

# The Relationship between South Korea and Taiwan: An Analysis through Korean News Articles and Internet Search Keywords†

Ohm, Sun-young\*, Park, Young-soon\*\*

## <Abstract>

In this study, an analysis of Korean news articles and internet search keywords is conducted to see how South Korean people have thought about Taiwan and Taiwanese people during a period of twenty years, from 1997 to 2017. This study has three major findings: Over time, the number of newspaper reports and Internet searches about Taiwan has increased, and the area of coverage has also expanded. This means that Koreans are increasingly concerned about Taiwan and areas of interest are becoming wider; various types and fields of practical exchanges, such as direct aviation, travel, academia, environment, agriculture, science and technology are on the rise; the Korean's concern with Taiwan and the continuous increase in exchanges between the two sides do not seem relevant to the change in Taiwan's presidents' political tendency toward mainland China and the cross-strait relations.

**[Key words]** *South Korea, Taiwan, civil, exchange, relationship, keywords, constructivism*

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\* Ohm, Sun-young (E-mail: ohmsunyoung@gmail.com )

An acquisition degree: Sogang University Master of Politics

Affiliation: Researcher of Center for Interdisciplinary Research on China at Kookmin University

\*\* Park, Young-soon (E-mail: pzy-04@hanmail.net)

Affiliation: Associate Professor, Center for Interdisciplinary Research on China, Kookmin University

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# 한국과 대만 관계: 한국의 신문기사와 인터넷 검색키워드 분석을 중심으로

엄선영, 박영순

## <국문요약>

이 연구는 1997년부터 2017년까지 20년간의 한국의 대만관련 언론기사와 인터넷 검색을 통해, 대만과의 단교 이후 대만에 대해 무관심한 성향을 보여 왔던 한국사회가 대만에 대한 관점이 어떻게 달라지고 있는지 알아보았다. 20년간의 신문기사와 인터넷 검색어를 분석하기로 한 이유는 보편적으로 이 두 가지 매체에는 한 사회 구성원들에게 비교적 중요한 이슈가 무엇인지가 반영된다는 점 때문이다. 이 분석을 통해 발견한 것은 세 가지가 있다. 첫째, 시간의 흐름에 따라 대만 관련된 신문기사 수와 인터넷 검색의 빈도수가 높아졌고 보도 영역이 넓어지고 있다는 점이다. 이것은 한국인들이 갈수록 대만에 관심이 높아지고 있으며, 관심영역이 보다 다양해지고 있다는 것을 의미한다. 둘째, 항공 직항노선, 대만여행, 민간교류가 급증하는 등 한국인들의 대만 교류 의사가 점점 증가하고 있다는 것을 파악할 수 있었다. 셋째, 이러한 관심도 증가는 대만의 지도자의 성향이 독립성향-친대륙-독립성향으로 교체되는 대만지도자의 성향과 무관하게 일관되게 증가했다는 점이다. 비록 공식적인 외교관계에서 양국의 관계가 제약이 있으나, 비공식 차원에서 더욱 밀접하고 활발한 교류를 기대하고 있다.

[주제어] 한국 대만 시민 교류 관계 키워드 구성주의

## I. Introduction

After the breaking off diplomatic ties between Korea and Taiwan in 1992, official exchanges had been very limited. It took twelve years before Korea and Taiwan signed the aeronautical agreement again since it was denounced. It is no exaggeration to say the view of the Taiwanese society on Korea had been very anti-Korea, whereas the Korean society's view on Taiwan had been very indifferent (Lee 2011; Kang 2013).

In this study, a datasets analysis using big data analyzing tools will be conducted to see how Korean people have thought about Taiwan and Taiwanese people during a period of twenty years, from 1997 to 2017<sup>1)</sup>. The data used is text data from Korean news articles and internet search keywords about Taiwan. Through this method, changes in popular discourse in Korean society will be examined. This approach is based on constructivism, which is one of the political theories. Constructivism sees that states' relations as a factor that can be changed by constant mutual interaction. Analyzing internet search keywords can reflect important topics of discourse among members in a society

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1) In the case of media analysis, it is possible to obtain twenty year's data which were created from 1997, but Internet search keyword can be obtained generated from 2004. This is because big data analysis at Google is possible since 2004 when Internet search became popular to the public.

(Thompson 1995)<sup>2)</sup>. If we look at the trend of discourse related to Taiwan in Korea for twenty years, a constructivist approach will be possible. This way, one can see how Taiwan is viewed and how this perception has been changing in Korean society.

In both Korea and Taiwan, there are not many studies done on the relationship (or exchanges) between South Korea and Taiwan. Moreover, in Korea, they are limited to three categories: Korea-Taiwan relations influenced by Cross-Strait relations; the Korean Wave; and Student Exchange. The first categorized one is based on structuralism, and this approach presumes the relationship between Korea and Taiwan is entirely influenced by China. From this perspective, it seems that both Korea and Taiwan have no right of option to develop its own relationship and there is no possibility of a closer relationship.

So far, it has been said that there is anti-emotion and indifference between Korea and Taiwan. But is still like that recently? Is there no possibility that Korea and Taiwan can be closer by having more active exchanges? The fatalistic idea of structuralism disrupts a more detailed observation. It is too early to say for certain that the relationship is unchangeable, and more observation is needed.

## II. Literature Review

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2) He argued that media can be an indicator of public discourse.

There are relatively few studies on exchanges between South Korea and Taiwan. The search results with the keywords "Korea", "Taiwan", "Exchange", "Relationship", from the National Assembly Library of Korea<sup>3)</sup>, which has one of the largest databases in South Korea, are very few. Some of these are not directly related to the relationship between Korea and Taiwan, or deal with the Cross-Strait relations as main factor in the relationship between Korea and Taiwan. After excluding these, only sixteen articles are directly related to the relationship between Korea and Taiwan. Given that two articles among sixteen articles are contributed by Taiwanese authors, it can be concluded that there are very few Taiwan related studies by Korean authors in Korea.

Existing studies generally can be divided into three categories: from the view point of structuralism of international politics; analyzing two sides' different opinions toward the Korean Wave; bilateral students exchange status.

Han (2008) explored what would happen to the bilateral relationship during Ma Ying-jeou's administration. He had prospected that Cross-Strait relations would improve, and thus improve the relationship between Korea and Taiwan. This study examined the bilateral relationship from the perspective of International Politics, and the units of analysis are national leader and country.

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3) National Assembly Library of Korea, <https://www.nanet.go.kr/main.do>

This approach presumes that the bilateral relationship is noticeably influenced by the relationship between mainland China and Taiwan.

However, there are still more observations and investigations needed to further define the nature of the relationship between Korea and Taiwan. If the analytical units are limited to national leaders and countries, it overlooks areas that can be achieved in the sphere of civil society and culture.

Cho et al. (2013) studied how both Korean and Taiwanese people think of the Korean wave. They conducted focus group survey on eight Korean students and eight Taiwanese students, sixteen people in total. Through this study, one can understand how the "younger" generation of both countries experience this social phenomenon, how their perceptions of the Korean wave are different.

But if someone wants to have some materials to understand "the relationship between Korea and Taiwan", it is hard to say this study can fit for this purpose. That is because all the participants surveyed were still in their twenties, and this study does not cover a wider range of age. Therefore, it can hardly represent all members of society which is composed of various age groups.

In addition, the Korean wave is not a medium of two-way communication, but a unidirectional medium providing pop culture from one side to the other. Studies focusing

on the Korean wave are limited to wondering how Taiwanese people think about this phenomenon. This reveals, conversely, that there is little discussion on how Korean people think about Taiwanese culture, society, and Taiwan. In this context, it is necessary to investigate “how” and “which part” Korean people know about Taiwan, and what kind of common interchange medium is used between the two sides.

Hwang (2002) and Wang (2017), as Taiwanese authors, mainly focus on educational exchanges. According to these studies, the exchange of students decreased after breaking off diplomatic ties in 1992. But recently it seems that the educational exchange is gradually becoming active, respectively the increasing number of sisterhood schools and exchange students between the two countries. Wang suggests a way that can activate non-governmental interchange by Korean language education

As can be seen above, the amount of research itself is very small, and the scope of the discussions is limited to national level, Korean wave, and education. The reason behind the lack of further study is because most studies are based on structuralism which contains the idea of structural fatalism. This discourages scholars to do more detailed observation. This is why we should focus on constructivist approach to understand the relationship between Korea and Taiwan.

### III. Theoretical Approach and Research Method

As can be seen from previous research reviews, it is best to organize the data through an inductive method rather than a deductive method of establishing a hypothesis for comprehensively understanding the current status of exchanges between Korea and Taiwan. In this study, Korean media reports and Internet search keywords are analyzed to see how Taiwan is identified in Korean society. These generally reflect relatively important topics among members in a society. Through tracking these, one can see what Korean people understand about Taiwan.

In the context of tracking the changes in one society and its relations with other countries over time, this study theoretically is based on a constructivist perspective. According to constructivism, relations between nations are not simply affected by structure, but are consistently constructed through interaction (Wendt 1987; 1994; 1999). The international political theories of Realism and Liberalism assume that the interests of states are already fixed by international structure (Nye 2009). From the viewpoint of structuralism, the relationship between Korea and Taiwan is faced with a pessimistic limitation. In the international order both Korea and Taiwan are in the fate of the weak countries, and are dominated by the movements of the

great powers. As Han (2008) assumed, the relationship between Taiwan and China is considered to be the most important factor in the relationship between Korea and Taiwan. In the process of considering the state's geopolitical fate, Korea might be reluctant to interact with Taiwan because of the existence of China which is one of countries influencing recent political and economic trend.

In constructivism, however, national interests are changed and constituted by subjective and social factors such as social norms, rules, and culture. To put it simply, the most characteristic aspect of constructivism is a "psychological relationship." And the unit of the actors forming this psychological relationship is not only limited to states or states' leaders, rather it can be citizens who are the majority of a society. And it is possible to consider all the states, national leaders, and citizens as actors.

However, the key to consideration here is how to measure the "psychological relationship" that constructivism emphasizes. This is because psychological relationships are unlike formal diplomatic relations or number of summit meetings held which are visible and countable. Since it is somewhat subjective and invisible, it is not easy to measure objectively. But as Thompson (1995) emphasized, media can be an indicator of public discourse, it will be possible to measure psychological relationships by tracking how the media in

Korea have been reporting Taiwan and how it has been changing.

Constructivism is not about predicting things that have not happened yet but about tracking what already happened, and it requires comprehensive and inductive approaches. Although a large datasets analysis as a research method is an analysis method using quantitative data, it requires an inductive reasoning rather than a deductive one. In this sense, this study using datasets analysis can be most appropriate for the study of constructivist perspectives that requires inductive logic.

To sum up, this article argues that the relationship between South Korea and Taiwan is not fixed as determined by a structure like the international order. From the viewpoint of structuralism, China's existence is recognized as the most important factor in the relationship between Korea and Taiwan, and it is very pessimistic about a possible improvement of their relationship. Rather, this article sees the possibility that the relationship between Korea and Taiwan will change through interactions.

#### **IV. Analyzing News Articles and Internet Search Keywords**

In this study, relatively large, highly unstructured datasets analysis is used for analyzing newspaper articles and internet keywords in Korea during the time period

of 1997-2017 . And used tools are Big Kinds and Google Trend which are providing big data service .

In Korea, it has become more convenient to conduct big data analysis with the data of Korean media reports. Korean news big data analysis internet sites are open to the public, and one of the major big data analysis services is BigKinds. This is a news analysis system that combines big data analysis technology with KINDS (Korean Integrated News Database System), a newspaper article database established in 1990 by the Korea Press Foundation. There are over 30 million articles accumulated over the last 26 years. BigKinds is a service that analyzes the network of people, places, and organizations related to the news keywords used. While the function of the existing KINDS is limited to storing the news, Big Kinds provides the news as visualized analysis results. For example, people, institutions, places, and keywords appearing in the news are separated, forming a relationship between them. If the sources to be used in Big Data Analysis are Korean news articles, you can analyze it through Big Kinds service very efficiently.

News Big data analysis consists of natural language processing and semantic network analysis. Natural language processing has four stages which are morphological analysis, syntax analysis, semantic analysis, and discourse analysis, in order. A morpheme is the smallest unit that gives meaning to a language, and morpheme

analysis is the task of separating sentences into minimal units. Syntax analysis is the process of determining the structure by analyzing the hierarchical relationship of sentences. Semantic analysis is the task of identifying what is represented by an abbreviation. Discourse analysis is the process of grasping macroscopic logic, and is the most difficult process. The key to network analysis is the algorithm that ranks the sources of person, institution, subject, etc. In this paper, both natural language processing and network analysis are used.

In the case of the Internet search keywords, the change in the search volume about "Taiwan" and Taiwan related topics during the time period from 2004 to 2017 are examined through the Big Data Analysis service that Google provides. Related topics and search terms on a yearly basis were categorized as well.

The analysis of newspaper articles in this study was conducted in the following order.

## 1. Collecting Articles

As the subjects of the analysis, eight nationwide newspapers, five business newspapers, twenty-five local newspapers, and four nationwide broadcasters were selected . The search period was from October 26, 1997 to October 25, 2017. In the process of collecting articles related to Taiwan, both Daeman, the pure Korean notation, and Taiwan, the foreign language notation, were used, because the results

would be different if only one of two is used.

## 2. Keyword extraction

The most frequently occurring words in twenty years were identified by using Big Data Analysis web service page which is provided by the Korea Press Foundation. This period was divided again by year, and words that appeared most frequently on an annual basis were sorted out. Henceforth, entire articles which contain these words of high frequency were reread.

## 3. Creating Relationship Matrix by Time and Fields

After extracting the keywords on an annual basis, results were classified by time and fields in a matrix. The vertical axis was arranged in the year from 1997 to 2017, and the horizontal axis was divided by fields.

## VI. Analysis Results

Over twenty years from 1997 to 2017, the most frequently occurred words related to Taiwan were mainland China, the Nationalist Party, Taipei, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United States, and Japan in order. This means that Korean people hardly thought of Taiwan as Taiwan itself. Rather, Taiwan has been regarded as an object of observation which was almost always related to China, the United States, and Japan in Korean society. However, after

the articles were divided by year and coverage topics, changes can be found. At first, politics and economics were the most common news reports, but as time passed, the reports related to travel and civil exchanges were increasingly appearing from 2000s onwards.

The Figure 1 is a network of keywords. The set of keywords shown in the network shows how the discussion over the past two decades has focused on Taiwan related topics. It shows the larger the node in the network diagram, the more frequent it has been associated with Taiwan. The closer the distance is from Taiwan, the more relevant it is. Through the analysis of the network in picture1, it can be seen that the news articles related to Taiwan have been mostly related to China. In addition, the Nationalist Party, Taipei, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United States, and Japan are closely related to Taiwan. This indicates that these have been used as important concepts in Taiwan related reports.

Within the international politics section, as one of the most frequently reported areas in news reports, the most frequently appeared words are the United States, China, and Japan. This implies when Taiwan related topics are discussed, the factors that are considered important are Korea's relationship with other countries, and Taiwan's relationship with other countries.

In the late-1990s, the most frequently mentioned topics were Semiconductors and

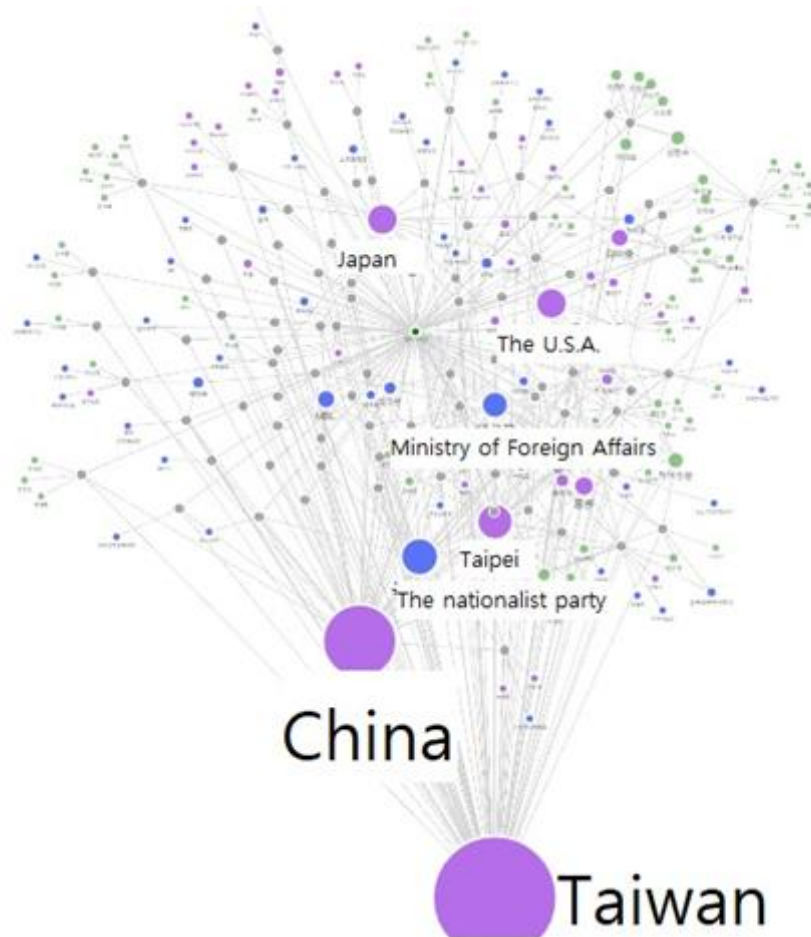


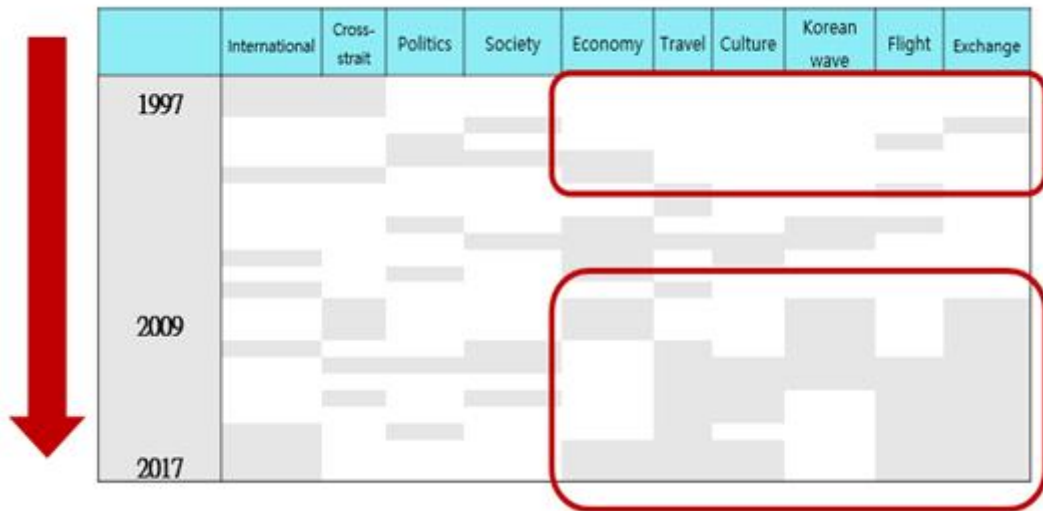
Figure1. The Keywords Network Diagram

LCD (liquid crystal display). This reflects the fact Korea and Taiwan were competing in the global economy for semiconductor and LCD production, and Taiwan is regarded as a competitor and observable object.

However, from the 2000s, changes can be found, and this means that Korean

society wants to know about Taiwan not merely as an object of observation. Semiconductor related queries have flourished in the late 90s, but the number of economy related articles gradually decreased over time. Instead, there are an increasing number of articles related to other fields.

Table1. Taiwan related new articles in 1997-2017



In the field of travel, we can see that the travel related articles have been increasing rapidly since the mid-2000s. As seen in the table 2, in the same period, there were a large number of reports stating direct flights between South Korea and Taiwan. At first, the travel related articles were mostly about Taipei, as time went on, the topics have been expanding to various places such as Taichung, Tainan, Kaohsiung, and Hualien. This shows that the change in reports reflect the growing interest of Korean society in Taiwan.

Lastly, since 2010, the number of articles related to non-governmental interchanges has been steadily increasing. The news reports coverage has diversified from cultural exchanges such as tea, performances and exhibitions, to academic exchanges related to medical science, technology, environment and agriculture.

Results of Taiwan related internet search keywords, Republic of China and Traveling in Taiwan occupied ranking number one and second during the period from 2004 to 2017. Particularly noteworthy is that the Taiwanese weather has been on the top of Internet search keywords since 2011, and the Taiwanese exchange rate has started to appear from 2012. This trend is due to the increasing number of Korean travelers visiting Taiwan, travelers tend to check the local weather and exchange rate before visiting a foreign country. Until 2009, there were not many related topics other than the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China. But in 2010, a search for Taiwan's anti-Korean sentiment emerged, and since 2011 Taiwan weather and exchange rate have appeared along with Taiwan travel search. This can be interpreted as follows. Until 2009, Korean

society had been observing Taiwan together with mainland China within given structure. As of 2010, there has been a demand for understanding as a neighbor of direct interaction rather than observation. And since 2011, the image of the country which makes people want to visit directly began to increase. This means that in the three years from 2009 to 2011, there has been a tremendous change in South Korea's perspective on Taiwan.

In addition, the keyword Grandpas over Flowers, a Korean TV program, was ranked third place from 2013 to 2016. This program provided a way for Koreans get to know Taiwan in a fresh and interesting way. Many Koreans discovered the beauty of Taiwan through the program. As a result, South Koreans who did not know much about Taiwan began to want to understand and visit Taiwan. In figure 2, we can see that the numbers of articles have increased in a same period.

Table2. Internet search keywords from 2004 to 2017

Ranking Year	1	2	3	4	5
2004			People's Republic of China		
		People's Republic of China	Singapore	Hong Kong	Taipei
2010	Republic of China Taiwan taekwondo	Baseball Korea Taiwan	Taiwan taekwondo Japan Taiwan	Emotion Anti-Korea	Anti-Korean emotion Baseball
2013	Republic of China Traveling in Taiwan	Traveling in Taiwan Taiwan weather	Taiwan dramas <b>Papas over Flower in Taiwan</b>	Taiwan Stars Exchange rate	Exchange rate Citizen Taiwan dramas Papas over flower Taiwan map Hong Kong Exchange Rate Papas over flower Taiwan Movie
2017			Taiwan google	Taiwan google Taiwan Korea	Taiwan Hotel

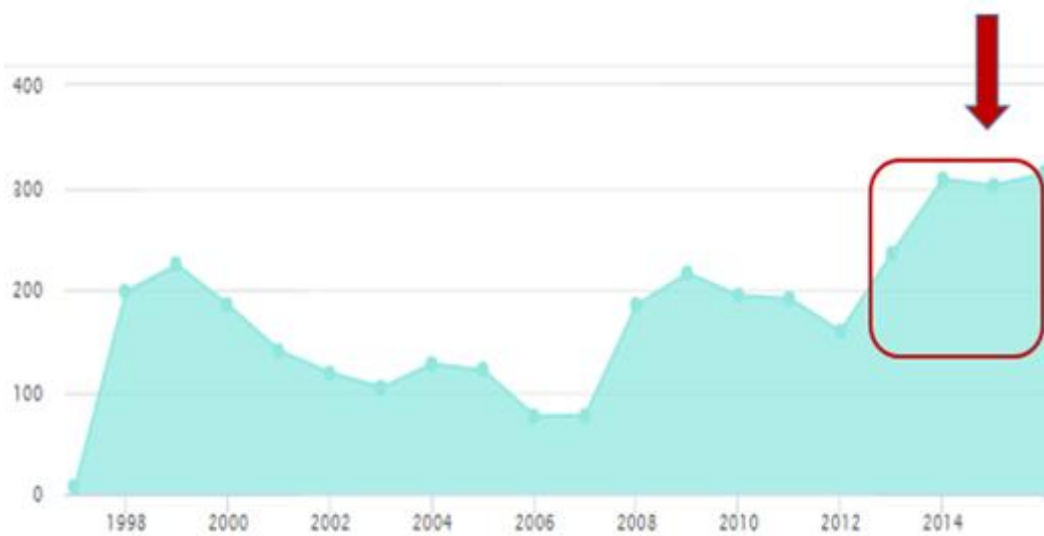


Figure 2. The increasing number of news articles on Taiwan

It can be seen that the Internet search keywords related to Taiwan have changed drastically starting from 2010. Until 2009 in Korean society, Taiwan was only an object of observation which was related to mainland China under the international political system. However, since 2010, the view of Taiwan in Korean society has changed from an object of observation to a country that people want to understand and visit.

## VI. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has two important findings. First of all, from the late 1990s to 2017, the number of domestic media reports about Taiwan in Korea started to increase steadily, and the theme of the reports also tended to be pluralistic. In the late 1990s, Korean society mainly observed Taiwan under the framework of Sino-U.S. Relations. However, over time, it began to show a tendency of looking at Taiwan separately. In other words, in the past Korean society focused on the international political reports section when it came to Taiwan, but currently the civil demand for understanding the social and cultural aspects of Taiwan is on the increase.

Furthermore, the background of this increasing demand for understanding Taiwan is not very relevant to the relations between Taiwan and mainland China or the policies of Taiwanese leaders towards China. Even though the successive presidents of Taiwan all have had different

tendencies in Cross-Strait relations from 1997 to 2017, South Korea's concern with Taiwan and the exchanges between the two sides have been constantly increasing. Therefore, the impact of the relation between China and Taiwan does not have any close correlation on the relation between Korea and Taiwan, other than people imagined.

Structuralists tend to assume that the fate of the relationship between Korea and Taiwan is decided by the international structure and the influence of China, causing scholars to neglect a more detailed observation and the possibility of a much closer relationship between Korea and Taiwan. Therefore, through a constructivist approach, one can focus on the changes in Korean society's attitude toward Taiwan. Constructivism highlights discourse in a society as well as the international structure as important and believes that relations between two societies can be positively developed by continuous interactions.

In this study, we observed the changes of Taiwan related keywords in news reports and internet search keywords for the period of twenty years in Korean society. With regard to the relationship between South Korea and Taiwan, we can use this method to track changes in the perspective of the Korean society towards Taiwan. This study finds that the Korean civil society's understanding of Taiwan continues to increase. We can see that Korean society is

becoming more and more interested in understanding Taiwan, and this trend is not affected by the political nature of Taiwan's president or Cross-Strait relations. So far the areas of exchanges between the two countries have also increased. Perhaps we can expect that there will be a more intimate day for the relations between the two countries.

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