

How to Use This Archive: A Researcher's Guide

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<https://freechina.live/research-archive/research-library/roc-taiwan-mainland-democratic-transition-research/how-to-use-this-archive-a-researchers-guide/>

1. The Question

A research archive is only as useful as the rules it discloses. When a researcher opens a paper in the "ROC (Taiwan) and Mainland Democratic Transition Research" series (series hub), three questions should be answerable quickly: what claim is being made, how strong is the evidence behind it, and what would change the conclusion. This guide exists so that researchers can answer all three without having to take the publisher's word for it. It describes the archive's tiers, evidence-grade system, version history, and correction channels, and compares this archive's approach with standard research-library practice.

2. The Series' Own Position, Cited

The series hub states the archive's subject matter as evidence-graded studies on "the constitutional history of the Republic of China, Taiwan's democratic development and electoral history, and the comparative study of democratic transition as it relates to mainland China" (hub). Its publication standard is stated as a fixed formula, quoted here exactly:

"Each approved paper carries an abstract, keywords, methodology, evidence grades, precise citations, competing interpretations, research limitations, author attribution (Free China Movement), and version history. Listing here does not imply independent peer review of manuscripts not yet released." (hub)

The subseries hub, "Taiwan Democratic Development and Electoral History" (subseries hub), covers party competition, electoral institutions, voter behavior, and democratic consolidation in the ROC (Taiwan) from 1996 to the present. It is anchored by two papers: Taiwan Paper 1, on KMT–DPP electoral competition from 2000 to 2024 (paper), and Taiwan Paper 2, on direct presidential elections and party alternation from 1996 to 2024 (companion paper in this same RA series). Three further subseries are listed as forthcoming, with manuscripts in preparation: DPP-01 (Democratic Progressive Party study), ROC-CONST-01 (ROC constitutional studies), and ROC-TRANS-02 (democratic transition studies) (hub).

3. Evidence: the Archive's Structure and Standards

Tiers

The archive is organized in descending tiers: **series hub** → **subseries** → **papers** → **primary sources** (hub). The series hub defines subject scope and the publication standard; the subseries hub narrows scope (for the Taiwan Democratic Development subseries: party competition, electoral institutions, voter behavior, and democratic consolidation in the ROC (Taiwan), 1996–present) (subseries hub); individual papers carry the full apparatus — abstract, keywords, methodology, evidence grades, citations, competing interpretations, limitations, attribution, and version history (hub). Primary sources sit at the base: constitutional texts, official gazettes, election returns, court records, contemporaneous reporting, and archived rights-defense documentation. The companion paper The Rights Defense Network Issue Reports as a Source: Method and Limits supplies a second tier of guidance for the source base itself.

Evidence grades

Every approved paper assigns grades to its evidence (hub). In practice, reading a paper means starting with its grades: they tell you which claims rest on official primary sources (e.g., Central Election Commission returns, constitutional text), which on contemporaneous reporting, and which on retrospective reconstruction or secondary synthesis. A grade is not a verdict on truth; it is a statement of provenance — what kind of source supports the claim, and how close that source sits to the event (hub).

Method, limits, and competing interpretations

The publication standard requires each paper to state its methodology, the competing interpretations it considered and set aside (and why), and the limits of what its sources can support (hub). These three sections define the domain in which the paper claims competence and name the alternatives the author already considered. A recommended first read runs: abstract → methodology → evidence grades → competing interpretations → limitations → findings. Reading the findings first is how errors travel.

Version history

Version history is part of the publication standard (hub). When a paper is revised — a figure corrected, a source re-graded, a competing interpretation added — the revision is recorded, not silently overwritten. This matters because the archive is growing: papers in preparation (DPP-01, ROC-CONST-01, ROC-TRANS-02) will enter, and early papers may be amended as the subseries fill in (hub). Cite the version you read; treat "the paper" as a versioned object, not a fixed text.

How to read and cite

Cite at the finest tier available: paper → section → evidence-grade statement → primary-source citation (hub). If you rely on a number from a paper, name the grade attached to it. If you quote the hub's scope or standard, cite the hub page (hub). If you draw on mainland rights-defense material, consult the N2 paper's guidance on method and limits before citing.

4. Comparative Options: This Archive Against Standard Practice

Research libraries and archives have settled ways of organizing material for researchers; it is worth seeing what this archive adopts and what it adds.

Archival description: what DACS does and does not do. The Society of American Archivists' standard *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS) is a content standard for describing archives, personal papers, and manuscript collections — the U.S. implementation of the international ISAD(G) descriptive standard (DACS overview). DACS tells archivists how to describe records, their creators, and the relationships between them so that researchers can find material; it specifies the content of description, not judgments about the reliability of what the records say (DACS overview). Several current DACS principles overlap with this archive's approach: archival description must "be clear about what archivists know, what they don't know, and how they know it," and archivists must "document and make discoverable the actions they take on records" (DACS overview). Its multilevel description framework — describing a collection at successive levels of detail — parallels this archive's tiered structure (series → subseries → paper → source) (DACS overview). The difference is direction: DACS describes holdings for discovery; this archive grades evidence inside interpretive papers.

Information literacy: constructed authority. The ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* treats authority as constructed and contextual: "Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used" (ACRL Framework). That is close to what evidence grades do: they refuse to let a claim travel without its provenance. The Framework's "Scholarship as Conversation" — "Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations" — and "Research as Inquiry" — "Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions" (ACRL Framework) — describe the environment in which version histories and competing interpretations sections make sense: claims are revisable, and the revision is part of the record.

What the archive adds. Standard finding aids rarely carry in-line reliability judgments, and scholarly papers rarely disclose a formal evidence-grading scheme. This archive's combination — tiered, archive-style structure with paper-level grades, stated competing interpretations, and version history — is unusual, and it is explicit about one thing that standard venues often leave implicit: that listing on the hub "does not imply independent peer review of manuscripts not yet released" (hub).

5. Recommended Design: Numbered Provisions

1. **Cite the versioned paper, not the series.** Cite paper title, section, and version date; name the evidence grade attached to any figure or claim you rely on (hub). 2. **Read grades before findings.** Check each paper's evidence-grade statements first; a conclusion resting on low-grade evidence is a hypothesis, whatever the prose says (hub). 3. **Consult the version history before reusing a figure.** If a paper has been revised, cite the version you read and check whether the number you need survived the revision (hub). 4. **Honor the competing-interpretations section.** When the paper says it considered and set aside an alternative, your citation should acknowledge the alternative unless you have new evidence against it (hub). 5. **Keep the tiers separate.** Do not cite a hub page for a paper's finding, or a paper for a primary source's content — cite the tier that makes the claim (hub; subseries hub). 6. **File corrections with source, page, and grade affected.** When you find an error, state the paper, the version, the erroneous claim, the corrected claim, and the source supporting the correction; version history is the channel by which corrections become visible (hub). 7. **Raise research questions in the open.** Questions that the papers' stated limitations already cover should be directed there first; new questions — especially requests for comparability arguments between the ROC (Taiwan) record and the PRC (Mainland) case — should name the papers and the evidence grades they would depend on (see § 6) (hub). 8. **Treat forthcoming subseries as forthcoming.** DPP-01, ROC-CONST-01, and ROC-TRANS-02 are manuscripts in preparation; cite them only when released, and do not infer their conclusions from the series scope statement (hub).

6. Open Questions and Risks

A growing archive. The series lists three forthcoming subseries as manuscripts in preparation (hub). Until they are released, the archive's coverage is incomplete by its own account; any synthesis that requires the DPP-01 institutional study or the ROC-TRANS-02 comparative work is premature.

Papers in preparation. The hub explicitly disclaims independent peer review for manuscripts not yet released (hub). Researchers should not rely on forthcoming manuscripts.

No independent peer review beyond the stated review. The publication standard names abstract, keywords, methodology, evidence grades, citations, competing

interpretations, limitations, attribution, and version history — it does not name any external, independent peer-review mechanism (hub). Researchers should treat papers as well-documented working studies and weigh the evidence grades and competing-interpretations sections accordingly.

Analogy discipline. The series treats the ROC (Taiwan) record as a record of what happened, not as a template that transfers automatically to the PRC (Mainland): the two differ fundamentally in social structure, institutional conditions, and the development of civil society, so any analogy between them requires a comparability argument made in the open, paper by paper (series framing text, companion deliverable). Researchers using the archive as background to transition design for the PRC (Mainland) should make that argument explicit — or treat its absence as the paper's limit, not its invitation.

Source-base asymmetry. The archive's ROC (Taiwan) record rests on open electoral and constitutional sources; its mainland documentation includes rights-defense reporting gathered under adversarial conditions (see the N2 companion paper on rights-defense sources, and the archive-adjacent research on information control and circumvention (circumvention research)). The two sides of the archive are not fed by the same pipeline of source availability.

7. Cross-Links

- Series hub: ROC (Taiwan) and Mainland Democratic Transition Research
- Subseries hub: Taiwan Democratic Development and Electoral History
- Series framing text: published on the series hub and subseries hub
- Companion paper: The Rights Defense Network Issue Reports as a Source: Method and Limits
- Taiwan Paper 1: KMT–DPP electoral competition 2000–2024
- Taiwan Paper 2: Direct Presidential Elections and Party Alternation in the ROC (Taiwan), 1996–2024