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ISSN: 1343-9006 (Print) 1469-2937 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/capr20>

# Taiwan's Pivot to the Indo-Pacific

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To cite this article: David Scott (2019) Taiwan's Pivot to the Indo-Pacific, *Asia-Pacific Review*, 26:1, 29-57, DOI: [10.1080/13439006.2019.1618602](https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2019.1618602)

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Published online: 17 Sep 2019.



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# Taiwan's Pivot to the Indo-Pacific

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DAVID SCOTT

*This article analyzes the Indo-Pacific pivot currently being pursued by Taiwan. It moves from theory application to policy analysis. Theory is applied in the shape of classical and critical geopolitics, social constructivism theory, social identity theory, role theory, strategic narrative theory, and balance of threat theory. Disputed identity and perceptions run through such theory application. Policy analysis is applied to Taiwan's reaching out to South-east Asia, Australia and India via its New Southbound Policy, to Taiwan seeking entry to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, to Taiwan reactivating the Austronesian Forum, and to Taiwan embracing the Free and Open Indo-Pacific framework being pushed by Japan and the US. The People's Republic of China (PRC) emerges as the clear driver behind Taiwan's Indo-Pacific pivot. The article concludes by judging the effectiveness of Taiwan's pivot, against the shadow of increasing pressure from the PRC to curtail such regional space sought by Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific.*

## Introduction

In the past few years the “Indo-Pacific” has become an increasingly used term in the strategic discussions circulating in Australia, France, India, Indonesia, Japan and the United States. The term involves treating the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean as one maritime zone shaping appropriate foreign, defense, and economic policies. This article looks at a new development, the adoption of “Indo-Pacific” rhetoric and policies by the Tsai administration that has been in power since 2016 in Taiwan.

The argument of this article is simple: that in order to achieve greater security vis-à-vis Beijing, Taiwan is adopting an explicit “Indo-Pacific strategy.” President Tsai argues that “the Indo-Pacific Strategy [...] will be able to strengthen our cooperation in terms of investment, trade, and infrastructure [...] and we are willing and able to work with other nations in consolidating freedom throughout the Indo-Pacific.”<sup>1</sup> The strategy is made up of various policies which are

geo-economic (New Southbound Policy, Trans-Pacific Partnership), geo-cultural (Austronesian Forum) and geopolitical (Free and Open Indo-Pacific) in focus.

The Tsai administration's Indo-Pacific pivot represents a widening but also a concentration of Taiwan's diplomatic efforts. It is a widening away from the cross-Straits "Chinese" focus of the previous Kuomintang administration, while compensating regionally for the continuing shrinkage of Taiwan's wider international space. Faced with Latin America/Caribbean and African diplomatic losses, the Tsai administration seeks to reinforce Taiwan's regional presence in the Indo-Pacific. This was reflected with the cabinet-level inter-departmental Ocean Affairs Council (OAC) set up in April 2018, and the Indo-Pacific Affairs Section (IPAS) set up in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in May 2018. Taiwan's Indo-Pacific outreach includes standard state-to state linkages, but it also includes other forms of cooperation that sidestep the formalities of traditional state-level recognition.

The organization of material is in five sections. First are insights from theory. This is followed by the empirical policy application in Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Austronesian Forum, and the Free and Open Pacific. The article combines close analysis of Taiwan's Indo-Pacific strategic discourse, in other words the rhetoric used in and around the Taiwanese government, with consideration of the effectiveness of Taiwan's Indo-Pacific strategy and related policies.

## Insights from theory

This article is an empirical foreign policy analysis (FPA) concerned with strategic discourse and identity-driven foreign policy change in Taiwan. Following Sil and Katzenstein's call for "analytical eclecticism," this article finds there are a range of overlapping analytical tools that are applicable in Taiwan's adoption of the "Indo-Pacific; namely, classical and critical geopolitics, social constructivism theory, social identity theory, role theory and strategic narrative theory, and balance of threat theory."<sup>2</sup> Such theories have new applications in Taiwan, and Taiwanese studies have new methodological tools to use.

Classical geopolitical analysis centers on a sense of *position* as "location" in a region. In one direction Taiwan faces the Western Pacific and the South China Sea; in another direction Taiwan faces the Chinese mainland across the Taiwan Strait. This geography underpins Taiwan's sense of its own geopolitical significance. President Tsai explained it simply as "Taiwan's geo-strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific region."<sup>3</sup> Gary Lin, the Taiwanese representative in the Philippines, argues that "strategically, a democratic Taiwan is an important strategic buffer for the national security of the Philippines and the USA," because Taiwan's geographic

location “controls the access between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia as well as the first islands chain.”<sup>4</sup>

However, in another sense the “Indo-Pacific” term is a construct, which *critical geopolitics* would argue reflects a sense of *position* in terms of national “aspirations, hopes and fears” in an envisaged region. Taiwan’s current adoption of Indo-Pacific rhetoric is to some extent a construct—a deliberate “realignment” by the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to distance the island of Taiwan from the mainland threat of the People’s Republic of China and ultimately achieve independence.<sup>5</sup>

Identity is a key issue in dispute between Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). On the one hand, the PRC continues to claim Taiwan as but a Chinese province awaiting reincorporation with the Chinese mainland, representing unfinished business from the Civil War in 1949, when Mao Zedong’s victorious Communist Party proclaimed the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and forced the previous Kuomintang (KMT) regime of Chiang Kai-shek to seek offshore refuge on the recently recovered island of Taiwan as the continuing increasingly notional Republic of China (ROC). On the other hand, Taiwan seeks to create more “international space” (*guoji kongjian*) for itself, especially under the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which held power from 2000 to 2008 and again since 2016.<sup>6</sup> Already there has been a shift in focus from the Chinese mainland to maritime horizons. It is telling that Taiwan’s National Oceans Policy Guidelines issued in 2004 asserted that “Taiwan is an Ocean State (*haiyang guoja*).”<sup>7</sup> These are Indo-Pacific maritime horizons. Under Tsai the linkage is being made explicit, self identification involving stress on Taiwan’s “island identity” (*daoyu shenfen*) as a multi-ethnic “Indo-Pacific nation.”<sup>8</sup>

Of course, Taiwan’s identity is an extremely subjective state of affairs.<sup>9</sup> Identity politics shape Taiwan’s internal and external politics.<sup>10</sup> National consciousness is in Taiwan a “social construction” with immediate political consequences.<sup>11</sup> In terms of foreign policy there is identity politics involved in Taiwanese parties looking either to the Chinese mainland in the case of the KMT, or the maritime reaches of the Indo-Pacific in the case of the DPP. This in turn brings reflections and responses by the PRC to such an asserted identity, which reflects Beijing’s own perceptions and self identity sought in its continuing call for “Taiwan’s return to the motherland (*zuguo*).”<sup>12</sup> The PRC (and notionally the KMT) consider Taiwan and the Taiwanese to be part of the “Chinese nation” (*Zhonghua minzu*), awaiting reunification into one Chinese state, for Beijing this being the PRC. The rise of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan has fed into identity shifts, in which “more have come to view China [the PRC] as the ‘Other’ that challenges these [Taiwanese] interests.”<sup>13</sup> Taiwanese polls from August 2018 show 55.8% self-identifying as “Taiwanese” (starting from 17.6% in 1992), 37.2% as “Taiwanese and Chinese” and only 3.5% as “Chinese.”<sup>14</sup> There is a drive to

position Taiwan as a multi-ethnic distinctive “Taiwanese nation” (*Taiwan minzu*), which deserves its own state.

It remains significant that, even as PRC military power continues to increase vis-à-vis Taiwan, mainland Chinese nationalism is also growing simultaneously with Taiwanese nationalism—a recipe for identity clash and political imperatives that IR constructivism theory would recognize.<sup>15</sup> Wendt’s *social constructivism* involves consideration of different perceptions, projections and constructions of identity.<sup>16</sup> Such identity-perception application of social constructivist theory has already been made with regard to Tsai’s DPP predecessor Chen Shui-ban.<sup>17</sup> It can now be re-applied in greater measure to Tsai. Social constructivism as argued by Wendt is “inherently relational,” involving the shaping of international/regional identity through particular rules and interactions.<sup>18</sup> This has certainly been in play in two converse directions. First is in one direction in the KMT’s Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) outreach, and the wider common “Chinese” anchoring policy pursued by the KMT in Taiwan and by the PRC on the mainland. Second is in the opposite direction by Taiwan’s current attempt to shape new relationship frameworks through its New Southbound Policy (NSP), reactivation of the Austronesian Forum, and support for Japan and the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative.

Even with formal diplomatic recognition as the Republic of China (ROC) continuing to shrink for Taipei, Tsai’s stress on “Taiwan” within an Indo-Pacific setting (be it the New Southbound Policy, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Austronesian Forum, or the Free and Open Pacific) seeks norm transfer through (other) state’s socialization. Such a “complex socialization” process combines social constructivism theory concerning ideational change with *social identity theory* (SIT) concerning identity formation and state socialization.<sup>19</sup>

Identification is also a role identity issue, which points to the relevance of a much earlier conceptual framework, namely *role theory*, that goes back to the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs talks about “Taiwan’s front-line Indo-Pacific role,” a role which currently involves a distancing from the Chinese mainland and a search for alternative venues and mechanisms across the Indo-Pacific that Taiwan could instead play a role in.<sup>21</sup> In terms of national role and role theory, Wehner and Thies’ consideration of the “domestic processes of divergence/convergence affecting national roles” in play with Chile and Mexico’s attempts to join APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) can be applied here to Taiwan.<sup>22</sup> The application is that the Kuomintang’s national role as “Chinese” led to the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) with the People’s Republic of China in 2010; whereas the Democratic Progressive Party’s sense of independence as a long term goal for Taiwan leads the DPP currently to pursue various different Indo-Pacific policy avenues.

A further model to throw in is *strategic narrative theory* (SNT), given its concerns with strategic discourse, identity projection, public diplomacy, and soft power.<sup>23</sup> Taiwan's sustained strategic narrative under the DPP is as an Indo-Pacific democracy. Mainland Affairs Council Minister Chen Ming-tong's logic was that:

As a vibrant democracy, Taiwan will work closely with neighboring countries to defend the collective achievements of freedom and openness in the region, protect rules-based international order and further contribute to stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, it can be argued that this particular Indo-Pacific democracy discourse by Taiwan is a "strategic resource," a weapon to reshape its international/regional space which is being otherwise constricted by the People's Republic of China.<sup>25</sup> China is the key perceived threat for Taiwan's President, "as Taiwan is on the front-line of the Western Pacific, we are naturally subject to tremendous pressure for some time now [from] China's unilateral diplomatic offensive and military coercion."<sup>26</sup> Walt's "balance of threat" theory logic is obvious here, his considerations of general political-economic aggregate "power" and "military capabilities" when aligned with "geographic proximity" and perceived "intentions" make China the clear existential threat to Taiwan's independent operation.<sup>27</sup> With the threat established, Taiwan's nestling within Japan and the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy can in turn be seen as a clear attempt to bandwagon with other countries who themselves are balancing against China. Taiwan's drive for closer Indo-Pacific links comes back to the growing economic and (most importantly) military threat it currently faces from the PRC.<sup>28</sup> As Tsai outlined in June 2018:

Today it's Taiwan, but tomorrow it may be any other country that will have to face the expansion of China's influence. Their democracy, freedom, and freedom to do business will one day be affected by China. We need to work together to reaffirm our values of democracy and freedom in order to constrain China and also minimize the expansion of their hegemonic influence.<sup>29</sup>

Needless to say, these Taiwanese comments were immediately denounced in the PRC as panic "ravings."<sup>30</sup> It was significant that "China" was seen by Tsai as the threatening "Other," Tsai in effect dropping the notional self-titling of "Republic of China (Taiwan)" and thereby any acceptance of Taiwan being notionally part of China.<sup>31</sup>

## New Southbound Policy

President Tsai defines the "New Southbound Policy" (*xin nanxiang zhengce*) as "the government's most effective policy for advancing Taiwan's engagement

with the Indo-Pacific,” while Vice-President Chen Chien-jen argues that “one way we’re working to increase cooperation and trade, and strengthen ties in the Indo-Pacific region, is by redefining Taiwan’s regional role through our New Southbound Policy.”<sup>32</sup>

The New Southbound Policy was formally announced in President Tsai’s inauguration address on 20 May 2016: “we will promote a “New Southbound Policy” in order to elevate the scope and diversity of our external economy, and to bid farewell to our past over-reliance on a single market.”<sup>33</sup> The reference to “past over-reliance on a single market” was made with reference to the impact of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement” (ECFA) signed by the previous Kuomintang administration of Ma Jing-yeou in 2010. From the opposition seats, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) figures had been clear in criticizing the ECFA agreement as pulling “Taiwan into the orbit of Chinese economic influence” and creating “overdependence on the Chinese economy, as well as an over-presence of China’s economic influence in our society.”<sup>34</sup>

The New Southbound Policy (NSP) is new in various ways when compared to the previous “Go South” policy initiated in 1994 by Lee Teng-hui, which had pursued greater trade opportunities for Taiwan in Southeast Asia.<sup>35</sup> Firstly, the NSP is economically wider with its focus on two-way trade rather than one-way Taiwanese investments and trade. Secondly, the NSP is concerned with cultural links as well as economic links. Thirdly, the NSP includes political undertones of shaping implicit recognition of Taiwan’s independent capabilities. Fourthly, the NSP is geographically wider through not just involving Southeast Asia, but also involving Australasia and South Asia—an Indo-Pacific span.

Tsai was clear in her National Day Address on 10 October 2017 that “the purpose of the “New Southbound Policy” is for us to hold a more advantageous position in international society.”<sup>36</sup> The disadvantageous position to be overcome was the constrictions placed on Taiwan’s external relations by the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Yan Jiann-fa argued in his study of Taiwan’s need for “living space” that “the New Southbound Policy is regarded as a new strategic blueprint for Taiwan to counter China’s domination.”<sup>37</sup> The New Southbound Policy (NSP) represents an Indo-Pacific pivot of redirecting Taiwan’s regional horizons away from East Asia and this looming and increasingly threatening presence of the PRC.<sup>38</sup> It is also an outreach across Southeast Asia<sup>39</sup> and South Asia to counter the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative, pushed by Beijing since late-2013.<sup>40</sup> Tsai’s argument at the Yushan Forum in October 2017, that “I wish to emphasize that the New Southbound Policy [...] is designed to complement, rather than compete against [...] the One Belt One Road, and India and Japan’s Freedom Corridor,” was politic but only half accurate.<sup>41</sup> The NSP certainly complements India and Japan’s Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) initiative. However, it is also an

implicit counter to the PRC's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative, of which Taiwan is not a part.

In an interview with the Indian media on 5 May 2017, Tsai asserted that with regard to “the New Southbound Policy [...] let me repeat: It is not about geopolitics. It is about economics and trade.”<sup>42</sup> However, if Taiwan gets other governments in the region to sign official economic deals with it, then this has political implications—implicit recognition of Taiwan's competency to act as a sovereign entity in state-to-state relationships. Meanwhile the NSP drive to establish city-to-city links is an imaginative sub-national trans-national attempt to circumvent the constraints on Taiwan's inter-state relations. In essence, Taiwan's attempt to shape closer economic relations with other countries through Southeast Asia, Australasia and South Asia is a form of geo-economic and geopolitical balancing vis-à-vis Beijing. Hence Tsai's comments that “Taiwan sits exactly where Northeast Asia meets Southeast Asia, so Taiwan's economic development cannot be separated from those of neighboring countries there.”<sup>43</sup> It is also a geocultural repositioning, as “the NSP creates an identity away from ‘*Chinese-ness*.’”<sup>44</sup>

So far, the New Southbound Policy has been a relative economic and cultural success. Economic and trade collaboration has been quite successful. During 2017, Taiwan's exports to the 10 ASEAN member states increased 14.2% to US\$58.6 billion, and exports to the six South Asian nations increased by 13.49% to US\$5.23 billion; but exports to Australia and New Zealand (with whom Taiwan has a Free Trade Agreement in existence) increased only by 1.6% to US\$3.57 billion. Here it was telling that out of office Julie Bishop, Australia's previous Foreign Affairs Minister, confirmed “increasing assertiveness” by the PRC throughout 2017 and 2018 to constrict Taiwan's relations in the Indo-Pacific: “the Chinese government made it clear to me that circumstances had changed between Taiwan and mainland China and that China would not look favourably on Australia seeking to pursue a free trade agreement with Taiwan.”<sup>45</sup> Taiwan seeks to upgrade and expand existing Bilateral Investment Agreements (BIAs) with India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand, and to sign new BIAs with other southbound countries. In that vein, Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs staged the Taiwan-ASEAN-India Strategic Investment Partnership Forum in July 2018. New Southbound Policy (NSP) statistics for 2017 show that people to people exchanges have been a success with significant growth in tourism and student exchanges. This was facilitated by the easing of visa requirements from NSP states announced in June 2017. Consequently, arrivals from the NSP states rose 27.3% to 2.28 million in 2017, exceeding the annual target of 1.8 million. Singapore has also maintained its long-established *Starlight* security exercises in Taiwan, running since 1975, despite PRC pressure, and continues to operate the 2013 Free Trade Agreement with Taiwan.<sup>46</sup> The 2012 Taiwan-Indonesia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on immigration and border security

cooperation, a sensitive quasi-governmental area, continues to operate, with their sixth annual bilateral meeting taking place in July 2018. A memorandum of understanding on comprehensive economic cooperation was signed between their (unofficial) Economic and Trade Offices in November 2018. However, Taiwan faces rising Chinese concerns over any official institutional link arising between Taiwan and NSP countries—as shown with regard to Taiwanese agreements with the Philippines and with India.

With regard to the Philippines, visa-free travel exemption for Filipinos was introduced in November 2017 for a nine month period. This proved a success, with two-way flow of tourists reaching record levels during the year, leading to another 12 months visa-free extension in July 2018. On the economic front, seven pacts on trade and investment were signed by private and public organizations on 7 December 2017, following the 23rd Taiwan-Philippines Joint Economic Conference. Quasi-official linkages were present in the agreement on bilateral investment signed on the one side by the Taiwan representative in the Philippines, Gary Song-Huann Lin (head of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office), and on the other side by the Philippine representative in Taiwan, Angelito Tan Banayo (head of the Manila Economic and Cultural Office). Responses by the People's Republic of China were immediate at their Foreign Ministry: “we express grave concern over the signing of the investment protection agreement and other cooperation documents that are obviously official in character between the relevant Philippine authority and the Taiwan authority.”<sup>47</sup> A further accord, in the sensitive border control area of training of law enforcement officials, was signed in January 2018 between Taiwan's Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau and the Philippine Bureau of Customs. At the Philippines' unofficial embassy in Taiwan, the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO), the director for commercial affairs Michael Ignacio affirmed in June 2018 that “we want to become Taiwan's gateway to Southeast Asia and New Southbound countries,” with discussions on immigration issues between MECO and Taiwan's Foreign Ministry carried out in August 2018.<sup>48</sup>

With regard to India, Taiwan's former Foreign Minister Chen Tan-sun argues that “India plays an essential role in Taiwan's New Southbound Policy in particular [...] as both our nations seek to reposition our roles in our neighborhood community.”<sup>49</sup> The repositioning of roles was of course with regard to Taiwan's attempt to reduce dependency on the Chinese mainland and recover some regional space. India looms as a significant alternative for Taiwan to the mainland market pull of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and increased economic links with India “helps diversification, away from China” was the rationale for Cheng-Mount Cheng, deputy minister at Taiwan's National Development Council.<sup>50</sup> Bilateral trade between Taiwan and India increased an impressive 27% in 2017, from around \$5 billion to \$6.33 billion. Figures for 2018 are indicating another annual rise of around 20%.

Quasi-official involvement was present on 14 December 2017 when their respective unofficial embassies, namely the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in India (TECC) and the India-Taipei Association (ITA), signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Industry Collaboration. Taiwanese and Indian government officials were also present there, in the shape of Taiwan's Lee Guann-jyh the Deputy Director General of the Bureau of Foreign Trade and India's Vandana Kumar the Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The PRC state media was immediately on the attack on what they considered was "a classic move of Tsai Ing-wen and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, as they constantly tout their dangerous political agenda of Taiwan-independence"; and that "China does not take such situations related to its core interests lightly."<sup>51</sup>

Admittedly the decision in July 2018 by the state airline Air India to change its public styling of "Taiwan" to "Chinese Taipei" was a disappointment to Taiwan. Nevertheless, Taiwan's Minister for Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu reaffirmed that "the government will continue working with India in advancing mutual interests, delivering mutual benefits and not letting the China factor disrupt the strengthening of relations."<sup>52</sup>

Quasi-official contacts were again on show with the India-Taiwan Industrial Collaboration Summit held in New Delhi in August 2018 which was attended by Shri Ramesh Abhishek, India's Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, together with Wang Mei-hua, Taiwan's Vice Minister at the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and Taiwan's representative in India Tien Chung-kwang who delivered the welcoming address. Forward momentum was seen with the updated Investment Protection Agreement with Taiwan signed by Tien Chung-kwang and the India-Taipei Association Director-General Sridharan Madhusudhanan, in December 2018.

Taiwan's representative in India, Tien Chung-kwang, continues to stress democratic convergence:

India and Taiwan share the universal values of peace, freedom, democracy and human rights. Both countries have no controversial issues, compared with the relations between India and her neighbouring countries [Pakistan and China]. Taiwan will work hand in hand with India to advance regional peace and stability.<sup>53</sup>

A year later and he re-emphasized this partnership:

India and Taiwan are natural partners. We share the same values of peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law and market economy. Comparing with the relations between India and her neighboring countries, Taiwan and India have

no disputed territory or security issues [...] and we enjoy a relatively balanced trade unseen in the trade relations between India and her northern neighbor.<sup>54</sup>

The “northern neighbour” being contrasted was the People’s Republic of China. Taiwan’s former foreign minister and chairman of the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) may have said that “the process to engage with India has nothing to do with geopolitics,” but it is all to do with the geopolitics of circumventing China’s threat to Taiwan, and indeed to India.<sup>55</sup>

## The Trans-Pacific Partnership

Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy (NSP) overlaps with Taiwan’s continued interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). At the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research, Darson Chiu stressed how “TPP membership will not only help Taiwan significantly expand its much needed free-trade pacts, but also make its southbound policy more effective.”<sup>56</sup>

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), formally re-created in March 2018, involves Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam—Trump having withdrawn the US from participation in 2017, but with Taiwan re-affirming its hopes of entry in the second wave of entrants being discussed in 2019. Taiwan’s logic is simple “if we do not speed up the pace of being better integrated with the TPP [...] we will be sucked into the orbit of Chinese influence.”<sup>57</sup> Crucially for Taiwan the TPP does not have China as a member, able to hamper Taiwan as it has to some extent in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) mechanism.

Entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would further cement Taiwan’s independence of economic action, even if not formal political independence.<sup>58</sup> Taiwan’s Vice-President Chen was explicit about the geo-economic and geopolitical overlap of the TPP:

Multilateral trade agreements support geopolitical alliances, and a rules-based trading framework can help support a rules-based security framework. So we’re very excited to see that the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for the TPP has some momentum, and we hope to be part of it soon.<sup>59</sup>

Taiwan announced in August 2018 that it had already appointed its team of negotiators for accession talks in 2019 over the second round of membership. Lobbying for Taiwanese TPP entry was carried out at the APEC summit in November 2018, in side talks between Taiwan’s representative Morris Chang and Shinzo Abe, and at the annual trade talks in December 2018 between Taiwan and Japan.

Taiwan is particularly hoping to use links with Japan to achieve entry into the TPP. The Taiwanese Prime Minister told Japanese media in June 2017 that “we’re

very pleased to see Japan taking on the mantle of TPP promoter—and in the future, including Taiwan as a candidate for membership when considering further expansion of the TPP.”<sup>60</sup> President Tsai’s sense in September 2017 was that “Taiwan hopes to build on the foundation of long-term cooperation between Taiwan and Japan to become a more prominent participant in the regional economic integration process, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership.”<sup>61</sup> Tsai’s tweet that “I’ve received positive remarks from Yoshihide Suga, Japan’s chief cabinet secretary, regarding Taiwan’s participation in the TPP, and I’m truly encouraged. I also appreciate Japan’s support” met with immediate PRC attacks.<sup>62</sup>

## **Austronesian Forum**

Identity repositioning is in evidence with Taiwan’s use under DPP administrations of the Austronesian links in its diplomacy in the Pacific and Southeast Asia.<sup>63</sup> Fellow “members of the Austronesian cultural family throughout the Pacific region” was the phrase used when President Tsai met Guam’s governor in July 2018, while fellow “members of the Austronesian-speaking family” was the phrase used when Vice-President Chen welcomed the Tuvalu deputy prime minister in August 2018.<sup>64</sup> This external re-direction complements the domestic redirection under the DPP where Taiwan’s own indigenous pre-Chinese Austronesian heritage is being given more prominence.<sup>65</sup> Tsai’s grandmother was from the Austronesian Paiwan community.

Since 2002 the Cabinet-level Council of Indigenous People (CIP) has organized an annual International Austronesian Conference (IAC). Sun Ta-chuan, the CIP minister argued at the 2011 IAC that “Austronesian culture has become an important agenda for cooperation between Taiwan and other Pacific nations.”<sup>66</sup> The 2017 IAC had the official theme of “Cultural Heritage and Community Empowerment—Taiwan’s Southbound Connection” and included an address by Vice President Chen. January 2019 witnessed an Agreement for Cooperation on Austronesian Peoples’ Cultural Affairs concluded by Taiwan and the Marshall Islands, signed by the CIP minister Icyang Parod and Amenta Matthew the minister of culture and internal affairs of the Marshall Islands.<sup>67</sup>

The Austronesian Forum was first held in Taiwan in 2007. This brought together delegates from Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu (Taiwan’s six remaining “Pacific Allies”), and the Philippines. In inaugurating the Forum, President Chen emphasized that “Austronesian peoples in Taiwan are not only part of Taiwanese culture, but are also an irreplaceable member of the Austronesian family in the Pacific region.”<sup>68</sup> Though the Austronesian Forum was in effect suspended by the KMT administration that was in power from 2008-2016, it was revived by President Tsai’s new incoming DPP administration. Tsai’s trip to the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu in

October 2017 not only witnessed ongoing invocation by Tsai of their common Austronesian links with Taiwan, but also brought her announcement that the Austronesian Forum would in future be held on an annual basis. Consequently, in August 2018 Tsai welcomed delegates to the Austronesian Forum not only from the Six “Pacific Allies” (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu, Palau), but also from New Zealand, Southeast Asia (the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia), as well as the US islands of Guam and Hawaii. This represented a significant widening range of Austronesian linkages, complete with Tsai in her welcome speech “pledging to work with like-minded countries in strengthening exchanges while promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.”<sup>69</sup>

A further cross-state mechanism was the establishment of the Taiwan and Austronesian Inter-Parliamentary Amity Association (TAIPA), inaugurated in April 2016, complete with DPP legislator Kolas Yotaka as its president. She has become the first indigenous (Amis community) Taiwanese to serve as Cabinet spokesperson. It was Kolas that led the first official Taiwanese delegation to the 25th Mechesil Belau Conference in September 2018 held in Palau, bringing together other prominent women from the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and the Northern Mariana Islands.<sup>70</sup> There she stressed the negative pressures exerted by China against Taiwan, but called for Pacific solidarity based on cultural and linguistic links between Taiwan and fellow Pacific island states. These Austronesian links opened the way for Taiwan’s attendance, headed by Foreign Minister Joseph Wu, for the first time at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) held in Nauru in September 2018. The year finished with the official publication of *The Culture White Paper*, with its aspirations on “fashioning Taiwan into a world platform for Austronesian cultural research and preservation.”<sup>71</sup> Four months later and Tsai’s visit to Palau, Nauru and the Marshall Islands in March 2019 came complete with her tweet that “bound together by the Pacific Ocean and democratic values, I look forward to celebrating the friendship between Taiwan and our Austronesian families.”<sup>72</sup>

## Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Taiwan has sought to align its New Southbound Policy with the Indo-Pacific formulations used by the US and Japan. At the Maritime Security Dialogue organized by the Formosa Forum in May 2018, President Tsai told scholars from India, Japan, the United States, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines that “with the increased prominence of the [US and Japanese] Indo-Pacific strategy, Taiwan is actively promoting its New Southbound Policy.”<sup>73</sup> Paul Lin argued in November 2017 that “it was reassuring to see that the US launched its new “Indo-Pacific tactic” [...] Taiwan can also benefit from the tactic, as it is in line with the nation’s New Southbound Policy.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the Ketagalan

Forum track 1.5 security dialogue held in Taiwan in July 2018 featured a special specific roundtable on the integration of the New Southbound Policy and the U. S. Indo-Pacific strategy. President Tsai opened it, “vowing to advance peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific while defending rules-based international order.”<sup>75</sup> A month later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed US stress on the Indo-Pacific and noted that “we will also integrate [the US strategy] with our New Southbound Policy and form effective partnerships with neighboring countries to ensure the sustainability of the Indo-Pacific initiative.”<sup>76</sup>

President Tsai continues to reaffirm “Taiwan’s commitment to free, open Indo-Pacific.”<sup>77</sup> This had first surfaced in her tweet on 11 December 2017 that “as a free and democratic country in Indo-Pacific, Taiwan is a natural party in [the] Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative.”<sup>78</sup> The initiative was the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) being put forward by Japan and the US. She went on that same day to announce elsewhere that Taiwan was a “stakeholder” in a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, where “we not only want to defend the collective achievements of freedom and openness. Even more, we want to protect a rules-based international order.”<sup>79</sup>

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) term was coined by Shinzo Abe in late 2016, and was then picked up by Donald Trump in late 2017. It is primarily driven by concerns over the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The “free” is an implicit rebuttal of the non-democratic domestic politics of the PRC, while the “open” refers to concerns over PRC assertiveness in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, as well as PRC pushing of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) stretching from the South China Sea through into across the Indian Ocean.

Taiwanese officials have welcomed the adoption by Japan and then the US (and Australia) of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” concept. At the seminar titled *Taiwan’s Opportunities under the Indo-Pacific Security Strategies* organized by the Taiwan Thinktank. Deputy Foreign Minister Wu Chih-chung reiterated that “we have been pleased to see the US and Japan promoting a vision of an Indo-Pacific region that is grounded in democratic values.”<sup>80</sup> With regard to Australia, Tsai tweeted in May 2018 that “I look forward to continuing our work with Canberra to further Taiwan-Australia ties and ensure a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>81</sup>

One recent regular mechanism for Taiwan reaching out to Japan and the US is the Track 1.5 Taiwan-US-Japan Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD), co-sponsored by Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has run since 2011. Taiwan’s leadership regularly participates in the forum: President Ma in 2015, the Minister of Foreign Affairs David Lee in 2016, and Vice-President Chen in 2017, which President Tsai considered highlighted “Taiwan’s strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>82</sup> The 2018 TSD meeting in Taipei between the Taiwanese, Japanese, and US think tanks was appropriately enough renamed as the *Indo-Pacific*

*Security Dialogue*, complete with a welcoming address to participants on 30 August by Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu on "the security dynamic to the idea of an Indo-Pacific region" in which the Minister considered that "Taiwan is an ideal partner for like-minded countries in their pursuit of an Indo-Pacific strategy [...] We view a free and open Indo-Pacific as a collective effort."<sup>83</sup> This message of trilateral Indo-Pacific cooperation is reiterated by Stanley Kao the Taiwanese representative in Washington.<sup>84</sup>

Taiwan continues to look for support from Japan, with Tsai tweeting in March 2019 that "I'm determined to work with like-minded partners such as Japan in defending shared values".<sup>85</sup> With regard to Japan, it is significant that, for over a decade, Abe has in his periods in power pushed Indo-Pacific frameworks, notably his enunciation of the "Confluence of the Two Seas" in 2007, the "Security Diamond" in 2012, and the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" in 2016. Taiwanese figures argue that Tokyo's current "Indo-Pacific Strategy presents Taiwan with a unique opportunity to establish a closer relationship with Japan."<sup>86</sup>

A significant move into maritime security issues was the initiation of the Maritime Affairs Cooperation Dialogue between Taiwan and Japan in October 2016.<sup>87</sup> On the one hand, it was a move to reduce friction over Taiwan and Japan's own territorial disputes in the East China Sea, already diminished with the 2013 Civil Fisheries Agreement which was augmented in 2015.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, it was a move to show greater maritime solidarity vis-à-vis the growing maritime pressure of the People's Republic of China, a threat of the first order to both Taiwan and Japan.

The two maritime neighbors continued a carefully calibrated convergence during 2017.<sup>89</sup> The Japanese government resisted ongoing PRC pressure to use the term "Chinese Taipei" instead of "Taiwan." Indeed, in January 2017 Japan changed the name of its unofficial embassy the *Interchange Association* to the *Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association* (JTEA), to explicitly reflect the organization's role in Taiwan. Shortly thereafter, Taiwan's *Association of East Asian Relations*, the unofficial embassy in Japan, changed its name to the *Taiwan-Japan Relations Association* (TJRA).

In March 2017, Japan's Vice Minister Jiro Akama's attendance at a tourism promotion event represented the highest-level government representative to officially visit Taiwan since 1972. The PRC response was immediate

An incumbent senior vice minister visiting Taiwan obviously breaches the commitment made by Japan to interacting with Taiwan only at non-governmental and local levels [...] China is firmly opposed to the visit and has lodged serious representations with Japan [...] Let me reemphasize that the Taiwan question concerns China's core interests and brooks no challenge in the slightest.<sup>90</sup>

The Chinese state media claimed that this strengthening Taiwan-Japan relationship was “an attempt to counter China’s maritime strategy.”<sup>91</sup> The following month, Shinzo Abe was quoted, with approval by Taipei, as saying that “Taiwan is an important partner that shares mutual values and interests with Japan.”<sup>92</sup> Later on, in November 2017, Abe rejected PRC warnings and went ahead with talks with Taiwan’s APEC envoy James Soong.<sup>93</sup> That same month, November, witnessed Chiou I-jen the TJRA head and Mitsuo Ohashi the JTEA head inking two accords on customs enforcement and cultural exchanges. December 2017 witnessed further attacks in the PRC state media on any strategic cooperation between Japan and Taiwan.<sup>94</sup>

Taiwan has sought Japan’s economic cooperation on various fronts. A Taiwan-Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is one focus for Taiwan, though little progress has been achieved on this after initial positive sounds in 2016. Trade has increased modestly, a rise of 7.2% in 2017; but Japanese investment in Taiwan of around \$649 million represented a marked rise of around 84% from 2017. A further five trade accords (on customs, patents, business partnerships, medical equipment and enterprise research) were signed by Chiou and Ohashi in the November 2018 round of talks. However, the continuing Taiwanese ban on agricultural and food imports from the five prefectures affected by the nuclear incident at Fukushima, reaffirmed days before in Taiwan’s November 2018 referendum, remains a highly emotive issue for both sides, an impediment in Taiwan-Japan trade and their wider relationship.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, at Taiwan’s Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Taiwan-Japan Industrial Collaboration Promotion Office (TJPO) continues to push for joint ventures in the two countries as well as in third party countries.<sup>96</sup> This could be extended into further Taiwanese cooperation within the Africa Asia Economic Growth Corridor (AAEGC) initiative being pushed by Japan and India as well as the Japan-US-Australia Trilateral Partnership for Infrastructure Investment in the Indo-Pacific (TPIIP)—playing into the particular infrastructure and development thrust of Japan’s Indo-Pacific strategy.<sup>97</sup> Finally, Taiwan looks to Japan for support for Taiwanese entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Japanese support which was reaffirmed in February 2019.<sup>98</sup> Taiwan remains concerned though that Japan’s economic thaw with China seen in late-2018 will come at Taiwan’s expense.

Closer security cooperation is being sought by Taiwan with Japan. In March 2019, President Tsai argued that because “Taiwan and Japan are confronted with the same threats in the East Asian region,” namely the People’s Republic of China, “it is necessary to strengthen our security discussions,” in which was “vital” to have immediate information sharing regarding the movements of the Chinese Navy near Taiwanese and Okinawan waters leading into the West Pacific.<sup>99</sup> This was immediately denounced in the Chinese state media.<sup>100</sup> Japan

though has avoided any direct response to this Taiwanese suggestion for security discussions.

Taiwan remains palpably worried about any US withdrawal from the “first island chain,” as typified by Kung Chia-cheng’s warnings delivered at the Democratic Pacific Union meeting in Taiwan in July 2018.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, Taiwan has also made noticeable and explicit signals to move alongside the US in the Indo-Pacific framework announced by President Trump in November 2017, with Vice President Chen quickly commenting that “at the recent APEC Leaders’ Summit in Vietnam, we were happy to see President Trump announce his vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>102</sup> The particular stress on political norms (democracy) and military security apparent in US Indo-Pacific formulations is something that Taiwan has embraced. If US Indo-Pacific formulations are seen as “containment” of the PRC, then Taiwan is more than happy to support that.

Taiwanese rhetoric was sustained during 2018. Naturally Taiwan welcomed the Taiwan Travel Act (TTA) passed in the United States in Spring 2018, which opens the way for direct political contacts between the US and Taiwan. Tsai tweeted that “the Taiwan-US partnership is a key pillar of peace and stability for the Indo-Pacific region and I am grateful to all members of Congress who supported this important bill.”<sup>103</sup> President Tsai’s meeting on 27 March with Ed Royce, chairman of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, included her emphasis that “robust Taiwan-US relations are an important cornerstone of peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region” and that “Taiwan has the ability, and the will, to cooperate with the US to make even greater contributions to the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>104</sup> Stanley Kao, the Taiwanese representative in the US, pledged in April 2018 that “we will continue to stand alongside the United States in promoting these shared core values in the Indo-Pacific region, because we know very well that no one can take democracy and freedom for granted.”<sup>105</sup> Similarly in July 2018, when meeting former US Defense Secretary Ash Carter at the Ketagalan Forum, Tsai affirmed how “both Taiwan and the United States support a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>106</sup>

Taiwan continues to hope for increased security and military cooperation with the US within Washington’s Indo-Pacific espousal, a “Taiwan Card” that the PRC remains hyper-sensitive over.<sup>107</sup> In February 2018 President Tsai met a Congressional delegation from the US, and pledged:

At a time when regional stability is subject to more and more challenges, we are happy to see that the US has chosen to keep maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region as a means of promoting peace and prosperity. To achieve this goal, the US needs the assistance of Taiwan.<sup>108</sup>

Deputy Defense minister General Shen Yi-ming and Admiral Lee Hsi-ming, chief of the Taiwan General Staff, attended the change of command ceremony for the newly renamed US Indo-Pacific Command (IPAC) on 31 May 2018. This was at a time when the PRC had just been dis-invited from the Pacific Rim exercises in July 2018, on grounds of Beijing's coercive assertiveness in the South China Sea. Conversely, the US National Defense Authorization Act for 2019, passed in June 2018, included calls for US participation in Taiwanese military exercises, notably the annual Han Kuang exercise. This met with immediate furore within China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and state media, as did the docking in Taiwan of a US navy research vessel in October 2018.<sup>109</sup>

The year 2019 continued this drive by Taiwan for closer US links, with the new Taiwanese Prime Minister Su Tseng-chang announcing in February that "Taiwan will continue to play a role as a peace maker and contributor in the Indo-Pacific, so as to reinforce the substantive ties between Taiwan and the U.S."<sup>110</sup> Foreign Minister Joseph Wu's address on 11 March 2019 to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council (LAWAC) was titled "Taiwan: An Enduring Partner with the U.S. in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific." In his speech Wu argued that "as the Trump administration carries out its strategy for Asia," Taiwan "marches forward in lockstep with our most vital partner and serves as an ideal ally for like-minded countries in the pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific."<sup>111</sup>

March also witnessed the joint announcement of the Taiwan-US Indo-Pacific Democratic Governance Consultations (IPDGC) mechanism. The month ended with Tsai's podcast welcome given to delegates at the Heritage Foundation conference titled *Taiwan-US: An Enduring Partnership in the Indo-Pacific* that was held on 28 March. May witnessed Taiwanese welcome to the *Taiwan Reassurance Initiative Act* (TRIA) passed with bipartisan support and section-3 preamble that "Taiwan is a vital part of the United States Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy." May also witnessed, for the first time since 1979, official-public security discussions between Taiwan and the US respective National Security Council advisers, David Lee and John Bolton. Taiwan explained this as Indo-Pacific cooperation, with Beijing furious.

Taiwan hopes to link itself to wider US Indo-Pacific balancing patterns, "that we welcome [...] the ideas concerned nations have proposed regarding the Indo-Pacific strategy. We believe Taiwan can play an important role in the strategy."<sup>112</sup> Tsai's discussion in November 2018 with James Moriarty, head of the AIT mission, saw her repeat that "Taiwan is committed to working closely with the U.S. and other like-minded countries in advancing freedom and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific."<sup>113</sup> The MOFA refrain was similar, "Taiwan looks forward to working in partnership with the US and like-minded countries throughout the region on fostering a peaceful, prosperous and stable Indo-

Pacific.”<sup>114</sup> This was to maintain “favorable regional balances of power in the Indo-Pacific,” in the words of Taiwan’s representative in the US Stanley Kao.<sup>115</sup> Looking forward, Taiwanese diplomats in rejecting Xi’s veiled threats in January 2019 argued that “2019 also marks a year to strengthen ties with the United States and the international community to protect democracy and to safeguard peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region,” and maintain Taiwan’s freedom of international space.<sup>116</sup>

The key trigger to such Taiwanese thinking was the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Indeed Chang Hsiao-yueh, minister of Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council, argued that the emerging PRC “sphere of influence,” regional hegemonism in other words, needed to be combated:

Taiwan could play an important role in building such an [...] Indo-Pacific alliance plan. The US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, India and Southeast Asia should work together to ensure that Asia is stable, and Taiwan can contribute.<sup>117</sup>

Taiwanese observers were even more explicit with regard to Taiwan’s participation in such “constraintment” mechanisms. Similarly, Soong Hseik-wen argued that the Indo-Pacific security architecture and military cooperation being shaped by the US, Japan, Australia and India (the “Quad”) was a “window of opportunity” for Taiwan, in which “Taiwan may further promote the Taiwan-US military cooperation agenda and cooperation with Japan, India, and Australia to play a prominent role, seeking the window of opportunity under the framework of the Indo-Pacific strategy.”<sup>118</sup> Yan Jiann-fa graphically argued that “in fitting themselves into the Indo-Pacific framework,” Taiwan could “play a role as an unsinkable aircraft carrier for the US and its allies in checking China’s rise.”<sup>119</sup> Reports in September 2018 indicated that unofficial military and security information concerning the PRC was being shared by Taiwan with India, Singapore, Australia and Japan.<sup>120</sup>

## Final thoughts

Geopolitically, what Taiwan can hope to achieve from its support of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and its New Southbound Policy is stronger military bilateral support primarily from the US and secondarily from Japan, together with a degree of unofficial political support from Australia and India.

However, formal Taiwanese involvement in the “Quad” set up between Australia, India, Japan and the US is almost certainly a step too far, as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) would see any formal Taiwanese involvement in collective anti-PRC security mechanisms as being a red line, with military action by the PRC highly likely to ensue under its Anti-Secession Law passed in 2005. This virtually inevitable PRC response makes it unlikely in the first place that Taiwan would actually push for

formal security involvement with the Quad or similar anti-PRC military mechanisms, and it would also make it almost inevitable that Quad members (particularly India and Australia) would not countenance formal Taiwanese involvement. Informal tacit understandings are the likely path for Taiwan. Such emerging security arrangements like the Quad, even if they do not have Taiwanese involvement, nevertheless improve Taiwan's own security prospects vis-à-vis a more constrained China.

Geo-economically, Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP) has been a mixed picture. Increased economic relations have been shaped with Southeast Asia and India. Nevertheless, the NSP has not (yet) delivered the original grand strategy goal of reducing dependency on the mainland market. Some higher figures of 13.4% increase for exports to NSP countries in 2017 have been replaced by a decline of 3% during January-October 2018, coupled with an upsurge of 16% in trade with the Chinese mainland in 2017 and of 10% from January-October 2018.<sup>121</sup> Almost two years after the announcement of the NSP, Taiwanese exports to the mainland were at an all-time share high of 44.8% in March 2018. Taiwan really needs to open up trade deals with the larger markets of India, Japan, and the US, perhaps leveraging its existing Investment Agreements into larger Free Trade Agreements, though complications would arise with the name for Taiwan to use. Taiwan's pursuit of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) membership in 2019 seems a reasonable prospect and could be supplemented by pursuit of "associate membership" (enjoyed already by Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore, and sought by South Korea) of the Pacific Alliance set up by Colombia, Chile, Mexico, and Peru. This could build on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Taiwan already enjoys with Chile, and which it is actively seeking with Mexico. Politically, the erosion of Taiwan's diplomatic support vis-à-vis the PRC is likely to be re-stabilized in the Pacific, helped by the consolidation of the Austronesian Forum and tacit support from Japan and the US.<sup>122</sup>

However, political uncertainties in Taiwan remain as the New Southbound Policy, the Austronesian Forum, and espousal of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific has been pushed by the pro-independence DPP administration in power since 2016. The presidential and legislative elections due in 2020 could, however, reverse this Indo-Pacific pivot by the DPP, which had poor results in the local elections held in November 2018. This showed a revival by the KMT but also victory for the Independent candidate Ko Wen-je, likely a presidential runner. A KMT administration would probably stay in the TPP, but would, in all likelihood, again halt the Austronesian Forum and pull away from this overt alignment with the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific, while re-embracing the ECFA framework with the PRC. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has been a key imperative behind the Indo-Pacific pivot by the DPP, but there is speculation in the wake of these local election results that the PRC might "infiltrate" KMT areas in Taiwan so as to undermine a DPP Taiwan, with the National Policy Research executive

director Kuo Yu-jen warning that “the 15 [KMT] cities and counties would become the best means for China to rapidly infiltrate Taiwan and this could have great effect on Taiwan’s role in the Indo-Pacific strategy.”<sup>123</sup>

Meanwhile outside Taiwan, the military strength of PRC and its reunification pressure increases, as signalled in Xi Jinping’s threatening Message to Compatriots on Taiwan, made on 2 January 2019. Ironically that seems to have back-fired in Taiwan as Tsai’s strong rebuttal of it, within which she reaffirmed that we “will vigorously promote strategies and measures that strengthen Taiwan to consolidate a Taiwan-centric, Taiwan-first path” seemed to restore much of her domestic popularity.<sup>124</sup> Speculation remains on 2021, the centenary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, being a likely deadline for China to try to forcibly reincorporate Taiwan, especially if it is still under a DPP administration.<sup>125</sup> In the short-term, Taiwan has created more regional space for itself under its Indo-Pacific pivot but the long-term remains uncertain.

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