



EVOLVING ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDIA AND TAIWAN IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250305027>

Abstract

India has the fourth-largest economy and military power in the World. On the other hand, Taiwan, a country of 23.3 million people, is one of the world's leading countries in terms of technology and economy. In the absence of formal diplomatic relations, India and Taiwan established informal relations in 1995. Taiwan remains one of the most strategically and geographically important place in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. India is trying to strengthen its influence and ties in the region through the "Act East" policy and Indo-Pacific strategy. Taiwan is growing in importance for trade, economy and its geopolitical location. The volume of trade between India and Taiwan has been steadily increasing. Trade, technology transfer and investment cooperation between the two countries open up new possibilities. India has a conflict with China over the Border issue; on the other hand, China and Taiwan have been at loggerheads since the 1950s, which has increased in recent times. In this case, Taiwan plays a key role in India's "Counter China" policy. The relationship between the two countries plays an important role in shaping the geopolitical balance and security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, study on this topic helps to strengthen the way for future cooperation by enriching policy-making and academic discussion. The objectives of this paper are to highlight the trade and strategic relations between India and Taiwan. And discuss the main obstacles and possibilities between the two countries. To analyse whether Taiwan can emerge as an important partner in East Asia in India's Indo-Pacific strategy. The methodology of this study is largely based on analytical and descriptive. The primary sources collected from Government database, documents, reports and statement such as Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economic Affairs. Secondary sources collected from various books, articles, journals, periodicals and newspaper.

Keywords: *Strategic Relations, Trade, Indo-Pacific Region, Act East Policy, New Southbound Policy*

Introduction

In the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and India's financial crisis reshaped Indian foreign Policy. In such a situation, economic and defence support from the Soviet Union almost stopped. India launched the "Look East" policy under the leadership of then prime minister P.V Narasimha Rao to strengthen partnership and relations with Southeast Asian countries. During this time, it laid the foundation for establishing relations with Taiwan. Taiwan is an important country in East Asia region, which is officially known as the Republic of China (ROC). After the communists under the leadership of Mao Zedong came to power in mainland China in 1949, the ROC government or Kuomintang (KMT) under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek relocated to Taiwan. India broke off relations with the ROC government in 1950 and established relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Since then, India has not established formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan. In the absence of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries, in 1995, India established the India-Taipei Association in Taipei (ITA), the capital city of Taiwan. In the same year, Taiwan established the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC) in New Delhi, India.¹ In 2012, Taiwan established another TECC in Chennai for the benefit of the South Indian state, and another office opened in Mumbai in 2024.² Bilateral relations between India and Taiwan have made significant progress in recent years. Especially in the areas of strategic, economic and technological corporation.

India-Taiwan relations grew in 1995 with the establishment of representative offices through a series of Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in various fields. In 2014, the new government came to power in India under the leadership of Narendra Modi, and the formation of the Tsai Ing-wen-led Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government in Taiwan in 2016 marked the beginning of a new journey, characterized by a strong framework, clear strategy, and economic vision. The changing geopolitical context, the perception of growing threats, and subtle yet impactful changes driven by shared

interests and concerns have redefined this partnership.³ Over the past three decades, India and Taiwan have significantly strengthened economic and cultural ties. Friendly policies and common interests have led to a significant increase in trade and investment exchanges. Which has established India as one of Taiwan's major export and outward investment destinations and made Taiwan a strategic partner for India's manufacturing ambitions.

In 2016, Taiwan's foreign policy underwent significant changes through President Tsai Ing-wen's "New Southbound Policy". However, it is considered an extension of the previous government's "Go South Policy", but the "New Southbound Policy" encompasses a wide range of geographical and administrative scopes. The "New Southbound Policy" aims to strengthen relations with Southeast Asia, South Asia and Oceanian countries. India's "Act East Policy", which began in 2014, aims to strengthen strategic, economic and cultural ties across the Indo-Pacific region.⁴ Although Taiwan is not officially mentioned in India's "Act East" policy, it remains within the geographical area of India's "Act East" policy.

On the other hand, it is becoming clear to India that China is not a trusted neighbour for India. There have been incursions into Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and the Union Territory of Ladakh at several times. In 2020, the Galwan Valley region of Ladakh was aggression by China's Peoples Liberation Army (PLA). This is the first time that we have seen criticism from Taiwan's foreign ministry against China's aggression and calling on the world to support India.⁵ India and China have ongoing disputes over a number of issues. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, which undermines Indian sovereignty. Also, under the Border Road Initiative (BRI), China is continuously increasing its influence over India's neighbouring countries. China's growing influence over India's neighbours is a challenge to India's security.

Relations between political figures associated with India and Taiwan are long-standing. Since the pre-independence period, there was contact between the Indian National Congress leadership and the Kuomintang (KMT) chief Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang Kai-shek visited India with Madam Chiang in 1942. This visit played an important role in increasing relations between the ROC and India. Although the KMT government was expelled from mainland China and relocated to Taiwan in 1949.⁶ From this time, India's relations with the KMT government went into a cold period. This made some progress in 1995 by establishing informal ties between the countries. The first direct aviation services between New Delhi and Taipei began in 2002. Taiwan's presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou in 2007 and opposition leader Tsai Ing-wen visited India in 2012. Former President of India Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam visited Taiwan in 2010. These unofficial high-level visits between the two countries played a significant role in enhancing relations. Another notable event was the establishment of the India-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Forum in 2016.⁷

In the context of increasing commercial and industrial engagement, TECC and ITA codified the signing of an MoU in 2017 on encouraging industrial cooperation. The first India-Taiwan Business Summit was held in early 2018. Later, the Taipei World Trade Center was set up in New Delhi, and the Taiwan Expo was held.⁸

Significant Agreements and MoU's between the two countries

- Bilateral Investment Agreement: 2002
- MoU on Scientific and Technological Cooperation: 2007
- MoU between Foundation for Intellectual Cooperation in Higher Education of Taiwan and Association of Indian Universities: 2010
- Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement: 2011
- Custom Mutual Assistance Agreement: 2011
- MoU on Taiwan-India Agricultural cooperation: 2016
- Letter of Intent for Cooperation on Railway Heritage in Chiayi City of Taiwan: 2016
- MoU on Promotion of Industry Collaboration: 2017
- Revised Bilateral Investment Agreement: 2018
- Mutual recognition of the Respective Authorised Economic Cooperation Programs to Facilitate Bilateral Trade: 2018
- MoU on Social Science Research: 2019

Also, on May 18, 2022, Taiwan and India signed an MoU on Intellectual Property Rights. And in July 2024, an agreement between India and Taiwan to facilitate trade in organic agricultural products came into force.^{9, 10, 11}

Economic ties between India and Taiwan have not been as good as they should have. From 2013 to 2018, the volume of trade between the two countries was almost at the same level. Bilateral trade accounts for about 1 percent of the total between the two countries.¹² Since 2018, we have seen a steady increase in the volume of trade. Trade between India and Taiwan \$10 billion for the first time in 2022, despite a setback during the COVID-19 pandemic. But in 2023, the trade volume stood at \$8.22 billion, a decrease of 2.78 percent compared to last year. Bilateral trade reached a record high of \$10.6 billion in the FY2024.¹³ Statistics over the past years after the COVID-19 pandemic show that economic relations between the two countries are showing significant growth.

As of early 2025, more than 250 Taiwanese companies have invested in India. Taiwanese companies are mainly invested in Electronics, IT and Petrochemicals.¹⁴ Taiwanese company Foxconn, a global leader in manufacturing and key supplier to Apple, has significantly expanded its operations in India. Additionally, major Taiwanese companies such as Wistron Corp., Pegatron, HCL, PSMC, and GOGORO have invested in India and plan to expand into more segments in the future. The company's significant investment in consumer electronics production facilities in India is strategically aligned with two key advantages: cost-competitive labour and the Indian government's Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme. In a pivotal move, TATA

Electronics acquired Wistron's iPhone assembly business in 2023, making India a major player in advanced electronics manufacturing for the first time.¹⁵

Indo-Pacific and the complex trilateral relationship between India, China and Taiwan

The Indo-Pacific region is of utmost importance to India in terms of maritime security, economic growth, strategic autonomy and global impact. The Indo-Pacific has important Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs). The waterways are through which 95 percent of India's trade and most of its energy, mainly petrochemicals, are imported. China's (PRC) aggression and influence in the Indo-Pacific region are constantly increasing; in such a situation, it is very important for India's maritime security and economic stability.¹⁶ Since the ROC government shifted to Taiwan in 1949, there has been conflict with the PRC government. The ROC government in Taiwan remained a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) until 1971. But in 1971, the permanent membership of the UNSC was taken from the ROC government in Taiwan and given to the mainland PRC government. through resolution 2758 (XXIV). This brought about a historic change in World Politics. For the last 2 decades, China's rise and geopolitical stance have reshaped the strategic picture in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the 21st century, India's importance in global politics and global trade is growing. According to data in 2025, India is currently fourth-largest economy and has the fourth-largest and strongest military.¹⁷ On the other hand, Taiwan is a powerful country in terms of nominal GDP, economic growth and IT. As well as a military pact with the US, which provides security to Taiwan.

Taiwan has long had an important position in the Indo-Pacific region. Taiwan's geopolitical position has increased its importance in international politics. The island country is positioned at the forefront of regional geo-strategic and economic interests, and obstructs the legitimacy and hegemonic ambitions of China. As the geopolitical and trade war between the US and China heats up in the Indo-Pacific and international trade, Taiwan's role is becoming more and more important.¹⁸ Taiwan's geographical and geopolitical position is very important for India. Along with China, Japan, Australia, South Korea and ASEAN countries, Taiwan is considered an important country due to its location and strong economy. China has disputes with Taiwan over "One China" and the PLA's aggression, and also has disputes with the Philippines and Vietnam over the South China Sea. The region has important SLOCs such as the Strait of Malacca, the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Which are commercially and strategically important. Through which a large amount of trade is transmitted.¹⁹

As India's economy and trade are continuously growing, and its geopolitical influence has continued to expand. India's foreign policy has sparked new interest from the Malacca Strait to the Taiwan Strait through the South China Sea. Historically, India had deep connections with the Southeast and East Asian countries. However, since British times, India's connections with those countries have decreased considerably. After independence, India tried to increase its relationship with those countries. Specifically, adopting the "Look East" policy in 1992, it focused on policy on how to improve relations with those countries. In 2014, the "Look East" policy was replaced with the "Act East" policy, emphasizing the strengthening of ties with Southeast and East Asian countries, as well as Far East countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed India's vision of the Indo-Pacific at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018. This reflects India's active growth in the greater Indo-Pacific region.²⁰

Over the past 20 years, while retaining the idea that the US is engaged in strategic competition with China, the Republican and Democratic administrations alike have been moderate to committed to Taiwan's security. The issue of Taiwan has been raised more strongly by the increasing competition between China and the US in the areas of Indo-Pacific and Asia. In 2011, the Obama administration announced that it would "Rebalance Asia" and deploy more military forces to the region. In 2015, the US National Military Strategy identified China as a "Revisionist Power", and the 2022 National Security Strategy describes China as a "strategic competitor" of the US. The 2022 National Security Strategy called it "the US's most consequential geopolitical deterrent". We have seen that the US Congress has introduced and enacted various bills in support of Taiwan. The US is also increasing cooperation with Taiwan through various agreements and MoU's. Since then, the Biden and Trump administrations have maintained a policy of defence of Taiwan.²¹ In 2016, the disputes between China and Taiwan escalated. The DPP came to power in the 2016 elections. The DPP does not support China's "One China" policy. Since this time, political and military pressure from China has increased on Taiwan. In a speech in 2019, China's president Xi Jinping reiterated a long-standing proposal for Taiwan. Xi said, "One country, two systems", which is for Hong Kong. But Taiwan rejected China's proposal. Newly elected Taiwan's president Lai-Ching Te said in his victory speech in 2024, "Instead of confrontation, he called for a resumption of dialogue with mainland China and pledged to maintain the cross-strait status quo".²²

While China's dispute with Taiwan has become extreme, China's relations with India are also not good. It becomes more obvious many times. China's presence in India's neighbouring countries is increasing. In this situation, India should take the initiative to develop trade and strategic relations with Taiwan to counter China. China had infiltration by the PLA in various parts of the northern border in India, and even in 2020, it turned into a clash between the Indian Army and the PLA. Aksai China, which is part of UT Ladakh, is occupied by China. China also claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of Tibet, which is an attack on India's sovereignty. The CPEC has passed through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. China has been providing military support to Pakistan, which is a concern for Indian security. Even the recent "Operation Sindoor" of India, which was launched to respond to the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir. At that time, China had given help and support to Pakistan in various ways. During this time, Taiwan strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Pahalgam and expressed support for India. Taiwanese President Lai-Ching Te expressed his deepest condolences to the victims and those affected.²³

Beijing has increased Air Force jets and Naval Vessels around Taiwan in recent years to put a presence in Taiwan. In early 2025, Taiwan's president called China a "foreign enemy power" and called for measures to combat Chinese espionage and infiltration.

As a result, China sent military, navy, air force and rocket forces to encircle Taiwan in April. According to the PLA, the self-governing island has been targeted in the blockade exercise. Taiwan said 19 Chinese vessels have been detected.²⁴ Another important power in the Indo-Pacific region is the US. U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022 has further fuelled the PLA's activities. Beijing said in a statement that Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taipei was a violation of its sovereignty. This time, the PLA increased activity around Taiwan and created tension between the US, China and Taiwan.²⁵ In a statement, the Office of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said India is concerned about the recent developments. Any unilateral decision could lead to conflict in the region, and the Indian side called on all parties to maintain the peace and status quo in the region.²⁶ According to experts, Taiwan's sovereignty is contrary to China's national interests and is hindering the growth of influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Challenges and Opportunities

Taiwan is one of the world's most notable countries in the field of technology. In that case, there is an opportunity for India. Taiwan produces about 70 percent of the world's semiconductors. Taiwan is trying to diversify economic dependency through its "New Southbound" policy. Taiwan, under the "New Southbound" policy, seeks to develop economic, cultural and resource-sharing relations with a total of 18 countries, including ASEAN, South Asia, Australia, and New Zealand.²⁷ In such a situation, India's huge market and economic growth have become a focus of interest for Taiwanese investment. Both countries have been working together in the field of education and research. Through the signing of various agreements and MoUs, joint research and academic exchanges in the field of AI, digitalization and technology are being enhanced. The DPP government has been trying to boost ties with India since it came to power in Taiwan in 2016. From 2016 to the present, under the leadership of then President Tsai-Ing Wen and subsequently under the leadership of newly elected President Lai-Ching Te in 2024.

One of the main obstacles to the relationship between India and Taiwan is the "One China" policy, although India has not made any formal statements in favour of the "One China" policy since 2008.²⁸ Also, for the sake of bilateral relations with India, India has not developed formal relations with Taiwan. If India officially recognizes Taiwan as a country, there could be a direct reaction from China (PRC). This could further complicate the border tensions between India and China. In the absence of formal relations between India and Taiwan, there is no embassy. Mainly Visa issues and communicated through the TECC in India and the ITA in Taiwan. In this situation, communication between the two countries is limited due to the absence of a formal embassy. There are no agreements and MoUs on military cooperation between the two countries. This reflects limited security cooperation and support between India and Taiwan.

In February 2024, India and Taiwan signed an MoU on migration and mobility. The MoU would enable Indian workers in the field of agricultural production, manufacturing and construction sectors and meet the demand of workers in Taiwan.²⁹ Cybersecurity is an important area of cooperation for India, Taiwan and other partners. In response to cyber-attacks, India, Taiwan and the US have launched joint efforts to secure cybersecurity, the digital economy and critical information infrastructure. The first meeting between the US, India and Taiwan was held in December 2023. From India's point of view, conflict in East Asia is not desirable. The stability of the region is very important for Indian Foreign Policy. Conflict between China and Taiwan will inevitably harm India's economy and India's Indo-Pacific strategy. About 55 percent of India's maritime trade passes through the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.³⁰ In this case, any conflict in the Taiwan Strait is likely to block important Sea Lines. From India's perspective, the security of Taiwan is vital for India's maritime trade with East Asian countries.

There is no doubt that India was one of the first countries to support and accept the "One China" policy. In 2014, the then External Affairs Minister of India, Sushma Swaraj had argued that if India had to follow the "One China" policy, China would also have to follow the "One India" policy.³¹ India also expressed its displeasure over China's Salami-Slicing tactics along the LAC and McMahon Line. Relations between India and China went cold after the 2020 Galwan Valley clash. From that time, we saw support for India come from Taiwan, and it raised its voice against China's aggression, calling on the world to support India.

Conclusion

Taiwan is one of the most important island countries in the Indo-Pacific Region. Taiwan is officially known as the Republic of China (ROC). In the 21st century, there is a competition among powerful states to increase their influence in the Indo-Pacific region. In such a situation, Taiwan becomes India's partner in East Asia in the Indo-Pacific region. India launched the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) in 2015, for maritime security, maritime cooperation and sustainable development in the area. India can work together through the SAGAR initiatives for the betterment of maritime security. India may also invite Taiwan to participate in a naval exercise such as the Malabar Exercise to enhance security cooperation. A strong message can be sent to China that if China violates India's sovereignty and continues to support Pakistan for the issue of terrorism and against India, then Indian has the options. Not only to counter China, but also to build strategic and security cooperation with Taiwan for the status quo in the region and India's own interests.

Taiwan has emerged as an important partner for India's ambitious plan to establish itself as a high-tech manufacturing hub. Cooperation in the field of technology has increased between the two countries, especially in the fields of agriculture, semiconductors and smartphones. Tata Group and Taiwan Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC) have entered into groundbreaking agreements to set up India's first Semiconductor Fabrication Plant in Dholera, Gujarat. This

collaboration aims to significantly enhance India's Semiconductor production capabilities and better its standing in the Global supply chain. Foxconn Technology Group has been playing a key role in Apple's iPhone production in India.³²

The democratic values of both countries have inspired to work together. The policy-makers of the two countries should be determined on how to increase people-to-people contact and exchange programs in the academic sector. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Taiwan Space Research Organisation (TASA) have an opportunity to work together in various fields. Trade between India and Taiwan has been steadily increasing since the post COVID-19 period, with a crossed the record 10\$ billion. These results reflect the growth in trade relations, and data shows that there is a lot of potential for trade relations between the two countries. Moreover, India and Taiwan can move forward with a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which will help companies from both countries to invest, joint ventures, export-import and set up manufacturing hubs.

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: *Prasenjit Roy*: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: Not Applicable

Competing Interest: No

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