

# NEPCAP POLICY BRIEF

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Taiwan New Decade, Old Challenges



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## Forward

### Lara Momesso and Ti-Han Chang

The year 2020 was marked by an unsettling start to the new decade, as the world confronted an unprecedented challenge in managing the crisis of a global pandemic outbreak. For many countries, particularly those situated on the European and American continents, lockdowns, curfews and tier systems have been introduced and extended repeatedly, and an emphasis on biopolitical surveillance has become the key to both domestic and international politics. While the rest of the world still struggles with limited mobility, restricted social gatherings, a shortage of mask and medical supplies, and is criticised for a political ideology which perpetuates a “state of emergency” [1], as Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, has harshly argued, Taiwan stands out as one of the few countries which has responded the Covid-19 outbreak in both a timely and effective way. Unlike other countries, Taiwan entered this new decade with far-sighted and well-prepared measures.

As soon as the news of a virus outbreak began to spread on social media, the Taiwanese government sent medical experts to Wuhan to gather first-hand information[2]. Drawing from its previous experience of the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic, the Taiwanese government put in place a series of political and public-health measures (e.g. setting up a central communication centre, imposing the track and trace testing system, closing down national borders, etc.) which instantly limited the spread of the virus. Despite its unrecognised status in the World Health Organisation (WHO), the immediately-effective response to Covid-19 put Taiwan in the international spotlight.

In February 2020, the Central Epidemic Command Centre was upgraded to a level 1 governmental institution which became responsible for coordinating works across different departments and communicating with the public. Development of Covid-related digital technologies was identified as the primary approach to tackle the spread, since it allows instant information-sharing and corrects disinformation.

These measures wouldn’t have been so successful without the cooperation of civil society groups and the general public, who have actively followed government guidelines and policies. If this has been a tough year for most people in the world, in Taiwan, life has continued with some sense of normalcy to a large extent.

While Taiwan seems to be capable of keeping up a well-managed system to deal with this new global crisis, some of the old challenges that Taiwan undergoes appear to persist. For nearly half of a century, with respect to its international recognition, Taiwan was almost by default only noticeable when its cross-strait relations and political autonomy vis-à-vis People Republic of China (PRC) were contextualised geopolitically. With Taiwan’s successful Covid-19 management, scholars and civil society groups began to wonder whether this success could be translated or re-invented as a new narrative, helping to overcome Taiwan’s persistent political challenge: the unbreakable chain connecting it to the People’s Republic of China. In this regard, Beijing has repeatedly challenged the sovereignty of the island, as well as its international recognition, to the extent that during the last fifty years, Taiwan has almost by default been noticeable only in terms of its relations to the other side of the strait.

Yet, building on its unique success in dealing with Covid-19, Taiwan has presented itself to the world not only as a distinct entity from China but also as a game-changer. Consequently, some unexpected changes have occurred to its international status and regional politics. For instance, a total of 67 members of the European Parliament signed a petition in April 2020 addressed to Josep Borrell, the EU’s High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, praising Taiwan’s performance in dealing with Covid-19 and asking for Taiwan’s inclusion in the World Health Organization (WHO).

Furthermore, in November 2020, 644 EU parliamentarians, as well as 25 members of European state parliaments, signed a joint letter to the Director-General of the WHO in support of Taiwan's attendance of the 73rd World Health Assembly [3]. In the letter, the parliamentarians praised the Taiwan Model in combating Covid-19, stressing the importance of global cooperation and condemning the exclusion of Taiwan from the WHO. It emphasised that Taiwan's exclusion due to a regional political dispute amounts to discrimination against its people.

In this special issue, we bring forward this old challenge of Taiwan's international status and critically re-examine it at the beginning of a new decade which has been dominated by Covid-19. With regards to the European region, **Pelaggi** asserts that Taiwan's success in Covid-19 management certainly has made the country more visible. However, he questions that to what extent this new visibility can be effective in producing notable changes for Taiwan's diplomatic relations, especially when we consider the dominating political power that Beijing maintains globally. **Singh** suggests that India's awareness of Taiwan has significantly increased due to the island's successful management of Covid-19. Indian media promotes this as a great opportunity to further strengthen India-Taiwan relations, particularly in light of its critical dealings with China on the Himalayan border. Nevertheless, this didn't turn into mutual political support against the threats of Beijing, as neither Taipei nor New Delhi desire to assume the role of troublemaker in the current political context within the region. Both papers seem to agree that, despite Taiwan's success with Covid-19, and the support for international recognition that it has garnered, Beijing's One China Policy remains forceful and continues to be the ultimate obstacle for Taiwan to overcome.

The reflections on Taiwan's international status and diplomatic relations are further examined in the context of US-Taiwan relations. During the final year of Trump's presidency, important agreements were signed to further consolidate the collaboration between Taiwan and the US. In November 2020, the Taiwan-US Economic Prosperity Partnership was signed, which assured the collaboration of the two sides in global health care, supply chain, security, energy development, 5G network development, etc.

The result of the recent US presidential election raised concerns over whether the new president, Joe Biden, will continue to deliver the promises initiated by his predecessor. **Coutaz's** analysis suggests that it is certain that there will not be major changes and Biden will continue to maintain good relations with Taiwan. The United States' national interests will continue to be the primary concern under Biden's leadership. And with China rising as a more forceful and dominating political power, keeping good relations with Taiwan can be the most strategic way to maintain a power balance globally.

Finally, it can boldly be claimed that the pandemic has significantly deteriorated cross-strait relations in many ways. Recently, an intensification of Chinese military threats against Taiwan has been noticed. It is also worth mentioning that Beijing has engaged in various political actions, including cyberattacks on Taiwan's critical infrastructure, disinformation campaigns and infiltration of its political system. Within Taiwan, **Smith** argues, this has led to a deepening of Taiwanese nationalism, to the point that even the traditionally pro-China Kuomintang (KMT) party finds it increasingly challenging to attract young voters. In such a threatening environment, **Schubert** critically argues, the pandemic has given the current ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government the opportunity to reinforce its nationalist ideology

and increase its biopolitical surveillance of Taiwanese people. This critical reflection leads us to question the democratic transparency, legal soundness, and long-term sustainability of a system that has been praised by many.

Collectively, these contributions identify how political visibility and other opportunities have been presented to Taiwan while the global pandemic continues to ravage the world. It places the island in the international spotlight, increases its visibility, and in some cases, wins support for its national cause against China. However, the global pandemic has also exacerbated the power dynamics that already existed between the two states. And it is difficult to conclude for now that this political opportunity has had a long-term positive effect for Taiwan.

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2 -Watt, L., 2020. Taiwan Says It Tried to Warn the World About Coronavirus. Here's What It Really Knew and When. Time, [online] Available at: <<https://time.com/5826025/taiwan-who-trump-coronavirus-covid19/>> [Accessed 25 February 2021].

3 -Tsai, M., 2021. Why Deepening EU-Taiwan Economic Ties Matter. The Diplomat, [online] Available at: <<https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/why-deepening-eu-taiwan-economic-ties-matter/>> [Accessed 25 February 2021]; Lim, Emerson, 2020. European parliamentarians call for Taiwan's participation in WHA. Focus Taiwan, [online] Available at: <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202011050022> [Accessed 1 March 2021].

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## Taiwan Projection in Europe

### Stefano Pelaggi

The perception of Taiwan in the European Union changed dramatically during the Covid-19 pandemic. Taiwan's presence in the European media has almost always been associated with conflicts in the Strait, tensions with Beijing and a general representation of Taiwan as an element problematic in the geopolitical balance in Asia Pacific. The election of Tsai Ing-wen, the social and cultural changes initiated in Taiwan over the last decade – with a particular focus on LGBT rights – and news related to progress in the environmental and social inclusion fields, have sometimes had good coverage in the European media. However, the general impression is that Taiwanese dynamics have remained the object of attention of an extremely limited segment of the European population. An audience that has a specific interest in the region or in international dynamics. The frequent mention of Taiwan in the sensitive issue of the Strait rarely includes a general picture of the evolution of Sino-Taiwanese relations and can be summarized in the well-known expression "in a move likely to anger Beijing".

The perception of Taiwan as a "troublemaker" seemed inevitably to figure in the mental image of the vast majority of the European population. It was an association that often went hand-in-hand with a total lack of information on Taiwan. The constant confusion between Thailand and Taiwan, or the identification of Taiwan as part of the People's Republic of China, has been the failure of Taipei's soft power efforts for decades.

Success in the management of the pandemic has brought Taiwan to the fore in a completely different perspective, completely outside the framework of relations between Taipei and Beijing. The protests in Hong Kong and the repression of the city-state were covered widely in the media and the aggressive projection of the People's Republic of China in international politics was at the center of the news for the whole of 2019. Even the public, which usually has no interest in international affairs had shown attention. In particular, a polarization effect with respect to the new equilibriums of international

politics has become evident in the general public.

The Taiwanese model in the fight against Covid-19 was highlighted in opposition to the methods linked to social control used by the People's Republic of China. The news and the many articles have created spaces for a new storytelling, based on the representation of an open and democratic society that manages to "solve" problems while maintaining spaces of respect for civil rights.

The creation of this new perspective has ensured a new visibility for Taiwan, especially a visibility outside the framework of relations with China. Taiwan has been cited as a model and sometimes as a possible alternative. An interpretation that all Taiwan Studies scholars and practitioners have tried to promote for years is that a Taiwanese perspective is not necessarily connected to the dynamics of cross-strait relations but can also be viewed in terms of cultural, political and historical subjectivity.

The greatest difficulty with soft power, for small and medium powers, consists precisely in creating an agenda in the media. Public opinion is increasingly saturated with news from all parts of the world, so Taiwan's popularity over the past year is therefore an incredible opportunity.

Taiwan's difficulties in having public communication with other states, a well-known dynamic that arises from the country's peculiar international condition, could be overcome by resorting to the instrument of "people-to-people diplomacy". A well-known motto in the Taipei Ministry of Foreign Affairs is "no news about Taiwan is good news". Diplomats have often found themselves at the center of international controversy in past years. The very structure of the MOFA and the approach of the employees of the various de facto embassies reproduce this problem.

The interest of European and world public opinion is also focused on civil participation in Taiwanese society.

Groups of Taiwanese citizens residing in individual countries, and various associations of scholars and supporters in various capacities in Taiwan, can therefore play an important role.

The peculiar condition of Taiwan's international projection could suggest a post-Westphalian approach in the international arena. It is still a premature dynamic, but the actors who support those new dynamic forms of representations in such a scenario are civil society organisations. The dynamics of informal diplomacy could be combined with people-to-people (P2P) diplomacy to ensure a change in the perception of Taiwan at the grassroots level.

The aim could ultimately be to generate political change at the leadership level, taking advantage of the renewed attention of public opinion towards Taiwanese dynamics.

The actions proposed in the seminar go precisely in this direction, a dynamic that is perfectly suited to the thrust of Taiwan's vibrant civil society.

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## Surge in pro-Taiwan sentiments in India in 2020: Are there any indications for the future?

Prashant Kumar Singh

This piece briefly discusses the surge in pro-Taiwan sentiments in India in 2020, and attempts to enumerate whether this surge gives any indication of the new decade being witness to the overcoming of old challenges in Taiwan's relations with India. Thus far, its ties with India have broadly faced three challenges: the first is related to Taiwan's desire for enhancement of its relations with India in political and diplomatic terms; the second pertains to its dissatisfaction with the pace of growth in bilateral relations; and the third concerns deepening economic ties, particularly under Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP). Analysing these challenges, the author argues that the old challenges in relations are likely to persist in the new decade and offers some prescriptions as to how to make relations stay the course despite difficulties. The author would like to give a caveat that his focus on specifying and analysing the challenges does not, in any way, negate the positive developments that relations have seen – a theme which he has been exploring separately.

### A short background to understand the challenges

The story of India-Taiwan relations is not yet in the wider international public domain. There are many interesting and educative historical episodes in India-Taiwan relations including: Jawaharlal Nehru and Chiang Kai-shek's friendship; the Kuomintang's (KMT's) and the Communist Party of China's (CPC's) common perceptions on Tibet and the boundary dispute with India; advocacy in India for making a common cause with the ROC vis-à-vis the PRC in the aftermath of the 1962 war with China and furtive yet unsuccessful efforts towards this end. However, the story of their so-called unofficial relations began in 1995 when they set up economic and cultural relations. Later, the Chen Shui-bian government of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) brought India into the Taiwanese discourse on foreign affairs. Apart from taking several India-specific initiatives for people-to-people exchanges, the most important contribution of the Chen gover-

-ment and the DPP was to project a possible India-Japan-Taiwan triangle of democracies that could act as a bulwark against China. The idea of India's importance as a possible ally, partner or friend has persisted in the DPP's discourse ever since. The current President, Tsai Ing-wen, has time and again emphasised the importance of relations with India. In fact, she initially mentioned India as the target country of the NSP along with ASEAN countries, though the term South Asia replaced India in the policy documents later. [1]

### The challenges

Now the question is, what challenges has Taiwan faced in relations with India in the last two decades? First and foremost, while Taiwan has been pushing to raise the profile of its relations with India, India's response has been very guarded, cautious and restrained. Analysing India's approach towards Taiwan, one can perceive that the government still remains very careful. However, a cerebral hyphenation between China and Taiwan appears to have taken place in India's official and intellectual elites' perspectives on Taiwan over two decades and it has begun respecting Taiwan as a separate entity from China, not adjunct to it. The period around 2008 and 2010 can be considered as a cut-off when India began vocally demanding reciprocity for its support for the PRC's one-China policy. After this, India appeared to be developing comfort and confidence in its relations with Taiwan. There are several pointers to establish this assertion. In the last decade, India has often subtly conveyed to China that it is aware of Taiwan's value as a tactical lever to exert pressure on China, or as they say in India, the "Taiwan card." However, its signalling has not gone beyond a point and has not given any benefits to Taiwan in diplomatic terms. For example, Taiwan's expectations for minister-level visits from and to India, the renaming of Taiwan's representative office in New Delhi and dialogue and consultations at high official and political levels are far from being met.

The second challenge pertains to Taiwan's dissatisfaction with the pace at which things move in the relationship. It is partly the result of bureaucracy and partly the result of India's cautious approach at top political levels. India's foreign ministry establishment's long habituation and attuning to India's support for the PRC's one-China policy also plays a role in the slow growth of relations with Taiwan. A lot of mental and professional considerations appear to be at work on the part of the foreign ministry establishment.

As for the third challenge regarding the prospect of success of the NSP in India, one should note that economic relations have shown optimism, albeit in a limited way. Except for a free trade agreement (FTA) which has not materialised yet, the institutional framework, that facilitates trade and also investment, is in place. If the trade has remained stagnant and Indian expectations of substantial Taiwanese investment have fallen short, it has basically to do with structural economic reasons, not so much with political constraints.

### **Understanding India's approach and attitude towards Taiwan**

The reason for this situation is that in any security-strategic assessment of India, China is a far bigger and a far more complicated reality as a neighbour. Even now, when relations with China are at their perceptible worst, the priority for India – or for that matter both India and China – is to salvage relations. It is very difficult for India-Taiwan relations to move beyond the Chinese shadow. One may recall that the initial three years of Prime Minister Modi, who has been very assertive towards China, saw a sudden increased momentum in relations with Taiwan. A number of agreements and MOUs, signed one after another in quick succession, marked this momentum. Modi even invited Taiwan's representative to his oath-taking ceremony in 2014. Such examples indicated that India was consciously recalibrating its relations with Taiwan. However, after the Doklam military standoff between India and China from June to August 2017, the usual

circumspection in India about relations with Taiwan returned. After the Doklam crisis, the focus turned towards mending fences with China. The informal summits between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi grabbed the headlines in India-China relations. As a consequence, no big news has been heard about India-Taiwan relations. In the meantime, India-China relations once again have taken a sharp turn towards their most severe deterioration since the 1962 India-China war. To sum up, now, with around one hundred thousand soldiers on both sides standing face-to-face in the Himalayas since May-June 2020, it is unlikely that India will take any action vis-à-vis Taiwan that may cause further deterioration in relations with China.

### **Surge in pro-Taiwan sentiments in India in 2020**

With this backdrop, what should one make of the surge of pro-Taiwan public sentiments in India in the year gone by? It is beyond doubt that the year 2020 saw a huge increase in public awareness in India about Taiwan, Taiwan's fight for a place in the WHO and cross-Strait relations. Taiwan's coverage in Indian newspapers suddenly increased. National dailies carried editorials supporting Taiwan's cause for entry into the WHO. Some TV channels hosted exclusive primetime debates on Taiwan, precisely on cross-Strait relations and the WHO issue, for the first time. Political leaders openly issued statements in favour of Taiwan. Indian newspapers haughtily laughed off Chinese suggestions not to cover Taiwan's Double Ten-Day ceremonies hosted by Taiwan's representative office. In fact, a political worker hoisted the ROC flag near to the Chinese Embassy, to mock China. Some media commentators had appealed to India to use the Taiwan card during the Doklam crisis too, but the public attention Taiwan enjoyed in India in the year 2020 was nevertheless unprecedented. Three reasons – the accusation against China of mishandling the COVID-19 outbreak; attention to Taiwan's success in containing the outbreak and China's military aggression against India in the Himalayas –

converged and occasioned the surge. One should also note that over the period, Taiwan's public diplomacy outreach to India has intensified. Think-tanks, universities, and entrepreneurs in industry and services, and to some extent political parties as well, have been the focus of this public diplomacy outreach. The coverage, attention and support Taiwan received in the year gone by can also be attributed to the success of Taiwan's public diplomacy.

### **A one-sided surge**

Nevertheless, the surge was more or less one-sided. A similar surge was not seen in Taiwan in support of India against Chinese actions, as one could glean through English media and social media sources from Taiwan. This was despite the emphasis on a democratic solidarity with India and a rhetoric of common hedging against China that we see in the Taiwanese foreign policy discourse. President Tsai and MOFA took much time to issue statements that could be deemed as supporting India. Tsai, for example, made a reference to Chinese aggression in the Himalayas in her Double Ten-Day speech. Taiwanese Foreign Minister, Joseph Wu criticised China in an interview with an Indian TV channel one week after Tsai's speech. Separately, the official ROC maps depict the India-China border in the northern Himalayas in the same way as the PRC maps do. Incidentally, Taiwan did not issue any statement during the Doklam crisis either. To be fair to the Taiwanese, Taiwan's reticence is understandable as its relations with China are even trickier and more fragile than India-China relations. The point here is that both India and Taiwan appear to be reluctant to publicly issue statements and display interest in each other's political and security-related issues.

### **Conclusion**

Reading the surge in pro-Taiwan sentiments in India in 2020 alongside longstanding and macro-level trends in India-Taiwan relations,

one can argue that stronger India-Taiwan relations, that are totally free from the Chinese shadow, remain a pipe dream. The China challenge to India-Taiwan relations will persist in the new decade. Growth in India-Taiwan relations is likely to remain slow and follow an ad hoc or an as-and-when route. A normative framework for India-Taiwan relations is unlikely to emerge anytime soon. Therefore, Taiwan's dissatisfaction with the pace at which things move in relations will continue for the better part of this decade. In this somewhat pessimistic sounding assessment of bilateral relations by the author, the NSP indeed gives reason for optimism. India welcomes Taiwan's NSP and has shown interest in it. To what degree it will receive active governmental support in India, and how much it will be successful in pursuing its stated objectives and goals in the country, remains to be seen. It very much fits in India and Taiwan's schemes of creating alternate, resilient, and diversified supply chains, reducing dependence on China. Since decreasing this dependence has been the focus of the two governments' strategic discourse in a big way, this logic has the potential to be a game-changer in relations.

### **Policy prescriptions**

In keeping with the discussion thus far and looking at conclusions derived from it, one can offer the following three broad policy prescriptions:

1. Playing up the Kautilyan maxim of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" is counter-productive and actually does not add much value. There should not be an obsession with "political relations." Moreover, what is "political" in relations depends on how one looks at it. To have robust economic and cultural relations by themselves could be a political decision. Furthermore, below-the-radar security cooperation does not need a policy prescription from scholars.

2. Taiwan should focus on consolidating the gains its public diplomacy has accrued in India.

Its public diplomacy efforts should be directed more towards removing unwarranted checks that it may be facing, in conducting its normal economic and cultural engagement with India.

3. India should accept convergence between Taiwan's NSP and its own Act East Policy as the organising framework for relations. It should acknowledge that Taiwan's role is crucial in creating alternate, diversified and resilient supply chains in the Indo-Pacific region. Accordingly, it should have an unambiguous policy in place for the smooth facilitation of relations with Taiwan under the proposed framework.

[1] It should be noted that even though the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou government did not commit itself to the rhetoric of democratic solidarity or hedging against China the way the DPP governments have done, it advanced closer relations with India in a more regular and official and low-profile manner in keeping with its policy priority for peaceful relations and deeper engagement with mainland China.

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## **Biden or Trump? US policy on Taiwan will be determined – once again – by the national interest**

### **Gregory Coutaz**

With the inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th president of the United States in January 2021, much has already been said and written about possible drastic changes in US policy toward Taiwan. There is understandable apprehension in Taipei about what a Biden presidency could mean for Taiwan's relationship with the United States.

There are several reasons for Taiwan to be concerned with Biden's new administration. One reason is that there was little in Biden's campaign rhetoric to suggest that the former vice-president would work to protect the island's security and democracy. Biden's recent record on cross-strait engagement remains closely associated with the more conciliatory approach toward China adopted by the Obama administration. Taiwanese democratic activists are quick to point to Washington's muted response to the 2014 Umbrella protests in Hong Kong as evidence that the Obama-Biden team ignored warnings about Beijing's tightening control over the former British colony.

Another reason is that it seems that President Biden will not be as supportive of Taiwan, and as willing to confront China, as his unorthodox predecessor. It is an open secret that Taiwan is one of the few hotbeds of support anywhere in the world for Donald Trump. During the past four years, US-Taiwan relations have strengthened in virtually every respect, from diplomatic gestures to the always sensitive domain of security cooperation. Many Taiwanese have dubbed Trump as the most pro-Taiwan president in US history. On December 19, a crowd of Trump fans did not hesitate to gather in the center of Taipei to show their support for the current US president. While the rally failed to attract a large turnout, it reflected a touch of nostalgia, that goes beyond just Trump supporters, for an era in which Taiwan's relationship with the US was as close to nation-to-nation as possible.

Joe Biden and Donald Trump could certainly not be more different, but when it comes to Taiwan policy, the preservation of national interest will remain the priority of the next US president.

More than seven decades ago, Washington supported Chiang Kai-shek because he was anti-communist, not because he was a democrat. When the Korean War broke out, the US decided to intervene militarily to prevent a Communist Chinese takeover of the island. This led to the signing of the US-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty in late 1954, which not only assured the security and continuity of Chiang's regime in Taiwan but also enabled the US to complete a network of military alliances containing Communist expansion in the Asia-Pacific. Flash forward two decades and President Richard Nixon was arguing that the US must come to grips with the reality of China. In Washington's view, the normalization of relations with Beijing was a calculated move designed to drive a deeper wedge between China and the Soviet Union. It was in the US interest to use closer diplomatic relations with Beijing as leverage in dealing with Moscow, especially on the issue of Vietnam. To Nixon, and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, the overarching geopolitical importance of developing a relationship with China justified the removal of any and all intervening obstacles. Neither Nixon nor Kissinger seriously worried about the fate of Taiwan or the will of the people on the island: the stakes were simply too high.

Now, at the dawn of a Biden era, what is the national interest of the United States when it comes to China? Biden will face a resurgent opponent who has been growing increasingly authoritarian at home and assertive abroad. Beijing's drive for primacy in the political, economic, technological, and, ultimately, military realms will require an offensive response from the new administration. While Joe Biden is likely to embrace opportunities for collaboration with China on globally urgent issues like trade, pandemics, and climate change, he will have to display a clear and bold stance against Chinese attempts at upending the current US-led liberal international order. Indeed, Beijing is not aiming at just participating in global affairs anymore, but is unambiguously seeking to rewrite the whole structure and rules of the system to its own benefit.

In this context, Biden will have very little choice but to maintain Trump's commitment to counter China and to stand up to the aspiration of the latter to overtake the US as the world's dominant power. Joe Biden's future policy on China is expected to take the form of a coalition-building effort in support of this containment strategy. It is only by strengthening its alliances with Asian democracies that Washington will be able to preserve its influence and retain its leadership on the continent. As a close partner of the US, this should be encouraging news for Taiwan. While the Biden foreign policy team might be less vocal than its predecessor when engaging with the island, it fully understands the substantive value of Taiwan, as well as the risks that its reunification with China would mean for the US.

For better or worse, Taiwan's destiny is intertwined with the interests of its powerful benefactor. Fortunately for Taipei, it seems that for the time being, the interests of Taiwan and the US are more aligned than ever. Therefore, the government of Tsai Ing-wen should continue to work closely with the US, which is a policy that has broad support across the partisan spectrum in Taiwan. While it is important for Taipei to readjust its pace with the new Biden administration in power, it should remind Washington that Taiwan is an asset to be valued and not a card to be played in the US relationship with China. As a post-pandemic world emerges, the United States has much to gain by deepening its ties with Taiwan, a leading democracy and a technology powerhouse.

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## Cross-strait relations with China in Taiwan politics

Courtney Donovan Smith (石東文)

By far the most dominant issues in Taiwan's national - but not local - politics are Taiwanese identity, views on sovereignty and relations with China.

Taiwan has five parties represented in the legislature, with the biggest being the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), with an outright majority of 61 seats. At one time openly advocating declaring a Republic of Taiwan, their current stance is best summed by President Tsai Ing-wen's comment to the BBC when asked if Taiwan will "declare independence": "We are an independent country already and we call ourselves the Republic of China (Taiwan)." [1]

The Chinese Nationalist Party, also referred to as the Kuomintang (KMT), is the second-largest party with 38 seats. Originating out of a Chinese revolutionary movement dedicated to overthrowing the Manchurian Qing Empire in China, they remain committed to maintaining the Republic of China, while also advocating for eventual unification with China.

The other three parties are much smaller. The biggest of those, the Taiwan People's Party with five seats, officially espouses a line very similar to that of the DPP. Their chairman, however, often takes stances that are between that of the DPP and KMT. The New Power Party (NPP, 3 seats) and the Taiwan Statebuilding Party (TSP, 1 seat) are widely perceived as being stronger on Taiwan sovereignty than the DPP, with some members openly espousing dropping the Republic of China (ROC) name, constitution, and trappings.

To understand the party positions, some basic history is crucial for context. Taiwan for thousands of years was under the control of various indigenous peoples who may have been the original Austronesian progenitors.[2] In the 17th century, the Dutch--and briefly the Spanish--colonized portions of Taiwan. They brought over Chinese as workers and farmers, to develop their colony and establish a tax base. Their colonial rule ended when forces, led by Chinese Ming dynasty loyalists fighting against the Manchurian Qing invaders, defeated the Dutch and took over their colony, declaring an independent Kingdom of Tungning. It lasted a mere 20 years.

The Manchurians, along with China, Tibet, the Uighur lands and Mongolia, folded Taiwan into their empire - though they never occupied more than two-thirds of Taiwan. This set off a sustained period of Chinese immigration that was very similar to that of English North America both in time frame and in the destructive impact it had on the indigenous population.

In 1895, following defeat at the hands of the Japanese over Korea, Taiwan was ceded to the Japanese Empire "in perpetuity". The Japanese invaded the remaining indigenously held lands, unifying Taiwan for the first time. They set about - especially in the later years - trying to make Taiwan more Japanese, including schooling done in the Japanese language. Though they had some success, it was during this period that a Taiwanese political consciousness began to appear.

At the end of WWII, like occupied Germany, the Japanese Empire was partitioned between allied powers, with the USA occupying the Japanese home islands and the ROC taking Taiwan. Not long into the ROC occupation, in 1947, the Taiwanese people rose up in revolt against the corruption, violence and looting of the economy that was being done by ROC soldiers to feed the Chinese Civil War.

The Japanese signed the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951 renouncing any claims to Taiwan - though it did not specify who would take over sovereignty of the island.

There is controversy over the issue of Taiwan's sovereignty post-WWII. Proponents of ROC sovereignty point to the Cairo Declaration made by the Allied powers, which states that Taiwan would be handed over to China after the war. Opponents of ROC sovereignty note that the Cairo Declaration wasn't a legal document, was unsigned and was fundamentally a press release. The US position on Taiwan's sovereignty remains to this day that it is "undetermined".

Regardless of the legality of the matter, in 1949 the KMT-led ROC government in China lost the civil war against the communists and moved the government to Taipei.

The KMT launched a campaign of brutal oppression under martial law to try to make Taiwan more “Chinese”. Mandarin was used in schools – which almost no Taiwanese spoke at the time – and the KMT enforced the line that Taiwan was a province of China and that “Free China” would “reclaim the motherland” one day.

The DPP was formed out of a collection of dissidents against martial law and, as democratization took hold in the 1990s, activists within the party wanting a Taiwan republic became dominant. However, over time a debate within the party began to take place between two groups, those espousing “Taidu”, and declaring a Taiwan republic and those supporting “Huadu”, who thought maintaining Taiwan as an independent ROC was more practical considering the People’s Republic of China’s stance that if Taiwan dropped the ROC name it would be a pretext for war. Under President Tsai, the “Huadu” stance has dominated the party. Polling has shown this is by far the preferred stance of the public, though when asked if they would support dropping the ROC name if there was no threat of war, they would do so.[3] [4]

Support for Taiwan sovereignty and Taiwan identity has been growing for years, especially following the 2014 Sunflower protests against the then-KMT led government over increasing ties with China. Recent threatening actions by China, as well as the examples set by Beijing in Hong Kong and Xinjiang have deepened this trend.[5]

Tsai’s DPP have positioned themselves in the centre of Taiwan opinion on these issues, which has led to two back-to-back landslide victories in national elections.

This has put the KMT in a quandary. Their support for “one China” and the “1992 consensus” is far outside of mainstream politics. The “1992 consensus” is a reference to meetings between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1992. Though no such consensus was actually reached, and the term was coined in 2000, it had taken on a life of its own as a diplomatic construct. There are two big problems with this as far as the public is concerned. To the CCP, the consensus simply meant “one

China”, while the KMT stated it meant “one China, each side with its own interpretation” – a position the CCP never accepted. In mainstream public opinion, however, it was dealt a death blow when the People’s Republic of China’s Chairman Xi Jin-ping, in January 2019, explicitly tied it to the “one country, two systems” imposed on Hong Kong.[6] [7]

Current KMT party Chairman Johnny Chiang understands that continuing to support the “1992 consensus” is widely unpopular with the public at large, and attempted to get it removed from the party platform at a party congress in September, 2020. He was defeated by two factors, and withdrew the attempt. First was opposition ex-President Ma Ying-jeou, whose legacy is tied to achievements made in China relations, and party elders whose families came from China in 1949 and often maintain business, family or emotional ties there. The second factor is the self-selected nature of KMT supporters, which is far outside the mainstream. An internal poll of KMT members showed 81.5% of them supported the “1992 consensus”. [8] Unless there is a complicated three-way race or they drop the “1992 consensus”, it will be very hard for them to win back the presidency or the legislature.

The recently established Taiwan People’s Party has been making moves that suggest they may be attempting to woo more moderate members of the KMT with a more pro-Taiwan stance, though it remains to be seen if they will succeed in becoming a major force large enough to challenge the DPP’s current dominance.

[1] Sudworth, John (14 January 2020) “China needs to show Taiwan respect, says president”. BBC News.

[2] Thomas, David R. (January 2011) In book: Alam Melayu: Satu Pengenalan (Malay World: One Contribution to Knowledge) (pp.13-21)Chapter: Origins of the Austronesian PeoplesPublisher: Institut Alam Dan Tamandun Melayu, Universiti Kebangsaan MalaysiaEditors: N. H. S. Abdul Rahman, Z. Ramli, M Z Musa, A Jusoh

[3] Hsiao, Russell (2 August 2019) “New Polling Data Reflect Deepening Taiwanese Identity”. Commonwealth/Global Taiwan Institute.

[4] Rich, Timothy and Dahmer, Andi (19 October 2020) “Taiwan Opinion Polling on Unification with China”. Jamestown China Brief.

[5] Pan, Jason (11 December 2020) “Survey finds 85 percent define as Taiwanese”. Taipei Times.

[6] Everington, Keoni (24 September 2024) “Only 2% of Taiwanese consider themselves ‘Chinese’”. Taiwan News.

[7] Sands, Gary (11 January 2019) “Is This the End of the ‘1992 Consensus’?”. The Diplomat.

[8] 陳弘志 (2 September 2020) “路線定調！藍:81%黨員支持「基於中華民國憲法的92共識」”. Nownews.

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# The Governmentality of Taiwan's Anti-epidemic Politics

**Gunter Schubert**

Taiwan has earned worldwide praise for its success in fighting the coronavirus crisis. It has become a shining example for those pushing the argument that state capacity in anti-epidemic politics is not preconditioned upon an authoritarian mode of government. Rather, the Taiwan case has shown that effective top-down policy steering, strict compliance of the populace with quarantine measures, hygiene measures and social distancing, and legitimate comprehensive tracing of digital data are all possible in a democracy.

Looking at the domestic and global discourses on Taiwan's anti-epidemic politics, we face a "master narrative" which emphasizes the combination of a high degree of state capacity and policy learning by government authorities, driven by civil society agency in a vital democratic system. This narrative privileges effective political leadership and accountability supported by overall public trust on the one hand and a high level of civic participation on the other. A "Taiwan model" of fighting the pandemic has come to the fore and is, as the Taiwanese government is happy to note, now being eagerly studied across the world.

However, is this all there is to the Taiwan case?

Looking more carefully at the domestic discourse, there is also a more "critical", non-mainstream narrative out there that ascribes Taiwan's performance in crisis management to the state's successful steering of the minds of the Taiwanese by invoking China's deadly threat as the real meaning of the coronavirus crisis. This invocation pinpoints "biopolitical nationalism" as a project of governmentality which arguably manipulates the people's crisis awareness for (Taiwan-) nationalist ends. Put differently, the coronavirus embodies the "China threat" and requires national mobilization to protect Taiwan's freedom and prosperity.

I came across this "critical" narrative on various occasions during the three months I spent in Taiwan between March and June last year. It was neatly summarized by a colleague of mine from a top-level

academic institution who, it should be emphasized, is not a KMT-leaning intellectual but rather a DPP supporter. When we talked about Taiwan's successful crisis containment and its perception by the populace this colleague made a surprising statement:

*"Look at us. We have so few infection cases here, but our government pretends that we are exposed to an existential threat. They nurture a sense of crisis and remind us all the time that we have to be on alert permanently. We do not question the government. Whatever they decide, the people go along, no questions, no thinking. They claim to be transparent, communicative, professional, democratic. Are they? What is all this 'crisis speak' really about? Of course, there is a virus out there. You have to be careful and do something about it. But is it just that? In fact, the government tells us: this is a national crisis, it is a deadly danger that comes from China. They have put us in a state of mental war, and a good part of the government's policy is just about Taiwanese nationalism and to get us prepared for the real war to come."*

This viewpoint may have been an outlier at the time of our conversation last spring, but it has since, it seems, become more pronounced in the Taiwan public discourse. Even social and natural scientists are reflecting on Taiwan's anti-epidemic politics, indicating some uneasiness as informed observers of the way the country has moved through the pandemic. As far as I can see, the following arguments are being made:

- By invoking the Covid-19 outbreak as a national security crisis, border controls, travel bans and close-meshed digital surveillance (by tracking mobile phones and gathering comprehensive information of interconnected data pools, most notably those of the national immigration and health authorities), have infringed heavily on individual privacy and data security, with little tolerance for criticism. It seems that Taiwan is celebrating bio-surveillance, with no sense of any need to critically ponder the dangers of

of nearly unlimited official access to personal data.

- Constantly releasing information, coupled with monotonous advice and the threat of punishment, the government (the state) has created a censoring atmosphere in Taiwanese society that encourages all citizens to engage in morally supervising each other to behave “reasonably” and “responsibly”. The state promotes mutual control in Taiwan’s rural and urban communities, encouraging people to spy on their neighbor and make them report “black sheep” to nearby police stations, then lauding these unpaid spies as “caring citizens” in the local and national media.

- By bestowing exclusive authority and responsibility to the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Central Epidemic Command Center under its supervision, the government has monopolized decision-making processes around the existence of a public health emergency and the discussion on all the necessary counter-measures to be taken. With no democratic deliberation in Taiwan’s parliament, there is almost no possibility to legally challenge these measures. This bespeaks a technocratic tendency in Taiwan’s bureaucracy, if not the state’s quest for technocratic power.

- This results in a “Foucauldian irony” embedded in the people’s overall response to the government’s strategy to fight the coronavirus. They embrace the state’s political supremacy by telling themselves: “The more we are being controlled, the more we are in control! The more we are being controlled, the better we perform compared to other countries! The more we are being controlled and the better we perform compared to other countries, the more we are internationally applauded and recognized! The more we are being controlled, and the more we are internationally recognized, the more we are protected against China!” [1]. Hence, the government has made good use of the pandemic for political ends and can easily withstand the opposition’s accusation of becoming increasingly authoritarian.

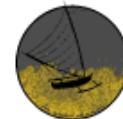
There is no question that Taiwan has (so far) been successful in fighting the pandemic at home, with extremely low infection rates and only a handful of people having died. The “master narrative” accredits Taiwan’s democratic system and healthy state-society relations to be the major causal factors behind this performance. I personally believe that this is a fair assessment. However, there are also questions, buoyed by the “critical narrative” that both the government and society should ponder. For example: has state power been strengthened too much by Taiwan’s crisis response, to the detriment of the political and legal accountability of power-holders? Has individual freedom and critical inquiry of government action been compromised, if not manipulated, by a biopolitical project which serves Taiwanese nationalism? Has Taiwan’s civil society lost much of its critical distance vis-à-vis the state during the coronavirus crisis?

1- I borrow here from de Kloet, Jeroen, Jian Lin and Yiu Fai Chow (2020). “We are doing better”: Biopolitical nationalism and the Covid-19 virus in East Asia, in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(4), 635-640.

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