou, who served from 2008 to 2016. In addition to elections for the president, Taiwan also began holding elections for legislators, mayors, and referendums on policies concerning specific issues.

After Taiwan's democratization in the mid-1990s, Taiwan's civil society rapidly expanded and took on a new diversity in organizations and agendas. The country now hosts offices of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontiers, MSF) and Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontieres, RSF, 無國界記者), and Taiwanese NGOs such as the Taiwan Association for Human Rights (台灣人權促進會) play an active role in global discussions surrounding political and social ethics. NGOs in Taiwan now take up issues ranging from women's rights, migrant workers' rights, global healthcare, human rights, religious advocacy, journalistic freedom, and more.

But as Taiwan's civil sphere evolved to reflect more openness and collaboration, the island's presence in the global political arena gradually deteriorated as China's rise forced it into isolation. The CCP, which won the civil war in 1949 and maintained a monopoly on power in mainland China ever since, has consistently held that Taiwan is a province of China which will someday be reunified with the mainland, by force if necessary. A central tactic in the CCP's campaign to gain control of Taiwan is its

attempt to exclude Taiwan from formal participation in international organizations. In many of the world's most influential international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO), Taiwan is excluded at Beijing's request. The CCP is a key donor to many of these organizations, and it uses its leverage to prevent international bodies from allowing Taiwan to play the same role as sovereign nations, which would grant recognition and confer legitimacy to Taiwan's self-ruling government. And as China's economy continued to grow after Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms of the late 1970s, more and more countries around the world abandoned formal recognition of Taiwan, seeing closer relations with Beijing as an economic boon. Today, only 17 countries recognize the Republic of China and have formal diplomatic relations with Taipei.

Taiwan itself is conflicted on the matter. After democratization in the mid-1990s, Taiwan's leaders relinquished the goal of retaking control of mainland China from the CCP, but they stopped short of declaring formal independence for fear of increasing already high tensions with Beijing. China's leaders feared Taiwan's democratization could scuttle the goal of eventually absorbing the island into the authoritarian Chinese nation. Since Taiwan democratized, its political juxtaposition with China has grown more and more jarring. Beijing since then doubled down on its authoritarian model and recently removed presidential term limits for Xi Jinping, abandoning the system of collective leadership established by Deng Xiaoping and reverting the country's politics back to a cult of personality style of one-man rule reminiscent of the chaotic Mao Zedong era. Taiwan, meanwhile, transformed into one of the most liberal societies in Asia. Political protests abound, popular elections occur regularly and with peaceful

transitions of power, the LGBT community enjoys a relatively high degree of freedom and respect, newspapers publish without overt censorship, people can access the entirety of the internet, and civil society groups such as NGOs are free to organize and advocate on whatever issues they deem important.

1.2 Purpose of Research

This research examines the potential impact that Taiwan's civil society has on its international space. Specifically, I will examine whether and how NGOs in Taiwan play a role in enhancing the island's footprint in international affairs. Can NGOs act as middlemen for Taiwanese people to influence geopolitics, given that they cannot do so through formal channels because their country is excluded from international bodies such as the UN? Are NGOs able to fill some of the void left by Taiwan's exclusion? If so, does this influence via NGOs advance Taiwan's foreign policy interests and boost its soft power?

I argue that NGOs in Taiwan often play a crucial role in giving Taiwan's citizens a voice on the global stage. This is because through NGOs, Taiwanese citizens are often able to influence international organizations from which they are excluded. Taiwanese citizens are also able to use NGOs to advocate for Taiwan's values and interests. Global discourse on issues like human rights is impacted by Taiwan. For example, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) often submits cases to the United Nations Human Rights Council about journalists being extrajudicially imprisoned. Sometimes these cases are in China. RSF's Taipei office acts as a research outlet for China cases. Taiwanese employees of RSF's Taipei office write case reports which are taken by employees of RSF's Paris office to the UN. The Taiwan Association for Human Rights

(TAHR), on the other hand, works closely with other international human rights organizations, such as the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). Sometimes, the two organizations collaborate in organizing conferences and choosing itineraries for those conferences. In ways like this, NGOs act as a bridge between Taiwan's people and international institutions.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Origins of Civil Society

Literature relating to civil society can be traced all the way back to Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher who in the fourth century BCE wrote *Politics*. In it, he makes what is widely considered the first reference to civil society, arguing that in order for people to be good citizens they must take part in communities. “[H]e who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state [or *polis*]” (Aristotle 1996: 1253 a26-9;). Aristotle used the term *koinonia politike*, which in Latin read *societas civilis*, and eventually arrived in English as *civil society*.

Aristotle's work became popular with classical Arab philosophers like Ibn Sina (980-1037) and Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), also known by their Latin names Avicenna and Averroes, respectively. Aristotle's ideas subsequently made their way to medieval European thinkers. In 1265, William of Moerbeke made the first Latin translation, which Catholic philosopher Thomas Aquinas used to craft commentaries on Aristotle's thoughts. “It is largely through Aquinas that the ideas of man as a social and political animal, of the citizen as one who participates in government, of the classification of

government by the number and quality of its rulers, of the mixed constitution, and many other concepts entered the medieval milieu” (Blythe 1986, 547-65).

William of Moerbeke’s original Latin translation, though, would eventually be superseded by that of Leonardo Bruni, an Italian Renaissance historian and humanist. Much of Bruni’s work, including his translation of Aristotle’s ideas and formulation of civil society, was tailored to advance his goal of promoting humanism. He wrote in the introduction to his translation of Aristotle’s *Politics* that it is crucial “to know what a city is and what a commonwealth is, and to understand how civil society is maintained or destroyed ... Man is a weak creature and draws from civil society the self-sufficiency and capacity for perfection he lacks on his own” (Hallberg and Wittrock 2006, 40).

Only later would the term *civil society* become intimately linked with Western-style democracy. After narrowly surviving the bloody French Revolution with an aristocratic background, French diplomat and intellectual Alexis de Tocqueville journeyed to the United States, where he “marvelled at the way Americans – in contrast, he thought, to continental Europeans – participated in countless associations and thereby breathed life into their democracy” (Hoffmann 2006, 2). Tocqueville was looking for a way democratic societies could avoid the gruesome proletariat violence of the French Revolution. He believed he found it in the voluntary associations that made up civil society in the United States. “If men are to remain civilized, or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased,” he wrote (Tocqueville 1835, 585).

Tocqueville was not actually a proponent of democracy. His “view of American society was that of a French aristocrat engaged in analysing the dangers that

democracy, which he thought would inevitably come, held for the old European social order” (Hoffmann 2006, 5). Yet his writing proved foundational for the idea that civil society is part and parcel of democratic politics. “Tocqueville’s belief in an intrinsic connection between civic activism and democracy is still the central point of reference for most contemporary theories of civil society” (Hoffmann 2006, 2).

It’s worth taking a moment here to notice how in its journey to our modern understanding, the idea of civil society, like most fragments of accepted knowledge, passed through the articulations of men (and they were all men) who shaped it according to their own beliefs and biases to suit their own agendas. Each man had a goal. Aristotle sought to intellectually undermine the conservative elites who sentenced his master’s master, Socrates, to death; Aquinas wanted to harmonize divine Christian belief with agnostic philosophical arguments to definitively prove the existence of God; Bruni made it his mission to push religion aside, formulating knowledge as free from dependency on the divine; and Tocqueville was desperate to curb the excesses of the French Revolution and protect the privileges of Europe’s social elite, of which he was a member.

The concept of civil society experienced a lull in popularity during the mid-1800s, as more attention was paid to analyzing the industrial revolution. “It bounced back into fashion after World War II through the writings of the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, who revived the term to portray civil society as a special nucleus of independent political activity, a crucial sphere of struggle against tyranny” (Carothers and Barndt 1999-2000, 19). These writings were inspirational to social movements in eastern Europe during the

Cold War, and eventually the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent wave of democratization would make civil society a byword for political liberalization.

1.3.2 Defining Civil Society

Instead of asking what civil society is, it may be more useful to declare what it is not. Civil society does not involve business or commerce; it does not seek profit in the traditional sense as a motive. Civil society does not involve politicians; it does not seek direct political power. “Civil society is the realm of ordinary citizens, who join and participate in groups and associations because of their everyday interests, needs, and desires” (Howard 2003, 35). As to the difficult question of how to measure civil society, Marc Howard advocates conducting surveys to find out the percentage of respondents who take part in associations in specific countries, as this “not only give[s] a better approximation of the development of that country’s civil society than can come from a hollow list of total numbers or types of registered organizations, but they also facilitate extensive comparisons among the social strata of the country being studied, as well as with other countries” (Howard 2003, 53). This representative survey approach has an advantage in that it can usually be replicated in multiple countries, which “provides the best overall opportunity for comparative research on this important attribute of democracy and democratization” (Howard 2003, 55).

1.3.3 Civil Society as an Independent Variable

In modern academic literature, civil society is often analyzed in conjunction for some result. Will it spur democracy? Does it foster economic development? Can it weed out corruption? Questions like these have guided countless academic studies that

sought to probe how beneficial civic associations are for different aspects of society. Some of this research has focused on specific places.

For example, Rob Jenkins argued that India's democracy "has progressed much further in terms of inclusiveness than with respect to accountability" (Jenkins 2007, 55), and that in the mid-1990s civil society groups began to play an important role in chipping away at corruption by uncovering specific acts of malfeasance, harnessing the efforts of average citizens, and focusing "on the local level, where routinized corruption was a daily curse, where the theft of public resources was personal, and where citizens themselves could do the most to expose the precise mechanisms through which corruption took place" (Jenkins 2007, 59).

Civil society is often thought of as a byproduct and self-reinforcer of democracy, as "almost all agree that a healthy democracy requires many voluntary associations and much local activity" (Ehrenberg 1999, 233). But its link with liberal politics may in fact come not primarily from civil society activities inside democracies, but rather from the demise of authoritarian regimes, particularly in former Soviet regions. "There is widespread agreement in the literature on the East Central European Velvet Revolutions that civil society was pivotal to the overthrow of communist regimes in 1989" (Jensen and Mislivetz 2006; Bernhard 1996, 135). However, other literature tries to dispel simplistic monocausal ways of thinking about civil society throughout the Cold War and thinks of civil society rather "as a master frame with which civic movements across Eastern Europe sought to mobilize public support in light of changing political opportunities" (Glenn 2001, 26-27).

Some literature is now less optimistic about civil society in eastern Europe. For example, Anders Uhlin wrote that post-Soviet civil society in eastern Europe is weak because, apart from strong trade union membership, “few people are engaged in civil society activities and most civil society groups have failed to mobilize members” (Uhlin 2006, 152). In Russia, civil society stagnated because, despite laws protecting the rights of associations, there is “resistance from public officials, a political culture of apathy and distrust, and a legal system oriented towards protecting those in power rather than making them accountable to an organized public” (Uhlin 2006, 153; Weigle 2000, 338). Civil society’s failure to take root in Russia was not for a lack of trying on the part of the people, but rather due to “the absence of a link between organized activism and state power” (Weigle 2000, 377).

After the fall of the Soviet Union, a lot of political science literature in the 1990s focused on democratic transition. But more recently, given the rise of China and Russia’s backsliding from democracy back to authoritarianism, recent political science literature has looked more at authoritarianism as a resilient form of government not necessarily prone to collapse. Civil society in these cases is studied for its ability to exist in an environment with significant restraints. And in fact Russia led the way in cracking down on civil society to prevent democratization. It passed a law in 2006 that placed NGOs under strict surveillance and limited the ability of NGOs to receive foreign funding; other authoritarian countries soon followed suit (Koesel 2018, 257-258).

One of the most consequential paths of civil society in recent decades has been its foray into developmental economics. NGOs working in developing countries for the purpose of poverty reduction began increasing dramatically in quantity and scale in the

late 1970s (Banks and Hulme 2012, 5). This happened shortly after global development assistance policy took a neoliberal turn, with poor countries pressured into embracing structural adjustment that canceled welfare services and state expenditures, emphasizing market-driven, trickle-down growth (Banks and Hulme 2012, 5; Murray and Overton 2011). As this neoliberal shift continued to bear little developmental fruit, philanthropists began to see NGOs as a useful way to fill the vacuum of public services for the poor (Gill 1997; Barr et al 2005; Lewis 2005; Murray and Overton 2011).

Thus began one of civil society's most well-known innovations: the developmental NGO. These can take the form of small local NGOs that work with foreign donors to provide malaria nets to low-income households, large international NGOs that provide healthcare services to remote locations, entrepreneurial organizations that seek to nurture small businesses and innovation, and more. "Where states cannot provide sufficient goods, services or enabling environments that help citizens in securing livelihoods, or where disadvantaged groups are excluded from existing state institutions, alternative channels of service provision and/or holding governments to account must be found. It is into this gap that NGOs have neatly fitted" (Banks and Hulme 2012, 3). Developmental experts and practitioners grew disillusioned with the neoliberal approach by the 1990s, and soon articulated a different strategy of fostering "good governance" that recognized the importance of public expenditures (Murray and Overton 2011). However, by this time, NGOs were so imbedded in on-the-ground efforts at poverty alleviation that they never fell out of significance, and they found support in a post-Cold War international community that valued human rights and grassroots participation (Murray and Overton 2011).

Developmental NGOs have received measured criticism, mainly that they often supply services without teaching local populations to provide these services for themselves, and that they do not efficiently accomplish long-term structural changes in target countries (Banks and Hulme 2012, 3). But they have nonetheless been accepted as crucial players in the fight against global poverty.

Some research into civil society has been more theoretical, such as Francis Fukuyama's article that argued the existence of a complex interrelationship between civil society, social capital, and economic growth (Fukuyama 2001, 7).

1.3.4 Civil Society, International Interaction, and Global Ethics

Another discussion involving civil society has been that of global ethics. Can international civil society groups facilitate interaction across cultures that foster shared normative values? "For the first time in history, a dynamic and globally connected civil society is emerging, independent of government," wrote Don Eberly, who worked for many years in the US State Department (Eberly 2008, 278). He argued that civil society groups have goals that "are all linked to the ethic of human worth and dignity, which must be guarded and transmitted by a global civic culture ... A diversified and tolerant political culture can rise up from this subsoil of democratic civil society" (Eberly 2008, 289).

Regarding classic international relations theories, global ethics is probably most related to constructivism. As Alexander Wendt argues, the global political arena fosters social interactions where countries' "identities and interests are socially constructed" (Wendt 1999, 248). Key to his theory is the notion that different countries can foster a

shared *culture* comprised of shared ideas which are then institutionalized and acted upon (Wendt 1999, 249).

1.3.5 Taiwan's International Space

Taiwan cannot directly take part in many of the geopolitical arenas Wendt referred to because it is excluded. This was not always the case. The Kuomintang as the Republic of China (ROC) was a founding member of the UN in 1945 and took a permanent seat on the influential security council. After the Kuomintang lost the Chinese civil war and fled to Taiwan in 1949, they retained the UN seat and claimed to represent China, even as they no longer had control of the mainland. But this changed in 1971, when diplomatic maneuvering by other nations on behalf of the People's Republic of China (PRC) succeeded in expelling the ROC from the UN. No seat was maintained for representing the people of Taiwan.

That isolation grew worse and worse, as Beijing's economic reforms in 1979 ushered in a new era of Chinese wealth and power. As a small nation of only 23 million, Taiwan has seldom been able to leverage its own successful economy and democratization to gain access to international political organizations. Only under the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou, who endorsed the PRC's preferred verbiage regarding the "1992 Consensus" that means there is only one China and Taiwan is a part of that China, did Taiwan make limited progress. Under Ma Ying-jeou's Kuomintang presidency, Taiwan was allowed to be an observer at World Health Organization assemblies, and Beijing did not object to Taiwan being represented at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 2008 annual meeting. Beijing's acquiescence was critical to these endeavors.

Some scholars of cross-strait relations believe Ma had the right approach, and that negotiating with Beijing is the only way to expand global participation. “Beijing’s flexibility in its application of the ‘one China’ principle and the Ma administration’s practicality in making its requests are critical to the realization of Taipei’s demand for international space and hence cross-Strait stability” (Wang, Lee and Yu 2011, 249).

But that endorsement of the PRC’s insistence that Taiwan is part of China is opposed by many in Taiwan, including politicians in the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which came to power in 2016 after a wave of student protests expressing anger at Taiwan’s increasingly close relations with the mainland. Now, the DPP is trying to expand Taiwan’s international participation while maintaining that Taiwan is an independent country.

As Jacques deLisle wrote shortly after the inauguration of independence-leaning DPP president Tsai Ing-wen, politicians in Taiwan seeking to expand the island’s international space “must do so in the face of continuing, and possibly increasing, resistance from Beijing and amid uncertainty about the policies of key states, including China and the United States” (deLisle 2016, 550). Taiwan was not allowed to continue observing World Health Organization meetings, but it maintained its spot at APEC meetings.

Observers believe a tough road lies ahead for Taiwan’s quest to gain formal representation on the world stage. The question I seek to probe is, given Taiwan’s exclusion from formal international bodies, can NGOs help Taiwan interact with the world so that Taiwan can take part in influencing and absorbing global norms?

1.3.6 NGOs in Taiwan

As formal avenues of interaction narrowed, however, informal ones proliferated. Taiwan's democratization ushered in an era of interaction through global NGOs. In order to understand how this happened requires a brief historical overview.

Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, writing about the history of civil society in Taiwan, said there are several distinct periods to distinguish. The first, which he called *political forces in absolute command*, lasted from 1947 to 1962. "All aspects of public life were placed completely under the control of the party-military state ... Taiwanese civil society fell under the complete control of the Mainlander-dominated central state apparatus. Suppression and coercion were immediately applied to any autonomous demands" (Hsiao 1990, 164).

The second period lasted from 1963 to 1978. Hsiao called it *economic forces in relative command*. "Economic forces gradually emerged as the KMT state incorporated economic growth into its priority agenda for ruling Taiwan ... Economic considerations were taken very seriously, allowing the rise of new economic interests to articulate and exert their influence on the state" (Hsiao 1990, 164). During the end of this period, kernels of civil society began to appear, but these remained mostly confined to intellectuals (Hsiao 1990, 165).

The third period lasted from 1979 to 1990, when he was writing. He called it *social forces in mobilization*. "In the past ten years, the civil society, across ethnic and class lines, has developed a new life cycle" (Hsiao 1990, 165). New civil society groups grew more bold in pressuring the state for change. "One means was to voice grievances growing out of the serious social problems facing Taiwan. The other, and more direct,

way was to organize collective action, with demands that the state should respond” (Hsiao 1990, 165).

Hsiao went on to say that these protest movements, nurtured by civil society, began to advocate systematic change. “One objective of Taiwan's protest movements of the 1980s has been to acquire autonomy from the domination of the authoritarian state. Reform has been sought not only of a specific public policy or a specific function of the state apparatus but also to transform the power relations between the authoritarian state and the mobilizing civil society” (Hsiao 1990, 165-166).

That systematic change eventually did come, culminating in Taiwan's first presidential election in 1996. Steadily thereafter, Taiwan's civil society activity became more international, not only with Taiwan's NGOs playing a role globally, but also with international NGOs coming to Taiwan in order to expand their influence in Asia. “According to governmental registration records, currently there are more than 40,000 NGOs in Taiwan, and more than 2,000 of them have conducted cross-national activities or are affiliated with international NGOs” wrote Wei-chin Lee in 2012 in an OP-ED for Brookings.

These NGOs take many forms, but a majority of them focus on poverty, healthcare, and disaster relief (Lee 2012). According to Lee, NGOs can often be used as a placeholder for Taiwan's perspective in international affairs. “NGOs offer Taiwan visibility and a voice for diplomatic sustainability as well as a sense of dignity, respect, and self-worth for an associational life in the global community. Participation in them is an important part of Taiwan's ‘huolu wajiao’ (活路外交) or ‘flexible diplomacy’” (Lee

2012). In fact, civil society is seen as so important to the government that Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) even has a department dedicated to NGO interaction.

1.4 Analytical Approach

In order to assess my research question, I will employ a qualitative analysis that focuses on two case studies. The first case involves advocacy done by an international French NGO called Reporters Without Borders 無國界記者 (Reporters Sans Frontieres, RSF), which is headquartered in Paris but operates a foreign bureau in Taipei. The second case involves advocacy done by the Taiwan Association for Human Rights 臺灣人權促進會 (TAHR), a local Taiwanese human rights NGO that often collaborates with other human rights NGOs around the world. These two case studies, one involving a foreign NGO and one involving a domestic NGO, will offer two distinct demonstrations of how Taiwan is able to influence international institutions through civil society. As Taiwan is excluded from formal international institutions, civil society allows Taiwan to access a "track II diplomacy," or informal, people-based diplomacy.

Through interviews and analyses of public statements, I will detail the ways in which Taiwanese employees of these two NGOs act to influence global political bodies from which Taiwan is excluded. The independent variable here is Taiwanese people's participation in civil society organizations, and the dependent variable is whether Taiwan gains an international voice as a result. In order to measure this, I will assess whether Taiwanese people are able to actually change the proceedings of international institutions through the indirect channel of NGOs. If the answer is yes, then the proceedings of relevant international institutions must be different from the counterfactual of if Taiwanese people were not taking part in the NGOs. I will also

discuss whether and how Taiwan's global influence through NGOs advances its own geopolitical interests.

In order to carry out this research, I will first conduct interviews with employees of these NGOs. These interviews will be held with both Taiwanese employees and, if relevant, interviews with citizens of other countries who work at the NGOs. I will also interview people who work at the intergovernmental organizations in question to confirm they were influenced by the NGO advocacy done by Taiwanese citizens. I will also interview other experts on civil society in Taiwan for general advice on conducting my research. By conducting these interviews, I will be better able to assess how Taiwanese employees interact with people at geopolitical institutions around the world as part of their work. How are Taiwanese NGO workers able to influence global discourse on issues like human rights? What are the cases in which Taiwanese people can influence international organizations from which they are excluded?

My interviews will therefore comprise questions about the global aspect of NGO workers' jobs. I will ask my interviewees to detail for me their interactions with other international NGOs or intergovernmental organizations. For example, I will have Anonymous A, a Taiwanese employee of RSF, tell me about case reports he/she has written which have been taken to the UN Human Rights Committee by his/her colleagues in Paris. Was he/she able to play a similar role as if he/she was a citizen of a member state of the UN?

In the case of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR), I will ask Taiwanese employees about interactions they have with international human rights groups. What are other international NGOs with which they are in frequent contact?

What transpires in their interactions? Is TAHR able to affect the global discourse on human rights? Are they able to play an indirect role in intergovernmental organizations from which Taiwan is excluded?

Another important question I will ask is what are they not able to do. What are the weaknesses of trying to affect intergovernmental bodies through NGOs? What are some instances in which these employees have experienced exclusion? This will allow me to assess the limitations of track II diplomacy.

The interviews will likely last around half an hour each and will be corroborated with publicly available documents. For example, much of the RSF case reports filed to the UN Human Rights Council eventually become publicly available.

I've chosen these two cases because each sheds a valuable light into a different form of NGO interaction: RSF elucidates the workings of a foreign NGO in Taiwan, while TAHR shows the case of a Taiwanese NGO. Taiwan has both many local NGOs and many international ones. While Taiwanese NGOs may primarily seek to yield an outward effect of influence, and international NGOs may primarily seek to yield an inward effect of influencing Taiwan, I am interested to probe whether the distinction is so clear-cut, or if it is in fact more fluid, with both local and international NGOs having both inward and outward paths of influence.

These two cases are important because they resemble the values Taiwan has worked hard to foster since the end of martial law. Both NGOs do work relating to human rights and are emblematic of Taiwan's shift away from authoritarianism several decades ago.

This is important because human rights is an issue which Taiwan has the opportunity to capitalize on for soft power. Also, both NGOs do work that is critical of China's human rights record, which is important because China is the source of Taiwan's isolation. At international forums like the UN Human Rights Council, China is now slowly pushing for the world to recognize an alternative definition of human rights. Under China's new definition, human rights include the right to peace, security, education, and pursuit of wealth, but human rights do not include other freedoms like freedom of the press, assembly, expression, religion, or the right to vote. Whether China succeeds may be affected by Taiwan's influence via NGOs, as Taiwan can offer an important Chinese-speaking rebuttal to China's truncated articulation of human rights.

In order to measure the hypothesis, I will firstly seek to directly confirm that staffers at the UN and EU did consult the advocacy documents put forward by the Taiwanese civil society workers in my case studies. This will be done through communicating with staffers at the UN and EU who were privy to the deliberations in question.

Secondly, I will classify the level of influence achieved by advocacy into three tiers. The first tier is the most basic. It incorporates general advocacy made for the public, designed to draw support for a particular cause, but not likely affecting decisions made by policy-makers. A promotional tweet or blog post could fit this description.

The second tier of advocacy influence is more sophisticated. It involves targeting specific actors, often politicians or other leaders, who have the power to act on the issue in question. This advocacy may be open to the public, but it usually focuses on specific events in order to try to shape the way policy-makers will behave at those events. A

limitation of this second tier is that the advocacy done, while homing in on specific leaders and events, inevitably falls into a general issue category such as human rights or environmental concerns. Therefore, this advocacy finds itself situated within a vast body of discourse touching upon the same topics found in the advocacy. This causes the existence of possible confounding variables when evaluating whether a certain act of advocacy caused a certain outcome.

The third tier is the most narrow and precise. Like the second tier, it involves time-specific advocacy to a certain influential audience. But unlike the second tier, it goes directly to the decision-makers in question, so we can be sure that no confounding variables exist, and we can say for certain that the act of advocacy caused a certain outcome.

My theoretical framework draws mostly from constructivist international relations theory, as I argue that its focus on social interactions and shared values relates most closely with the practice of civil society. Taiwan has been excluded from most formal international institutions, and therefore has no way to take part in the legal benefits of liberalism.

And although Taiwan relies on a realist military relationship with the United States for survival, it cannot use its military or monetary power for substantial influence, as China always looms more powerful. I therefore argue that constructivist shared values fostered from international interactions offer the best theoretical framework from which to view Taiwan's international influence.

The theory of constructivism arises from the concept that "Many structures we take to be immutable in IR are actually embedded social relationships that are

contingent to a large extent on how nation-states think about and interact with one another” (Sterling-Folker 2013, 130). According to the constructivist paradigm, “we create our own security dilemmas and competitions by interacting in particular ways with one another so that these outcomes appear to be inevitable” (Sterling-Folker 2013, 128).

As prominent constructivist thinker Alexander Wendt posited, the international political structure gives rise to social interactions where nations’ “identities and interests are socially constructed” (Wendt 1999, 248). An important aspect of his argument is that different leaders and societies can construct a shared culture composed of shared ideas which are then normalized into institutions and influence behavioral patterns (Wendt 1999, 249). This last element about institutionalization is not unimportant. “Once ideas have influenced organizational design, their influence will be reflected in the incentives of those in the organization and those whose interests are served by it” (Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 20).

The ideological infrastructure underpinning these institutions comprises norms with “collective expectations with ‘regulative’ effects on the proper behavior of actors with a given identity,” (Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998, 679-680). Norms, if accepted by groups of people over time, become subconscious understandings, and “such collective understandings, and their accompanying social identities and interests, can become reified or embedded over time so that alternatives seem unimaginable” (Sterling-Folker 2013, 128).

For this particular thesis, it is important to consider human rights and civil society through the lens of constructivism. Can Taiwanese citizens contribute to the

reinforcement of global human rights norms through international civil society interactions? Will its global civil society engagement foster a shared culture with citizens of other countries?

Can Taiwan help frame a global human rights discourse that socially constructs other states' interests to align with its own? As Wendt noted, "anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt 1992, 395). In a world governed by disparate governments vying for power and influence, can Taiwan mold the institutional design of organizations from which it's excluded, thereby affecting the incentives of individuals in those institutions? Could Taiwan's values coalesce with those of other countries so that one day alternatives to those values would seem unimaginable?

1.5 Outline of Thesis

Chapter one of this thesis introduced Taiwan's civil society situation and political landscape, then detailed the motivations and goals of this research. It then featured a literature review that delved into the origins of civil society and how its meaning has shifted over the course of human history. The literature review also discussed how civil society plays into Taiwan's politics and international interactions. Chapter one then included an analytical approach to explain my research methodology.

Chapter two of this thesis discusses Taiwan's precarious position on the world stage and how NGOs affect that position. From which international organizations is Taiwan excluded? What are the implications of Taiwan's exclusion? How do NGOs help Taiwan play a role in these international organizations? What are the implications of Taiwan's global discourse via NGOs? What are the strengths and weaknesses of NGO diplomacy?

Chapter three of this thesis discusses the specific case of Reporters Without Borders (RSF). What are the origins of the French NGO and what are its operations in its headquarters in Paris? When and why did it open its office in Taipei? How does the Taipei office, together with the Paris office, play a role in international institutions? How does this promote Taiwan's perspective on the global stage?

Chapter four of this thesis delves into the case of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR). How did the organization begin? What are its Taiwan activities? What are its global activities? How does it interact with international human rights NGOs? How does this interaction promote Taiwan's perspective on the global stage?

A conclusion discusses the study's findings and make recommendations for further research.



Chapter 2 Taiwan on the Global Stage

This chapter discusses Taiwan's precarious position in global politics and considers how its exclusion affects its ability to pursue its interests. This chapter also provides the reader with background information regarding strategic and tactical power dynamics between Taiwan, China, and the United States that make Taiwan a unique middle power caught in the middle of a great power competition between the U.S. and China. Chapter 2 then delves into the contentious topic of ideological legitimacy for the governments of Taiwan and China through the contested lens of democratic values, and discusses what implications this holds for Taiwan's civil society. Lastly, the chapter details the strengths and weaknesses of Taiwan's track II diplomacy, or diplomacy through civil society.

2.1 Taiwan's Exclusion and Strategic Considerations

Excluded from many of the international political arenas in which countries pursue their own interests and espouse their own ideologies, Taiwan has no direct avenue to influence global politics in its favor. It cannot formally express its identity in relation to other polities on the global stage. That leaves economic, military, and civil society interactions as some of the only channels through which Taiwan can exert influence.

Taiwan's current government, under President Tsai Ing-wen of the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), has fought an uphill battle trying to gain representation for Taiwan at international organizations. In addition to not gaining access to the United Nations, Taiwan was excluded in 2019 from the World Health Organization (WHO). As a February 2019 article in Focus Taiwan News Channel

noted, Taiwan acted as an observer in the World Health Assembly from 2009-2016, but since 2017 “China has persuaded the WHO not to invite Taiwan, in line with Beijing's hardline stance on cross-Taiwan Strait relations after President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) of the Democratic Progressive Party took office in May 2016” (Yeh 2019).

Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs lamented Taiwan’s exclusion from the WHO in a tweet on February 18, 2019 scheduled to coincide with World Health Day:



Figure 2.1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Tweet

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ROC (Taiwan)

Taiwan’s unique exclusion from international political fora takes place amid a severe disadvantage and an empowering advantage. Its disadvantage is China’s

relentless campaign to block any and all displays of Taiwanese identity or manifestations of de facto sovereignty. Taiwan's advantage is its partnership with the United States. Although the U.S. does not formally recognize Taiwan as a sovereign country, it provides crucial support to Taiwan by selling the island advanced weaponry and maintains extensive trade links with the island's economy.

In the American foreign policy mindset, Taiwan is an important ally in the long-term strategic standoff with China, which shows signs of developing into a new Cold War. Growing unease about China burst to the surface of United States official circles even before the election of Donald Trump, who imposed tariffs on Chinese goods, initiating a trade war that simmers to this day. Official talk of the threat China poses to the U.S. has ranged from then Secretary of Defence Ash Carter's [announcement](#) in February 2016 that great power competition will color the Pentagon's priorities for the foreseeable future to FBI Director Christopher Wray in April 2019 [saying that](#) China is now America's biggest threat due to its economic and intelligence espionage (Freedberg and Clark; DeAeth).

In the midst of this strategic rivalry, Taiwan plays a crucial role in preventing China's expansion into the Western Pacific and maintaining America's military advantage. Ian Easton, a scholar specializing in the military dimensions of the US-Taiwan-China relationship, wrote in a 2016 article:

Every professional American strategist since Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur has recognized that Taiwan is a center of gravity in the Asia-Pacific. The island sits astride the world's busiest maritime and air superhighways, right in the middle of the first island chain, a defensive barrier for keeping Chinese naval power in check. America does not need Taiwan as a base for its soldiers, marines, sailors, or airmen, but it does require that the island remain in the hands of a friendly government. If Taiwan were lost, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines would become

extremely vulnerable to the threat of Chinese naval blockades and air assaults. For this reason (and many others), any PRC attempt to gain control of Taiwan would almost certainly be regarded as an attack on the vital interests of the United States, and therefore repelled by any means necessary, including military force. (3-4)

As mentioned, Taiwan plays a crucial function in keeping Chinese forces at bay relative to American troop deployments and allies in Asia. The following is an illustration of the strategic importance of Taiwan's location in Asia:

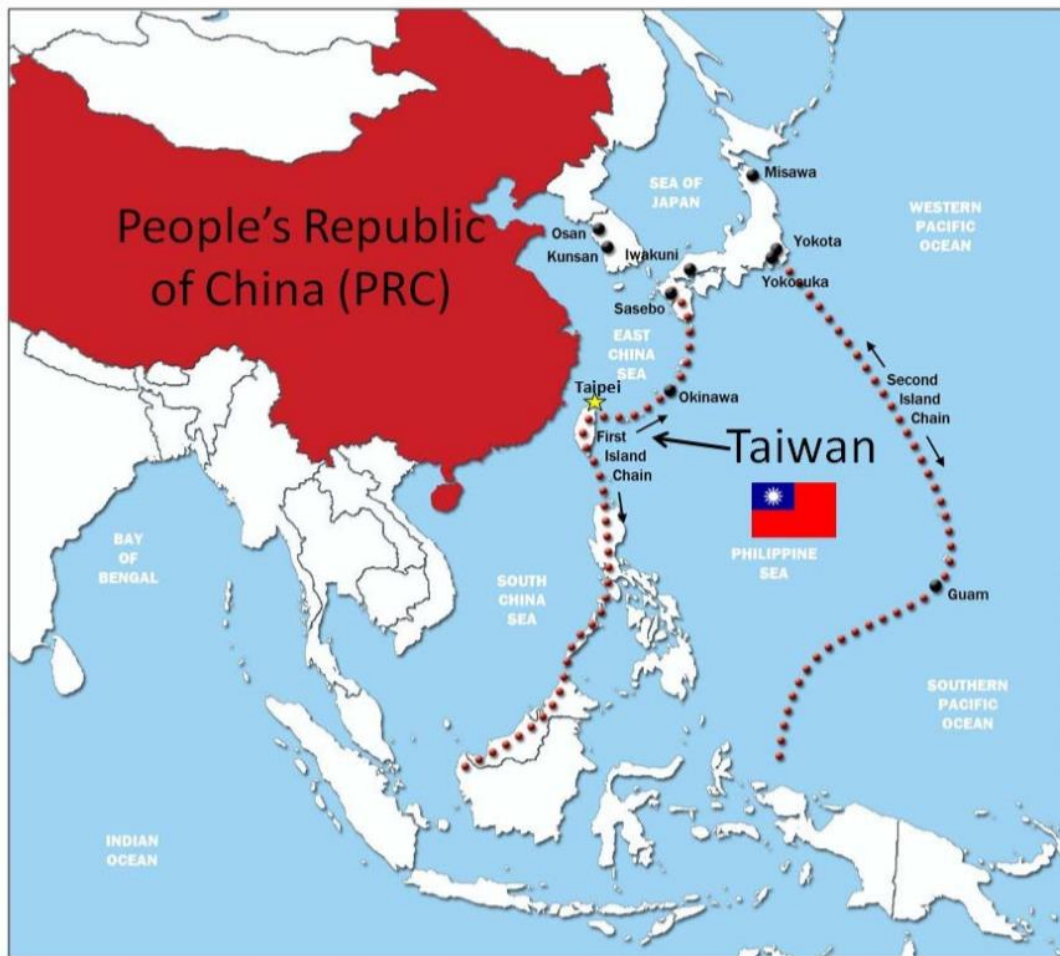


Figure 2: Map of Taiwan's Location in First Island Chain (Source: CSBA and Project 2049 Institute).

Figure 2.2 Island Chain Display

Source: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) and Project 2049 Institute

The map shows how Taiwan is at a vital position to assist the U.S. in keeping Chinese forces within the first island chain.

2.2 The Ideological Battle For Legitimacy

Beyond strategic and tactical considerations, Taiwan's partnership with the United States and opposition to China take on ideological dimensions of liberal democratic values emphasizing checks and balances and individual rights versus authoritarian values emphasizing collective well-being and state control. While these questions concerning values and political legitimacy may seem less important than raw material power comparisons between nations, they play a huge role in the lived experience of everyday people. Political values are the essential cleavage between Taiwan and China in terms of how their respective leaders claim political legitimacy, and this cleavage has foreign policy ramifications.

The United States is a country that prides itself on its democratic values and unabashedly seeks to spread those values to the world in the belief that doing so will make the world a safer place. This perspective also has deep implications for the international community. As Senator and 2020 presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren notes in [a 2019 article](#) in Foreign Affairs, "There's a story Americans like to tell ourselves about how we built a liberal international order—one based on democratic principles, committed to civil and human rights, accountable to citizens, bound by the rule of law, and focused on economic prosperity for all" (Warren 2019).

Warren later argues that in upholding and further building this liberal international order, the United States should not shy away from defending those who advocate for democratic values in the face of pressure from repressive governments: "Around the

world, we should aggressively promote transparency, call out kleptocracy, and combat the creeping influence of corruption. And we should stand with those who bravely fight for openness and pluralism in Moscow, Beijing, and beyond” (Warren 2019).

Since Taiwan’s democratization in the 1990s, it has come to represent a shining ideological victory for the U.S. over China, as the world now has a Chinese democracy, disproving the Chinese Communist Party’s argument that democracy and human rights are incompatible with Chinese culture. In touching on the ideological implications Taiwan’s democracy holds for China in his 2016 article, Ian Easton notes: “The CCP views Taiwan, which exists as a free and independent state that is officially called the Republic of China (ROC), as a grave threat to its grip on power. Taiwan is anathema to the PRC because it serves as a beacon of freedom for Chinese speaking people everywhere” (2).

Cédric Alviani, RSF’s Taipei bureau chief who I interviewed on March 26, 2019, echoed this sentiment:

Taiwan represents the best we could hope for the Chinese society because in a few decades Taiwan has managed to turn itself into a peaceful society that is very respectful of the human rights, of the rule of law, of the democratic process. So this is the blatant example that what the Chinese authorities say has no ground. President Xi Jinping likes to say that democracy cannot work in a Chinese culture context, that freedom of the press cannot apply in an Asian culture. All these things are obviously not correct, and Taiwan is the proof of this.

Taiwan, for its part, engages in democracy promotion as part of its foreign policy strategy. One example of this is the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, established in 2002 by Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and founded by the Taiwanese government. The organization [describes](#) its own mandate on its website as follows: “Domestically, the TFD strives to play a positive role in consolidating Taiwan's democracy and fortifying

its commitment to human rights; internationally, the Foundation hopes to become a strong link in the world democratic network, joining forces with related organizations around the world” (TFD, Background).

Also on the organization’s [website](#) is an explanation of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy’s dedication to democratic values from the chairman, Su Jia-Chyuan: “In the near future, not only will we persist walking down on the road of democratic reforms, but also are willing to perform our duties and to share our valuable experiences to the international society without holding anything back in order to spread our democratic experiences and human rights ideas to every corner of the world” (Su).

One example of a democracy promotion activity put on by the foundation is a [youth conference](#) for young promoters of human rights from all around Asia called the Asia Young Leaders for Democracy program (AYLD). A web page explains: “Each year, young practitioners advocating for democracy or human rights across the countries in Asia are selected to participate in the AYLD which empowers them through lectures, discussions, and site visits” (TFD, What is the AYLD?).

The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy is proof that Taiwanese leaders take liberal democratic values seriously and consider it worthwhile to invest taxpayer money to try to spread and safeguard those values in the region.

Within the big-picture ideological struggle between China and liberal states like Taiwan and the U.S., NGOs play a critical role. Less attached to the interests of particular countries, NGOs are often seen as relatively free from conflicts of interest and therefore objective and trustworthy in setting global discourse. For Taiwan, NGOs play an even more important role than in most countries because of Taiwan’s global political

exclusion. In the earlier mentioned OP-ED for Brookings by Wei-chin Lee in 2012, he writes:

An active push for enthusiastic engagement in international activities through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has surged as an alternative approach to the expansion of Taiwan's international space. NGOs have long been cherished as an avenue through which Taiwan can navigate the turbulence of globalization, the rapid revolution of information technology, and the high degrees of complexity and interdependence in numerous transnational and interconnected issue areas across which various powers and interests compound and compete. By complementing the role and function of states, NGOs are an international venue for the representation and articulation of Taiwan's public interest in areas such as the promotion of human rights, environmental sustainability, local community infrastructure construction, public health advancement, agricultural assistance, and humanitarian reliefs. They also represent an important forum in which Taiwan can share its experiences, learn from the experiences of others, and develop networks of connections. (Lee 2012)

As will be discussed in detail in this thesis, I argue a similar point to Lee's. I argue that Taiwan's NGOs play an important role in granting it a way to influence organizations it does not have direct access to.

2.3 The Implications of Taiwan's Exclusion and NGO Diplomacy

Taiwan faces immense challenges as a country without a formal voice. Its exclusion leaves it unable to represent its own interests in some of the most important decision-making deliberations in the world. In particular cases, its isolation may leave its citizens' lives on the line, as in the case of health. A [Time article](#) from May 2017 detailed the issue of Taiwan's exclusion from the World Health Assembly: "Experts warn that Taiwan's exclusion from the assembly, the decision-making body of the World Health Organization, creates a 'dangerous' public health risk for East Asia and beyond" (Smith 2017).

This issue hit home in 2003 when Asian countries scrambled to control an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) that originated in China's Guangdong province. [An article](#) in *Nature* from April 2003 investigated the trouble Taiwanese medical researchers had in obtaining crucial information on the virus because Taiwan is excluded from the World Health Organization; in the article, Taiwanese researchers complained of being denied crucial samples and information that would have aided the fight against SARS on the island (Cyranoski 2003). Unreliable access to global health information is one of Taiwan's most severe disadvantages it faces because of its exclusion.

Because of its exclusion from formal participation in international institutions, Taiwan is forced to rely heavily on soft power for impacting geopolitics. NGOs are one of Taiwan's main soft power assets. The first scholar to use the term soft power was Joseph Nye, who introduced it to articulate a country's influence that derives not from economic or military strength, but from other less quantifiable attributes. He later explained it as "the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive interaction in order to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye 2011, 21).

Contrary to realism, an international relations theory which relies mainly on material power dynamics to explain international interactions, soft power posits that preferred outcomes can be pursued by means other than force and coercion. Other countries can be persuaded, coopted, inspired. Soft power allows a country like the United States to get other countries to act in its best interest through appeal to shared ethical values, cultural appeal, and reverence of good governance. "Mutual democracy,

liberal culture, and a deep network of transnational ties mean that anarchy has very different effects than realism predicts” (Nye 2011, 19).

Another important aspect of soft power, relating also to constructivism, is the way we construct our own ontological existence through narratives. “By choosing particular narratives to justify our actions, we do not simply make sense of the world, as an epistemological positivist might assert, but actually make the world according to those narratives” (Sterling-Folker 2013, 132). A country’s narrative is one of its soft power resources.

Other soft power resources “include culture, values, legitimate policies, a positive domestic model, a successful economy, and a competent military” (Nye 2011, 99). A critical task for any country is power conversion, which essentially means using those resources to obtain desired outcomes. “Whether the possession of power resources actually produces favorable behavior depends upon the context and the skills of the agent” (Nye 2011, 22).

One of Taiwan’s main soft power assets is civil society. There is certainly an admiration for Taiwan among many human rights activists in Asia who live in less open societies. Some of these activists have even relocated to Taiwan as a safe haven to engage in advocacy for democratic reform. As a quick example, human rights activists from Vietnam relocated to Taipei to run [a website](#) titled *The Vietnamese*, which publishes articles focusing on human rights abuses in Vietnam. Being a safe haven for liberal reformers makes Taiwan an influential place for many grassroots activists in Asia and beyond.

2.4 Conclusion

Being an open society, Taiwan has become an attractive place for international NGOs to operate foreign bureaus. For example, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Amnesty International both have offices in Taipei. This status as a hub for international NGOs can give rise to concrete instances of Taiwan's interests being promoted by these NGOs. For example, RSF published [an article](#) on April 7, 2019, arguing that the United Nations should grant Taiwanese journalists the right to cover United Nations events (RSF). Taiwanese journalists have not been granted access to the UN as of this writing, but this example nonetheless shows how Taiwan's status as an open society leads to its interests being promoted on the global stage. This advocacy no doubt carries more legitimacy when conducted by an international issue-based NGO than it would have if it simply came from the Taiwanese government.

Taiwan's capacity to utilize this soft power to its benefit is significant, but because it is one of the only avenues Taiwan has to influence the world, it comes with severe limitations. The benefits of Taiwan's use of civil society include that it highlights to the world Taiwan's humane political values compared to China's. This likely drums up international empathy for Taiwan and makes China seem like a bully in the eyes of many observers around the world. In addition, because Taiwanese people independently promote specific political values such as press freedom and human rights, they build ideological bridges with people around the world who also care deeply about those issues. This likely enhances the level of solidarity many around the world feel for the Taiwanese people.

The weaknesses of Taiwan's civil society-based diplomacy include the instances where Taiwanese people are denied critical information during global crises such as

outbreaks of deadly viruses. Also, Taiwan's perspective always takes a back seat to those who are granted a spot at the table. Taiwanese people may be able to promote Taiwan's interests to decision-makers that will take part in deliberations at intergovernmental organizations. But because Taiwan cannot send formal representatives to take part in these deliberations, its role is limited to advocacy. It cannot take part in the actual decision-making. And as China plays a central role in many intergovernmental organizations today, it is usually easy for China to stifle attempts by Taiwan to gain recognition.



Chapter 3 The Case of Reporters Without Borders

This chapter first provides a brief overview of Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the organization's French roots, and its expansion into Taiwan. The chapter details activities commonly taken up by employees in RSF's Taipei office. Chapter 3 then explores the case study of advocacy done by Taiwanese employees at this office on behalf of a Chinese journalist named Huang Qi. By analyzing how United Nations human rights experts reacted to the advocacy, I evaluate how this case study shows the ability of Taiwanese people to use NGOs to influence intergovernmental organizations.

The research for this chapter was dependent on five interviews. Three were with RSF staffers: one conducted on March 26, 2019 at RSF's Taipei office with Cédric Alviani, RSF's Taipei bureau chief; another conducted on March 26, 2019 at RSF's Taipei office with Anonymous A, an anonymous Taiwanese full-time staffer of RSF's Taipei office; one conducted on April 26 via Skype with Paul Coppin, head of legal desk for RSF at its Paris headquarters; another conducted on April 26 via Skype with Anonymous B, an anonymous Taiwanese former intern for RSF's Taipei office; and one conducted via email on May 06-07 with Seong-Phil Hong, chair-rapporteur for the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. I am able to confirm that the advocacy in question was considered by the relevant authorities, and I classify this case study into the third and highest tier of advocacy influence.

3.1 Reporters Without Borders in France

Reporters Without Borders is an international NGO headquartered in Paris that defends journalistic freedom around the world. Founded in 1985, and registered in 1995 as a non-profit organization, the French NGO engages in a wide range of advocacy

activities relating to media freedom. RSF has consultative status at several intergovernmental organizations, including the United Nations. Since its founding, RSF has grown to be the largest non-profit media freedom watchdog in the world. On [its website](#), RSF explains that, in addition to the Paris headquarters, it has foreign bureaus in 10 cities and correspondents in 130 countries, giving RSF “the ability to mobilize support, challenge governments and wield influence both on the ground and in the ministries and precincts where media and Internet standards and legislation are drafted” (RSF, Presentation).

Also on its website is an explanation as to why journalistic information is so important for the well-being of society: “Freedom of expression and information will always be the world’s most important freedom. If journalists were not free to report the facts, denounce abuses, and alert the public, how would we resist the problem of children-soldiers, defend women’s rights, or preserve our environment?” (RSF, Presentation).

In 2002, RSF began what would become one of its signature initiatives, its global press freedom index. The index is a ranking of countries and territories around the world based on their relative levels of press freedom. The following information is taken from [an RSF webpage](#) dedicated to explaining the index (bolded as on the webpage).

The Index **ranks 180 countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists**. It is a snapshot of the media freedom situation based on an evaluation of pluralism, independence of the media, quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists in each country and region. It does not rank public policies even if governments obviously have a major impact on their country’s ranking. **Nor is it an indicator of the quality of journalism** in each country or region. (RSF, The World Press Freedom Index)

One interesting thing worth noting is that, as mentioned on the explanatory webpage, the index not only takes into account the legal rights given to journalists by the state, but also examines the levels of safety in which journalists operate. For example, India and Mexico have laws in place promising freedom and independence for the media, but they both rank poorly on the RSF index because of the danger commonly faced by journalists in those countries. Taiwan [ranks](#) at 42, compared to China at 177 and Hong Kong at 73.

Taiwan is the second highest-ranked country in East Asia in the 2019 index, behind only South Korea. From 2013 to 2018 Taiwan ranked the highest country in East Asia for press freedom, but was surpassed in 2019 by South Korea. Hong Kong has seen one of the most precipitous falls in media freedom in recent years, going from 34 [in 2010](#) to 73 in 2019.

The index gained RSF considerable attention, and has earned a reputation as a valuable tool in assessing a country's adherence to liberal values. [As noted](#) on RSF's website, the index is used by prestigious groups like the "UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the World Bank, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation in determining the allocation of development aid. Their reliance on the Index has helped to increase the attention that governments pay to freedom of information" (RSF, Presentation). Alviani, during our interview on March 26, 2019, said the following:

Our biggest advocacy tool is the map of the freedom of the press and RSF world press freedom index. This is used to engage with governments and engage with the local populations because of course an index means that you set countries over other countries, territories over other territories. This creates a lot of interest and sometimes frustration from people who would not understand why their country is ranked so low. And this is very interesting for us because it allows to start a discussion. And of course it

allows to impact because some countries would be proud to have a better ranking. Some countries, some politicians might want to act.

In addition to the work that goes into the index, as an advocacy NGO focusing on media freedom, RSF publishes articles relating to press freedom violations, trains and offers support to journalists in dangerous regions, conducts research and publishes in-depth reports on topics relating to freedom of information, and interacts with intergovernmental organizations and governments in order to promote adherence to freedom of the press.

3.2 The Opening of the Taipei Office

On July 18, Reporters Without Borders officially opened its first Asian bureau in Taipei. Led by Cedric Alviani, a French expatriate who's lived in Taiwan for many years, the bureau was created to enhance RSF's influence in East Asia. The Taipei bureau is responsible for tracking the press freedom of and engaging with journalists in the following countries and territories: Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, and Mongolia.

In addition to Alviani, the bureau employs one full-time Taiwanese staffer (who preferred to remain anonymous and is referred to as Anonymous A). This employee shoulders much of the responsibility for writing RSF's Mandarin publications and conducting research of Mandarin sources. Alviani, meanwhile, handles most of the communication (in French) between the Taipei office and the headquarters in Paris. In addition to these two full-time staffers, RSF's Taipei bureau also hires part-time interns on a rolling basis and usually pays them a small remuneration. These interns include Taiwanese as well as foreign citizens living in Taipei, often students. Alviani and the full-time Taiwanese employee particularly value interns who are native English-speakers,

because neither of them are. I served as an intern at RSF's Taipei office from October 2018 to January 2019.

The Taipei office occupies an important position at RSF as the organization's gateway into the Asia Pacific region. The Paris headquarters relies on employees at the Taipei office to have the most knowledge and understanding of the region. Only with their perspective can the headquarters best adapt its global mandate to affect the region.

Alviani explained the imperative of having a bureau in the region:

Democracies around China, which are somehow threatened not only by the Chinese model but also inside by the temptation of authoritarianism from some of their politicians, so the action we do is very important. It's somehow a new territory because from Paris, we could gather information coming from Asia but there was no way we could act on Asia; there was no way we could have a successful communication with Japan or Korea while not understanding their work culture, not understanding how they think.

The anonymous Taiwanese full-time staffer I interviewed on March 26, 2019, Anonymous A, elaborated on why it is important that RSF has an office in the region: "By establishing ourselves here we have that local reach. We can do things we cannot do from Paris. We can talk to press freedom defenders from Asia directly; we can interact with them in their own language. I think that makes a difference. And that will help to promote press freedom in all the territories we cover."

Paul Coppin, head of legal desk at RSF's Paris headquarters, who I interviewed on April 26, 2019, explained the symbiotic relationship between the Paris and Taipei offices. "It's the Taipei office who's the expert on the area, so I do nothing on any case without information provided by them. They are alerted. They know the situation. They know the context. They know the cases," Coppin said. "So when the Taipei office alerts me on a case, on a situation, I discuss it with my

colleagues at the advocacy office, and then we decide what course of action is the most efficient.” In summing up his interaction with the Taipei office, Coppin said this: “I depend on them to have the facts and they depend on me to take action.”

One of the most consistent activities of RSF’s Taipei office is the publishing of articles to RSF’s website relating to press freedom violations in China. During my time as an intern, these seemed to average about two per week. For example, on November 15, 2018, RSF [published an article](#) to its site that was written by employees in the Taipei bureau with the headline: “China: two financial journalists sentenced to jail terms.” The article detailed the sentencing of two financial journalists who exposed an ongoing government investigation against the chairman of a powerful dairy company. Below is a screenshot of this article:



NEWS

November 15, 2018 - Updated on November 21, 2018

China: two financial journalists sentenced to jail terms



ORGANISATION

 RSF_en

RSF urges Chinese authorities to release two financial journalists sentenced last month to jail terms for the simple act of revealing the existence of an investigation against the chairman of Yili Industrial Group, a powerful dairy company.

Figure 3.1 Financial Journalists Article

Source: RSF

RSF's articles usually follow a standard format. A large bold headline introduces the main topic, then an isolated paragraph with font slightly larger than the article's text follows, which proclaims RSF's position on the topic.

This is followed by the article itself, in slightly smaller font. The article begins with about two paragraphs relating the facts of the story in a standard news format, a simple inverted pyramid structure with the most important information coming first. For this article, the following two paragraphs related the substance of the events (bolded words appear as in article).

On October 24, a court in the Chinese Autonomous Province of Inner Mongolia sentenced financial reporters **Zou Guangxiang** and **Liu Chengkun** to prison terms of one year and eight months, respectively, on the charge of "picking quarrels and provoking troubles." Their sentencing comes after having revealed the existence of an investigation against Pan Gang the chairman of the dairy group Yili, from the region.

Zou was arrested in Beijing in March, two days after disclosing on his blog the existence of the investigation, information which became viral and caused a 3.5% fall in the share price of the company. Liu took some elements of the story and published them as fiction, probably to protect himself, which did not prevent his arrest a few days later. (RSF 2018)

Then the article will quote an RSF representative—for articles written in the Taipei bureau this is Alviani—declaring RSF's position on the matter, often condemning the authorities in the country for the press freedom violation and urging them to release detained reporters. For example, below is the paragraph quoting Alviani in this story about a Chinese court sentencing financial reporters to jail time (italics are as they appear in the article).

"These two journalists have done their job by bringing crucial information to the public's attention and it is outrageous that it costed them their freedom, said Cédric Alviani, director of RSF's East Asia office, who condemns "the policy of terror put in place by the Chinese authorities to replace independent journalism with a new media order based on censorship and propaganda." (RSF 2018)

After the quote, a final paragraph will briefly explain the overall situation for media freedom in the country and mention how the country scores on the RSF global press freedom index. In this case (hyperlinks are as appears in the article):

China is one of the world's most egregious jailers of journalists, holding **more than 60 professional and non-professional journalists** behind bars. In the **2018 World Press Freedom Index** published by RSF, the country stagnates at 176 out of 180. (RSF 2018)

The research done by employees in the Taipei office for these articles is usually reading of secondary news sources, though sometimes might also involve communicating with people on the ground with more knowledge of the events. After a draft of the article is finalized in the Taipei office, usually in English by an intern, it is translated into French by Alviani, who then sends this French draft to the Paris headquarters for approval. Once it is approved, it is sent back to the Taipei office. Because RSF publishes its articles in both French and English, this approved French article must then be translated back into English, and finally both the French and English versions are published.

At the time of this writing, RSF's articles are usually not published in Mandarin, which is a problem for RSF's mission of advocating press freedom in the region. It is a goal of the RSF Taipei office to build the capacity necessary to regularly publish its articles in Mandarin.

Though the articles are only published in French and English, they are shared by RSF's twitter accounts in simplified and traditional characters, as well as by its English-language account. They are also shared on Facebook and LinkedIn.

In addition to the articles, RSF's Taipei bureau has sought to build connections in territories which it covers but in which it does not have an office. Alviani has taken

multiple trips to Hong Kong since the Taipei office's inception to meet with journalists there and take part in events relating to press freedom. Alviani and the Taiwanese employee took trips to South Korea and Japan to hold discussions with journalists and meet with politicians to promote media freedom. They traveled to Seoul to hold a press conference and release the 2018 press freedom index. Also in 2018, they traveled to Tokyo to take part in an open discussion with journalists there regarding sexual misconduct that female journalists often face.

In some cases, RSF's Taipei office takes steps to reward defenders of freedom of information in East Asia who have faced dangerous situations. For example, after Liu Xia, the wife of Liu Xiaobo, went to Germany in exile in 2018, RSF's Taipei office took steps to fly an acquaintance of hers to Germany to present her with an RSF prize that the NGO had awarded to her late husband.

Employees at RSF's Taipei office sometimes help the Paris headquarters fill out petitions to the United Nations regarding journalists in East Asia receiving mistreatment at the hands of authorities. As will be discussed in detail in the following section, staffers at the Taipei office sometimes procure documentation of human rights abuses against journalists in China. The RSF Paris headquarters then uses this documentation to petition the United Nations to take action against Chinese authorities.

The Taipei office is also supposed to raise money through soliciting philanthropic donations. The Paris headquarters wishes the Taipei bureau to eventually become economically self-sustaining. But this effort is still in its early stages.

Networking is another function of the office. Employees at the Taipei office commonly go to functions to broaden their base of contacts in the media, government, civil, and private sectors.

Alviani told me he would like to expand the Taipei office in both size and scope. But because funds and bureaucratic approval is limited at this time, the office seems likely to only have two full-time staffers for some time.

3.3 The Case of Huang Qi and the United Nations

In this section, I will examine advocacy done by RSF for Huang Qi, a Chinese journalist and blogger who has been held in prison in China since November 2016. Much of the research and legal documentation on this case was handled by RSF's Taipei bureau, before being finalized by RSF's Paris headquarters and forwarded to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which later issued a subsequent statement condemning Chinese authorities' treatment of the journalist and urging Chinese authorities to release him. Because this initiative, shouldered by Taiwanese employees in RSF's Taipei office (the full-time Taiwanese staffer and a part-time Taiwanese intern), garnered a response from the UN, it is a crucial case study of how NGOs act as a gateway for Taiwanese people to affect intergovernmental organizations from which they're excluded.

A native of China's Sichuan province, Huang Qi made a name for himself by blogging about local government negligence that allowed for the construction of shoddy buildings that easily collapsed during the catastrophic 2008 Sichuan earthquake and may have greatly exacerbated the human toll of the disaster. In 1998, Huang and his wife created a website called 64 Tianwang, which originally focused on bringing to light

cases of human trafficking. Over time though, the site expanded its coverage to include articles on an array of human rights-related topics considered sensitive to the Chinese Communist Party, including the Falun Gong and the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Huang was also a frequently [quoted source](#) in international media coverage of the 2008 earthquake.

While Huang has been detained since 2016, this most recent and ongoing detention is just one of many prison terms he has served since 2000. He has been in and out of prison a number of times since 2000. In that time-span, RSF has bestowed on Huang its Cyber-Freedom Prize in 2004 and named 64 Tianwang [the winner](#) of its Press Freedom Prize in 2016.

In late 2018 and early 2019, during which time I was an intern at RSF's Taipei office, Huang Qi was the subject of considerable attention. Employees in RSF's Taipei office had been tracking Huang's case since his detention in 2016, both through direct sources and secondary news sources. For example, in September 2018 RSF published [an article](#) with the headline: "China: RSF press freedom laureate falls victim to violence in detention again." The article detailed allegations of torture against Huang Qi and described his deteriorating health in prison while being denied medical treatment.

But articles to RSF's website were not the only way RSF's Taipei office advocated for Huang Qi that winter. In early November, the full-time Taiwanese staffer of RSF's Taipei bureau, who shared her experience with me for this thesis on condition of anonymity, conducted extensive research into the case of Huang Qi for the purpose of petitioning the UN to condemn China's treatment of him. A Taiwanese intern also contributed research to the petition. The intended audience of the petition was the UN's

Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which falls under the umbrella of the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In order to file this petition, employees at RSF's Taipei bureau filled out a [model questionnaire](#) that can be accessed easily on the website of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Below is one section of the model questionnaire:

II. Circumstances surrounding torture

- A. Date and place of arrest and subsequent torture
- B. Identity of force(s) carrying out the initial detention and/or torture (police, intelligence services, armed forces, paramilitary, prison officials, other)
- C. Were any person, such as a lawyer, relatives or friends, permitted to see the victim during detention? If so, how long after the arrest?
- D. Describe the methods of torture used
- E. What injuries were sustained as a result of the torture?
- F. What was believed to be the purpose of the torture?
- G. Was the victim examined by a doctor at any point during or after his/her ordeal? If so, when? Was the examination performed by a prison or government doctor?
- H. Was appropriate treatment received for injuries sustained as a result of the torture?
- I. Was the medical examination performed in a manner which would enable the doctor to detect evidence of injuries sustained as a result of the torture? Were any medical reports or certificates issued? If so, what did the reports reveal?
- J. If the victim died in custody, was an autopsy or forensic examination performed and which were the results?

(UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, model questionnaire)

In filling out this questionnaire, Taiwanese citizens at RSF's Taipei office produced a much more thorough account of Huang Qi's ordeal than could be done for one of RSF's short articles. The model questionnaire more closely resembles a legal document that might be used in a court case than a typical advocacy petition.

When finished, the aforementioned Taiwanese full-time employee of RSF's Taipei office forwarded the document to Paul Coppin, head of legal desk at RSF's Paris headquarters. Coppin then submitted the completed questionnaire to the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture via email on November 09, 2018.

RSF published [an article](#) on November 13, 2018 with the headline, "China: RSF submits the case of journalist Huang Qi to UN Special Rapporteur on Torture." In addition to announcing that RSF had filed a case with the UN accusing Chinese authorities of torturing Huang Qi, the article summarized the issue of Huang Qi's imprisonment and alleged torture. "On Friday, RSF filed a petition with the **UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** to urge the United Nations to publicly challenge China on the torture of Huang Qi," read the article (RSF 2018).

It quoted Cédric Alviani, director of RSF's Taipei bureau, as saying, "On the rare visits allowed to them, Huang Qi's lawyers found that Huang was the victim of **repeated beatings and denials of medical treatment**, which is clearly torture because of his state of health." The article went on to explain that "Since November 28, 2016, the journalist has been detained without trial ... The mistreatments inflicted on Huang, which appear to be intended to force the journalist to plead guilty, are **all the more worrying** because Huang is seriously ill in the kidneys, heart and liver" (RSF 2018).

A bit over a month later, the UN responded. In what amounted to a resounding success for RSF, and a searing rebuke to the Chinese Communist Party, the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) expressed concern over the alleged torture of Huang Qi, reiterated an April 2018 opinion by the UN's Working

Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) that found Huang Qi's imprisonment arbitrary, and highlighted a statement by the WGAD urging China to release Huang Qi. One intriguing part of the statement, which was [published on the official website](#) of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, detailed an exchange between UN human rights officials and Chinese authorities:

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has been in contact with the authorities regarding the case. The Government has responded to the communication leading to the adoption of the Opinion, but has not yet implemented it. More recently, the Government has informed the WGAD that Mr. Huang was being "provided with adequate medical treatment (...) that his illness is under control, and he is in sound state mentally. The alleged torture is inconsistent with facts." (OHCHR, 2018)

We see here an example of United Nations officials pressuring Chinese authorities over human rights abuses due to a case report written by Taiwanese citizens and submitted to the UN indirectly through an NGO.

Seong-Phil Hong, chair-rapporteur of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and one of the UN human rights experts credited with forming the UN's expressed concern about Huang Qi, confirmed to me over email that the decision was made after consulting RSF's model questionnaire.

Regarding the three tiers of advocacy influence I outlined in the analytical approach section in the first chapter of this thesis, it is clear this case should be classified as tier three, the tier with the sharpest focus and highest efficacy. This case study fits this tier because it is a time-specific piece of advocacy aimed at influencing the behavior of specific actors, and because we are able to rule out confounding variables.

3.4 Taiwan's Perspective on the Global Stage

The Huang Qi case offers a clear confirmation of the hypothesis of this thesis, that NGOs can act as middlemen for Taiwanese people to influence intergovernmental institutions from which they are excluded. In this case, Taiwanese citizens influenced operations and discourse at the United Nations by going through Reporters Without Borders. Because Taiwanese citizens are not allowed to work at the UN, they could not have played a direct or formal role. For example, a Taiwanese citizen could not have received the petition as a UN staffer, he or she could not have been involved in the UN's decision-making process as a UN human rights worker in determining how to respond, and he or she could not have subsequently communicated to China on behalf of the UN.

However, as we have seen, it is possible for a Taiwanese citizen to work for an NGO that has consultative status in the UN, and to influence UN policy through work done under that NGO's mandate. One crucial thing that makes this possible is Taiwan's adherence to liberal democratic values surrounding human rights. This makes Taiwan a safe place for global civil society groups to operate, creating jobs for Taiwanese citizens that may involve indirectly interacting with intergovernmental organizations.

Beyond establishing that Taiwanese people are able to influence intergovernmental organizations through NGOs, it is important to ask the question, does this influence via NGOs advance Taiwan's own foreign-policy interests? I argue that the answer is yes. Taiwan's own security relies on support from countries with similar democratic values, such as the United States. In fighting to uphold those values, Taiwanese people are working to maintain the ideological infrastructure that keeps them safe.

For example, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, Ian Easton, a scholar who once studied at National Chengchi University in Taipei, wrote an article titled “Strategic Standoff: The U.S.-China Rivalry and Taiwan,” for a think tank called The Project 2049 Institute, which [describes itself as](#) “a nonprofit research organization focused on promoting American values and security interests in the Indo-Pacific region.” In the 2016 article, Easton articulates the affinity many foreign policy professionals in Washington feel towards countries that support liberal democratic values: “PRC diplomats often assert that China is big and Taiwan is little, therefore constructive relations with China matter more, and it is in the American interest to compromise on Taiwan. This is a false argument. When it comes to freedom, human rights, and quality of government, Taiwan towers over China” (5).

The reason for this logic, posits Easton, lies in trust and comradery forged through common political values. “Experience has shown senior U.S. policymakers time and time again that nations that share democratic values are the best partners and worth defending. Common values generate common interests, which are the basis for making a common cause in addressing global challenges” (Easton 2016, 5).

A specific example of Taiwan’s adherence to liberal democratic values playing a crucial role in ensuring continued support from the United States can be found in the Taiwan Assurance Act, introduced to the United States Senate on March 26, 2019, and to the United States House of Representatives on April 1. A portion of [the act’s text](#) reads as follows:

It is the sense of Congress that the Department of State’s guidance regarding relations with Taiwan ... should be crafted giving due consideration to the fact that Taiwan is governed by a representative democratic government that is peacefully constituted through free and fair

elections that reflect the will of the people of Taiwan, and that Taiwan is a free and open society that respects universal human rights and democratic values. (U.S. Senate, 2019)

Because Taiwan's survival depends heavily on support from the United States, and the United States seeks to defend liberal democratic values around the world, Taiwan's adherence to human rights plays a huge role in ensuring Taiwan's continued sovereignty.

In the case of RSF's Taipei office advocating for Huang Qi, not only is Taiwan benefiting by its citizens framing global human rights discourse around Taiwan's own values, but also it is gaining an ideological victory at China's expense, as China faces being publicly shamed over its heavy-handed treatment of its own dissidents. By upholding human rights through NGOs, Taiwan maintains immeasurable soft power that is crucial to its own survival.

China has a very different idea of what should constitute human rights. Its vision includes economic and public safety privileges but rejects the ideas of many of the political rights espoused by the liberal world order, such as the freedom of people to choose their own leaders and the freedom of people to access uncensored information. As Ted Piccone [writes for Brookings](#), China has emerged as an active member of the UN Human Rights Council, participating with the aim to “1) block international criticism of its repressive human rights record, and 2) promote orthodox interpretations of national sovereignty and noninterference in internal affairs that weaken international norms of human rights, transparency, and accountability” (2018).

In trying to muzzle voices within the United Nations that are critical of China's human rights record, China has even sought to get NGOs expelled. Interestingly, RSF

itself has come under pressure from Beijing within the UN. Coppin told me in our interview over Skype on April 26, 2019, that about two years ago China requested that UN authorities eject RSF from the list of NGOs with consultative status at the UN. “China has been trying to take this status away from us because of the way we talk of Taiwan and Hong Kong,” Coppin said. According to him, Chinese dignitaries told UN officials: “Either you ask RSF to quit talking of Taiwan as a country, or you take away this consultative status.”

Coppin clarified that RSF does not take a position on Taiwanese independence or Hong Kong sovereignty, but simply ranks them differently on the press freedom index because the press freedom situation is drastically different between those three places. The index itself states that it ranks countries and regions. This avoids taking a stand about whether certain territories count as countries. Coppin said that RSF responded to the UN’s inquiries and clarified that RSF takes no position on the Taiwan and Hong Kong issues. RSF did not hear back again about the matter. Coppin said that RSF does not know whether or not they are in fact in danger of being thrown out of the UN.

China’s pressuring the UN to eject RSF shows that the ideological infrastructure that underpins human rights at the United Nations is under attack from China, which seeks to reshape the UN in its own image, deleting the influence of actors outside state control. It will be interesting to watch the future of civil-government relations at the UN, and whether China will ever succeed in expelling civil society actors.

In the case of RSF and its Taipei bureau, we are able to observe an interesting example of Taiwan playing a role in jockeying at the UN for the future of the meaning of human rights. Citizens of Taiwan, a country not recognized by the UN, are working to

uphold ethical norms that are threatened by China. By working to uphold rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, information, and religion, Taiwan is in effect undermining China's goal of rewriting the definition of human rights to adhere to its authoritarian vision.

Because RSF focuses on media freedom and frequently publishes content on the web, it is an influential player in shaping the global narrative. Constructivism maintains that narratives, especially surrounding sensitive topics like human rights, matter a great deal in the global discourse. "If the social world is linguistically constructed and reproduced through the act of communication, then the words we use and the narratives that we invoke matter a great deal to the social reality that is created" (Sterling-Folker 2013, 132).

Within the global contestation over the narrative of human rights, we are also able to see a sense of camaraderie between the people of Taiwan and their international counterparts who are fighting in the UN to preserve human rights. RSF has employees not just from France but also from Taiwan and other countries around the world. They come together at RSF to fight for a common cause, to work for something they believe in. This partnership is one of many dividends paid by Taiwan's soft power and adherence to democratic values.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I first examined the history of RSF, its working mandate, and how the organization has developed over the years. I then detailed the NGO's opening of its Taipei branch, and what this signaled about the organization's concerns about press freedom in the region. I then gave an overview of the activities taken up by staff

members at the Taipei office, before moving into a discussion of the case study of advocacy done for Chinese imprisoned journalist Huang Qi. Using both RSF's statements and those from the UN, I was able to investigate the concept of Taiwanese citizens using NGOs as a way to influence international institutions.

By examining the activities of RSF's Taipei bureau, and specifically its action in petitioning the UN on the case of Huang Qi, we are able to confirm the hypothesis, that Taiwanese people are able to use NGOs to influence intergovernmental organizations from which they're excluded, as well as to affect global discourse surrounding issues such as human rights. RSF's Taipei bureau offers evidence that civil society groups in Taiwan do not merely reflect Taiwan's own political values, but also project those values onto the world stage in a way that benefits Taiwan's foreign policy interests and national security.



Chapter 4 The Case of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights

In this chapter, I first detail the Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR), providing information on the NGO's origins within the context of Taiwan's democratization. I then outline TAHR's global interactions with international NGOs and alliances such as the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). I then move into an examination of the case study of a joint letter to the European Union, endorsed by TAHR, which encouraged European diplomats to broach certain topics during meetings with Chinese counterparts. I then look at statements made by the European Union about the proceedings, and I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how this case study provides support for the idea that Taiwanese citizens can use civil society organizations as a way to indirectly influence global political proceedings on topics such as human rights. I am able to confirm that the advocacy in question was considered by the relevant authorities, and I classify this case study into the second tier of advocacy influence.

4.1 The Organization's Beginnings and Current Activities

The Taiwan Association for Human Rights was founded in 1984, three years before Taiwan lifted martial law in 1987. A baby of Taiwan's democratization process, the NGO focused on domestic Taiwanese affairs for many years, but began translating United Nations documents pertaining to human rights into Mandarin in the late 1990s. After 2000, it began engaging with international NGOs. On [its website](#), TAHR outlines its intentions:

- Non-aligned with: government, political parties, financial groups, interest groups, or groups with specific political ideologies
- Aims to establish and improve human rights, and are devoted to strengthen human rights standards and protection mechanisms.

- Cares for individuals, groups, and communities, who suffer from threats or violence regardless of class, status, race, gender, belief, or nationality.
- Focuses its attention on domestic human rights issues, and cooperates with international human rights organizations on global human rights issues.

(TAHR, About TAHR)

Also on its website, TAHR describes its main responsibilities as individual case support, policy monitoring and advocacy, education, training, and cooperating with international human rights groups (TAHR, About TAHR).

The Taiwan Association for Human Rights now has two offices, one in Taipei and one in Kaohsiung, with eight staffers in the Taipei office and two in the Kaohsiung office. On a trip to the NGO's office, which is publicly disclosed and located a short walk from Civil Rights West Road, I was given a brochure that outlined TAHR's main areas of focus as the following: right to assembly and association, rights of personal freedom, internet freedom and privacy, right to housing, refugees, stateless persons, migrant workers and migrants, and international human rights conventions and protection mechanisms (TAHR, Brochure).

First and foremost, TAHR focuses on domestic activities to make sure Taiwan does not deviate from global human rights norms. Members of the organization do not take their rights for granted, as they understand that throughout much of Taiwan's history before the lifting of martial law, they could not have participated in such human rights work.

They therefore focus on ensuring the continuation of these rights in the face of a growing long-term threat from a rising authoritarian China intent on ruling over Taiwan in

the future. But, as mentioned before, international interaction has also been an integral part of TAHR's operations starting in the 2000s.

4.2 Global Interaction

While the Taiwan Association of Human Rights initially focused on defending human rights throughout Taiwan's democratization process, it began in the 2000s to engage in substantial international interaction. According to E-ling Chiu, TAHR's secretary general who I interviewed at her office at TAHR's Taipei headquarters on April 25, 2019 for this thesis, a breakthrough for TAHR's international operations came when members of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) visited Taiwan to meet with TAHR representatives. While here, FIDH representatives accompanied TAHR representatives on tours of prisons and discussed abolishing the death penalty. FIDH is an international federation of human rights NGOs. According to [its website](#), it is "an international human rights NGO federating 184 organizations from 112 countries. Since 1922, FIDH has been defending all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (FIDH, The Worldwide Human Rights Movement).

In 2009, TAHR became an official FIDH member. TAHR is now one of 184 NGOs that constitute FIDH's member organizations. [According to FIDH](#), member organizations make up a core pillar in its three-pillar structure, as visualized on its website (FIDH, Our Organization).

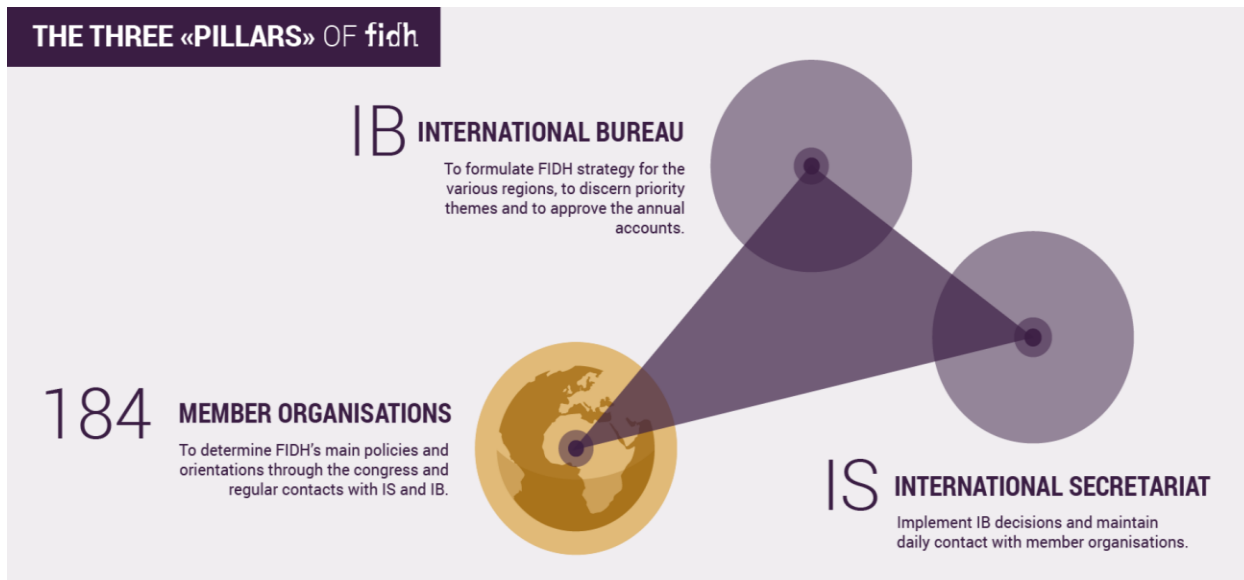


Figure 4.1 Three Pillars of FIDH

Source: FIDH

On [a webpage](#), FIDH explains that its operations revolve around its global partner organizations by combining their local know-how and cultural understanding with the FIDH headquarters' expertise in international law to take action on human rights abuses and encourage good governance (FIDH, Interaction: Local Presence - Global Action). In becoming a member of FIDH, TAHR became part of a global human rights movement in a more real and direct way.

This partnership will manifest itself in a high-profile way in October 2019, when FIDH will hold a Congress in Taipei. FIDH Congresses take place once every three years, and involve hundreds of participants from NGO partners in dozens of countries. At these meetings, important matters like leadership succession and admittance of new NGO members are deliberated. In [a press release](#) from FIDH after the 39th Congress, it announced the leadership accession of new FIDH president Dimitris Christopoulos, mentioned that delegates from its 178 member organizations from 120 countries

attended, and outlined areas the alliance will give particular attention to in the coming years (FIDH 2016).

In an email from TAHR and FIDH to the Taiwan Foreign Correspondents Club inviting journalists to cover a press conference about the upcoming Congress, TAHR and FIDH pitched the importance of the event:

For the first time in its nearly 100-year history, FIDH will hold its Congress in Asia. At the invitation TAHR, the Congress will take place in Taipei, Taiwan. From 21 to 25 October 2019, Taipei will become the human rights capital of the world, hosting around 400 human rights defenders from more than 100 countries.

The FIDH movement, Taiwanese civil society, international experts, local authorities, and foreign guests will gather to discuss the mounting threats to the universality of human rights and the possible strategies and responses to such challenges. (TAHR and FIDH 2019)

Holding FIDH's 40th Congress in Taipei will put center stage global concerns about China's rise and its determination to bowdlerize human rights discourse around the world. It will also reinforce Taiwan's status as a safe haven for civil society activity in Asia, and consequently reinforce Taiwan's status as a society quite different than that of mainland China, where a symposium like this would be out of the question due to China's repressive human rights record and iron-fisted approach to preventing meetings of civil groups, especially those which meet to discuss ideas pertaining to liberal values the Chinese Communist Party deems troublesome Western ideology that could destabilize China.

In holding the Congress in Taipei, FIDH is giving Taiwan the limelight, and also drawing the world's attention to the dire situation for human rights practitioners in China. The decision by FIDH is likely a sign that, in the minds of many in the global human rights community, China looms large as a threat to liberal democratic values, which

enjoyed a period of expansion after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but which now seem to be in retreat in the face of rising authoritarian countries like China, belligerent authoritarian countries like Russia, vulnerabilities in voting processes to hacking, and the rise of right-wing leaders with authoritarian tendencies in democracies like Turkey, the U.S., the Philippines, Brazil, and Hungary.

Taiwanese citizens at TAHR will play a central role in organizing the event and determining discussion topics for the meeting's agenda, according to Chiu. When I interviewed her, she did not divulge specific panel topics, but she said China and Russia will feature largely in the itinerary, as well as issues like LGBT rights, the death penalty, and migrant rights. When I visited TAHR's office, a FIDH representative was temporarily working there to assist in planning and logistics preparation for the event.

Playing such a fundamental role in FIDH's international Congress will likely provide ample opportunity for Taiwanese citizens at TAHR to play a big role in shaping upcoming global human rights discourse. It also seems likely that the Congress's proceedings will boost Taiwan's soft power while undermining China's ethical standing. But because this Congress is now still in the preliminary planning stages, I will not focus too much attention on it in this thesis.

In addition to its connection with FIDH, TAHR has worked with Forum Asia (Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development), a human rights NGO headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand, as well as the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), which [describes itself as](#), "an open and growing network consisting of more than 340 civil society organizations and individuals from 28 countries committed to advancing the rights of refugees in the Asia Pacific region" (APRRN, Who We Are).

In addition to working with these specific organizations, TAHR periodically joins coalitions of NGOs to make joint statements in areas of common interest. This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

4.3 The Case of the Joint Letter to the European Union

As part of its international interactions, TAHR often teams up with other NGOs around the world to issue joint statements on issues of shared importance. These statements are usually made with the intent of influencing relevant policymakers, often in advance of an important political event. In this section, I will use one joint statement as a case study to evaluate whether it was able to influence its target audience.

In June 2018, TAHR joined a coalition of NGOs in issuing a joint statement to the European Union (EU) roughly a month before a series of talks between the EU and China were to take place. The letter was addressed to Mr. Donald Tusk and Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Council and the president of the European Commission, respectively. The open letter addressed a long list of human rights concerns that the coalition of NGOs hoped the EU representatives would bring up while meeting with Chinese counterparts.

Among the statement's signatories, in addition to TAHR, were Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, FIDH, Freedom House, International Campaign for Tibet, Uyghur Human Rights Project, Frontline Defenders, and Human Rights in China, among others. The letter, which [can be accessed](#) on TAHR's website, opens by noting that the human rights situation in China "has further deteriorated" since 2017 (NGO Coalition 2018). The letter then moves into a discussion of Liu Xiaobo, a prominent pro-democracy writer, and Liu Xia, his widow, stating that Beijing "refused to

allow 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner and journalist Liu Xiaobo to leave the country to seek treatment for liver cancer, such that he died under state guard in July. The forthcoming EU-China summit will take place one year on from Liu Xiaobo's death" (NGO Coalition 2018).

The letter later explicitly requests that EU representatives urge Chinese authorities to release the poet and widow Liu Xia. It also brings up the case of Gui Minhai: "In January 2018, Chinese authorities forcibly disappeared Swedish citizen and bookseller Gui Minhai while he was traveling with Swedish diplomats. Their inability to visit him in detention violates China's obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations" (NGO Coalition 2018).

Also early on in the joint letter is a blunt statement criticizing EU inaction at a meeting with Chinese representatives about two weeks prior: "At the EU-China Strategic Dialogue on June 1, 2018, in Brussels, the EU once again did not publically challenge China over any human rights violations, ... publically mention a single human rights defender, or insist on immediate and unconditional releases of those wrongly imprisoned" (NGO Coalition 2018).

The letter goes on to give a thorough account of current human rights concerns relating to China, ranging from censorship to ethnic minority issues to forced television confessions:

Our organizations continue to document China's abusive campaign against independent civil society, ethnic and religious minorities, the rule of law, and press freedom. The Chinese government has created a comprehensive national security legal architecture that is misused by the authorities to silence dissent, censor information, and harass and prosecute human rights defenders. Authorities have subjected lawyers and human rights defenders to show trials, airing excerpted forced "confessions" on state television and social media. Police coerce

detainees' into complying through torture and other ill-treatment, denying access to lawyers, and holding them incommunicado for months.

The government oversees one of the strictest online censorship regimes in the world, has limited the public's access to censorship circumvention tools, and strengthened ideological control over education and mass media. The Chinese government has increasingly promoted its notion of "internet sovereignty" to rewrite accepted rules so that censorship and surveillance would become the norm globally.

Authorities in Tibetan-populated areas severely restrict religious freedom, speech, movement, and peaceful assembly, and have failed to respect Tibetans' culture, language, and traditions, or redress popular concerns about mining and land grabs by local officials. In Xinjiang, authorities have stepped up mass surveillance and adopted new policies denying Uyghurs cultural and religious rights. Hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs are being arbitrarily detained. Elsewhere, fears of retaliation for opposing Beijing's policies were heightened when Hong Kong courts last year disqualified four pro-democracy lawmakers and jailed three prominent pro-democracy student leaders. (NGO Coalition 2018)

The letter then addresses the EU and candidly evaluates the efficacy of the EU's efforts to curb China's human rights abuses. In a sober assessment, the letter reads:

The EU's June 2017 human rights dialogue with China unsurprisingly failed to produce any concrete results. Given China's refusal to engage in meaningful dialogue and the EU's unwillingness to set and maintain clear benchmarks for human rights improvements in China as a requirement for further dialogues, it is difficult to see how future rounds will produce a more useful outcome. Committing to another round of this exercise appears to be the only human- rights-related "deliverable" of the Strategic Dialogue, a decision that should be revisited. The EU calls for the releases of wrongfully detained activists but, in our view, lacks a strategy to achieve those goals, and imposes no consequences when China refuses to deliver.

The EU's broad and principled commitments to promoting human rights has not been matched in China with a willingness to act or a determination to at least achieve releases. Issuing statements calling for the release of arbitrarily held lawyers and activists is welcome but not enough - especially without consequences for a failure to release people. The Chinese government's human rights abuses inside and outside China increasingly present serious threats to the EU and its values, to key institutions on which the EU depends for peace, security, and human rights, and to the citizens of EU member states. Each missed opportunity by the EU to raise human rights at the highest levels tells China's

leadership - and people across China - that those concerns remain subordinated to other issues, even at the expense of the freedom and safety of EU member state citizens. In sum, the EU's failure to robustly challenge China's abusive conduct helps enable it. (NGO Coalition 2018)

After this disillusioned commentary on the EU's efforts to steer China in the direction of liberal human rights norms, the joint statement moves on to concrete recommendations on how EU representatives should best go about bringing up human rights issues with China:

- Publicly and repeatedly call - before, during, and after the summit- for the release of Liu Xia, Wang Quanzhang, Tashi Wangchuk, Ilham Tohti, Lee Ming-che, and Gui Minhai, among many others detained for non-internationally recognized crimes and solely for exercising their human rights, and announce an EU strategy to ensure their releases;
- Invoke the EU's June 2016 China strategy to suspend the human rights dialogue with China until it can make meaningful contributions to the promotion of rights, and, in the meantime, pursue a "shadow" dialogue with human rights activists from across China who would welcome such an interaction with the EU;
- Identify specific human rights issues that the Chinese government needs to address as a strategic priority for the EU and its member states;
- Adopt new Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on human rights in China; and
- Commit to publicly marking the first anniversary of Liu Xiaobo's death in July, the twentieth anniversary of China's signing, but not ratifying, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in October, and the thirtieth anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown in June 2019. (NGO Coalition 2018)

The letter then reiterates the importance of the EU standing up for human rights issues in China, before ending with a list of the signatories of the joint statement. The joint statement is an important example of TAHR taking part in a time-specific act of advocacy that bridged the interests of many different international NGOs, both those

that specialize in China-related issues and those that maintain global mandates.

For the purpose of this thesis, this joint statement is an important document because it offers an example of Taiwanese citizens, through an NGO, taking part in an effort to influence an organization (the EU) from which they're excluded. Of course, Taiwan is not excluded from the EU in the same way that it's excluded from intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations, as the European Union excludes all non-European countries. However, this case study nonetheless represents a situation in which Taiwanese people seek to influence international institutions and global discourse relating to human rights.

Also worth noting is that the Chinese Communist Party insists, often in response to criticism that Taiwan is unfairly excluded from international fora, that Taiwan's perspective is not excluded but represented just as the interests of other Chinese provinces are represented; therefore, it is interesting to note that according to the Chinese representatives interacting with European counterparts, Taiwan is supposedly also represented, although of course anyone with Taiwanese citizenship would not be allowed to take part.

We will now turn to the question, was TAHR (along with the other NGO signatories to the joint statement) successful in influencing the EU's interaction with China and shaping subsequent human rights discourse?

The joint statement from the EU and China following the EU-China Summit on July 16, 2018 was anticlimactic and only made brief mention of human rights. "The EU and China agreed to conduct exchanges on human rights at the bilateral and international level on the basis of equality and mutual respect, including in the context of

UN human rights mechanisms,” read [a statement](#) issued on July 17. “Both sides welcomed the holding of their Human Rights Dialogue in China in July” (EU and China 2018).

However, this was a joint statement agreed to by both the EU and China, which explains why the human rights portion of the statement was relatively toothless. More significant developments in the realm of human rights took place a week earlier, when on July 9-10 in Beijing the annual EU-China Human Rights Dialogue was held. In a monumental breakthrough, on July 10, China released Liu Xia, allowing her to travel to take up exile in Germany. “Liu Xia, the widow of the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, has arrived in Berlin, having left Beijing after almost eight years of living under house arrest and days before the anniversary of **her husband’s death**,” read [an article](#) in The Guardian on July 10 (Kuo 2018).

The Liu Xia breakthrough of course cannot be credited to the NGO joint statement alone. Liu Xia’s release came after fierce efforts not just from civil society groups, but also journalists, scholars, diplomats, and elected officials. And it is impossible to know what exactly convinced the top echelons of China’s leadership to decide to release her. Some observers suggested it may have been an effort by Xi Jinping to garner the goodwill of German Chancellor Angela Merkel to capitalize on global dislike of United States President Donald Trump.

But Liu Xia’s release nonetheless represents a huge victory for TAHR and the other NGOs who drafted the joint statement. Liu Xia’s release was one of the most high-profile human rights breakthroughs in China during the Xi Jinping era, and TAHR can rightfully claim to have taken part in the global effort to bring about that breakthrough.

In addition to the release of Liu Xia, the EU issued [a statement](#) detailing the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue of 2018. Significantly, the EU's statement expresses many of the same concerns brought up by the joint statement published by TAHR and other NGOs, and it calls for the release of a long list of individuals who are in prison for human rights-related activity. Prisoners the EU urged China to release included names that the NGO joint statement also mentioned, including Gui Minhai, Wang Quanzhang, Ilham Tohti, Lee Ming-che, and Tashi Wangchuk. Below is a portion of the EU's statement:

The EU also stated its expectation that all detained individuals be allowed to be represented by a lawyer of their choosing, be given the possibility of meeting their family members, have access to appropriate medical assistance when required, and have allegations of their torture and mistreatment promptly investigated.

Participants also discussed the promotion of freedom of religion and belief, and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, especially Tibetans and Uighurs. The system of political re-education camps which has been established in Xinjiang is of particular concern.

Other issues raised include the death penalty, systemic problems in the criminal justice system, including cases of arbitrary detention, restrictions on freedom of expression and association, and as well as the implementation of China's Foreign NGO Activity Management Law.

The promotion of human rights in international fora and the need to implement recommendations from international human rights bodies were also discussed, also in view of China's upcoming Universal Periodic Review in November 2018. (EU 2018)

Several other things that both the EU statement and the NGO joint statement both emphasize are the arbitrary detention of Uyghurs in re-education camps in Xinjiang, the repression of Tibetans, and allegations of torture.

A European Union official who took part in the July 2018 EU-China Human Rights Dialogue (who requested anonymity and who I refer to as Anonymous C)

confirmed that he/she and other EU officials read the joint letter and took its contents into account when preparing to interact with their Chinese counterparts.

Regarding my classification system explained in the analytical approach section of Chapter 1, I put this case study into tier two, the tier with the second-highest efficacy. This is because it goes beyond simply publishing statements to the public and targets a specific audience, hoping to influence their behavior at an event. The advocacy, however, cannot be easily extricated from confounding variables, due to the high volume of information published on the same topic that could have also influenced the European Union decision-makers.

4.4 Conclusion

The NGO joint statement to the European Union and the EU's statement from the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue offer an example of global NGOs trying to affect the actions taken by political leaders through advocacy. In this case, it also gives us the chance to observe a Taiwanese NGO playing a role in that process. Was TAHR able to influence global political interactions that Taiwanese citizens could not have formally taken part in? I argue yes. While it is impossible to know exactly what information EU leaders consulted, in addition to the joint letter, before entering into human rights discussions with China, I posit that the NGO joint letter played a role in shaping how the EU handled the talks with China and what issues were most important to them. Evidence for this, I argue, is that the EU explicitly mentioned many of the same human rights defenders brought up in the NGO letter, most notably Liu Xia, but also Gui Minhai, Wang Quanzhang, Ilham Tohti, Lee Ming-che, and Tashi Wangchuk; also the EU condemned China for many of the same issues touched upon in the letter, such as the

situations in Xinjiang and Tibet, as well as allegations of torture among human rights prisoners.

In this case study, we see that although Taiwanese citizens cannot directly take part in an international forum such as the annual EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, they can make an indirect impact through advocacy done through non-governmental organizations. An important dimension of this impact relates to the global discourse surrounding human rights. As discussed earlier, China is in the midst of a long-term attempt to alter the international understanding of human rights to match its own authoritarian values.

E-ling Chiu, in an interview on April 26, 2019, elaborated on why the EU likes to interact with Taiwan: “For EU they also believe that Taiwan plays an important role to affect China because we speak the same language, we can speak and write Mandarin, so they believe that the democracy of Taiwan or the freedom of Taiwan” could maybe have some effect on the Chinese government. EU leaders hereby likely see Taiwan as a linchpin in nudging China towards liberal political values.

As Sterling-Folker (2013) noted, “social contexts, and hence identities and interests, may be consciously reshaped by particularly shrewd or conscientious individuals” (131). Although China’s leaders may be trying to erase human rights as we know them, through efforts such as the NGO joint letter to the EU, Taiwanese citizens are using NGOs like TAHR to buttress the liberal democratic understanding of human rights and oppose China’s ideological campaign against it. As discussed earlier, these efforts benefit Taiwan’s own interests and national security because human rights are

an important part of the country's soft power and appeal to the United States, its main ally.



Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the question, can Taiwan's civil society act as an avenue for it to influence international arenas from which it is excluded? I've also probed the ability of Taiwan to impact global discourse pertaining to human rights. In addition to these fundamental questions, I analyzed whether Taiwan's influence via NGOs worked in accordance with Taiwan's own interests and strengthened its national security.

The answer to these questions, as I argued in this thesis, is yes. Taiwan's civil society does provide a path for Taiwanese citizens to influence international institutions from which they're excluded. This influence often makes significant contributions to global human rights discourse. Taiwan's interests and national security are enhanced by its NGO diplomacy, owing to how human rights NGOs strengthen Taiwan's soft power, reinforce its partnership with the United States, and undercut the Chinese Communist Party's moral legitimacy.

I reached this conclusion by examining two case studies: advocacy done by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and advocacy done by the Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR).

RSF, an international NGO headquartered in Paris that advocates press freedom, operates a foreign bureau in Taipei. A Taiwanese full-time employee and a Taiwanese part-time intern at the Taipei bureau worked to complete a case report on allegations of torture that a Chinese journalist named Huang Qi suffered while in prison. When the case report was finished, the Taiwanese full-time employee forwarded it to the Paris headquarters, where Paul Coppin, head of legal desk for RSF, sent the case report to

the United Nations by email. A little more than a month later, the United Nations responded to the torture allegations, repeating an earlier opinion by the UN that recognized Huang Qi's detention as arbitrary, and urging Chinese authorities to release him.

The case is a confirmation of the hypothesis that Taiwanese people can influence intergovernmental organizations through NGOs.

In the case of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, a Taiwanese NGO headquartered in Taipei that engages in both domestic and international advocacy, I looked at the NGO's participation in a joint letter to the European Union in anticipation of the upcoming EU-China Summit and EU-China Human Rights dialogue. The letter touched upon a number of pressing human rights issues including Liu Xia, political prisoners arbitrarily detained, ethnic repression in Xinjiang and Tibet, and online censorship. After the Dialogue took place, the European Union issued a statement detailing issues that were brought up during the human rights discussion. The list of issues on the EU's agenda for the meeting mirrored many of the same concerns mentioned in the NGO joint letter. In addition, Liu Xia was released by China so she could take refuge in Germany.

The case shows how Taiwanese NGOs collaborate with international NGOs on issues of common interest for time-specific advocacy that plays a crucial role in shaping the global discourse on human rights.

Taiwan's track II diplomacy via NGOs has both strengths and weaknesses. Its main strengths are its ability to solicit solidarity from Taiwan's most important ally, the United States, and its capacity to utilize soft power to enhance global admiration for the

democratic island. The weaknesses of Taiwan's NGO diplomacy are its limitations. Taiwan cannot play a direct role in many global decision-making processes, leaving it vulnerable to global decisions that could end up running counter to its own national interests.

Taiwan seems likely to be restricted from international fora for the foreseeable future, as China shows no signs of abating its campaign to exclude Taiwan from the global stage. Civil society interactions will therefore remain a crucial part of Taiwan's limited geopolitical toolkit for some time.

In providing the government of Taiwan with policy recommendations, I would first encourage the government to continue and expand ongoing efforts to foster NGO development, particularly at the international level. Taiwan's international civil society seems to have made great strides when it comes to human rights, media freedom, health, migrant rights, and religion. More could be done at the government level to lock in these gains and encourage further development.

One important aspect is funding. Of course, non-governmental organizations must retain independence from the government, but as long as Taiwan's government does not prioritize certain groups based on partisan preferences, and awards funding in a way that treats NGOs from all issue areas equally, then conflicts of interest can be avoided or mitigated. NGOs are cash-strapped everywhere in the world and Taiwan is no exception. Taiwan should continue and expand ongoing grant schemes designed to get Taiwanese civil society activities off the ground. In addition, the Taiwanese government should offer grant schemes to civil society members to attend conferences abroad where they can interact with their foreign counterparts. This would particularly

help young civil society workers and start-up NGOs, which often lack funding to take part in such activities. Funds should also be allocated to coalitions of foreign NGOs who want to come to Taiwan to hold conferences. Taiwan should even consider offering partial funding to international NGOs who are interested in opening a foreign bureau in Taiwan. Providing these funding structures will augment streams of interaction and ensure that global civil society remains a dependable soft power tool in Taiwan's limited foreign policy arsenal.

Another policy recommendation I would make to the Taiwanese government is to try to increase the efficacy of civil society in Taiwan vis-a-vis China. Because China is seen by much of the world's public as oppressive and overbearing, Taiwan should support Chinese citizens fighting to liberalize Chinese society. This could mean offering Taiwanese citizenship or residency to Chinese dissidents who could face persecution if they return to China, or providing funding opportunities to Chinese NGOs, or even sponsoring trips for Chinese NGO workers to travel to Taiwan and interact with their Taiwanese counterparts. By supporting Chinese civil society workers, Taiwan will achieve victories in its ideological battle with China over political legitimacy, helping Chinese citizens rebut the Chinese Communist Party's logic that Chinese culture and values are not compatible with democracy.

Further research on Taiwan's civil society would benefit the world's understanding of the small but strategically important and economically and politically vibrant island. Much news coverage and scholarly articles on Taiwan's international exclusion focus on its lack of formal representation but do not mention the indirect role Taiwanese citizens play in global institutions through NGO advocacy. To only observe

what is lacking in the open is to turn a blind eye to all that is happening under the surface. I hope my thesis was able to shed light on this overlooked but important aspect in Taiwan's struggle to find an international voice.

To briefly expand this conclusion to discuss where Taiwan's political and civil situation stands within the greater global context, we must now reflect upon the current moment as one of democratic withdrawal. In 2019, the human rights NGO Freedom House published [a report](#) with a dire diagnosis; it concluded that authoritarianism is solidifying in countries with already illiberal politics, while democracy is backsliding in states assumed to be bastions of liberal political values since the end of the Cold War, as populism erodes democratic institutions and rule of law (Freedom House 2019). In Turkey, the United States, China, the Philippines, Hungary, and Brazil, world leaders are steering their countries in more authoritarian directions with less institutional restraints on their powers.

But not (yet) Taiwan. In our current moment of authoritarian resurgence and democratic decline, Taiwan is a crucial silver lining in an otherwise unsettling global trend. Since its democratization in the 1990s, Taiwan has acted as an inspiring global leader that has consistently doubled down on democracy rather than abandon liberal values for populist tribalism.

Over and over again, the Taiwanese people show themselves as tenacious and unrelenting in the face of isolation and pressure from China. If the world's future is one of open societies, rule of law, democratic principles, and vibrant civil activity, it will be in large part thanks to efforts by the resilient Taiwanese people at places like the Taiwan Association for Human Rights and the Taipei bureau of Reporters Without Borders.

Further research on civil society in Taiwan is needed, but also research examining global civil society interactions and how these interactions play a role in counteracting the world's current trend of democratic retreat. Valuable insights would be yielded by researchers who investigate how international NGOs are reacting to this distressing trend, and if they play a distinctive role in buttressing democracy during times of political stress. Such research would result not only in salient additions to the cannon of civil society literature to allow scholars to better understand NGOs, but also guide best practices for NGOs operating in a post-Pax Americana world where authoritarian leaders feel unbridled.

Civil society in the 21st century operates in a world much different than the one following the end of the Cold War, when new democracies bloomed and liberal notions of human rights enjoyed unchallenged moral authority. We are now in an era with a multitude of actors of nuanced power dynamics, each with interpretations of human rights that may not align with those of established norms. This multipolar world's major players include a newly populist United States, a rising China, a relatively reliable European Union, a resurgent Russia, a nascent India, and others. NGOs navigating this terrain need tenacity and dexterity to best protect the norms and values that will ensure a safe and prosperous future.

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