Araştırma Makalesi

TAIWAN'S ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY UNDER TSAI ING-WEN'S PROGRESSIVE POLICIES*

Tsai Ing-Wen'in İlerici Politikaları Kapsamında Tayvan'ın Ontolojik Güvenliği

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Abstract

This article investigates the impact of Tsai Ing-wen's policies on Taiwan's ontological security, emphasizing her transformative leadership and its implications for national identity and stability. The importance of this topic lies in understanding how Tsai Ing-wen's progressive approach has fortified Taiwan's ontological security amidst a complex geopolitical landscape. Despite the significance of this area, there is a research gap regarding the specific influence of Tsai Ing-wen's policies on Taiwan's ontological security. This article uses an ontological security framework based on leadership studies, with a view to studying the effects of Tsai's policies on Taiwan's sense of identity and sovereignty through quantitative research methodology. By examining Taiwan's relations with China and international positioning, the study explores the contribution of Tsai's leadership to Taiwan's ontological security. The research findings reveal that her policies, focused on asserting Taiwan's autonomy, fostering democratic values, and enhancing international engagement, have strengthened Taiwan's national identity and stability. In summary, the research demonstrates how her leadership approach has positively influenced Taiwan's sense of self amidst a complex geopolitical landscape. This study brings important insight into how to understand ontological security within the context of Taiwan's political landscape through its examination of such a dynamic relationship among leaders, policy and identity.

Keywords: *Taiwan, Tsai Ing-Wen Administration, Ontological Security, Geopolitical Landscape, Democratic Governance.*

Öz

Bu makale, Tsai Ing-Wen'in politikalarının Tayvan'ın ontolojik güvenliği üzerindeki etkisini araştırmanın yanı sıra Tsai'ın dönüştürücü liderliğini ve bunun ulusal kimlik ve istikrar üzerindeki etkilerinin nasıl geliştiğini incelemektedir. Bu konunun önemi, Tsai Ing-Wen'in ilerici yaklaşımının karmaşık bir jeopolitik ortamda

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Tayvan'ın ontolojik güvenliğini nasıl güçlendirdiğini anlamakta yatmaktadır. Ontolojik güvenlik çalışmalarının son dönemde artan önemine rağmen, Tsai Ing-Wen'in politikalarının Tayvan'ın ontolojik güvenliği üzerindeki spesifik etkisine ilişkin bir araştırma boşluğu bulunmaktadır. Bu makale, Tsai'nin politikalarının Tayvan'ın kimlik ve egemenlik duygusu üzerindeki etkilerini nicel araştırma metodolojisi aracılığıyla incelemek amacıyla liderlik çalışmalarına dayanan ontolojik bir güvenlik çerçevesi kullanmaktadır. Çalışma, Tayvan'ın Çin ile ilişkilerini ve uluslararası konumunu inceleyerek, Tsai'nin liderliğinin Tayvan'ın ontolojik güvenliğine katkısını araştırmaktadır. Araştırma bulguları, Tayvan'ın özerkliğini savunmaya, demokratik değerleri geliştirmeye ve uluslararası katılımı geliştirmeye odaklanan politikaların Tayvan'ın ulusal kimliğini ve istikrarına nasıl bir katkı sağladığını açıklamaktadır. Araştırma, Tsai'ın liderlik yaklaşımının karmaşık bir jeopolitik ortamda Tayvan'ın benlik duygusunu hangi yönde etkilediğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, liderler, politika ve kimlik arasındaki dinamik ilişkiyi inceleyerek Tayvan'ın siyasi manzarası bağlamında ontolojik güvenliğin nasıl anlaşılabileceğine dair farklı bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Tayvan, Tsai Ing-Wen Yönetimi, Ontolojik Güvenlik, Jeopolitik Konum, Demokratik Yönetim.*

Introduction

The pursuit for security exceeds the mere preservation of physical boundaries and military force in the complicated fabric of international interactions. Under the surface of statecraft, there is a deep desire for ontological security-the guarantee of identity, stability, and self-preservation in an ever-changing geopolitical arena. This need is felt nowhere more than in Taiwan, an island nation at the crossroads of history, culture, and power relations. This article offers a multidimensional examination of Taiwan's complex position in the world arena. The discussion that follows attempts to explore the subtleties of ontological security, its importance in international relations, and its resonance within Taiwan's unusually complicated geopolitical situation.

Taiwan's geopolitical story is one of opposites, encompassing both victory and suffering. This island republic, formally known as the Republic of China (ROC), bears evidence of the lingering legacy of a historical divide, as well as the present problems provided by its closeness to the People's Republic of China (PRC). This past has thrown a long shadow, impacting Taiwan's socio-political fabric and moulding its connections with the rest of the globe. Taiwan's economic dynamism demonstrates its endurance and adaptability. As a technical powerhouse, it has left its stamp on global supply networks, including sectors that have clout well beyond its borders. However, economic strength alone cannot capture the nuances of Taiwan's geopolitical quandary-a complicated dilemma of recognition and non-recognition, diplomatic isolation, and pragmatic engagement.

Tsai Ing-wen is a crucial character whose progressive policies have altered Taiwan's internal environment while also projecting Taiwan's identity onto the international scene in the previous six years. Her leadership is distinguished by a dedication to democratic ideals, human rights, and social progress, which aligns with the ambitions of a people navigating the crosswinds of history and change. As we go further into the core of this debate, it becomes clear that Tsai Ing-wen's progressive policies are more than just a collection of policy initiatives; they are crucial in developing Taiwan's ontological security, which in turn influences her foreign policy decisions. They are the result of a concerted effort to consolidate Taiwan's national identity, bolster its confidence, and traverse the complicated routes of a complex global environment. These measures, through fostering ontological security, have the capacity to shape Taiwan's foreign policy options, define its diplomatic outreach, and affect Taiwan's perception of the world arena. The article illuminates the delicate interplay between Tsai Ing-wen's progressive policies and the search of ontological security. The study focuses on how these strategies interact to strengthen Taiwan's sense of self in a landscape marked by historical legacies, shifting alliances, and regional power dynamics.

Framework: Definition and Concept of Ontological Security

Ontological security is a term that has gained significance in international relations as researchers strive to understand the role of identity, perception, and existential well-being in shaping state conduct and relationships among states. Ontological security, which is rooted in the larger area of security studies, refers to a state's fundamental requirement for a stable and coherent "sense of self", "identity", and existence. It extends beyond traditional concepts of physical security to include psychological and socio-cultural factors that impact state activities in international forums. Ontological security, at its foundation, emphasises the concept that states, like individuals, aim to develop and sustain a sense of order, predictability, and purpose in their existence. This theory contends that a state's view of its identity and location in the world has a significant influence on its policy choices, strategic relationships, and foreign policy decisions (Steele, 2008).

The subjective components of state conduct are emphasised in ontological security. The perception of foreign threats, alliances, and regional dynamics is shaped by a state's conception of its identity-cultural, historical, and political. When a state's identity is endangered or ambiguous, it can cause feelings of vulnerability and a greater desire for self-preservation, which typically leads to assertive or defensive responses. States aim to maintain their ontological security by reaffirming their identity and standing. Diplomatic attempts to gain worldwide recognition, involvement in global organisations, and the building of a favourable international image can all be part of this. Ontological security can also

inspire confidence, allowing nations to negotiate difficult situations with caution and strategy (Mitzen, 2006).

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of ontological security in international relations. Traditional security theories frequently emphasise tangible elements like military capability and economic power, on the other hand, ontological security illuminates the intangible components that govern state activity. It explains why nations prioritise identity preservation above immediate monetary advantages and why they may avoid abandoning their essential ideals in the face of external pressures. Ontological security provides insights into nations' reactions to identity-based challenges, historical traumas, and power imbalances in the context of a complex geopolitical landscape. Diplomatic strategy, alliances, and readiness to engage in war or collaboration can all be influenced by the quest of ontological security (Subotić, 2016).

Methodology

The methodology used in this essay is to give a complete and impartial examination of Tsai Ing-wen's progressive policies and the promotion of Taiwan's ontological security within the multifarious framework of a complicated geopolitical environment. A combination of qualitative research methodologies, academic literature analysis, and case study investigation were used to accomplish it. This research is based on a thorough assessment of academic literature, policy documents, and credible sources from subjects such as international relations, security studies, political science, and regional studies. This literature study serves as the foundation for comprehending the notions of ontological security, Taiwan's geopolitical dynamics, and Tsai Ing-wen's progressive policies.

The theoretical framework of this study hinges on the concept of ontological security as articulated in the works of scholars such as Steele (2008) and Mitzen (2006). This framework provides the lens through which the impact of Taiwan's sense of identity and stability on Tsai Ing-wen's progressive policies. Concurrently, the exploration involves understanding how these policies contribute to Taiwan's confidence, self-perception, and positioning in the international arena. Selected case examples are used to highlight the relationship between progressive policies and ontological security. These case studies look into particular policy measures implemented by Tsai Ing-wen's government, such as healthcare improvements, environmental sustainability, and democratic changes.

Finally, this technique tries to synthesise information from many sources and perspectives in order to provide a comprehensive and insightful study of how Taiwan's ontological security contributes to Tsai Ing-wen's progressive policies in the middle of an elaborate tapestry of a complicated geopolitical environment. This study intends to shed light on a crucial aspect of Taiwan's international identity and connections by synthesising qualitative research, theoretical frameworks, and case studies.

Ontological Security: Concept and Significance

Relationship Between Ontological Security and State Behaviour

The concept of ontological security emphasises the importance of psychological well-being in determining a state's behaviour within the international system. Ontological security, at its heart, relates to a state's perception of stability, identity continuity, and the reduction of worries caused by external dangers or internal ambiguities. This notion is especially important in international relations because it explains how a state's self-perception, identity, and confidence influence its dealings with other states.

States with a strong level of ontological security display specific behavioural patterns. Initially, such countries are more inclined to participate in cooperative diplomacy and collaboration with other countries. This is due to their internal coherence and confidence, which allow them to approach foreign affairs with openness and a readiness to develop mutually beneficial connections. When a state's identity is secure and its societal stability is assured, it has the psychological space to invest in diplomacy that seeks common interests and peaceful dispute resolution. Furthermore, ontologically secure states are more likely to adhere to international standards and favourably contribute to global challenges. Their confidence in their own identity and values motivates them to embrace and support international norms and laws that are consistent with their own beliefs. Instead of isolation or aggressiveness, these governments frequently see their position in the international community as one of duty and influence (Mitzen, 2006).

On the other hand, states experiencing ontological insecurities may exhibit different behaviours, and these insecurities can stem from historical grievances, unresolved territorial disputes, cultural clashes, or the challenges of nation-building. Such states might adopt defensive postures to protect their identity, sovereignty, or domestic stability. They may resist external pressures that they perceive as threatening their core identity, resulting in a more confrontational approach to international relations. Furthermore, states that are ontologically unstable may prioritise self-preservation above cooperative participation. For instance, fearful of foreign forces that might weaken internal cohesiveness; they may pursue more isolationist or protectionist policies that impede collaboration and mutual understanding with other governments (Rumelili, 2020: 267).

The identity of a state and its feeling of ontological security are inextricably linked, and its conception of itself and its position in the world determine its behaviour in international relations. A state confident in its identity is more likely to participate in cooperative acts. In contrast, a state that is anxious about its identity may turn to defensive or assertive behaviour to protect its sense of self. Ontological security extends beyond standard material security concepts. Instead, it refers to a state's emotional well-being as well as its sense of its internal and external environments. Understanding state behaviour and the motives underlying diplomatic contacts requires an understanding of the emotional dimension of security. Emotional security refers to the national interests of the state as a result of its authority as a nation-state. Thus, the state meets the need for ontological security by completing the social construction process of its own identity. What is important here is that self-identity formation is effective in the political decision-making processes of state leaders. The perception of identity created by the state over time fundamentally affects the foreign and domestic policy decisions of the state's leader. For this reason, there is a mutual interaction between ontological security and state policy (Steele, 2008: 17).

Relevance of Ontological Security in Taiwan's Context

For a comprehensive understanding of Taiwan's ontological security, it is necessary to know the state narrative during the colonial period and military dictatorship. One of the reasons for the treatment of the Taiwanese as second-class citizens during the Japanese occupation (1874) can be explained by the Japanese view of Taiwanese as the owner of Chinese heritage. This situation has prepared a strong ground for the Taiwanese not to adopt the Chinese identity. Accordingly, the issue of Taiwanese Nationalism began as a reaction to the impact of the Japanese Occupation on the inhabitants of the island (Hao, 2016). When Taiwan came under Japanese rule in 1895 under the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, the islanders tried to resist this occupation. For example, local notables decided to establish the Republic of Taiwan (Taiwan *Minzhuguo*). However, the forced assimilation policies adopted by the Japanese Empire caused the disappearance of these aspirations and an even deeper anger in Taiwanese nationalism (Ching, 2001).

Between 1945 and 1949, the opposition between mainlanders and Taiwanese who came with Chiang from China played an important role in shaping Taiwan's ontological security. The cultural construction based on Chinese nationalism that the KMT tried to impose and the Taiwanese's efforts to claim their own identities caused a great conflict in the KMT's nation-building and state narrative (Cabestan, 2005). As a result of the KMT's imposition of Chinese nationalism, the February 1947 Uprising / February 28 Incident took place. After this event, martial law was declared in Taiwan, and systematic disregard for "provincial natives/*benshengren*" began (Dreyer & deLisle, 2021: 288).

For 50 years, the KMT dictatorship strove to control Taiwan with the belief of being a Chinese country, and this cult saw Taiwan as a small part of China. However, as Taiwanese leaders like Lee Teng-hui ascend and Taiwanese politics become more Taiwanese, this China-centric paradigm has become outmoded. In the 1980s, the fundamental fault line in the redefining of the idea of "identity" was the divide between the Chinese approach, which emphasises cultural roots, and the Taiwanese identity, which emphasises ethnicity (Chang, 2015: 1). Taiwan gained a new discourse that advocated independence and included radical identity change after gaining rapid momentum towards democratization in the 1990s with the Lee Teng-hui era. This perspective has attached great importance to Taiwan's unique history and cultural position. This political movement, which aims to promote Taiwanese identity and to create a longing for Taiwan with its ancient characteristics, pointed to the

opposite of the previous China-oriented discourse. Thus, the issue of Taiwanization has been at the centre of Taiwanese politics in the last forty years (Chang, 2015).

Over the course of its evolution, the politicisation of identity in Taiwan has notably engendered the delineation of the state's self-identity. Commencing with the era under President Lee Teng-hui's leadership, the Taiwanization process distinctly catalysed the establishment of the state's foundational ontological security. This substantial transformation in self-perception consequently wielded a discernible influence on the formulation of the state's foreign policy determinations. The Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995-1996 conspicuously underscores the depth of Taiwan's importance within China's comprehension of ontological security. The prospective ascent of Lee Teng-hui to the presidential position and its envisaged implications vividly underscore the significance ascribed to Taiwan within China's cognitive paradigm of ontological security.

Taiwan's Complex Geopolitical Landscape

Brief Overview of Taiwan's Geopolitical Situation

Taiwan is an island state in the East Asia region, and it's formally known as "The Republic of China". In a context which is shaped by history, economy and politics, it has found itself at the crossroads of global geopolitical situations. The history of Taiwan plays an important part in the contemporary political challenges which it faces. After the Chinese Civil War, which concluded in 1949, the defeated Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) retreated to Taiwan, while the victorious Communist Party established the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland. That division brought about the creation of two different policy entities which have differing views on whether or not China is a legitimate government. Geopolitically, Taiwan's status is a contentious issue due to its relationship with PRC, which claims Taiwan as a part of its territory. The origins of Taiwan's geopolitical challenges can be traced back to the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), which resulted in the split between the communist-led PRC and the nationalist-led ROC. The ROC has retreated to Taiwan and retains its status as an independent political entity. Diplomatic isolation at the global level is a consequence of Taiwan's failure to formally recognise itself as a sovereign state (Rawnsley, 2000).

Despite the diplomatic isolation that Taiwan faces, it has become a significant player in the global economy. In particular in the fields of technology and electronics production, the island's export oriented economy has flourished. Taiwan is home to major technology giants like TSMC, which produces a substantial portion of the world's semiconductor chips. As a result, global supply chains can be affected if Taiwan's production is interrupted, which could affect industries as diverse as consumer electronics and automotive manufacturing. The geopolitical situation is further complicated by the "One China" policy, adhered to by many countries, which recognizes the PRC as the legitimate government of China and does not formally recognize Taiwan. However, there are a number of states that maintain informal relations with Taiwan and promote its participation in international organisations under different names (Nam, 2020).

On the other hand, there are consequences for Taiwan's security as it is close to China. The PRC has not ruled out the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control and has increased military activities and pressure campaigns around the island. China's military activities in the Taiwan area, including naval exercises and air manoeuvres, have continued to increase over recent years. Those actions have prompted Taiwan to increase its own defence capabilities and seek partnerships with likeminded countries such as the United States, so it can protect itself.

History has woven a complicated and persistent narrative that informs Taiwan's current geopolitical reality- a narrative that is intertwined with the island's relationship with China. This historical background serves as a backdrop for the quest of ontological security, including both the legacy of a divided past and the strategic calculus of the present. Taiwan's historical relationship with China provides a complicated backdrop to its current geopolitical position. This historical setting highlights the intricacies that constitute Taiwan's global position, defining its quest of ontological security in an ever-changing geopolitical scene. Taiwan's historical connection with China has demanded a complex international balancing act. As the PRC moved to diplomatically isolate Taiwan, the ROC launched a push to build unofficial relations with significant states, establishing economic and strategic links in the absence of full diplomatic recognition. This complex diplomacy shows Taiwan's

ongoing effort to maintain its ontological security by negotiating the geopolitical dynamics of recognition and non-recognition (Lin, 2019).

The end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 was a watershed point in Taiwan's geopolitical trajectory. Following the Nationalist Party's defeat on the mainland by the Communist Party, two independent political entities emerged: the People's Republic of China (PRC) under Communist authority and the Republic of China (ROC) on the island of Taiwan. This separation, the result of ideological disagreements and political realities, established a dual sovereign dynamic that has persisted to the present day. The international community's acknowledgment of the PRC as China's legitimate representation was a watershed moment in world diplomacy. Taiwan's geopolitical isolation grew as the ROC was excluded from official statehood recognition. This seclusion, however, did not dampen Taiwan's spirit. Instead, it required innovative diplomatic measures to forge unofficial alliances with states sympathetic to its cause, cultivating economic, cultural, and strategic relationships under the banner of pragmatic engagement (Chang, 2015).

The shifting interests of key global powers complicated Taiwan's strategic tightrope dance even further. The transition in diplomatic recognition by the United States from the ROC to the PRC altered the boundaries of Taiwan's international status, ushering in an age of "strategic ambiguity". This posture allowed for a dual-track strategy, with unofficial connections maintained while unilateral changes to Taiwan's status quo were avoided. Taiwan's complex balancing in preserving connections with important allies while keeping its uniqueness demonstrates its sophisticated quest of ontological security. The maintenance of a distinct identity- a mosaic of cultural, linguistic, and historical elements- is at the foundation of Taiwan's ontological security. Taiwanese people have developed a collective sense of identity as a result of their historical independence from mainland China, emphasising democratic, human rights, and pluralistic ideals. Simultaneously, the PRC's claim to Taiwan's sovereignty encourages continuing identity contestation, requiring Taiwan to affirm its unique identity and forge a different course on the world arena (Magcamit, 2015).

We can reveal the relevance of Tsai Ing-wen's progressive policies in the complicated diplomatic actions between identity preservation and geopolitical manoeuvre by contextualising them within this historical narrative. Taiwan's connection with China shapes its approach to current issues, encompassing the complexities of ensuring ontological security amid a changing global system. The next research dives deeper into how Taiwan's ontological security fits into this historical tapestry, supporting Tsai Ing-wen's actions in the face of an ever-changing geopolitical scenario.

Economic and Political Implications of Taiwan's Geopolitical Positioning

Taiwan's geopolitical stance has fuelled a unique economic resiliency. Driven by a thriving technological industry, the country has established itself as a leading producer of electronics and semiconductor components in worldwide supply chains. This economic strength serves a dual purpose: it not only contributes greatly to global technical growth, but it also gives Taiwan an appearance of international prominence, even in the lack of complete diplomatic recognition. The complexities of Taiwan's diplomatic interactions demonstrate the interweaving of economics and politics. Balancing China's economic might with its own political identity necessitates strategic caution. Taiwan's economic reliance on China for trade and investment needs a diplomatic strategy that balances animosity with national interests and ontological security.

Taiwan's strategic position, economic vibrancy, and diplomatic ties have enormous geopolitical ramifications, highlighting the delicate interaction between ontological security and global forces. Taiwan's importance is as a hub of international trade and technology echoes well beyond its boundaries, sending waves that impact regional and global events. The active waterways surrounding Taiwan are home to some of the world's most bustling maritime channels, allowing the transfer of products between countries. Because China, Japan, South Korea, and other regional nations rely significantly on these lanes, any interruption or crisis involving Taiwan might have a significant impact on global commerce and logistics. As a result of its centrality, Taiwan is a critical node in the global economic ecosystem, emphasising the need of safeguarding its ontological security (Magcamit, 2015).

Taiwan's crucial position at the heart of the first island chain in the western Pacific endows it with varied relevance for regional powers. Its geographical situation offers both defensive and offensive goals,

allowing for influence projection and strategic depth. Recognising the implications of any danger or crisis involving Taiwan, regional stakeholders are responsible for the possible disruption in political and economic dynamics, emphasising the nation's role in sustaining regional stability (Reinsch, 2022).

Taiwan's growing relationship with the United States intensifies the geopolitical consequences of Taiwan's economic and political situation. Taiwan's status as the United States' greatest trading partner in 2021 demonstrates the strength of this cooperation as bilateral commercial relations develop. Beyond the numbers, the symbiotic supply chain links between Taiwanese and American enterprises demonstrate the deep intertwining of economic interests, reinforcing Taiwan's ontological security through reciprocal collaboration. Thus, the changing international situation, along with uncertainty in China's political and economic environment, has prompted changes in the strategy for investment. As American corporations rebalance their investing strategies, Taiwanese firms follow suit in order to diversify and share risks. Investments in Asia, India, and the United States demonstrate Taiwan's economic actors' versatility, leading to a more diverse and internationally expanded investment policy (Reinsch, 2022).

Security Challenges and Risks: Navigating Taiwan's Geopolitical Landscape

Taiwan's ontological security goals emerge against a landscape of security difficulties and vulnerabilities that intimately define its international stance. These problems, which stem from Taiwan's complicated geopolitical environment, historical legacies, and power dynamics, highlight the necessity for Taiwan to manage an intricate web of dangers in order to maintain its sovereignty and stability. The uncertainty surrounding Taiwan's geopolitical standing is important to the country's security issues. PRC "One China" policy opposes Taiwan's sovereignty and wants its reunification under PRC control. The volatility of international recognition complicates matters further, as many countries defer formal diplomatic connections with Taiwan in order to retain relations with the PRC. This geopolitical uncertainty raises the possibility of a PRC military intervention, emphasising the necessity for vigilant monitoring (Magcamit, 2015).

The geographical proximity of Taiwan to the PRC heightens fears of military assault. China's growing military capabilities and provocative manoeuvres, such as naval and aircraft exercises near Taiwan, raise the prospect of war. The Chinese government's determination on ultimate reunification and the incorporation of Taiwan into China's core territorial integrity enhances the spectre of military coercion, necessitating Taiwan's ongoing investment in defence capabilities and foreign allies. Cybersecurity vulnerabilities have arisen as a major security risk for Taiwan in the digital age. The threat of cyber espionage and assaults by state and non-state actors, especially China, jeopardises Taiwan's key infrastructure, national security, and sensitive data. Taiwan's significance in technology and electronics production, as well as the interconnection of global networks, makes it a perfect target for cyber operations that might damage its economy and endanger its national security (Nam, 2020).

Furthermore, the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan as a result of the "One China" policy improves diplomatic concerns. Taiwan's engagement in international forums and organisations is hampered by its lack of official diplomatic recognition, limiting its ability to voice its concerns, contribute to global decision-making, and generate international support. This isolation not only highlights Taiwan's ontological security goals but also the hard balance between preserving its uniqueness and managing a hostile geopolitical situation.

Tsai Ing-Wen's Progressive Policy Agenda

Overview of Tsai Ing-Wen's Leadership and Policy Approach

Tsai Ing-wen's presidency has been marked by a strategic policy approach focused at bolstering Taiwan's ontological security in the face of historical, geopolitical, and security difficulties. Her administration's policies have demonstrated a thorough knowledge of Taiwan's concerns as well as the need to develop a secure and confident national identity. Tsai Ing-wen took power in May 2016, ushering in a major upheaval in Taiwan's political scene. Her chairmanship of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) signified a change from the previous administration's attitude to cross-strait ties and global participation. Tsai, Taiwan's first female president provided a distinct approach to administration, emphasising on progressive policies, diplomatic rebalancing, and security preparation (Brînză, 2016).

Tsai focused on defence modernisation and security preparation, recognising Taiwan's security concerns amid global uncertainty. To address fears about foreign threats and strengthen Taiwan's ontological security, investments in domestic defence capabilities and cooperation with major allies like the United States were promoted. Tsai's administration continues to stress Taiwan's active engagement in international affairs. Her government alleviates diplomatic isolation concerns and garners international support through participating in global projects and environmental cooperation. Tsai strengthens Taiwan's ontological security by portraying it as a responsible global actor. Tsai's administration places a premium on preserving Taiwan's democratic ideals and distinct national character. Her administration's support for democratic institutions, human rights, and the rule of law resonates with the public, assuaging concerns about the loss of key principles. This connection reinforces Taiwan's ontological security by portraying it as a beacon of democratic resilience in a volatile political context (Thornton, 2021).

On the other hand, domestic politics will limit her ability to negotiate with China. To begin with, Taiwan is well recognised for having a fragmented national identity. Although the mainstream and tendency is to keep Taiwan and China independent, a small fraction of the population supports Taiwan's eventual unification with China. Despite their modest number, these persons constitute a hurdle to developing agreement among Taiwanese people on Taiwan's policies towards China. Taiwan's democratic growth is a successful example that many nations, including the United States, admire and respect, although it is still a young democracy. Some of Tsai Ing-wen's issues may also come from her party. The DPP is a political party plagued by factionalism. Taiwan independence fundamentalists, who advocate for the establishment of an independent Taiwanese state, are opposed to any policy that may jeopardise Taiwan's sovereignty (Gerber, 2015).

Tsai Ing-wen's leadership and policy trajectory, in conclusion, establish a cohesive narrative of resolving Taiwan's anxieties and building ontological security. During her term, progressive policies, diplomatic realignment, security enhancements, and continued international engagement have all contributed to the development of a confident national identity amid a complicated geopolitical context.

Emphasizing on Democracy, Human Rights, and Social Progress

Tsai Ing-wen prioritised progressive initiatives that resonated with Taiwan's growing ambitions during her first years in office. Healthcare reform, marriage equality, and environmental sustainability were all addressed, displaying a commitment to resolving social well-being and identity fears. Tsai's government took a pragmatic approach to diplomacy as China increased diplomatic efforts to isolate Taiwan globally. During this time, there was increased cooperation with like-minded countries, engagement in global health efforts, and partnerships in regional forums. Such activities attempted to alleviate fears caused by diplomatic isolation and to strengthen Taiwan's ontological security (Lin, 2019: 112).

Taiwan has seen a deliberate effort to reaffirm some core ideals such as democracy, human rights, and social progress under Tsai's leadership, building a society that is not just economically affluent but also socially inclusive and politically robust. Tsai's government recognises that Taiwan's democratic system is more than just a political framework; it is also a source of ontological security. Her policies, which emphasise democratic resilience, have focused on strengthening democratic institutions, increasing openness, and maintaining effective checks and balances. Initiatives like judicial reform and anti-corruption measures have not only strengthened voters' trust in the political system but have also positioned Taiwan as a model for democratic administration in the region. Tsai's government has fought for Taiwan's inclusion in international human rights frameworks, emphasising the country's dedication to universal ideals. Tsai has also emphasised inclusion by advocating for gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and indigenous rights. Her administration exhibits a comprehensive approach to human rights by advocating these issues, which connects with Taiwan's varied populace and generates a sense of communal security (Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan), 2020).

Tsai's government also has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at enhancing Taiwan's socioeconomic growth. These policies include a wide range of topics, such as healthcare, gender equality, labour rights, social welfare, and education. The overriding objective has been to establish a more fair and inclusive society that addresses the needs of many parts of the people while also promoting a feeling

of social stability. The Long-Term Care 2.0 programme aims to increase and improve long-term care services for the elderly and disabled. Recognising the issues faced by an ageing population, it attempts to improve home-based care, promote community-based services, and offer carer support. Gender equality policies include encouraging women to work, eliminating workplace harassment, and improving maternity and paternity leave regulations (Brown, 2017).

In addition, the government has fought to reduce domestic violence and promote equal pay for equal labour. Policies aimed at empowering youth include attempts to improve vocational education, foster entrepreneurship, and offer assistance to young professionals. The "Youth Action Plan" focuses on providing chances for skill development, innovation, and career growth for young people. Tsai's government has started projects to improve the availability of social housing and affordable rental choices in order to alleviate housing affordability and homelessness. The goal is to offer secure homes for vulnerable and low-income people and families. The government has tried to improve workers' rights and protections. Reforms have included initiatives to promote work-life balance, migrant worker treatment, and workplace safety regulations. Tsai's education policies place a premium on innovation and diversity. Efforts have been undertaken to improve educational quality, modernise curriculum, and provide more support for students with disabilities (Brown, 2017).

Analysing How Tsai Ing-Wen's Progressive Policies Contributes to Taiwan's Ontological Security

Along with the reformist foreign policies under the Tsai administration, developments such as the removal of Chiang Kai-shek statues, the construction of 228 Monumental Parks, and the emphasis on the name "Taiwan" on the passport are examples of the reflections of Taiwan's ontological security in domestic politics. The focus on the Chinese identity-centred state narrative during the KMT period is changing over time with a state autobiographical narrative in which Taiwanese identity is at the centre. The strongest example that can be given to this situation is former President Lee Teng-hui's request for a referendum to use the name Taiwan instead of the name of the Republic of China (Chen, 2017).

Non-Chinese people/*benshengren* that was seen as a threat to Taiwan's ontological security during the KMT period officially ceased to be an ontological security problem in the second quarter of the 21st century. Thus, the existence of indigenous peoples in the Taiwanese state narrative was ignored by the KMT administration, but after the Tsai administration's "official" apology for the first time, it is seen that the Taiwanese state narrative has changed. The "official" apology to the local people regarding human rights shows that the Tsai administration is seriously sensitive to this issue (Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan), 2016). This issue also shows that Taiwan has a sense of "shame", as mentioned in the ontological security studies. On the other hand, such an apology is an example of the reshaping of the autobiographical narrative of the state because the state more clearly shows its vision of "others" towards "others" along with the autobiographical narrative. But it should be noted here that with this apology, Taiwan's diversity has been acknowledged, and thanks to this "divided" "self", Taiwan has overcome distrust. Taiwan started to give the international world the image of a peaceful country that respects human rights because it built a healthier narrative with its political authority through this policy (Steele, 2008: 3-6). Contrary to the examples of Türkiye and Japan in the literature, on the contrary, Taiwan acknowledges that it has not always pursued good policies in its history and that the state may violate its people's rights. Turkey and Japan still do not accept the crimes they committed during the war and have a policy of ignoring them (Zarakol, 2010).

However, the Tsai administration interpreted that such a radical decision could leave Taiwan in a difficult situation in relations with the United States and China. The reason why the Tsai administration is so careful about the "independence" referendum or changing the name of the country can be interpreted as focusing on protecting Taiwan's ontological security as well as prioritizing its physical security. In other words, a solid and logical basis is needed to explain to citizens the military and economic decisions to be taken to ensure Taiwan's physical security. In this case, the state uses its sovereign authority to develop a narrative that the identity of the state and its citizens is threatened. As a result, in the case of Taiwan case, China's airspace violations and the constant rhetoric of Taiwan's "unification" with mainland China create ontological distrust and anxiety for Taiwan (Steele, 2008: 20).

Within the realm of global politics and local governance, the agenda of the Tsai administration has accorded paramount significance to Taiwan. Following its assumption of power, the administration has consistently confronted threefold-equilibrium: diplomatic ties with the United States, engagements with China, and domestic policy imperatives. President Tsai has effectively demonstrated her proclivity for fostering amicable relations with the United States and Western nations, a predisposition bolstered by her educational background. Moreover, she assiduously navigated the intricacies of local politics, notably exemplified by her formal expression of remorse to the indigenous populace a year subsequent to assuming office. However, the dimension of Sino-Taiwanese relations remains rife with uncertainty owing to President Tsai's policy approach, characterized by bedrock of Taiwanese nationalism and a novel interpretation of the 1992 Consensus. Notwithstanding, a modicum of assurance is discernible in the contours of the New Southbound Policy (NSP) crafted by President Tsai's administration. This policy framework serves as a harbinger of economic diversification, envisaging the attenuation of Taiwan's economic reliance on China through a concerted outreach to nations in South and Southeast Asia, thereby cultivating economic entwinements through bilateral agreements (Chin, 2017). Intriguingly, alongside the NSP, there has surfaced a proclivity for cultivating investment-centric accords with the United States, Taiwan's principal trading partner. This pivot illuminates the multifaceted strategies that President Tsai's administration is deploying to fortify Taiwan's economic landscape, juxtaposing both regional diversification and fostering substantive economic engagements with key partners.

In Taiwan, where the democratic political environment is very young, the functionality of institutions beyond identity and security debates is at a much higher level compared to other Asia-Pacific countries. The main factor that has been effective here has been both the struggle of the Taiwanese people in gaining their democratic rights in the historical process and the continuity of the state narrative that ensured the successful progress of the democratic process as of 1996. Although the issue of "continuity", which is at the basis of ontological security, has been interrupted many times in the case of Taiwan, it became systematic and institutionalised in 1996 and continues to progress successfully today despite China's political, economic and military threats. The Tsai administration has neither pursued a rigid independence approach as under Chen Shui-bian, nor has it softened relations with China to the extent of jeopardising Taiwan's economic and political freedom as under Ma Ying-jeuo. Although the Tsai administration's priority in foreign policy has always been to prioritise the security and welfare of the Taiwanese people, the ontological security concerns underlying these policies should not be ignored.

Conclusion

In a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, where nations grapple with shifting alliances and complex challenges, the case of Taiwan and President Tsai Ing-wen's leadership serves as a compelling testament to the enduring importance of ontological security. This article has explored the profound impact of Tsai Ing-wen's policies on Taiwan's ontological security, shedding light on the transformative leadership that has fortified the island nation's national identity and stability. Tsai's foreign and internal policies mostly focus on human rights and spreading democratic rights towards the rising authoritarian power of China in the region and these policies are merely based on the understanding of the democratic governance system in Taiwan.

This research explored the specific impact of Tsai Ing-wen's policies on Taiwan's ontological security through an ontological security framework based on leadership studies. Using quantitative research methodology, we analysed Taiwan's relations with regional issues and its international position. Finally, we addressed the important contribution of Tsai's leadership to Taiwan's ontological security, namely the establishment of "continuity" in the conception of identity and the development of policies to ensure that the state narrative is based on a particular conception of identity. Upon exploring the dynamic relationship between leaders, policies, and identity, it becomes evident that Taiwan's ontological security is intricately linked to visionary leadership.

The findings of this study unequivocally illustrate that Tsai Ing-wen's progressive approach, characterized by a staunch commitment to asserting Taiwan's importance geopolitical place, fostering democratic values, and enhancing international engagement, has had a profound and positive impact. It has not only strengthened Taiwan's sense of self but has also fortified its position as a vibrant and

resilient democracy in the face of external pressures. During her time as President, Tsai Ing-wen has shown that prioritizing national identity and stability can be a powerful tool in shaping a country's future amidst the difficult geopolitical tensions of the New Cold War between competing global powers. This research provides important information on the concept of ontological security in Taiwan's political environment. Despite the current uncertain times, Taiwan serves as a great example of how effective leadership, policies, and identity can work together to maintain a nation's ontological security amidst a constantly evolving world.

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