

# India-Taiwan Ties: Can They Overcome Structural Challenges?

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## Abstract

Examining the logic and depth of India-Taiwan ties, this article provides an analysis of the context in which they operate and asks whether the two sides can develop bilateral relations as a hedging bet against China with which they seem to have common strategic and security concerns. The article is exploratory in nature and argues that while India might like to reserve the so-called Taiwan Card as an extreme option, India's "Taiwan Card" and Taiwan's "India Card" – if they were to play any such cards – are unviable in the present scheme of their bilateral relations, their separate relations with China, the regional strategic situation and Taiwan's domestic politics. This article places the limitations in a historical context and argues that the history that has defined the present India-Taiwan people-to-people relations, lives on. It concludes that while it is unlikely that their bilateral ties will be able to move beyond China's shadow in the strategic context, there is immense scope for transforming the hitherto ad hoc nature of the ties to a self-defined people-to-people relationship, which does not rest on approval or disapproval from China. The hypothesis is that the structural and domestic dynamics currently shaping the bilateral ties appear to be in sync and conducive for strengthening the ties—a rare occurrence in the history of their relations.

## Introduction

India has silently emerged as one of the most important destinations for Taiwan's pragmatic diplomacy, even though both structural constraints and domestic dynamics, such as a lack of political will and bureaucratic enthusiasm, have primarily determined the course of India-Taiwan relations. The internal dynamics of the two countries under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Tsai Ing-wen – for the first time – have shown signs of furthering pragmatic growth in bilateral relations. At this juncture, nationalistic governments in both countries appear to be open to deeper and closer ties; therefore, Chinese reactions are less likely to guide their relations. Nevertheless, China's disapproval continues to be relevant and takes precedence over the geopolitical consideration that "the enemy's

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enemy is my friend,” a Kautilyan<sup>1</sup> extrapolation that would favour a closer relationship between India and Taiwan. Therefore, relying on a deterioration in India-China relations for any dramatic upgrading of India-Taiwan relations would be too optimistic. In fact, a dispassionate scrutiny would reveal the unviability of India’s “Taiwan Card” and Taiwan’s “India Card,” if they were to play any such cards. Here, it should be noted that although the term “card” is hardly ever explained when it is used in either popular or academic writings, it implies a pragmatic, common-sense understanding of employing joint strategic-security-diplomatic moves to “unnerve” China.

### **India’s Act East and Taiwan’s Pragmatic Diplomacy: A *Sui Generis* Nature of India-Taiwan Ties**

Any study of India-Taiwan relations from a geo-political point of view is complex given that India-Taiwan relations were almost non-existent for more than four decades after India switched recognition from the Republic of China (ROC) to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on December 31, 1949.<sup>2</sup> Even after 1995 when India and Taiwan set up their representative offices,<sup>3</sup> marking the beginning of their non-diplomatic or so-called unofficial ties, bilateral relations have struggled for attention. Besides, Taiwan has either not been studied in India or been studied as an adjunct of China, for decades.<sup>4</sup>

However, a survey of this apparent “insignificance” is actually quite relevant. It recalls how “facts on the ground,” an allusion to the Kuomintang’s (KMT’s) defeat and the founding of the PRC, prevailed over Jawaharlal Nehru and Chiang Kai-shek’s anti-imperial comradery rendering India-ROC relations insignificant. Studying the factors that prevented cooperation is also helpful in understanding the workings of the systemic constraints and domestic dynamics during the Cold War. These factors prevented any contact or understanding between the ROC and India. The decision to establish the representative offices furthers an understanding of India’s Look East Policy<sup>5</sup> and Taiwan’s pragmatic

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<sup>1</sup> Kautilya, who is credited to have authored the famous treatise on statecraft, *Arthashastra*, is believed to have been born in ancient India. The said extrapolation comes from a Mandala theory, propounded by him, that discusses foreign policy and diplomacy and classifies states in terms of friend or foe. The basic assumption of this classification is that a given state and its neighbouring states are generally enemies, leading to another assumption that the neighbour’s neighbour should be that neighbour’s enemy, and hence a friend of the first-mentioned state. Thus, the maxim “the enemy’s enemy is my friend.”

<sup>2</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Letter, December 31, 1949, in *Letters to Chief Minister Vol. 1*, ed. Gopaldaswami Parthasarathi (A Project of the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund: hereafter JLNMF) (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 516.

<sup>3</sup> “Taiwan India Relations,” The Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre (TECC) in India Website. Accessed September 28, 2017: [http://www.roc-taiwan.org/in\\_en/post/39.html](http://www.roc-taiwan.org/in_en/post/39.html)

<sup>4</sup> Janardan Sahu, “Taiwan Studies in India,” in *India and Taiwan: From Benign Neglect to Pragmatism*, eds. D.P. Tripathi and B.R. Deepak (New Delhi: Vij Book India, 2016), 201–215.

<sup>5</sup> The then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao enunciated India’s Look East Policy, now known as the Act East Policy, in the early 1990s to re-engage with East Asia after a long stint of insipid relations with the region during the Cold War. See, Amar Nath Ram, ed. *India’s Asia-Pacific Engagement: Impulses and Imperatives* (New Delhi, ICWA-Manohar: 2015).

diplomacy<sup>6</sup> in the post-Cold War period.

At present, a study of their relations provides an interesting point of reference for understanding India-China relations in the shifting strands of Asian geopolitics.<sup>7</sup> It also helps to understand Taiwan's external engagement with the world, especially South Asia. The present tensions in India-China relations have yet again fuelled speculation about India seeking closer relations with Taiwan.<sup>8</sup> Although India is not the same to Taiwan as the U.S. – Taiwan's informal ally under the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), 1979, or Japan – its neighbour and a possible supporter in a hypothetical military confrontation with China (elaborated in the subsequent sections), yet, New Delhi seems to have emerged as a significant actor in Taiwan's pragmatic diplomacy.<sup>9</sup>

India's large size, rich cultural diversity, shared democratic values and strong economy provide Taiwan a large space to implement its pragmatic diplomacy, even as the country is not a factor in Taiwan's security arrangements. In addition, owing to the perceived commonality of strategic concerns vis-à-vis China, from time to time, many analysts have drawn attention to the maxim "the enemy's enemy is my friend."<sup>10</sup> Amidst the current strategic uncertainty that dominates India-China and cross-strait relations, this concept becomes even more appealing.<sup>11</sup> Such a parallel has hitherto not formed part of Taiwan's pragmatic diplomacy which gives India a *sui generis* importance.

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<sup>6</sup> Taiwan's pragmatic diplomacy, also known as flexible diplomacy and substantive diplomacy, is about enhancing its international profile and facilitating its external engagements by using "unofficial" and "non-diplomatic" channels in the broader economic and cultural arenas, without attempting conventional state-to-state diplomacy, so as not to invite ire from the PRC. Chen Jie, *Foreign Policy of the New Taiwan* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2002), 5–58.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Smith, "Where Is India on the One China Policy?" *The Diplomat*, March 6, 2017. Accessed September 23, 2017: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/where-is-india-on-the-one-china-policy/>

<sup>8</sup> Yu Ning, "New Delhi will Suffer Losses If It Plays Taiwan Card," *Global Times*, February 14, 2017. Accessed September 17, 2017: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1033001.shtml>; Harsh Pant, "Is India Playing Hardball by Bringing Taiwan into the Equation with China?" *Scroll.in*, February 24, 2017. Accessed September 17, 2017: <https://scroll.in/article/830157/is-india-playing-hardball-by-bringing-taiwan-into-the-equation-with-china>

<sup>9</sup> The author has arrived at this view after numerous interactions, spread over a number of years, with Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) officials in Taipei, its representative officials in New Delhi and Taiwanese scholars following India.

<sup>10</sup> Fang Tien-Sze states how the balance of power logic might have guided the DPP government to cultivate relations with India. Fang Tien-Sze, "Taiwan's Relations with India: Issues and Trends," *China Report* 49:4 (2013): 431; Chen Mumin applied the alliance theory to test this logic. He avers that while a theoretical space for an India-Taiwan alliance does exist, translating it into a practical reality is, perhaps, not possible because India, like any other big power, has a conservative view on exploring Taiwan's utility as a formal diplomatic ally. Chen Mumin, "Taiwan-India Relations under the Shadow of a Rising China," in *India and China in the Emerging Dynamics of East Asia*, eds. G. V. C. Naidu, Chen Mumin and Raviprasad Narayanan (New Delhi: Springer, 2015), 43–58.

<sup>11</sup> Although the "card advocacy" is not new, its frequency and shrillness rises, in the media and at think-tanks, during diplomatic or military stand-offs with China. Former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal said during the recent Doklam Military standoff between India and China from mid-June to end-August 2017, "A conflict should be avoided, but if it becomes inevitable, we will be freed from many constraints that we have imposed on ourselves despite China's unceasing provocations, whether in Tibet, Taiwan, East Turkestan and so on." Aviral Virk, "Should India Take China's Doklam Threat Seriously," *The Quint*, July 22, 2017. Accessed September 17, 2017: <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/india-china-doklam-stand-off-experts-speak>

## History: Explanations and Limitations

From India's point of view, what defines India-Taiwan relations is people-to-people contacts, pragmatism in India's policies towards Taiwan, differing foreign policy and strategic priorities, and the lack of realistic opportunities for applying the Kautilyan maxim vis-à-vis China.

### *A Legacy of People-to-People Warmth Fraught with Structural Constraints*

A study of the contacts between India and the ROC from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s draws attention to a legacy of people-to-people warmth that has always had to reckon with pressures from structural factors, then as well as now. During this period, the historical contexts of India's fight for freedom, the ROC's resistance against the Japanese invasion in the 1930s, the Chinese Civil War, and the Second World War, shaped their interaction. This period saw warm fraternal ties between the Indian National Congress (INC) and the ruling KMT in the ROC, and a rapport between their leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru and Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>12</sup> The point, relevant for the present, is that the ROC's contacts were with "non-state India," represented by the INC. The British colonial government advised the ROC to have only cultural and economic ties with India. The two parties laid out "The Preliminary Outline for India-China Cultural Cooperation" to "cloak" their "political" relations.<sup>13</sup> This was the opposite of the present-day situation in which India has to take into account the PRC's reaction when dealing with "non-state" Taiwan, within the cultural and economic framework.

The second reminder from history, important for the present-day well-wishers of India-Taiwan ties, is to be aware of how difficult it was for the anti-imperial comrades to remove the geopolitical obstacles in their vision for India-China friendship. The anti-imperial friendship, articulated in somewhat "overblown" expressions,<sup>14</sup> failed to resolve the difficult geopolitical issues restricting their cooperation. During his visit to India in February 1942, Chiang could not enlist the INC leaders' (Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru) support for the Allied Powers' anti-fascist struggle against the Axis Powers in World War II (1939–1945), as they were sceptical of British commitment to India's freedom. Therefore, they were unwilling to commit anything to Chiang, except moral support and sympathy for China in its struggle against Japan.<sup>15</sup>

Separately, the Chinese Civil-War, which resumed in 1945–1946, added new twists to this story of friendship, which was envisaged to have steered the course of Asia's destiny. The interim

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<sup>12</sup> For examples and references with regard to people-to-people contacts between India and the ROC, and the interaction between Jawaharlal Nehru and Chiang Kai-shek see Yang Tianshi, "Chiang Kai-shek and Jawaharlal Nehru," in *Negotiating China's Destiny in World War II*, eds. Hans van de Ven, Diana Lary, and Stephen MacKinnon (California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 127–140; Prashant Kumar Singh, *Transforming India-Taiwan Relations: New Perspectives*, IDSA Monograph Series 35 (2014): 27–44; B.R. Deepak, "India's National Leaders and the Nationalist China," in *India and Taiwan: From Benign Neglect to Pragmatism*, eds. D.P. Tripathi and B.R. Deepak (New Delhi: Vj Book India, 2016), 70–93.

<sup>13</sup> Yang Tianshi, "Chiang Kai-shek and Jawaharlal Nehru," 129.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 130, 132, 140.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–135.

government in India, which took office in 1946 with Nehru as prime minister, interacted briefly with the KMT over the Tibet issue. This interaction revealed that personal bonding was not enough to deal with complex strategic issues. Thus, the Nehru–Chiang friendship that had developed between 1939 and 1945 ended on a “sad, bitter note,”<sup>16</sup> under the weight of structural realities. Pragmatism soon overcame their mutual appreciation.

*Pragmatism in Nehru’s China and Taiwan Policies*

Nehru’s growing ambivalence towards the KMT rule in China after 1945, his government’s eventual decision to switch recognition from the ROC to the PRC, and his quiet burial of his personal bond with the Chiang family ran counter to the much reviled “idealism” of his China policy.

Nehru held only the KMT responsible for its loss of the Mainland, arguing that although the Chinese people “had no sympathy with communism,” it lost to the communists because it was an authoritarian government tolerating no criticism.<sup>17</sup> Aware of the ground-realities, he took the position that a country has the right to “choose its own political or economic structure.”<sup>18</sup> Nehru stated, “As for recognition, there is no doubt that recognition has to be given to a fact.”<sup>19</sup> He wrote to his sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who was India’s ambassador to the United States (1949–1951), “Indians ‘cannot possibly ally themselves with the Kuomintang merely because of the past’.”<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the Korean War (1950–1953) changed his perception of Chiang Kai-shek completely. He perceived him, along with South Korean President Syngman Rhee, to be obstructing the peace process: “[The War was] the only solution [to their problems] ... [they were therefore] averse to any peaceful settlement.”<sup>21</sup> Alluding to the United States propping up of the KMT regime in Taiwan, Nehru argued that Chiang’s legacy belonged “to the past and is done with ... and attempts are made to hold on to [him] ... and to shut our eyes to reality.”<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, when Chiang felt that Nehru was “trying to solidify and expand Britain’s privileges in Tibet,” which independent India was to inherit, he remarked that “such arrogance was unbelievable.” In March 1951, when he had already relocated to Taiwan, the Tibetan administration contacted the PRC authorities for negotiations. Chiang’s response to this was: “This time the Dalai

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Colombo Conference, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* 14 (1), A JLNMF Project, Second Series (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 256.

<sup>18</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Letter, August 15, 1949, in *Letters to Chief Ministers Vol. 1*, ed. Gopaldaswami Parthasarathi, A JLNMF Project (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 434.

<sup>19</sup> “To Tan Yun-shan,” Letter, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* 14 (1), A JLNMF Project, Second Series (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 514–515.

<sup>20</sup> “To Vijay Laxmi Pandit,” Cable, July 1, 1949, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* 12, A JLNMF Project, Second Series (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 408–409.

<sup>21</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Letter, July 2, 1953, in *Letters to Chief Ministers*. Gopaldaswami Parthasarathi, A JLNMF Project (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 323.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Lama was not stopped by Britain and India. He has sent delegates to Beijing. India's plot has failed."<sup>23</sup> Here, he was referring to the delayed arrival of a Tibetan delegation for negotiating with the PRC authorities in 1950. The delay was caused by a variety of reasons, mainly visa-related. The delay, however, was construed as deliberate, under foreign influence, not only by the PRC but also by Chiang and became a justification for the People's Liberation Army's march into Tibet in October 1950.<sup>24</sup>

*Challenge to the Official Position: Don't Forget the Balance of Power*

Various political parties criticised Nehru's ROC policy and that of the succeeding governments of his party, the INC. Here, in the current context, it would be most relevant to recall the positions taken by the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the organisational and ideological predecessor of the present ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the BJS's ideological fellow-traveller the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha (ABHM), as their positions provide ideological inputs to the present BJP government's actions vis-à-vis Taiwan. In the 1950s and 1960s, vocally criticising India's Formosa policy in the Parliament, they pushed for the Two-China policy as "Chiang's Formosa is as much a fact as Mao's Peking ... [It] was the symbol of unity against the spread of communism in Asia."<sup>25</sup> They identified Formosa as "a natural ally" and the PRC as the "enemy," and lamented that the government was recognising an enemy at the cost of a natural ally.<sup>26</sup> The BJS's Balraj Madhok argued, "We can check China with the help of Formosa ... [It] wants to be friends with India, but, unfortunately Nehru's policy was not favourably to it."<sup>27</sup> The ABHM's V.G. Deshpande questioned the justification for India "siding with [PRC's] aggression" on Formosa. N.B. Khare asked the government to explain the rationale behind its support, given that the PRC was not supporting India's sovereignty on the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> The two parties demanded recognition for the ROC, and sometimes even that the PRC be derecognised. The BJS opined that India should recognise Taipei and "dare Peking to snap diplomatic ties with India." It bemoaned that "such common sense politics have been well beyond the special sense of New Delhi."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Yang Tianshi, "Chiang Kai-shek and Jawaharlal Nehru," 140.

<sup>24</sup> Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, volume 2: The Calm before the Storm: 1951–1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 69–70.

<sup>25</sup> Mohammed, *Jana Sangh and India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Associate Publishing House, 1969), 106.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Jetly, *India China relations, 1947–1977: A Study of Parliament's Role in the Making of Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1979), 44.

<sup>29</sup> Mohammed Ali Kishore, *Jana Sangh and India's Foreign Policy*, 106. The statements attributed to the ABHM's Deshpande and Khare were made during a parliamentary debate in February 1995 after the President's address wherein the Indian government had supported the PRC claim to Formosa (Taiwan). The statements attributed to the BJS and its leader Balraj Madhok, were issued to the media between 1964 and 1967, i.e. after the 1962 India-China War and the 1965 Indo-Pak War, particularly in the BJS's official magazine *Organiser* and at the party convention.

*Analysing the Two Positions*

Nehru's diagnosis that the establishment of the PRC on Mainland China could not be wished away in the international order was proven correct. The opposition, which opposed Nehru's Formosa policy, blissfully ignored its earlier remonstrations and followed the China and Formosa policies set by the Indian governments of the 1950s and 1960s when it joined the government (discussed in the subsequent sections). However, Nehru's prophecy that Chiang's legacy belonged "to the past and is done with" and had "no place in the future" has been proven wrong. Taiwan as a unique entity under the ROC constitution continues to survive and thrive. Although he recognised Taiwan's "distinct identity," he could not visualise how it would play out in the future. He looked at Taiwan from the prism of the CPC-KMT divide, and so did the opposition. The opposition raised the issue of self-determination for the Formosans and their human rights. However, it was the balance of power consideration that influenced its positions. Its exhortations to the government betrayed a certain ignorance about domestic and international contexts of the ROC's life in the 1950s and 1960s that did not allow any balance of power equation between India and the ROC to contain China.

*Differing Foreign Policy and Strategic Priorities*

During the period between the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) in New Delhi in 1947 to around 1959, Nehruvian internationalism in Indian foreign policy was at its peak. This was the last time that any official comments on cross-strait issue were made by India. Identifying the Formosa Problem as one of the residual peace problems of the Second World War, Nehru expressed his views in the media and the Parliament during the First and the Second Strait Crises in 1954–1955 and 1958. He discussed the issue with international leaders such as the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan.<sup>30</sup> He opposed terming the cross-strait problem as a continuation of a civil war as it would be dangerous on account of the two sides drawing respective support from the two rival superpowers, the United States and USSR.<sup>31</sup> Although during the first Strait Crisis, he supported the PRC's claim to the offshore islands citing their strategic importance, he advocated a negotiated settlement implying a possible role for international arbitration. He did not accept Taiwan's international identity but did acknowledge Taiwan's "distinct individuality" qualifying it for autonomy as "an autonomous part of China."<sup>32</sup>

This approach was in line with India working closely with other like-minded countries on issues of world peace, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and support for the United Nations (UN) system. This value-based foreign policy elevated India's status to a leading non-allied country. India wielded more influence and gained more approbation than any other newly de-colonised country could have

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<sup>30</sup> "To Harold Macmillan," Letter from September 7, 1958, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* 44, Second Series (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 572.

<sup>31</sup> J.P. Jain, "The Legal Status of Formosa: A Study of British, Chinese and Indian Views," *The American Journal of International Law* 57:1 (1963): 25–45.

<sup>32</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, "To Chief Ministers," Letter from September 6, 1958, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* 44, Second Series (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

normally expected.<sup>33</sup> The Nehru government considered the PRC revolutionary regime's inclusion in the international community as necessary for regional and world peace.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it championed the cause of the PRC's entry into the UN and the exclusion of the ROC. India, along with the USSR, moved the first resolution in the UN General Assembly in 1950 for its entry into the UN.<sup>35</sup>

Further, the ROC's foreign policy priorities were not conducive to having closer relations with India. The ROC signed a Mutual Defence Treaty in 1954 with the United States,<sup>36</sup> and emerged as a steadfast U.S. ally. It argued that the end of the communist regime in Mainland China was a necessary condition for world peace.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Chiang Kai-shek's grand diplomatic and security schemes revolved around the United States, exhibiting an unflinching conviction in anti-communist polemics of the time. Taiwan remained in the U.S. camp even after Sino-U.S. rapprochement in 1972, whereas India signed the Treaty of Friendship and Amity with the USSR in 1971.<sup>38</sup> Chiang's rejection of any form of dual recognition<sup>39</sup> and the ROC's alienation from the non-aligned and third-world countries makes one wonder whether he had any serious strategic interest in countries such as India. Therefore, given this situation, it was not possible for India to play the Taiwan card.

### *Inappositeness of the Kautilyan Maxim*

An analysis of domestic political contexts of the two countries' strategic choices explains why even India's defeat in the India-China War of 1962 could not bring India and Taiwan closer; and how the legacies of the past continue.

The most telling example of the legacy of differing foreign policy and strategic priorities is that at present even when the supposedly India-enthusiast Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is in power in Taiwan, its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website hosts an India map which as per India is inaccurate and thus objectionable. It depicts India's boundaries in the same way as the PRC

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<sup>33</sup> B.R. Nanda, "Introduction," *India Foreign Policy: The Nehru Years* (New Delhi: Sangam Books, 1990), 1–23.

<sup>34</sup> John Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 105–112.

<sup>35</sup> "Struggle to Restore China's Lawful Seat in the United Nations," Foreign Ministry of People's Republic of China (FMPRC). Accessed September 21, 2017: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/t18013.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18013.shtml)

<sup>36</sup> John Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (New York: ME Sharpe, 1997), 52–72.

<sup>37</sup> It was only after the Second Strait Crisis of 1958 that the ROC, under U.S. pressure, renounced military means to recover the Mainland, though it continued to exhort the U.S. throughout the 1960s to use military force to destroy the communist regime. *Ibid.*, 139; Denny Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 113–116.

<sup>38</sup> Even then, cross-camp dealings could have been possible as the USSR itself was reported to be exploring the possibilities of doing a China on the U.S., by hobnobbing with Taiwan. But this was never to happen. John Garver, "Taiwan's Russian Option: Image and Reality," *Asian Survey* 18:7 (1978): 751–766.

<sup>39</sup> Chiang Kai-shek, who treated Taipei as his war-time capital, vociferously refused to entertain any idea of dual recognition, taking the position that "there is no room for patriots and traitors to live together." Dennis Van Vranken Hickey, *Foreign Policy Making in Taiwan: From Principle to Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 2006), 82.

would. Moreover, this is a reminder of the legacy of Chiang's ROC that persists, so much so that even though the ruling DPP, as a political party, may not be in sync with the KMT's territorial notions of the ROC; it has a commitment to consider Mongolia and Tibet as part of its national territory as per the ROC's constitution, which is a pre-1949 legacy.<sup>40</sup> Incidentally, "when the Indian government announced the establishment of Arunachal Pradesh [an Indian state in the North-eastern Himalayas, which China claims as its own] in 1986, Taipei [the then KMT government] even issued a statement condemning it."<sup>41</sup>

Chiang Kai-shek not only spurned dual recognition, but his government's positions on some key strategic-security issues, such as Tibet<sup>42</sup> and the McMahon line with India (the contested India-China border), tallied with that of the PRC.<sup>43</sup> He was more interested in recovering China with U.S. help than exploring balance-of-power propositions with countries such as India.<sup>44</sup> On India's part, even the defeat in the 1962 War with China did not change its overall Nehruvian foreign policy, and in spite of the friendship treaty with the USSR in 1971, its primary political identity remained non-aligned. The balance-of-power and alliance building logic failed to find traction in India's foreign policy. Thus, even though India had to fight three wars in quick succession – in 1962 with China, and in 1965 and 1971 with Pakistan – its foreign policy did not involve any aggressive military-diplomatic posturing vis-à-vis China. There was also the capability constraint, as military modernisation to deal with China did not become a top priority. In fact, any revival of diplomatic relations with the ROC would have enhanced the two-front China-Pakistan threat, a threat that has existed at the back of Indian security

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<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Chung, "Taiwan Calls Time on Mongolia and Tibet Affairs Commission," *South China Morning Post*, August 16, 2017. Accessed September 21, 2017: <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2106907/taiwan-calls-time-mongolia-and-tibet-affairs-commission>

<sup>41</sup> Chen Mumin, "Taiwan-India," 51.

<sup>42</sup> John Garver informs that "while India never openly endorsed the objective of an independent Tibet," the ROC leadership was concerned about the perceived Indian objective to create an independent buffer in Tibet. He writes, "Following the 1962 War, Taipei began using its influence to direct the Tibetan insurgency away from advocacy of independence from China and toward advocacy of Tibetan autonomy within a non-Communist China..." John Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance*, 180.

<sup>43</sup> Nancy Jetly, *India China relations, 1947–1977*, 44.

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, D.P. Tripathi and B.R. Deepak extensively quote from a Chinese scholar Zhao Weiwen's Chinese language article (trans. "Records of Turbulence in Sino-Indian Relations: 1949–1999," Beijing: *Shishi Chubanshe* [Current Affairs Press], 2000). Zhao provides a detailed list of backchannel, unofficial and low-key contacts between India and Taiwan during the 1960s. The article also discusses the then Indian Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai's Taiwan visit in 1968, and states that "during his next leg of journey in Japan, he spoke of 'two Chinas' and expressed that his visit to Taiwan was a tacit acknowledgement of the existence of 'Two Chinas.'" Similarly, Chiang Ching-kuo during his meeting with two visiting senior Indian journalists "urged India to snap diplomatic ties with Beijing and join hands with Taiwan in order to deal with the mainland 'threat,' however the modus operandi of this alliance was to be discussed at an opportune time." D.P. Tripathi and B.R. Deepak, "Introduction," in *India and Taiwan*, 5–7. If the information provided by Zhao could be corroborated from Indian or Taiwanese sources, it would bring fresh insight for researchers. Considering the volume of the contacts Zhao refers to, a legitimate research question would investigate, what developments took place in the 1970s that led to the rejection of Director-General, Bureau of Foreign Trade (1982–1988), and later Vice President of Taiwan, Vincent Siewm's visa application by the Indian Government seven times in the 1980s, as Fang Tien-Sze informs us. Fang Tien-Sze, "Taiwan's Relations with India: Issues and Trends," *China Report* 49:4 (2013): 426.

planners' mind since the 1960s.

The above discussion explains why the opposition's appeals to the government in the 1950s and particularly after the 1962 War with China and the 1965 War with Pakistan to switch recognition to Taiwan, or to recognise both, and its back-channel efforts in the 1960s failed in changing the narrative of the India-Taiwan relations.

### **Connecting the Dots between History and the Present**

The following section will confirm that the present status of India-Taiwan relations that began in 1995 is broadly in line with the aforementioned historical details. The ties are more or less based on people-to-people relations in the broad sense of the term, which include economic, cultural, and educational and scientific and technological ties, while the official contacts remain inconsequential. Pragmatic concerns as to how to conduct the relations with Taiwan without offending China continue to determine the course and nature of the relations. Taiwan remains as diplomatically squeezed as ever before; therefore, it is in no position to offer any meaningful political reciprocity. However, the ensuing discussion highlights some points of departure as well, explaining how India appears to be more comfortable in its relations with Taiwan, how mainstream strategic thinking seems to be accepting Taiwan as a diplomatic leverage and how current domestic political and ideological considerations may be expected to move beyond the longstanding historical pattern of reticence and self-constraint.

### **People-to-People Reconnect in 1995, without a “China Angle”**

Do you think that this can be done without damaging in any way our relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC)? That is far too important for us. I am told that it would be in India's interest to establish economic relations with Taiwan, but we cannot risk our relations with the PRC.<sup>45</sup>

This apprehension was expressed by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao to Ambassador Vinod C. Khanna, the first Director General of the India Taipei Association (ITA), and it has determined the course of India-Taiwan relations since 1995. While Rao recognised the value of economic relations with Taiwan under his Look East Policy, he was fully aware that good relations with China were a priority. Since then, India-Taiwan relations, which began with an economic focus, have diversified in other fields such as science and technology, education, culture and think tank and civil-society cooperation. However, they have, by and large, been confined to non-political and non-diplomatic people-to-people relations, i.e., without any overt political or diplomatic motives or implications. Barring a few unremarkable instances of perceived signalling, there has been no evidence to suggest that India has ever considered using its relations with Taiwan as a bargaining chip in its relations with

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<sup>45</sup> “The India-Taipei Association: A Mission Extraordinaire,” Interview with Ambassador Vinod C. Khanna, *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 5:2 (2010): 240–251.

China. The DPP and its governments (2000–2008 and 2016–continuing) have clearly been interested in it though.

*A Brief Account of Progress in Relations*

Over the past 23 years, India and Taiwan have made substantial progress in their bilateral relations, even though these have lacked a well-defined vision. Since 1995, India has had governments of every ideological hue, but the lack of political interest has been common among all. The relations have mainly been run by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials. In Taiwan, while the DPP governments have, indeed, shown a political interest in furthering relations, the KMT governments have pursued relations in a more official way. However, at present, it is likely that the Tsai and Modi governments might have some political connect, which, if cultivated carefully, could lead to stronger relations – which is discussed in this article.

In 1995, India eased visa norms as there had been no contact between the two countries for 45 years or so, and travel to India had been restricted thus far. It was also difficult to establish an institutional presence and a protocol for conducting regular official business, particularly for India, because it had to do so without upsetting China.<sup>46</sup> Here, the example of other countries which had been maintaining the so-called unofficial ties with Taiwan came in use.<sup>47</sup> The pace of building ties accelerated after 2000, the credit for which should mainly go to Chen Shui-bian's DPP government (2000–2008) and its pro-active approach. Many of the notable gains took place during this period, which saw the start of a direct flight between New Delhi and Taipei, a convenience which is as yet not available even for a country like Vietnam, India's strategic partner in East Asia and "a key pillar of its Look East Policy." Similarly, cooperation in the Information Technology (IT) sector, the most talked about aspect of the cooperation between the two, was also an early achievement. Taiwan began welcoming Indian IT and other engineering professionals to the Academia Sinica, Nangang Science and Hsinchu Science Parks during the Chen years. India's Department of Science and Technology (DST) under the Ministry of Science and Technology and Taiwan's National Science Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2007 for cooperation in science and technology. Exchanges led by senior level officials under this MOU have been a remarkable instance of cooperation between India and Taiwan. This period also witnessed universities, think tanks and scholars reaching out to each other. Taiwan under Chen decided to extend its international scholarships, such as Huayu Enrichment Scholarship, Taiwan Scholarship and Taiwan Fellowship, to Indian students.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Pranay Sharma, "Floodgate across the Straits," *Outlook*, December 19, 2016. Accessed September 29, 2017: <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/floodgate-across-the-straits/298238> Sharma quotes Ambassador Vinod C. Khanna in this article.

<sup>48</sup> For examples of bilateral cooperation see "Taiwan India Relations;" Chen Mumin, "Testing the Limits of Pragmatic Diplomacy: Taiwan's Relations with India," in *India and Taiwan*, 120–136; Prashant Kumar Singh, *Transforming India-Taiwan Relations*, 90–92.

The foundation laid during this period continues to pay off. Between 2008 and 2016, during Ma Ying-jeou's KMT government in Taipei, significant achievements were recorded for facilitating an institutional framework for trade promotion. These initiatives were in keeping with India's increasing economic integration with East Asia.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Taiwan has been identified as the alternative source of Chinese language learning in India, where a budding Chinese language market with Taiwanese resources is now in place. Also, unofficial think tank-level dialogues and consultations on strategic affairs – which in some instances might have partial official involvement or endorsement – have noticeably increased in the past few years. The presence of Taiwanese academicians from universities, think tanks and foundations and other scholars and students in India is also on the rise. The same is applicable to the Indian scholastic community's presence in Taiwan. While many of the exchange initiatives are indeed Taiwanese, India too offers slots for Taiwanese students in its Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) international fellowships. Hence, India-Taiwan people-to-people relations under Tsai and Modi now stand on considerably firmer ground. It should be underlined that six out of the 12 major agreements and MOUs signed between India and Taiwan since 2007 were signed after Modi came to power in 2014, and four out of the six in 2016 and 17, after Tsai assumed office in Taipei. Taiwanese companies have been the lead participants in the Modi government's Make-in-India initiative.<sup>50</sup> A notable development in this period has been India's inclusion in Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, unveiled by Tsai, to promote Taiwan's economic engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India, to reduce its economic reliance on Mainland China.<sup>51</sup> The mentioning of India by name along with ASEAN is a pointer to India's place in the DPP's vision for Taiwan's economic and external engagement, though South Asia replaced India in the later drafts of the policy. The Secretary General to the President, Joseph Wu, is said to be heading an India-specific taskforce for promoting the policy. Thus, one can see that India-Taiwan people-to-people ties have acquired substantial momentum.

Notwithstanding the recent momentum in the relations, instances of cooperation have been slow, spasmodic and lacking any broad policy. In addition, although mutual familiarity has increased within the limited space, it has been confined to peer-based activities. Mutual familiarity and appreciation that follows a broader civil-society interaction is still negligible.

### **A Political Analysis of the India-Taiwan Relations: Prospects under Tsai and Modi**

The above-mentioned momentum in the India-Taiwan relations roughly coincided with the

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<sup>49</sup> India signed free trade agreement in goods with ASEAN in 2010, and a “comprehensive economic partnership agreement” with South Korea in 2010 and Japan in 2011.

<sup>50</sup> For information regarding the 12 agreements and MOUs, see “Taiwan India Relations.” Make-in-India is the Modi government's flagship programme for inviting foreigner manufacturers to set up their facilities in India. See the government portal for detailed information at <http://www.makeinindia.com/home>. Accessed September 22, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Chen Mumin and Saheli Chattaraj, “New Southbound Policy in India and South Asia,” *Prospect Journal* (Taipei) 18 (2017): 35–62.

change of political guard in India in 2014 and in Taiwan in 2016. Modi is the second Prime Minister, after Inder Kumar Gujral, who has been to Taiwan. Both visited Taiwan before becoming Prime Minister and when they were not holding any government positions. Modi went to Taiwan in 1999 when he was the General Secretary of the BJP. He seems to have maintained some channels of communication with Taiwan while he was chief minister of Gujarat (2002–2014). During this period, Gujarat hosted large business delegations from Taiwan.<sup>52</sup> The Taiwanese steel giant China Steel Corporation (CSC) also made a big-ticket investment in the state.<sup>53</sup> This leads one to make the reasonable inference that Modi would have a personal view about relations with Taiwan. Similarly, President Tsai, on her part, has time and again underlined the importance of India in her vision for Taiwan’s friendship with the leading democracies of the world.<sup>54</sup> She travelled to India in 2012 after her defeat in the presidential election and stepping down as the DPP chair in 2012.<sup>55</sup> Thus, at this juncture, the two sides appear to have a mutual familiarity, appreciation and empathy. This backdrop begs the question as to whether there can finally be a political dimension to the relations in times to come. This question would necessitate a study of the relations in the post-1995 decades to arrive at an understanding of what this “political” dimension might be. And more importantly how to locate the answer of this question in the present Asian geo-strategic context.

### *Exploring the “Political” or “Strategic” Dimension*

At a press conference on the eve of the India visit of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in May 2013, a reporter asked the joint secretary of the East Asia division in the MEA: “Sir, I just want to know if India’s cooperation with South East Asian countries, especially Vietnam and Taiwan, will figure in the talks between the two Prime Ministers.”<sup>56</sup> This might have appeared a bit out of place and even a bit intriguing as it referred to Taiwan, even though there did not seem to be any apparent context for the reference. It is also difficult to ascertain the motivation behind the reporter’s question. However, it is possible to trace the broader context behind this question. In November 2010, the media had reported that Indian Foreign Minister S. M. Krishna in a communication to his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi

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<sup>52</sup> Fang Tien-Sze, “India-Taiwan Relations: A Comprehensive Security Perspective,” *India Defence Review* 40:4. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/india-taiwan-relations-a-comprehensive-security-perspective/>

<sup>53</sup> “China Steel Corp to Invest Rs 1,000 Cr in Gujarat,” *Business Standard*, January 24, 2012. Accessed September 22, 2017: [http://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/china-steel-corp-to-invest-rs-1-000-cr-in-gujarat-112012400051\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/china-steel-corp-to-invest-rs-1-000-cr-in-gujarat-112012400051_1.html)

<sup>54</sup> “Full Text of President Tsai’s Inaugural Address,” *Focus Taiwan*, May 20, 2017. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201605200008.aspx>: “President Tsai’s Opening Statement in Interview with Journalists from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand,” Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), May 5, 2017. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://english.president.gov.tw/News/5132>

<sup>55</sup> “Taiwan India Relations.”

<sup>56</sup> “Transcript of Media Briefing on Chinese Premier’s Forthcoming Visit,” Ministry of External Affairs, May 18, 2013. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?21718/Transcript+of+media+briefing+on+Chinese+Premiers+Forthcoming+Visit>

had drawn “a dramatic parallel between the territorial red lines of both countries ... that just as New Delhi had been sensitive to its concerns over the Tibet Autonomous Region and Taiwan, Beijing too should be mindful of Indian sensitivities on Jammu and Kashmir.”<sup>57</sup> It should also be recalled that by 2010 India had stopped reaffirming its support for the PRC’s One-China principle in the joint communiqués issued after visits of top leaders. The last time it was done was in 2008, when the reaffirmation for China’s authority over Tibet was missing in the communiqué. The point here is that by 2008-2010, India’s resentment over, what it perceives to be, the lack of Chinese empathy for its concerns relating to its territorial unity and integrity had taken a definite shape. In this, India’s longstanding support for the PRC’s One-China policy figured prominently as a reference point. These sentiments received full public expression when India’s current Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj pointed out to her visiting Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in June 2014, that if he expected India’s support for One-China, then he should also consider China’s support for One-India.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps, it was this sentiment that prompted the reference to Taiwan in the reporter’s question since the premier’s visit was taking place against the backdrop of the unprecedented military standoff between Indian military and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in India’s Ladakh.

The quest for identifying the “political” and “strategic” aspects in the relations underscores two relevant points. First, the DPP governments in Taipei have been seeking a political context for the relations. Second, even though New Delhi has been unresponsive to these overtures, it is quite apparent that it is aware of the possible diplomatic leverage offered by Taiwan.

One can recount some major political overtures made by Chen Shui-bian’s DPP government.<sup>59</sup> Taiwanese Vice President Annette Lu offered to bring relief material for the earthquake victims in Bhuj in 2001 during her intended visit to India. This visit, which could not take place, would have been the first by any ROC or Taiwanese government leader since Chiang Kai-shek’s visit in 1942.<sup>60</sup> Some think tanks identified with the DPP, such as the Taiwan Think Tank and Democratic Pacific Union (DPU),

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<sup>57</sup> Siddharth Varadarajan, “India Tells China: Kashmir Is to Us What Tibet, Taiwan Are to You,” *The Hindu*, November 15, 2010. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/India-tells-China-Kashmir-is-to-us-what-Tibet-Taiwan-are-to-you/article15687050.ece>

<sup>58</sup> Pranab Dhal Samanta, “One China? What about One India Policy: Sushma Swaraj to Wang Yi,” *The Indian Express*, 12 June 2014. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/one-china-what-about-one-india-policy-sushma-to-wang/>

<sup>59</sup> Information and discussion in this paragraph draws from: Fang Tien-Sze, “Taiwan’s Relations with India”; Parriss Chang, “From Benign Neglect to Pragmatism,” in *India and Taiwan*, 137–153; Prashant Kumar Singh, *Transforming India-Taiwan Relations*: 89–95. The purported US diplomatic cables available at WikiLeaks may also be given some credence in understanding the nature of India-Taiwan relations during 2000–2008. “Taiwan Dreams of an Indian Card,” WikiLeaks Cable: 04TAIPEI3845\_a December 6, 2004. Accessed September 22, 2017: [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04TAIPEI3845\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04TAIPEI3845_a.html); “Taiwan-India Relations Looking Up, But Trying to Avoid Annoying Beijing (C-AL6-00293),” WikiLeaks Cable: 06NEWDELHI2230\_a, March 31, 2006. Accessed September 22, 2017: [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06NEWDELHI2230\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06NEWDELHI2230_a.html); “Taiwan Seeking to Counter the PRC in India (C-AL6-00293),” WikiLeaks Cable: 06TAIPEI1325\_a, April 14, 2006. Accessed September 22, 2017: [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06TAIPEI1325\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06TAIPEI1325_a.html)

<sup>60</sup> Prakash Nanda, “Taiwan’s Courtship with India,” in *Rising India: Friends and Foes*, ed. Prakash Nanda (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2007), 309–310.

started roping in Indian politicians and senior academicians and propagated the idea of India-Taiwan-Japan trilateral cooperation. George Fernandes, a senior political leader, attended events in 2004 and 2006 organised by the Taiwan Think Tank and endorsed the idea. The possibility of high-end technological cooperation in areas such as space science, which could have a strategic context as well, was also explored. The establishment of the Taiwan-India Cooperation Council (TICC) in 2006 was perhaps the most important political gesture made during this period. The stated purpose of the TICC was to explore and promote economic relations with India. However, it was difficult to overlook the presence of DPP politicians within it, both from the government and the party. On its part, India became receptive to visits by Taiwanese academicians, activists and other non-governmental personalities. India's decision in 2003 to send a serving Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer to head the India Taipei Association (ITA) was indeed a notable development. There were media reports about the Indian Air Force Chief's Taiwan visit in 2002. India accepted Taiwanese officials from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and National Security Bureau (NSB) at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre (TECC) in India. Presently, one in-service colonel as military attaché and two officials from the NSB are permitted to be stationed at the TECC in India.<sup>61</sup> However, although India was agreeable for people-to-people and functional contacts, it ignored the political gestures. Lu could not travel to India, though the relief material sent by her was received. Except for George Fernandes, who is famous for his "China-is-India's-enemy-no.1" statement,<sup>62</sup> the idea of an India-Taiwan-Japan trilateral cooperation found no serious takers. Thus, the attempts for high-end technological cooperation could not succeed.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the TICC did not receive encouragement from India's representative office in Taipei. In fact, no senior political functionary in the DPP government could visit India during this period.<sup>64</sup>

However, India has shown an increasing confidence in its dealings with Taiwan after 2008. India's reluctance to reaffirm the One-China policy and S.M. Krishna's reported statement are instructive in this regard. Also significant are the announcement of a joint study on India-Taiwan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2011 by the Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao,<sup>65</sup> Taiwan's President

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<sup>61</sup> Fang Tien-Sze, "Taiwan's Relations with India: Issues and Trends," *China Report* 49:4 (2013): 432.

<sup>62</sup> Manoj Joshi, "George in the China Shop," *India Today*, May 18, 1998. Accessed September 20, 2017: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/china-is-the-potential-threat-no.-1-says-george-fernandes/1/264241.html>

<sup>63</sup> "Taiwan Dreams of an Indian Card," WikiLeaks Cable: 04TAIPEI3845\_a December 6, 2004. Accessed September 22, 2017: [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04TAIPEI3845\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04TAIPEI3845_a.html)

<sup>64</sup> Fang Tien-Sze states, "The DDP government's strategic plot received a setback when the Congress Party [INC] returned to power in New Delhi in 2004. The Congress government was more cautious about developing strategic cooperation with Taiwan, and found the DPP's general anti-Chinese stance, 'uncomfortable.' As a result, the idea to dispatch a senior Taiwanese intelligence officer with the rank of lieutenant general to New Delhi did not materialise. Taiwan's proposal to appoint Parris H. Chang, the former Deputy Secretary-General of National Security Council, as its representative to India was also rejected by New Delhi because Chang had advocated the 'allying with India against China' policy." Fang Tien-Sze, "Taiwan's Relations with India," 432. Here, the corresponding changed attitude and priorities within Taiwan under the KMT government (2008–2016) need to be equally underlined.

<sup>65</sup> Mary Swire, "Taiwan, India Begin FTA Feasibility Study," *Tax-News*, March 10, 2011. Accessed September 22, 2017: [https://www.tax-news.com/news/Taiwan\\_India\\_Begin\\_FTA\\_Feasibility\\_Study\\_\\_\\_\\_48170.html](https://www.tax-news.com/news/Taiwan_India_Begin_FTA_Feasibility_Study____48170.html)

Ma Ying-jeou's stopover in Mumbai in 2012,<sup>66</sup> and Vice President Wu Den-yih's layover in New Delhi in 2014.<sup>67</sup> There was speculation that all these events had political and strategic overtones. However, these did not yield any great dividends for India-Taiwan relations even in terms of high-level political visits. India and Taiwan are yet to sign an FTA.<sup>68</sup> Even so, these events did display India's growing comfort level with Taiwan, which was reflected in the deepening of the people-to-people relations.

Further, India, under the present Modi government, has also sent mixed signals, which may or may not be planned. Such signals indicate that it is difficult to completely ignore China's structural strength. Modi invited Taiwan's Representative in India to attend his swearing-in ceremony in May 2014,<sup>69</sup> which was a departure from practice. However, a delegation of Indian parliamentarians was reportedly dissuaded from attending Tsai's oath-taking ceremony in May 2016.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Vice President Chen Chien-jen's stopover in New Delhi en route to the Holy See received a late clearance, which forced the Taiwan Government to change the itinerary,<sup>71</sup> a development not in line with the past precedents of Ma's and Wu's stopovers. At the same time, the setting up of an India-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Forum in December 2016 was a significant development.<sup>72</sup> Also notable is the increased momentum in India-Taiwan people-to-people relations, as seen in the sudden increase in the number of MOUs and agreements signed under Modi and Tsai. Besides, an increase in the Track 1.5 (partly official) interaction has also been noticed. The years under discussion have also seen a renewed advocacy in India to post a military attaché to Taiwan.<sup>73</sup>

Considering the fast-paced growth in India-Taiwan ties under Modi and Tsai and India's rising

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<sup>66</sup> "Taiwan India Relations."

<sup>67</sup> Sachin Parashar, "Taiwan Vice President Wu Den-yih to Land in Delhi," *The Economic Times*, April 26, 2014. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/taiwan-vice-president-wu-den-yih-to-land-in-delhi-china-likely-to-bristle/articleshow/34236994.cms>

<sup>68</sup> Lin Shu-yuan and Lilian Wu, "Not Yet time to Conduct Official FTA Talks with India: MOEA," Focus Taiwan News Channel, March 8, 2011. Accessed September 22, 2017: [http://bilaterals.org/spip.php?page=print&id\\_article=19184](http://bilaterals.org/spip.php?page=print&id_article=19184)

<sup>69</sup> Indrani Bagchi, "Tibetan Leader at Modi's Swearing in Irks China," *The Times of India*, June 5, 2014. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Tibetan-leader-at-Modis-swearing-in-irks-China/articleshow/36080500.cms> Bagchi's report refers to the Taiwanese representative's participation in the swearing-in ceremony as well. Jabin Jacob, "India-Taiwan Relations: Constrained or Self-Constraining?" in *India-Taiwan Relations in Asia and Beyond: The Future*, ed. Jagannath Panda (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2016), 39.

<sup>70</sup> "India Backtracks on Sending MPs to Inaugural of New Taiwan Prez," *Hindustan Times*, May 19, 2016. Accessed September 22, 2017: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world/india-backtracks-on-sending-mps-to-inaugural-of-new-taiwan-prez/story-fKU1XVbkjYSWc37sgdDT6M.html>

<sup>71</sup> Prashant Kumar Singh, "When the Taiwanese Came Calling: Chinese Reaction and the Indian Response," March 3, 2017. Accessed September 23, 2017: [http://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/when-the-taiwanese-came-calling\\_pkxingh\\_030317](http://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/when-the-taiwanese-came-calling_pkxingh_030317) The source of the Taiwanese inference about declining the visa by delay is the author's conversation with visiting Taiwanese interlocutors and during his stay in Taipei from October to December 2016.

<sup>72</sup> "India Steps Up Parliamentary Ties with Taiwan," *Focus Taiwan*, December 21, 2016. Accessed September 23, 2017: <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201612210027.aspx>

<sup>73</sup> Jeff Smith, "Where Is India on the One China Policy?" *The Diplomat*, March 6, 2017. Accessed September 23, 2017: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/where-is-india-on-the-one-china-policy/> Liam Gibson, "Moving India-Taiwan Ties in A New Direction," *Taipei Times*, January 11, 2018. Accessed January 17, 2018: <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2018/01/11/2003685567>

confidence under Modi to take on China in the bilateral and regional contexts of the two countries' divergent interests, a possibility of India stationing a military attaché at its representative office in Taiwan, cannot be ruled out. However, this would mark a significant scaling up of the relations, with considerable implications for India-Taiwan-China relations, given the current state of India-China and cross-strait relations, along with the regional strategic scenario, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.<sup>74</sup> It should be recalled that the visit of a Taiwanese parliamentary delegation to India, in February 2017, evoked a sharp Chinese reaction, demanding that India respect its sensitivities on the Taiwan issue. This development was important because it was perhaps the first publicly reported reaction of China to India-Taiwan ties. The MEA, which is hardly seen to ever speak on Taiwan, came out with a proper response countering the Chinese reaction.<sup>75</sup> This reaction might partly have to do with the fact that the delegation was uncharacteristically forthcoming in airing its views and reportedly suggested that India should approve the change in the nomenclature of Taiwan's representative office in the country by including the word "Taiwan."<sup>76</sup> In addition, this reaction indicates China's discomfort with Taiwan's growing closeness with India, keeping in view the larger Asian strategic context. Besides, "the return of the Tibet card" in India-China relations in recent years might also have shaped the Chinese reaction.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, the latest MOU for Promotion of Industry Collaboration, signed by India and Taiwan in December 2017, also earned the ire of the hawkish Chinese newspaper *Global Times*. Deng Xiaoci, a contributor to the newspaper, quoted Wang Dehua, head of the Institute for South and Central Asian Studies, the Shanghai Municipal Center for International Studies as saying:

India is using the Taiwan question as a bargaining chip in exchange for China's support and concession on its own territorial disputes. It is also possible that India is staying close with Taiwan to serve as a friendly signal toward the U.S., which just released a new national security strategy branding China as a rival power.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, although the relations are still far from being a strategic one in the conventional sense,

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<sup>74</sup> For present strains between India and China, which could provide a context for strategic or tactical cooperation between India and Taiwan, see Prashant Kumar Singh, "Resurfacing of Divergence in India-China Relations," in *East Asia Strategic Review: China's Rising Strategic Ambitions in Asia*, ed. M.S. Prathibha (New Delhi: IDSA, 2018), 35–72.

<sup>75</sup> "Official Spokesperson's Response to a Question on the Visit of a Taiwanese Delegation to India," MEA, February 15, 2017. Accessed September 23, 2017: <http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/28063/Official+Spokespersons+response+to+a+question+on+the+visit+of+a+Taiwanese+Delegation+to+India>

<sup>76</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference," FMPRC, February 15, 2017, Accessed September 23, 2017: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1438808.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1438808.shtml) ; Kallol Bhattacharjee, "We are Fully Sovereign, Says Visiting Taiwanese Leader," *The Hindu*, February 14, 2017. Accessed September 23, 2017: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/We-are-fully-sovereign-says-visiting-Taiwanese-leader/article17298533.ece>

<sup>77</sup> Liu Jianxi, "New Delhi Using Dalai as Diplomatic Tool Harms Sino-Indian Ties," *Global Times*, April 5, 2017. Accessed September 17, 2017: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1040828.shtml>

<sup>78</sup> Deng Xiaoci, "India Cozies up to Taiwan in Foolish Move," *Global Times*, December 19, 2017. Accessed January 18, 2018: [at http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1081121.shtml](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1081121.shtml)

a subterranean push towards a relationship with some political and strategic colour or understanding can be perceived. China cannot be unaware of these undercurrents, which explains the sudden Chinese statements on India-Taiwan ties.

### *Modi and Tsai's Attitudinal and Ideological Convergence*

Modi and Tsai's leadership presents a potentially conducive political context for relations. Modi is from the BJP, which is opposed to the INC's legacy of Nehruvian politics. The BJP advocates a nationalism defined in terms of ancient Hindu religion and culture.<sup>79</sup> It has all along opposed Nehruvian foreign policy as well. The BJP, and its predecessor the BJS, have critiqued it as lacking in aspiration to attain a great power status.<sup>80</sup> It has been particularly opposed to Nehru's and INC's Pakistan and China policies. It holds Nehru accountable for the failure of India's China policy, particularly India's defeat in 1962 and the "loss" of Tibet to China.

In the case of Taiwan, Tsai's DPP, as opposed to the KMT's position, does not believe in the eventual unification of Taiwan with China. It leaves the future of Taiwan to the will of the Taiwanese people, implying that independence could be an option, too. It does not agree with formulations such as the 1992 Consensus, One China, Respective Interpretation, and the One China principle or framework on the basis of which the KMT governments and the PRC held cross-strait dialogues during 1991/2–1999 and 2008–2016. As per the DPP, these formulations a priori assume Taiwan to be a part of China, which undermine its separate existence that predates both the PRC as well as the ROC. China refuses to enter into any dialogue with the DPP, accusing it of promoting Taiwan's independence.<sup>81</sup>

The following discussion would reveal that the two governments face complex strategic situations vis-à-vis China, in addition to their shared attitudinal and ideological predispositions.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> "Vision Document 2004," Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Accessed September 23, 2017: <http://www.bjp.org/documents/vision-document?u=vision-document-2004>

<sup>80</sup> Mohammed Ali Kishore, *Jana Sangh and India's Foreign Policy*, 105.

<sup>81</sup> "DPP Resolution on Taiwan's Future," May 8, 1999, Taiwan, Ilha Formosa. Accessed September 24, 2017: <http://www.taiwandc.org/nws-9920.htm> Prashant Kumar Singh, "Can Taiwan Talk 'Political' with the Mainland?" *Strategic Analysis* 39:3 (2015): 254–273.

<sup>82</sup> Incidentally, the A.B. Vajpayee government (1999–2004), a BJP-led coalition, and the Chen Shui-bian (2000–2008) government, a DPP government, had similar ideological contexts. However, convergence of strategic concerns vis-à-vis China was absent. Early 2000s onwards, India-China relations were based on "managing the relations and engaging each other." On the other hand, cross-strait relations passed through their most strained phase from 2000–2008, when Chen Shui-bian's anti-China rhetoric and China's counter measures acquired threatening proportions. Later, Ma Ying-jeou's government (2008–2016), which largely coincided with Manmohan Singh's government (2004–2014), introduced normalcy in cross-strait relations. On his part, Manmohan Singh carried forward Vajpayee's legacy. Thus, when Modi and Tsai assumed command in 2014 and 2016, respectively, for the first time, India and Taiwan appeared to be simultaneously sharing ideological contexts and strategic concerns vis-à-vis China.

*Modi, Xi and Tsai at the Helm of Affairs*

Serious strains and tensions have been visible in India-China and China-Taiwan relations when Modi, Xi and Tsai are at the helm of affairs, which coincide with the geo-political shifts underway in Asia, with reference to China.

Recent years have seen a sudden sharp widening of the fault lines between India and China. The two countries have witnessed intense diplomatic sparring over China's technical hold on the Indian resolutions in the UN Security Council (UNSC) seeking to sanction Pakistan-based terrorists;<sup>83</sup> the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), under Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI);<sup>84</sup> and China's opposition to India's application for the membership into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).<sup>85</sup> The rows over these issues have created considerable furore at the highest political and official levels. India's decision to not accept the invitation to attend the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) in May 2017 was in response to its resentment over the CPEC.<sup>86</sup> The Chinese stand and actions relating to these issues impinge upon India's notion of its territorial sovereignty and security strategy and highlight China's non-accommodation of India in the international leadership space, while India's firm stance on the CPEC raises questions about the BRI's internationalism. In addition to these diplomatic rows, the two countries have engaged each other in a series of large-scale military face-offs in Depsang in Ladakh in 2013, Chumar in Ladakh in 2014 and the recent Doklam (in Bhutan) in 2017.<sup>87</sup> Briefly, unilateralism, inconsideration towards India's aspirations and security concerns, and confirmation of Pakistan's primacy over India, characterise China's India policy at present. This also confirms the absence of any place or consideration for India in Xi Jinping's New Type of Major Power Relations. However, equally significant is the way India has handled military stand-offs, particularly the recent Doklam crisis, pointing to a gradual building of India's capabilities over the decades. This has brought the relationship to inflexion point, where the prevailing national sentiment is opposed to deferring to

<sup>83</sup> "Modi Takes Up Lakhvi Issue with Xi," *The Hindu*, July 9, 2015. Accessed September 24, 2017: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/modi-takes-up-lakhvi-issue-with-xi/article7400568.ece>

<sup>84</sup> "India to China: Our Rise Not Harmful to Your Ascent, Sovereignty," *India Today*, January 18, 2017. Accessed September 24, 2017: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/china-india-rise-foreign-secretary-s-jaishankar-raisina-dialogue-cpec-united-nations-pakistan/1/860220.html>

<sup>85</sup> "Centre Names China as Country Blocking India's Entry into Nuclear Suppliers Group," *The Indian Express*, July 21, 2016. Accessed September 24, 2017: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/nsg-china-blocking-india-entry-sushma-swaraj-2926704/>

<sup>86</sup> "Official Spokesperson's Response to a Query on Participation of India in OBOR/BRI Forum," MEA, May 13, 2017. Accessed September 24, 2017: <http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/28463/official+spokespersons+response+to+a+query+on+participation+of+india+in+oborbri+forum>

<sup>87</sup> Manoj Joshi, "Making Sense of the Depsang Incursion," *The Hindu*, May 7, 2013. Accessed September 25, 2017: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/making-sense-of-the-depsang-incursion/article4689838.ece>; Rajat Pandit, "India-China Set to End 16-Day Chumar Stand-off by Saturday," *The Times of India*, September 26, 2014. Accessed September 25, 2017: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-China-set-to-end-16-day-Chumar-stand-off-by-Saturday/articleshow/43467644.cms>; Sushant Singh, "Two Perspectives on Doklam Standoff," *The Indian Express*, July 26, 2017. Accessed September 25, 2017: <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/two-perspectives-on-doklam-standoff-china-india-4767086/>

Chinese power.

The deterioration in India-China relations occurred as China became more assertive in the East and South China Seas, pushing India and Japan and India and Vietnam into an even tighter strategic embrace.<sup>88</sup> In the event of a U.S. strategic scale-down in the region, strategic networking among countries such as India, Japan and Vietnam will shape the re-alignment of regional dynamics,<sup>89</sup> which is where Taiwan comes into the picture. Although Taiwan cannot be put in the same bracket as it is not recognised as a sovereign country, it is difficult to predict how the region, particularly Japan, will view the Taiwan issue if the US scales down its engagement with the region, with its attendant implications for its political commitment to Taiwan's security under the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979. Will Taiwan become a frontier embankment to push back the Chinese wave in a hypothetical post-U.S. Asia-Pacific? In which case, India might have to take a strategic call on Taiwan.

Except for taking a protectionist line in trade and withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in January 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump has not yet shown any sign of strategic disengagement from the region. Instead, during his visit to Asia in November 2017, Trump's repeated use of the term "the Indo-Pacific" – a concept that Indians push vigorously<sup>90</sup> – and which many perceive as a U.S. tilt towards India,<sup>91</sup> was viewed as a U.S. endorsement for geopolitical realignment in Asia. In a symbolic move, the United States renamed its Pacific Command (PACOM) as the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in May 2018.<sup>92</sup> Concerning Taiwan, contrary to initial apprehensions that Trump might use it as a bargaining chip with China, he signed a strategically important piece of legislation, the Taiwan Travel Act, in March 2018.

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<sup>88</sup> Sachin Parashar, "In a First, India-US Joint Statement Mentions South China Sea," *The Times of India*, October 2, 2014. Accessed September 25, 2017: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/In-a-first-India-US-joint-statement-mentions-South-China-Sea/articleshow/44028687.cms>; "China Reacts Guardedly to Modi's Expansionist Remark," *The Indian Express*, September 1, 2014. Accessed September 25, 2017: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/china-reacts-guardedly-to-modis-expansionist-remark/>; "Satellite Centre in Vietnam," Press Information Bureau, Department of Space, Government of India, February 24, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2017: <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=136692>

<sup>89</sup> Raja Mohan writes, "The emerging Asian dynamic, however, suggests that Delhi and Tokyo must necessarily draw closer. Whether the relationship between Delhi and Tokyo will eventually approximate to an alliance is likely to be determined less by tradition and more by the current convulsions in their shared Asian and Indo-Pacific geography." Raja Mohan, "The Case for Alliance," *The Indian Express*, September 14, 2017. Accessed September 25, 2017: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-case-for-alliance/> Raja Mohan also argues, "Rather than act as a 'lynchpin' of the US pivot to Asia, India can become the leading element in the regional balance of power system..." Raja Mohan, "How should New Delhi Read the Donald in White House," *The Indian Express*, November 10, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2017: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/donald-trump-win-hillary-clinton-us-elections-india-us-relations-obama-modi-new-delhi-4367275>

<sup>90</sup> Gurpreet Khurana, "The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept: Retrospect and Prospect," *National Maritime Foundation Brief*, February 2, 2017. Accessed January 17, 2018: <http://cimsec.org/indo-pacific-concept-retrospect-prospect/34710>

<sup>91</sup> Zhenhua Lu, "US to Help India Balance China's Power under Donald Trump's New Asia Strategy, Ex-CIA Official Reveals," *South China Morning Post*, October 28, 2017. Accessed January 18, 2017: <http://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/2117389/us-help-india-balance-chinas-power-under-donald>

<sup>92</sup> "US military renames Pacific Command," *BBC*, May 31, 2018. Accessed June 1, 2018: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44312024>

The visit also saw a working-level meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (popularly known as Quad) attended by officials from the United States, India, Japan and Australia in Manila, ahead of the thirty-first ASEAN and twelfth East Asia summits.<sup>93</sup> Quad, a fixed expression for quadrilateral cooperation between the aforementioned four democratic countries, was first proposed by Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe during his first term in office from 2006–2007. Quad-enthusiasts as well as its critics see it as an Asian NATO with the leading democracies of the Indo-Pacific region as its members.<sup>94</sup> Although this idea has a long way to go before becoming strategically a functional entity, the question is whether “an Asian NATO” in any form can ignore Taiwan, especially when Japan is perceived to have a direct security stake for the security of its sea lanes, in Taiwan's continued separation from Mainland China. It seems difficult to imagine that “an Asian NATO” that includes the United States will abandon Taiwan. Thus, this scenario also requires India to take a strategic call on Taiwan.

In either of the two above-mentioned strategic scenarios, and given China's refusal to recognise the DPP as a legitimate dialogue partner at par with its predecessor, the KMT, there are strong reasons for Tsai wanting the regional powers, including India, to be interested in Taiwan as a security hedge.

The period following May 2016, when Tsai was sworn-in as President, cross-strait relations have seen the collapse of *plucking-the-low-hanging-fruits-first* policy. In response to the Tsai government's reluctance to categorically reaffirm Taiwan's commitment to the 1992 Consensus or the One-China principle, China suspended the cross-strait dialogue in June 2016,<sup>95</sup> which had been resumed in 2008 when the KMT came into power under Ma Ying-jeou, eight years after it broke down in 1999. It has resorted to low-grade punitive economic measures and increased pressure on Taiwan's external engagement, thus ending the diplomatic truce. It curtailed the group tourism to Taiwan, hitting the tourism and dependent retail sectors.<sup>96</sup> The African island nation of Sao Tome and Principe and Panama switched recognition from the ROC to the PRC in December 2016 and June 2017, respectively. Severing ties with the ROC, the Dominican Republic and Burkina Faso established diplomatic relations with the PRC in May 2018. In January 2017, Nigeria asked Taiwan to relocate its representative office out of Abuja to some other town. Fiji closed down its representative office in Taipei in May 2017.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Kallol Bhattacharjee, “India, Japan, U.S., Australia Hold First ‘Quad’ Talks at Manila ahead of ASEAN Summit,” *The Hindu*, November 12, 2017. Accessed January 18, 2017: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-highlights-indo-pacific-cooperation-at-the-first-quad-talks/article20317526.ece>

<sup>94</sup> Tanvi Madan, “The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the ‘Quad,’” *War on the Rock*, November 16, 2017. Accessed January 18, 2017: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad/>

<sup>95</sup> “Mainland Spokesman Says Cross-Strait Communication Mechanisms in Suspension,” *Xinhua*, June 25, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2017: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/26/c\\_135466191.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/26/c_135466191.htm)

<sup>96</sup> “Govt to Subsidize Tourism Sector after Chinese Visitor Drop,” *The China Post*, November 5, 2016. Accessed September 26, 2017: <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/business/2016/11/05/483088/govt-to.htm>

<sup>97</sup> These instances of Taiwan's diplomatic allies switching recognition to the PRC and the pairing down of ties by some other countries, have been widely reported by the media. The detailed information is easily available through Google search and is also available through the Press Room section of Taiwan's foreign ministry website: <https://www.mofa.gov.tw/en/default.html>

China's stand on Taiwan will only harden, unless Tsai provides some hope for the future to the Chinese. However, how far Xi will go to punish her is yet unclear, even though further power consolidation by Xi post the nineteenth Party Congress in October 2017 has added to Taiwan's security concerns. This situation is not unprecedented; the Chen Shui-bian era witnessed an even graver standoff with the Mainland.<sup>98</sup> However, the power differential in favour of China has greatly increased since then. Besides, there are general apprehensions about U.S. strategic commitment to regional security in Asia. Hence, if Taiwan, regardless of which party is in power, continues to refuse entering into unification talks on the PRC's terms, then it will have to look beyond the United States to hedge its bets.

Thus, under Modi's and Tsai's leadership, India and Taiwan are witnessing intense geopolitical and strategic churning, and they may find themselves on the same side of the divide. In addition, their leadership appears to be on the same page vis-à-vis each other. This larger picture might suggest the increasing likelihood of some political understanding between India and Taiwan. Therefore, it is legitimate to explore how the strategic situation and leadership contributes to the growth of bilateral relations.

### **What May Modi and Tsai Possibly Ensure for Bilateral Relations?**

Thus, prospects of India-Taiwan bilateral relations have all along confronted a fundamental incompatibility vis-à-vis China, underscoring the tussle between optimism and circumspection. The following statistics prove that in a hypothesised India-Taiwan-China triangle, China is way ahead of both India and Taiwan in all major aspects of international life, except in hard-core military realm where India is a close competitor. Also, China one-sidedly dominates the relations both with India and Taiwan in this triangle. Furthermore, since the relationship with China perhaps remains the most important for both to manage, their bilateral relations are unlikely to be free from geopolitical considerations involving China.

#### *A Statistical View of an India-Taiwan-China Triangle*

While India and China had \$ 71.45 billion bilateral trade in the financial year (FY) 2016–2017, India and Taiwan had trade worth only \$ 5.3 billion during the same FY. On the other hand, China and Taiwan had \$ 117.86 billion bilateral trade in 2016 with Taiwan having around \$ 29.88 billion trade surplus.<sup>99</sup> India received \$1,668 million foreign direct investment (FDI) equity inflows from China during April 2000–June 2017, in contrast to \$242 million from Taiwan for the same period. In 2015,

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<sup>98</sup> Su Chi, *Taiwan's Relations with Mainland China: A Tail Wagging Two Dogs* (London: Routledge, 2009), 161–198.

<sup>99</sup> India-Taiwan and India-China Trade Statistics, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India. Accessed November 11, 2017: <http://commerce.nic.in/eidb/iecnt.asp>; Taiwan-China Bilateral Trade Statistics, Bureau of Foreign Trade, Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA). Accessed November 11, 2017: <http://cus93.trade.gov.tw/FSCE040F/FSCE040F>

Taiwan's investment in China was \$10.4 billion.<sup>100</sup> China was the top-ranking merchandise exporter and second-ranking importer in the world in 2016, whereas India was ranked twentieth and fourteenth in the same period. As per the available figures for 2015, Taiwan was the seventeenth largest exporter and eighteenth largest importer of merchandise.<sup>101</sup> According to the latest available data, "In 2016, Chinese investors made a direct non-financial investment" of \$170 billion. On the other hand, Taiwan's total outward FDI including China was around \$ 21 billion in 2015.<sup>102</sup> India is not a significant provider of FDI. China and India have markets of 1.4 billion and 1.32 billion population, respectively. For Taiwan's population of 23 million, China works as an economic hinterland. The presence of 56,020 non-resident Indians (NRIs) and persons of Indian origin (PIO) in China, in comparison to 2,572 in Taiwan, as of December 2016, is also a pointer for advantage to China in the assumed triangle.<sup>103</sup>

In military-security terms, as per the Global Fire Power ranking, China was the third top-ranking military power in the world; India was fourth and Taiwan eighteenth.<sup>104</sup> Similarly in the diplomatic-strategic arena, China is a veto-wielding permanent member of the UNSC and the NSG. It is also a leading member in organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and in regional processes such as Regional Economic Comprehensive Partnership (RCEP). While India has its own diplomatic standing and is well-integrated in the international strategic domain through international organisations and many strategic partnerships, it has had to negotiate with China or face its reservation for membership in the SCO, East Asia Summit (EAS) and RCEP. For the NSG, it continues to face open opposition from China. Likewise, Chinese consent will play a crucial role for its membership in the UNSC if ever India's quest for membership comes to fruition. On the other side, Taiwan has no representation in international bodies, which are only open to sovereign states. It is a member only in organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and APEC, where sovereignty is not a criterion for membership, plus some specialised UN agencies such as the World Health Agency (WHA) with observer status which requires Chinese consent and always remains tentative in the face of Chinese opposition. In addition, only 20 small countries recognise Taiwan as a sovereign country.<sup>105</sup> Thus, it is difficult to see any meaningful role for Taiwan in India's international diplomatic-security-strategic manoeuvrings aimed at

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<sup>100</sup> FDI Statistics, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Government of India. Accessed November 11, 2017: [http://dipp.nic.in/sites/default/files/FDI\\_FactSheet\\_June2017\\_2\\_0.pdf](http://dipp.nic.in/sites/default/files/FDI_FactSheet_June2017_2_0.pdf); "Economy and Finance," *The Republic of China Yearbook 2016* (Taipei: Executive Yuan, 2016). Accessed November 11, 2017: <https://english.ey.gov.tw/cp.aspx?n=905F77468DAF5C28>

<sup>101</sup> WTO Country Profile (China and India). Accessed November 11, 2017: <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?>; "Economy and Finance," *The Republic of China Yearbook 2016*.

<sup>102</sup> Ministry of Commerce, People's Republic of China. Accessed November 11, 2017: <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/article/newsrelease/policyreleasing/201701/20170102503092.shtml>; "Economy and Finance," *The Republic of China Yearbook 2016*.

<sup>103</sup> The data is provided by the MEA. Accessed November 11, 2017: <https://www.mea.gov.in/images/pdf/NRIs-and-PIOs.pdf>

<sup>104</sup> "2017 Military Strength Ranking," *GlobalFirepower.com*. Accessed November 11, 2017: <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>

<sup>105</sup> "Diplomatic Allies," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan). Accessed November 11, 2017: <https://www.mofa.gov.tw/en/AlliesIndex.aspx?n=DF6F8F246049F8D6&sms=A76B7230ADF29736>

maximising its national interests vis-à-vis China. Similarly, it is also not realistically possible to visualise how India can make direct contributions to influence cross-strait relations in favour of Taiwan. Thus, this is the structural reality that will prevail over any attitudinal influences and shape any scenarios that can be visualised for India-Taiwan relations.

Keeping this structure in mind, there can be six possible scenarios for what Modi and Tsai can achieve bilaterally. These scenarios are pegged between the most extreme and unlikely—from Scenario 1 to 6. Scenario 3 is what the two leaders may aspire for, while Scenario 4 is what is most achievable. In these scenarios, particularly in Scenarios 2–5, ingredients shaping them are not mutually exclusive and may overlap; the difference will be in how they are presented.

*Scenario 1 (most unlikely):* That India will withdraw recognition to the ROC or recognise both the PRC and ROC unmindful of whether the PRC accepts it, is the wildest of the wild cards. Such a card can be played only as an ultimate retaliation in the event of a total collapse of relations with the PRC. Positive and lean phases keep alternating but the relationship with China remains important for India. The two industrialised and nuclear powers with around 36 per cent of the total world population, interact on a very complex and wide bilateral, regional and international strategic canvas. Similarly, Taiwan’s relationship with China is one of its top two relationships – the other being with the United States. Hypothetically speaking, if India were to take the aforementioned extreme measure, would Taiwan be able to welcome it while being fully aware that such a situation would, in all likelihood, invite violent reprisals from China? The question remains.

*Scenario 2 (unlikely):* While the formal support for the PRC’s One-China policy will continue, India may endorse Taiwan in the Asian strategic networking. Enhanced political contacts, some low-key but visible military-diplomatic cooperation, especially in training, and helping Taiwan extend its “diplomatic” presence in South Asia would be the hallmarks of such a scenario. India may become vocal on issues such as Taiwan’s entry into RCEP or UN specialised agencies. Broadening the consultative space, India may invite Taiwan to the various Track 1.5 dialogue mechanisms, such as the Delhi Dialogue, or international military exercises and other events, held in India. Thus, an Indian military attaché in Taiwan would be a definite pointer towards this scenario. This scenario, however, would be very aggressive in nature, which will depend on what turn India-China relations take in the coming years. Besides, this is an uncertain scenario; and India is unlikely to be the prime mover and the lead protagonist in it. Its emergence primarily depends on the following factors: first, on the level and nature of the U.S. commitment to regional – and Taiwan’s – security in times to come. Will it become more involved and encourage countries such as India to be involved in regional security affairs, including those of Taiwan; second, what will Japan’s call be on Taiwan in case the US withdrew from the region or abandoned Taiwan – would it perceive Taiwan’s unification with China as a security concern?<sup>106</sup> Third, as regards the course of cross-strait relations, would Taiwan prepare itself for

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<sup>106</sup> China considered and objected to “situations in areas surrounding Japan” in the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defence Cooperation, 1997, as the reference to the Taiwan Strait. However, Japan did not accede to Chinese pressure. Although, the 2015 revised guidelines did not contain this phrase, its absence does not confirm the lack of interest on Japan’s part. “The Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation,” September 23, 1997. Accessed September 18, 2017: [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/ampo/](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/ampo/); “The Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation,”

unification with China, or prefer to leverage the regional strategic situation to resist the pressure for unification or negotiation for a better deal with the PRC.

*Scenario 3 (not unlikely):* A transformation from the ad hoc nature of the ties to a self-defined relationship that does not rest on approval or disapproval from China, with elements of Scenario 2 but minus its aggressive posturing is the best that Modi and Tsai can aspire to in India-Taiwan relations. For example, it may be possible that India may show interest in regular high-level official contacts, which are few and far between now, and agree to have more glorified names for their respective representative offices. Non-traditional security (NTS) cooperation such as coast guard or disaster management cooperation may begin. A robust cybersecurity cooperation can be visualised – IT being the area in which both sides have remarkable expertise. A relationship modelled on these lines will identify Taiwan as a fully autonomous cooperation partner in India’s foreign policy, and will showcase the latter’s Act East Policy differently, projecting it as a power that is not shy of taking the road less travelled. However, this scenario will face considerable resistance from the bureaucracy, which has been attuned to dealing with Taiwan while being mindful of Chinese sentiments. Also, this scenario will need a Taiwan that is willing to express its empathy for India on the security and strategic issues that matter to it, for example, the issue of the McMahon line, other issues between India and China and India’s security concerns such as cross-border terrorism. Therefore, this scenario will require a strong political will, which is not impossible.

*Scenario 4 (very likely):* A self-sustained relationship in a well-defined framework, as visualised in Scenario 3 minus strategic-diplomatic posturing of any kind, is perhaps the best that Modi and Tsai can achieve. This will enable the two sides to freely respond to the need and requirements of a mature people-to-people relationship. This scenario is in keeping with the existing people-to-people focus. The momentum perceived to have been gained under Modi and Tsai also suggests that relations might already be moving in this direction. If the New Southbound Policy can sell Taiwan’s economic, cultural, educational and scientific and technological attractiveness to Indians, the perceived momentum is only likely to increase. A convergence between this policy and the people-to-people aspects of India’s Act East Policy has the potential to redefine and further deepen bilateral relations.

*Scenario 5 (not unlikely):* As has been argued, the recent momentum in relations can be attributed to the fact that Modi and Tsai are in sync with regard to the geo-political shifts in Asia. However, a strategic flux or a change of guard in India or Taiwan, can adversely affect this perceived “sync.” The Modi-Xi “informal” summit in Wuhan on April 27–28, 2018, popularly known as “the

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April 27, 2015. Accessed September 18, 2017: [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/ampo/5](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/ampo/5) The recent period has witnessed subtle developments in Japan-Taiwan relations. Japan and Taiwan have replaced the earlier vague names of their representative offices on both sides with clearly identifiable names. “China Slams Japan Over Name Change of De Facto Taipei Embassy,” *Bloomberg*, December 28, 2016. Accessed September 18, 2017: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-12-28/china-tells-japan-it-s-unhappy-with-name-change-of-taipei-office>; “Taiwan Changes Name of Semi-Official Body Handling Ties with Japan, Irking China,” *The Japan Times*, May 18, 2017. Accessed September 18, 2017: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/05/18/national/politics-diplomacy/taiwan-changes-name-semi-official-body-handling-ties-japan-irking-china/>

Wuhan Reset,”<sup>107</sup> introduced a thaw in relations after a run of confrontations. Whether the “reset” will prove temporary, or ensure a China that is more accommodating to India, or whether it is actually a sign of a restoration of the old normalcy in relations, which essentially worked on the basis of India acknowledging its power differential vis-à-vis China, will become clear over time. However, as is widely perceived, the initiative for the summit came from India’s realisation that a lingering security-strategic ambiguity in its relations with China can be potentially detrimental to its interests. If it were to hold true, the “reset” is likely to restore the “old” normalcy, in which India may tone down its assertiveness towards China. As China is determined to strangle Taiwan’s international persona to punish the Tsai government, will India allow Taiwan to come between it and China? Alternatively, if the KMT were to come back to power in 2020, Taiwan would most likely revert to the 1992 Consensus, reintroducing priority to good relations with Mainland China over foreign relations. Thus, a return to bureaucratic inertia, habitual resistance or caution is not an impossibility.

*Scenario 6 (most unlikely):* Deepening economic engagement with Taiwan and India’s refusal to show undue deference to Chinese power suggest that India will not end its “unofficial relations” with Taiwan or substantially dilute these under Chinese pressure.

### **The Case for India’s Own Taiwan Policy Review**

There are strong moral and pragmatic imperatives for healthy relations with Taiwan. Even though China is undeniably a much bigger reality that gives more opportunity and, at the same time, poses challenges, relations with Taiwan have significance. An “either-or” approach in relations with China and Taiwan would merely reflect self-constraint. Recognised as a sovereign state or not, the existence of a Taiwanese society, functionally well-integrated with the international community, separate from China, cannot be wished away. Hesitation in promoting normal people-to-people relations with it, is against the spirit of universal brotherhood and not in anyone’s self-interest. India may have its own legitimate reasons for not recognising Taiwan as a political idea. However, now is the time for India to recognise Taiwan also as a social idea and not just as an economic one. Great power aspirations cannot be only about projecting capabilities; it also requires mature positioning on various international and regional issues and a willingness to shoulder responsibilities. A self-defined and self-sustaining relationship with Taiwan, as visualised in Scenarios 3 and 4, depicts India as a confident yet responsible power in the Asia-Pacific. Incidentally, China does not oppose the international community’s people-to-people ties with Taiwan. In fact, it itself has robust people-to-people exchanges with Taiwan, and even treats it as a foreign economy in the WTO regime. Besides, both India and Taiwan face their gravest strategic challenge from the same source, China. Therefore, counsel of prudence would always recommend some form of security cooperation as well. India stands to gain from Taiwan’s expertise on Chinese elite politics and the developments in the PLA. Considering Taiwan’s close economic engagement with Southeast Asia and its resultant expertise in the region, India

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<sup>107</sup> M.K. Narayanan, “Making Sense of the Wuhan Reset,” *The Hindu*, May 21, 2018. Accessed June 1, 2018: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/making-sense-of-the-wuhan-reset/article23944124.ece>

can benefit from interactions with Taiwan, and also from its knowledge of the Chinese engagement with Taiwan. In return, Taiwan will gain more confidence in its dealings with the international community, citing its productive relations with India. Such successful relations should add to its confidence in its negotiations for peace and stability in cross-strait relations.<sup>108</sup> Thus, it is highly recommended that India undertake a serious study of how the United States, Japan and various European and Southeast Asian countries conduct their relations with Taiwan. India's own Taiwan policy review is needed now more than ever.

## Conclusion

The structural concerns for regional stability shaped India's support for the PRC's One-China policy in the 1950s and later decades. However, of late, these concerns appear to be redefining themselves. After the collapse of the USSR, now the U.S. relative decline, the rise of China and the increasing strategic profile of middle powers such as India, who have their own *raison d'être* to hedge a rising China, have changed the post-Second World War context of Asian geopolitics. So far, the international community has consigned the Taiwan issue to the United States. However, when regional middle powers deal with China on their own, how they look at the issue and how this impacts their support for the PRC's One-China policy, is a valid academic exercise. Although the concerns for regional stability shaped India's support for the One-China Policy, the support in the 1950s became a defining feature in its value-based foreign policy. Presently, however, this support does not enjoy such sanctity. Therefore, China can no longer expect India's unquestioned support for the policy if the latter's similar concerns go unreciprocated. This change has attracted attention to an otherwise unnoticed India-Taiwan relations.

A perceived systemic realignment in Asia and the apparent synchronicity between the Modi and Tsai governments, indeed, makes the ground conducive for enhancing relations. Further, as the article has traced the optimism back to 2008–2010, it implies a structural trajectory of this optimism. Therefore, this trajectory should persist beyond Modi and Tsai. Considering the way India has faced up to China in recent years, it would not like to lose the possible diplomatic leverage Taiwan may offer.

Taiwan can be tactically leveraged for occasional signalling and posturing to China, but a realistic strategic scenario for ties with Taiwan is difficult to visualise. Also, the future cannot rest on a negative premise. At this juncture, an unconstrained acceptance of Taiwan as an autonomous entity for people-to-people cooperation and cerebral de-hyphenation of China and Taiwan in India's China/Taiwan policy, is the best that can be visualised. Thus, in the short- to mid-term, one may expect to see further growth in their economic, cultural and other relations. At present, it is all about the right initiatives emanating from the two sides.

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<sup>108</sup> Prashant Kumar Singh, "Taiwan: A Forgotten Frontier of India's 'Act East'?" in *India-Taiwan Relations in Asia and Beyond*, 31–33.