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Taiwanese Identity and Culinary Diplomacy: Moving from Dim Sum Diplomacy to *Made in Taiwan*

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China's continual efforts to squeeze Taiwan out of the international community limit Taiwan's options for connecting with the outside world through traditional diplomatic channels. Not only does this undermine Taiwan's sovereignty, but the resulting diplomatic isolation has also created a general lack of awareness regarding Taiwan around the globe. One of the most valuable cultural assets that Taiwan could utilize to gain more global awareness—as well as to distinguish itself from China—is its vast culinary tradition. Gastrodiplomacy, which public diplomacy scholar Paul Rockower describes as “the act of winning hearts and minds through stomachs,” presents an invaluable opportunity for Taiwan to enhance its nation branding by connecting foreign audiences with its diverse cuisine. [1]

Food is already a huge draw for tourists visiting Taiwan. [A survey conducted by Xinmedia](#) found that 60.7 percent of international respondents (the majority of whom hailed from Asian countries) cited Taiwan's specialty foods as a main reason for wanting to go to Taiwan. Gastrodiplomacy has the potential to encourage foreign tourism, teach foreign audiences about the complexities of Taiwanese identity, and gain global support for Taiwan's fight to protect its sovereignty. However, it is also important for future culinary diplomacy efforts to reflect Taiwan's changing identity—and there is increasing awareness that Taiwanese food is more diverse than beef noodles and *xiao long bao*. New cultural diplomacy campaigns will need to acknowledge this. In addition to formal government campaigns, grassroots efforts to spread the word about Taiwanese cuisine through social media, video streaming platforms, English-language cookbooks, and specialized retail should also be utilized to reach foreign audiences in ways that feel more organic.

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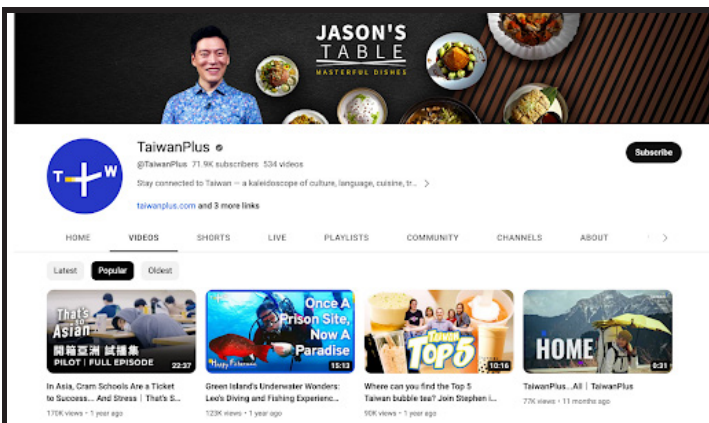
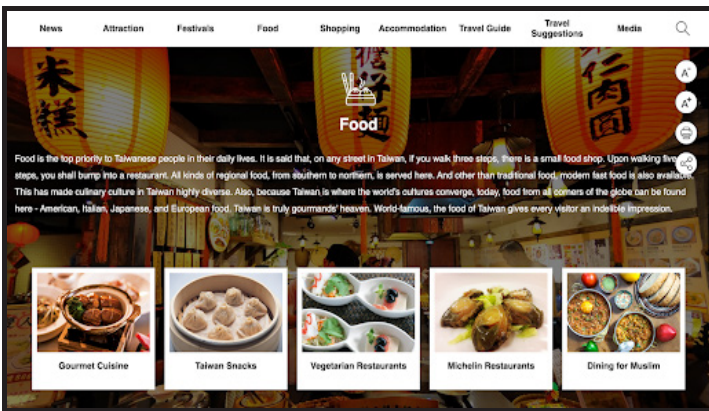
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Images: Screenshots of Taiwan's Government Tourism Website (above) and Taiwan Plus' YouTube Channel (below), showing how both promote Taiwanese cuisine. (Source: Screenshots taken by the authors.)

Culinary Tourism

Exposure to Taiwanese food can serve as an effective gateway for foreign audiences to learn more about Taiwan, and to entice them to visit. As noted in the [soft power rubric](#) developed by Irene Wu, travel is an important means of ensuring that attraction evolves into more sustainable, long-term affinity. [Taiwan Tourism Bureau](#) data shows that food is already a significant draw for tourists coming to Taiwan: in 2020 (before the imposition of strict COVID-19 border controls), 72.87 percent of inbound travelers cited “gourmet food” as one of their major reasons for traveling to Taiwan, while 71.35 percent ranked the island’s night markets as the top sight-seeing activity. Past government-led gastrodiploacy campaigns, such as the “[dim sum diplomacy](#)” efforts of the Ma Ying-Jeou (馬英九) Administration, have attempted to raise the profile of Taiwanese cuisine abroad, while also using it as a tool to promote tourism. However, these earlier campaigns—in part due to the Kuomintang’s (KMT, 中國國民黨) belief that Taiwanese culture is “[Chinese culture with Taiwanese characteristics](#)”—have mainly focused

on Taiwanese food that originates from China. As a result, these campaigns have often been ineffective at promoting Taiwan as a distinct country separate from China. For instance, a [2021 study](#) conducted by Fame Pascua found that the name “dim sum diplomacy” was confusing to Filipinos, as dim sum is of Cantonese origin, and recommended that future efforts be reframed as “milk tea diplomacy” instead.

However, government messaging around Taiwanese cuisine has shifted of late to better reflect the diversity of Taiwanese cuisine, and more recent efforts include [actively promoting distinctly Taiwanese foods to tourists](#). But despite these efforts, the Taiwan Tourism Administration (交通部觀光署) website’s categorization of foods of Chinese origin as “[gourmet cuisine](#)” and Taiwanese *xiaochi* (小吃 – “small eats”) as “[Taiwan snacks](#)” could perpetuate the stereotype that Chinese food is high cuisine and Taiwanese food is low cuisine. Additionally, a lack of clear messaging describing Taiwanese food as distinct and multicultural could also contribute to the myth that Taiwanese cuisine is merely a subcategory of Chinese cuisine rather than its own distinct entity.

In addition to official tourism campaigns, media such as YouTube videos, social media, and [television programs](#) that focus on global street food can also be used to lure more travelers to Taiwan to experience its cuisine in person. [2] The Taiwanese government-affiliated [Taiwan Plus](#) streaming platform has already attempted to take advantage of the growing popularity of food travel vlogs by creating original content focused on Taiwan’s culinary traditions and destinations. Taiwan Plus has even enlisted foreign YouTube content creators with substantial followings of their own to host some of these videos. These include [Taiwan Top 5](#), hosted by Canadian Youtuber [Luke Martin](#), whose street food-focused channel has 1.5 million subscribers. However, the *Taiwan Plus* YouTube channel has thus far struggled to reach a large audience (its current number of subscribers stands at 71.7K) and it is unclear whether it is successfully reaching a broader audience outside of Taiwan. Despite this, the food-related content of *Taiwan Plus* has been some of its most popular (currently, [10 of its top 25 videos](#) are about food). If the platform’s viewership and reach can be improved, it could potentially emerge as a major player in the food travel vlog market.

Teaching the World about Taiwanese Identity through Cuisine

From Chinese Cuisine to a Distinctly Taiwanese Identity

In addition to the draw that Taiwanese cuisine has for tourists, it could also be an effective means of teaching foreign audiences about Taiwanese identity, since gastrodiploacy can “heighten

awareness of the distinctness of a nation's unique culture.” [3] National identity in Taiwan has undergone seismic shifts in the years since its democratization, and the overwhelming majority of Taiwanese people now identify as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. The [most recent survey conducted by National Chengchi University's Election Study Center](#) has found that 62.8 percent of people in Taiwan identify as Taiwanese only; while 30.5 percent identify as both Taiwanese and Chinese; and only 2.5 percent see themselves as exclusively Chinese. The embrace of a distinct Taiwanese identity over a Chinese identity has radically changed the discussion around Taiwanese cuisine—a fact that Taiwan's future gastrodiploacy campaigns should work to reflect.

During the era of Kuomintang single-party rule, the government systematically repressed Taiwanese national identity—[sometimes brutally](#)—while simultaneously imposing Chinese identity and culture on the island's inhabitants. During this time, Taiwanese cuisine was treated as an inferior subcategory of Chinese cuisine, while traditional Chinese banquet foods were considered haute cuisine fit for formal state events. [4] This view of native Taiwanese food began to change alongside the shifts in Taiwanese consciousness that occurred as a result of the end of Kuomintang rule and Taiwan's subsequent democratization. The establishment of a national cuisine in Taiwan in the decades since its democratization became an element of conscious government efforts to highlight Taiwan's distinct identity. [5] The inaugural banquet of Taiwan's first Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) president, Chen Shui-Bian (陳水扁), was [the first to feature native Taiwanese foods](#)—thereby marking a turning point for the development of a localized national cuisine and the overall reputation of Taiwanese food. Subsequent state banquets under Chen became “highly charged with symbolic references to indigenization and ethnic integration,” while Hakka and Indigenous Taiwanese cuisine became celebrated as Taiwanese “ethnic cuisine.” [6]

While the gastrodiploacy campaigns of Chen's successor Ma focused on promoting Taiwanese foods with Chinese roots like beef noodle soup, subsequent campaigns have attempted to highlight the complexity and distinct characteristics of Taiwanese cuisine. For example, the Taiwan Tourism Administration put on [tourism promotion events](#) in New York, Los Angeles, and Vancouver in September of this year that included Hakka cooking classes and cocktail demonstrations by acclaimed Taipei bar Bar Mood, both of which featured local Taiwanese ingredients like guava and oolong tea.

Decentralized Efforts to Promote Taiwanese Cuisine

Complementing the official campaigns to highlight Taiwanese cuisine, many Taiwanese and Taiwanese American [chefs](#), [entrepreneurs](#), and [writers](#) have turned to Taiwanese cuisine as a means of spreading awareness about Taiwanese culture and identity around the world. These figures can serve as powerful cultural ambassadors, and should be utilized to help spread the word about Taiwanese cuisine and identity from a Taiwanese perspective. Additionally, promoting Taiwanese cuisine through these channels could potentially help to reach audiences in ways that feel more authentic or organic than government-led efforts.

One example of these types of efforts is the newly released cookbook [Made in Taiwan: Recipes and Stories of the Island Nation](#), by Taipei-based Taiwanese American freelance journalist Clarissa Wei. In her book, Wei discusses Taiwan's complex history of colonialism and immigration in order to emphasize Taiwan's unique identity and dispel the myth that Taiwanese cuisine is a subcategory of Chinese cuisine. In a [Taiwan Salon](#) interview, Wei expanded on this argument, noting that key pantry staples in Taiwan like soy sauce and rice wine are more similar to Japanese ingredients than Chinese. She aimed to convey to foreign audiences that Taiwanese food is not Chinese food—but rather its own, separate, syncretic cuisine, shaped by centuries of immigration, colonization, and globalization, as well as the influence of indigenous culture.



Photo: President Tsai Ing-wen visiting Taiwanese American-owned store Yun Hai on her stopover in New York in March 2023. (Source: [Office of the President, ROC \(Taiwan\)](#))

[Yun Hai](#)—a Brooklyn-based online and brick-and-mortar shop selling artisanal Taiwanese pantry ingredients like cold-pressed sesame oil and soy paste—is another example of efforts put forth by the Taiwanese American community to spread awareness of Taiwanese cuisine outside of Taiwan. Much like Clarissa

Wei, Yun Hai owners [Lisa Cheng Smith and Lillian Lin have expressed their view that it is important to accurately represent the Taiwanese pantry and what makes Taiwanese cuisine distinct](#), especially at a time when Taiwan is under constant threat from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨). Yun Hai has also worked to spread awareness of China's coercive actions against Taiwan and help Taiwanese farmers diversify their exports. Upon hearing of China's efforts to economically punish Taiwan by [banning imports of pineapple and other fruits](#), Smith and Lin decided to [help Taiwanese farmers produce dried Taiwanese fruits for the US market](#) (since there are import restrictions on fresh fruits). Their Kickstarter campaign to help launch these dried fruits was a major success, raising USD \$113,050. Yun Hai has also caught the attention of the Taiwanese government, with President Tsai Ing-Wen (蔡英文) [visiting the shop](#) during a stopover in New York in March 2023.

While boba tea—perhaps Taiwan's most famous export—has certainly expanded the island's cultural footprint worldwide, access to Taiwanese ingredients and authentic recipes would help to highlight the diversity of influences present in Taiwanese cuisine, and emphasize its divergences from Chinese cooking. Increasing global familiarity with—and admiration for—Taiwanese cuisine could also help to undermine the People's Republic of China's (PRC) false argument that shared culture, [including cuisine](#), justifies its claims of sovereignty over Taiwan.

Recommendations:

Taiwanese cuisine is already a huge draw for tourists to Taiwan, especially those hailing from other Asian nations. However, in order to complement decentralized efforts being made by Taiwanese Americans, the government should consider the following steps:

1. Ensure that official tourism and gastrodiploacy campaigns reflect a changing Taiwanese identity by highlighting what makes Taiwanese food distinct, taking steps to avoid conflating it with Chinese cuisine, and eschewing language that suggests it is inferior to cuisine of Chinese origin.
2. Involve Taiwanese American food ambassadors in official public diplomacy campaigns, in addition to those organized by Taiwan Plus.
3. Assist Taiwanese food brands—particularly those that are unique to Taiwan—and support local farmers with efforts to achieve a greater presence in global markets.

The main point: Despite initial culinary diplomacy campaigns that conflated Chinese culture with Taiwanese identity, recent

government campaigns have begun to highlight the distinctiveness of Taiwanese cuisine. Considering the role that Taiwanese food has played in bringing tourists to Taiwan and the potential it has to illustrate Taiwan's complex cultural history, future government campaigns should take care to work together with decentralized efforts—especially within Taiwanese American communities—to promote Taiwanese cuisine.

The authors of this piece would like to thank GTI Intern Daniela Martinez for her research assistance.

[1] Rockower, Paul S. 2012. "Recipes for Gastrodiploacy." *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8 (3): 235–46. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2012.17>.

[2] Silaban, Pantas H., Wen-Kuo Chen, Tongam Sihol Nababan, Ixora Javanisa Eunike, and Andri Dayarana K. Silalahi. 2022. "How Travel Vlogs on YouTube Influence Consumer Behavior: A Use and Gratification Perspective and Customer Engagement." *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 2022 (June): 1–16 <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/4432977>.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Chuang, Hui-Tun. 2009. "The Rise of Culinary Tourism and Its Transformation of Food Cultures: The National Cuisine Of Taiwan." *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 27 (2): 84–108. <https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v27i2.2542>.

[5] Chen, Yu-Jen. 2011. "Ethnic Politics in the Framing of National Cuisine." *Food, Culture, and Society* 14 (3): 315–33. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174411x12961586033483>.

[6] Ibid.

Taiwan's Democracy amid Widespread Democratic Backsliding

By: Ko Shu-ling

Ko Shu-ling is a journalist from Taiwan. In 2022-2023, she was a Reagan-Fascell fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington DC.

It is no secret that many democracies are performing poorly, and not just new ones. Older democracies, even those that have existed for centuries, often find it hard to provide competent governance and to resist authoritarian impulses by populist pol-

iticians. That Taiwan's democratic system is performing well is doubly curious, as it contends with many problems others do not—including diplomatic isolation, exclusion from international forums like the World Health Organization (WHO), and, of course, threats from its autocratic neighbor, the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Taiwan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic—a central focus of this article—is emblematic of the island's democratic success, but that is far from the only example. Taiwan's economy has also proved resilient—its tech-sector in particular, which supplies more than [60 percent of the world's semiconductors](#). More broadly, while many countries struggle with inflation, Taiwan has managed to keep [levels low](#), in part because the government refrained from flooding the economy with cash during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, Taiwan's economy is linked to a wide range of global factors, making it much more complicated as an indicator of Taiwan's democratic success. COVID-19 is easier to treat as a localized event, as it began in late 2019 when rumors of the virus first began to circulate, and ended in April 2022 when the Taiwan government decided to drop the “zero COVID” policy. Also, unlike the semiconductor industry, which is largely controlled by business elites, the island's pandemic response was driven by ordinary citizens. These individuals consistently demonstrated the ability to put personal politics aside and unite in following guidelines set by their elected officials—who for their part, exercised authority with sensitivity and a high degree of apolitical transparency.

Unifying amid the Pandemic

By [COVID success](#), I mean that between 2020 and 2021, with millions dying around the world, Taiwan went eight months with no domestic cases. When an outbreak did occur in May 2021—during which infections rose to 600 a day—the number dropped again to zero by fall, a recovery [experts said was impossible](#). More impressive still, Taiwan accomplished this without lockdowns, school closures, or significant economic impact. Once Western vaccines arrived, the government dropped its [“zero COVID” policy](#) and infections rose to levels similar to other countries—thereby leading to political differences normal in a healthy democracy, but without the anger and malaise that followed post-pandemic normalization elsewhere.

How did a country that should have been among the hardest-hit avoid the pandemic's worst effects? While the Taiwan government has been justifiably credited for managing the crisis, au-

thorities had no special insight into the nature or treatment of the virus. However, protocols established after the [2003 SARS pandemic](#) helped. During that outbreak, 73 Taiwanese died, [largely due to mistakes](#). In response, Taiwan established the [National Health Command Center](#) based at Taiwan's Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 衛生福利部疾病管制署), which is a facility designed to mobilize quickly against infections like SARS, avian flu, swine flu, H1N1, and many others. News of a new virus prompted CDC officials to begin airport screenings on [December 31, 2019](#)—long before most countries—with quarantine and other control measures following shortly after.

Yet as effective as the government response was, the key factor in Taiwan's pandemic success was a citizenry that allowed itself to be governed. When officials said wear masks, Taiwanese wore masks. They did other things too, but in hindsight, wearing masks may have been the most effective response in limiting transmission and signaling collective support for elected officials and appointed experts. Even when mistakes were made, Taiwanese remained united in support of government efforts to address the crisis.

At a time when world democracies are increasingly threatened by would-be autocrats (and the voters happy to elect and then re-elect them), governability has been one of Taiwan's greatest advantages. Leaders in democracies such as [Turkey](#), [Hungary](#), [Israel](#), and [Brazil](#) have demonstrated success at the polls despite performing poorly in office, openly defying limits on their political power and manipulating elections to their advantage. Even where democratic governments are still accountable, constituents often make it difficult to govern (France being the most dramatic current example).

While peaceful protests have been common throughout Taiwan's 27 years as a democracy, its citizens have consistently elected competent leaders and allowed them to lead. The only outright resistance came in 2014, when a coalition of students and civic groups—dubbed the [“Sunflower Movement”](#)—occupied the Legislative Yuan (LY, 中華民國立法院) in a challenge to the Kuomintang (KMT, 中國國民黨) government's attempt to push through a trade agreement with China that had very little public input. But even with democracy on the line, Sunflower protesters did not push for the agreement to be retracted. Instead, they demanded that it receive the required clause-by-clause legislative review, which the government avoided through procedural means. Later, having received significant public support, protest leaders indeed demanded the trade pact be rejected—and further, that all future agreements with China require special legislative oversight. The KMT relented,

and was subsequently defeated in the next election.

The Underpinnings of Taiwan's Governance

To a significant degree, Taiwan's governability—what I believe that academic [Shelley Rigger](#) means by its “secret sauce”—stems from cultural and historical factors that, while important, are not easily replicated by other countries. Nevertheless, they are worth noting.

First is the communitarian teachings of Confucius, who advocated for respecting authority and prioritizing the collective good over that of the individual. While often seen as incompatible with democracy, Confucianism deeply influenced the democratic thought of Republic of China (ROC) founder Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙). The ROC constitution preserved Sun's thought during Taiwan's brutal “[White Terror](#)” period, and laid the groundwork for Taiwan's democratic transformation at the end of the 20th Century. While Confucius' writings are 2,500 years old, and some traditional Confucian principles have been replaced by more modern modes of thought, they remain central to childrearing, education, and general socialization in Taiwan.

The second source of Taiwan's governability is proximity to its authoritarian past. Before holding its first open presidential election in 1996, the island was a police state ruled by a series of dictators, beginning with Sun Yat-sen's military protégé, Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石). Before Chiang, Japan administered Taiwan as an overseas colony, also with an iron fist. So, whatever Taiwanese learned at home or in school about respecting authority, these lessons were reinforced by hard experience. Especially for those born under authoritarian rule, governability was less a philosophical respect for authority than a habit of deference once necessary to survive.

Taiwan enjoys other advantages too. Thanks to a history of closed immigration, the island is largely homogeneous racially and ethnically, while identity categories like gender and sexuality have not been politicized to the extent they have in the West. It bears repeating, however, that such advantages are circumstantial and not easily replicated. We only have to recall the failures of the [Arab Spring](#) to appreciate the risks posed by democratization without social and cultural advantages such as those held by Taiwan.

What is more, there is no guarantee that these advantages will persist. Over a quarter-century of freedom and affluence has produced rising expectations. Taiwanese have grown increasingly individualistic, which could potentially erode communitarianism. Fading memories of pre-democratic autocracy will do

the same for deference. Ethnic and racial homogeneity will also decline as leaders seek to offset the effects of population aging by increasing immigration.

Cultivating Public Trust

This is not to say that Taiwan has nothing to offer. Seeing that competent administration requires competent citizenship, successive governments have sought to cultivate public trust. One way they have done this has been by actively addressing public problems. In 2001, Taiwan expert Larry Diamond noted several worrisome characteristics of the island's fledgling democracy: including corruption, weak institutions and rule of law, a problematic electoral system, and insufficient consolidation of democratic values. Recently, Stanford's [Kharis Templeman](#) concluded that, while shortcomings remain, many of the reforms that Diamond called for have been implemented. Templeman also pointed out new concerns, notably China's growing influence over Taiwan's political parties, business groups, and civil society.

Here we find the second way Taiwan's leaders have cultivated public trust: innovations in democratic practice. This may also be the island's most valuable contribution to struggling world democracies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan's [Central Epidemic Command Center](#) handled more than disease treatment and control: it also provided information and emphasized transparency. Officials did this often, with apolitical scientists providing updates rather than partisan officials. The Center also worked with [Audrey Tang](#) (唐鳳), a Cabinet official overseeing digital efforts, to track infections, identify hotspots, and publicize this information. Tang also addressed one of the biggest problems COVID responders faced around the world: false information. In addition to working to correct such falsities, she sought to reduce public disputes between experts, politicians, and in social media.

Audrey Tang was not appointed to lead the [Ministry of Digital Affairs](#) (MODA, 數位發展部) simply to bolster pandemic response. Taiwan established the new ministry to develop better means of facilitating governance. Central to Tang's project has been managing the risks of digital media, while also embracing its democratic potential. Even before COVID, Tang was designing platforms to reduce the ill effects of misinformation and disinformation. Here, as Templeman suggests, the main culprit is once again China. In recent decades, Beijing has supplemented its hard power resources by investing in information warfare. Many of these efforts have centered around promoting Taiwan's “reunification” with the mainland by turning its democratic openness against it. This has included spreading narratives to

discredit pro-independence views, extol the PRC model of governance, and promote polarization, thereby increasing gridlock and eroding confidence in the island's democratic processes.

To protect itself, Taiwan has taken a multi-pronged approach, encouraging national pride and monitoring individuals and organizations vulnerable to Chinese influence. Civil society groups like [Taiwan Media Watch](#) and the [Association for Quality Journalism](#) have also joined forces to establish the [Taiwan Fact Check Center](#) to “curb the negative impact of false information and enhance the information literacy of the public.” Tang’s Digital Ministry has actively supported such projects and pursued its own.

Tang has attracted the most attention for her work designing [digital platforms](#) that address democratic weaknesses vulnerable to exploitation. Working with government policymakers, Tang’s ministry harnesses the power of social media, while avoiding divisions caused by network services like Twitter and Facebook that encourage conflict in pursuit of revenue. For example, Tang’s applications solicit input on policy issues, while eliminating the reply option. In doing so, they limit the rage fueled by the back-and-forth of commercial apps. Tang also measures neither respondents’ opinions, nor their understanding of facts, but rather how they “feel” about a topic in question. By measuring feelings rather than opinions, Tang looks for what she calls “rough consensus”—which officials can use to develop policies that, while not necessarily ideal for everyone, provide solutions that most people can live with.

Again, this may be Taiwan’s most valuable contribution to democracies plagued by internal divisions. When people have a say in making public policy, Tang says, they are more willing to comply, even when they do not entirely agree. By reducing the social divisions produced and magnified by social media, constituents are also less likely to fall for the lies of those who seek to turn elections into contests that produce only winners and losers, rather than a shared sense of collective achievement.

None of this suggests Taiwan’s democracy is problem free. With age, it could well develop the same problems as older democracies, with foundational commitments diminished through a combination of complacency and exhaustion. Voters tired of drama want things done and do not ultimately care how. It may be worth saying that the most consistent advice I received about this project since arriving in Washington DC, capital of the world’s oldest and greatest democracy, has been, “nobody wants to hear about COVID.” Beyond practical solutions to policy problems, avoiding complacency and exhaustion is Audrey Tang’s long game: to uphold foundational commitments by pre-

serving communication and compromise, the factors that make democracy possible.

The main point: Taiwan’s democracy is performing well while other democracies around the world are struggling. The reasons for this are to be found in responsive governance, a cooperative population, and innovative responses to China’s information warfare.

Sunak on the Strait: Exploring the UK’s Taiwan Policy

By: Daniela Martinez

Daniela Martinez is a Fall 2023 Intern at the Global Taiwan Institute.

After a tumultuous autumn 2022, the United Kingdom’s political system found some stability in October 2022 following Rishi Sunak’s election as prime minister. In March 2023, Sunak’s government released the [Integrated Review Refresh](#), a revamp of the country’s foreign policy approach. The Refresh outlines the government’s aims to protect Britain’s national security interests, and to align with like-minded global partners (and non like-minded partners, when it serves the United Kingdom’s national interests). Notably, the document expanded upon the government’s “Indo-Pacific Tilt” strategy, which was originally outlined in the [2021 Integrated Review](#). While both publications emphasized Downing Street’s vested interests in securing peace and economic stability in the Indo-Pacific, the Refresh took the unprecedented step of including discussion of Taiwan. This demonstrates the United Kingdom’s intent to make a greater effort toward maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait and maintaining the status quo.

It is clear, however, that other parts of the British government want Sunak to take a stronger stance on the Taiwan issue. In their review of the Refresh, titled [Tilting Horizons](#), the Foreign Affairs Committee—in charge of reviewing the executive’s foreign policy—stated that “Taiwan is already an independent country, under the name Republic of China (ROC)” and that it already “[possesses] all the qualifications for statehood.”

This is a departure from past rhetoric out of the United Kingdom on this topic. While critiques of China—typically regarding human rights abuses in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, alongside the threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the UK’s national security—are fairly common, open support for Taiwan-

ese independence had yet to be seen.

Despite this shift, the United Kingdom continues to maintain substantial ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC), making a meaningful turn toward Taiwan difficult in the near-term. In fact, the *Tilting Horizons* review was published while former Foreign Secretary James Cleverly was [meeting with CCP officials](#) in Beijing in an effort to rekindle relations. It is clear that Sunak wants to maintain a relationship with China where it benefits the United Kingdom, but how does Taiwan factor in? And what steps has his government taken to protect, align, and engage with Taiwan to ensure stability in the strait?

Protect

The United Kingdom has been working to foster stronger relationships around the globe in the wake of the 2016 Brexit referendum. As part of the [“Global Britain” strategy](#), London has aimed to reinvest in preexisting relationships, champion the rules-based international order, and demonstrate that the United Kingdom is outward-looking on the world stage. The Indo-Pacific has become a primary target of these efforts. While it has paid close attention to protecting its consistent regional allies, like [Japan](#), the UK government is coming to understand why Taiwan should also become a policy priority.

On October 24, the House of Commons Defence Committee published a [report](#) stating that “Conflict over, or a blockade affecting, Taiwan would have an acute global impact and directly affect UK households due to the significant flows of trade and shipping through the region.” The report cites the high volume of trade that passes through the Taiwan Strait, as well as the indispensable nature of Taiwan’s semiconductor chip industry for military equipment and consumer electronics manufacturing. The Defence Committee’s report, along with *Tilting Horizons* from the Foreign Affairs Committee, indicates that Parliament is seeing that maintaining stability in the strait is increasingly relevant to the United Kingdom’s national security interests.

It seems that Sunak has also realized this, and has tested the waters in terms of providing Taiwan with defense aid. While the rhetoric out of London regarding its involvement in the Taiwan Strait has thus far focused on seeking a “peaceful resolution first,” Sunak [has not ruled out sending arms](#) to the island.

Under former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, two patrol vessels were permanently deployed to the Indo-Pacific [to support maritime security](#). He also [deployed a carrier strike group](#) to the region in 2021—including the carrier *HMS Queen Elizabeth*—and had one of the frigates, *HMS Richmond*, sail through the Tai-

wan Strait. Sunak has built upon these actions by promising to [send the Royal Navy’s other Queen Elizabeth-class carrier, HMS Prince of Wales](#), to the Indo-Pacific in 2025.

In March 2023, London also approved an increase in sales of submarine parts and technology to Taiwan that will help to [upgrade its naval forces](#). It is very likely that these sales contributed to the construction of the ROC Navy’s [new Hai Kun submarine](#), revealed in September. These exchanges began when Johnson was still in office; submarine-related exports to Taiwan during his final 9 months as prime minister totalled GBP £167 million (USD \$201.29 million).

Sunak is building upon what his predecessors did to protect Taiwan through military aid, but his overall goal is to ensure that the United Kingdom’s democratic allies in the Indo-Pacific are well-equipped and trained to protect the region in the case of violence in the strait.

Align

The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is a trade agreement composed primarily of American and Indo-Pacific states. While initially led by the United States, then-President Donald Trump withdrew the country from the CPTPP in 2017. However, the United Kingdom joined in March 2023, becoming [the largest western economy](#) signed onto the deal. At the time, Sunak claimed that the ability to join the partnership was an advantage of Brexit. Furthermore, he argued that the partnership [offers benefits](#) to British businesses through eliminating tariffs with the world’s fastest-growing economies, primarily those in the Indo-Pacific.

This announcement came as applications to the CPTPP from both China and Taiwan were—and still are—simultaneously being considered. China sent its application in early 2021, and Taiwan [followed suit a week later](#). While the Foreign Affairs Committee has [called upon](#) the United Kingdom to support Taiwan’s bid to join the partnership, the government has not given any indication as to whether it will accept the applications of Taiwan, China, or both. As these are the next two bids in line for consideration from CPTPP member states, a decision must be made soon.

While Sunak and his government have not given much indication regarding their stance on Taiwan’s participation in multilateral negotiations, they have sent a message about direct economic alignment. In November, the UK Department for Business and Trade brought both sides even closer through the recently-signed [Enhanced Trade Partnership \(ETP\)](#), which will

increase Taiwanese-British cooperation through mutual investment, digital trade, and renewable and net-zero energies. Taiwan is the [United Kingdom's 10th-largest trading partner in Asia](#), with mutual trade amounting to GBP £8.6 billion (USD \$10.9 billion) in 2022. The [areas of focus](#) for a potential ETP line up with the primary [bilateral trade markets](#) – those being green energy, digital trade and overall two-way investment. While former Prime Ministers Johnson and Liz Truss showed an interest in increasing trade with Taiwan, this announcement is the clearest and most decisive indication of Number 10's desire to strengthen economic ties thus far.

Engage

Through engaging with the United Kingdom's allies, Sunak seems determined to expand upon the United Kingdom's people-to-people ties and other cooperative efforts, including climate change and education.

The United Kingdom currently hosts 30 Confucius Institutes, the PRC's globally present, state-sponsored language and cultural institutions. There have long been concerns about the impact these institutes have on Chinese and Hong Konger diasporas abroad, [with many arguing](#) that they infringe on free speech and serve as conduits for PRC propaganda. While Sunak initially pledged to shut them down during his original bid for prime minister last August, his government went back on its word, saying that banning Confucius Institutes would be a ["disproportionate response."](#)

The conversation surrounding Confucius Institute operational restrictions in the government has resurfaced after two high level Conservative party researchers were [arrested in March under suspicion of spying for Beijing](#). This shakeup has led to calls for the government to distance itself from China. As a result, the Home Office, charged with domestic security responsibilities, is seeking to [restrict its Government Authorised Exchange](#) scheme (a visa program permitting foreign language teachers to stay for work experience).

While the government claims it is taking action to [eliminate UK government funding](#) to Confucius Institutes, Sunak is simultaneously trying to increase Britain's ability to respond to China-related issues. He recently announced that the government would be doubling funding for the [China Capabilities Program](#), which aims to provide policy and Mandarin language training to Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) diplomats and civil servants. As most of the country's Mandarin language teaching funding is currently [funneled through Confucius Institutes](#), they have naturally become lightning rods for

the UK's China-skeptics.

Alicia Kearns, a Member of Parliament (MP) serving as the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, [held talks to discuss shifting funding](#) to Taiwan-based Mandarin language programs in 2022. Since then, several programs sending students from Britain to Chinese-speaking regions have slowly shifted their operations away from China and toward Taiwan. Taiwan's Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC) has also provided funding to Chinese-language schools across the United States and Europe. These efforts have worked in tandem with the Taiwan Ministry of Education's (MOE, 教育部) [Mandarin Education 2025 Program](#), in order to [promote teaching Chinese with "Taiwanese characteristics."](#) There are currently two of these Taiwan Centers for Mandarin Learning (TCMLs) in the United Kingdom, with hopes to establish more in the future.

As Sunak seeks to improve the United Kingdom's ability to respond to Chinese threats while ensuring national security, it is possible that he will increasingly rely on these Taiwan-based programs as a replacement.

Looking Forward

Rishi Sunak has built upon the actions of his predecessors to continue the expansion of the UK-Taiwan relationship. However, he has proposed further policy cooperation efforts that have yet to be enforced due to his simultaneous efforts to maintain a friendly relationship with the PRC. Although there are some policy areas in which London has closer ties to Beijing, the calls from Parliament for decoupling in favor of Taiwan are growing louder by the day.

While MPs from both the Conservative and Labour parties have welcomed the Enhanced Partnership Trade talks and potential further military deployments in the Indo-Pacific, many still believe that Sunak is being too "soft" on China, arguing that his government should do more to stand up to the CCP while fostering a closer relationship with Taiwan. This stance was made very clear in the *Tilting Horizons* report.

The [Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee](#) also came out with its own report in July stating that "the level of resources dedicated to tackling the threat posed by China's 'whole-of-state' approach has been completely inadequate." This finding was reinforced when the two British parliamentary researchers were arrested for spying for Beijing.

One year into his term, the pressure is on for Sunak to publicly establish a policy approach toward China and Taiwan. While the [government response](#) to the Intelligence Committee's report in-

dictates an acceptance of Parliament's desire for him to be more strict on China, besides the initial signing of the ETP, Sunak's policies have yet to produce concrete action toward advancing the United Kingdom's national interests in Taiwan.

In his next year as prime minister, all eyes will be on Sunak and his government as they decide whether or not to distance themselves from China, and whether or not they focus their attention toward Taiwan instead. While Sunak does appear to be further aligning with Taiwan, he [appointed](#) former Prime Minister David Cameron as foreign secretary on November 13. Cameron's tenure as prime minister (2010-2016) saw a "Golden Era" of UK-China relations, so there are widespread assumptions that his onboarding indicates an attempt from No. 10 to rekindle the relationship.

After former [Secretary Cleverly recently commented](#) that "preventing [a conflict in the strait] from happening is an absolute core plank of the UK's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region," it is increasingly evident that Taiwan is becoming a pressing issue for the United Kingdom. For now, we will wait to see the government response to the *Tilting Horizons* Report, which has been overdue since October 30, 2023.

The main point: The government of the United Kingdom, through measures such as the *Tilting Horizons* report issued by the UK Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, has taken recent steps since Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's appointment in late 2022 to elevate the prominence of Taiwan-related issues in UK foreign policy.

Using Fiction to Address the Challenges of Reality: Observations of Taiwan Naval Staff Training and the Value of War Games

By: Terence M. Nicholas

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The Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan) Navy faces a multitude of challenges reacting to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on a day-to-day basis, with the prospect of an invasion looming in

the background (*see discussions [here](#) and [here](#)*). A war game with a fictional vignette can serve to improve the readiness of Taiwan's navy to address the challenges of this reality. A fictional vignette, in the context of a war game, is a scenario in which the opposing sides are fictional and the conditions under which the conflict in the game occurs is also fictional. Because of its fictional nature the vignette can be created to the specific requirements of those using it.

Such vignettes can provide commanders and their staff with an environment to train and study aspects of existing plans without the biases associated with real world operations. This is the value proposition for such a vignette: removing existing biases can allow for clearer analysis on real world problems, and allow for greater focus on the skills of solving them. In order to demonstrate the value of war gaming with a fictional vignette, this article will discuss its use to the ROC Navy for educational, analytical, and experiential purposes, as well as the role of the ROC Naval Command and Staff College (NCSC, 海軍指揮參謀學院) in the execution and modification of these war games.

Enhanced Staff Training for ROC Navy Officers

As part of its efforts to prepare itself for a potential conflict with the PRC, the ROC Navy has sought to improve the planning abilities of its officer corps, particularly those assigned to an operational staff. The ROC Navy leadership has rightly identified a need to enhance the planning capability of its staff corps across all echelons of command. [1] Doing so will make the navy more robust in its ability to react to actions by the PRC—whether those be gray-zone activities, a blockade, or a full invasion. The ability to solve problems up and down the chain of command is a key enabler for commanders. Having staff officers capable of analyzing problems and providing solutions to commanders becomes even more crucial in times of war, where the ability of a centralized higher command to issue orders and directives may become restricted or denied entirely.

The annual training regimen for the ROC Navy at levels above a single unit are focused on a series of war games that culminate in large scale exercises—one of which is a broader-scale joint military exercise. [2] All of these events are currently informed and modeled on real world events that Taiwan's military must address, in large part regarding actions by the PRC. While this annual training regimen is robust in its integration of units at all echelons of command, it is recognized by the ROC Naval Command and Staff College as being aligned with present day operating conditions—and therefore too structured and rigid to foster the development of creative thinking. [3] The ROC NCSC has

therefore called for refinement to its training curriculum going forward, in order to “let students understand the planning process, develop critical thinking, and avoid falling into the inherent scenario or cross-strait situations.” [4]

The ROC Naval Command and Staff College possesses such a war game using a fictional vignette to facilitate the teaching of operational level planning—therefore addressing the institution’s desired curriculum change. As part of a course developed to teach operational planning to NCSC instructors, this war game and its fictional vignette addressed the ability of the Taiwan navy’s staff corps to plan large-scale operations and provide viable recommendations to their commanders for solving complex and dynamic problems. [5]

The established training schedule executed by Taiwanese naval forces over the course of a year is focused around the refinement and validation of existing plans through their execution in the *Han Kuang* (漢光) and *Hai Qiang* (海強) exercises. The use of war games and associated fictional vignettes provides benefits that might not be found in these annual exercises—namely, detachment from biases associated with the realities facing Taiwan’s naval forces. [6] The primary value of this provided fictional vignette is the removal of biases associated with real world operations, providing a means for the analysis of existing concepts in an isolated environment. Furthermore, it is a tailorable vignette suitable for educational and experiential war games for Taiwan naval staffs at all levels of war. This is not to say that this game should be completely detached from reality; rather, a fictional vignette can allow for a more focused view of the challenges faced by the navy by placing them in a hypothetical environment. In doing so, preconceived perceptions about concepts of operation, force constructs and operational design associated with Taiwan’s naval operations can be viewed through the lens of this fictional scenario, which may open the door to new or different ways to solve existing problems.

Educating Officers in the Art of Planning

The use of a fictional vignette as part of the NCSC curriculum was a conscious decision by the NCSC to remove biases associated with established plans, which could inhibit a student’s ability to effectively learn operational planning because of the established solutions associated with an existing plan. [7] By developing the skill set to form plans independent of preexisting plans, the ROC Navy will increase the capability of its force to react to the threats facing it, without a reliance on decision-making made at the highest level of command. Use of mission command by senior Taiwan naval commanders, with subordinate

commanders and staff able to take higher commander’s intent and turn it into action, will enhance the effectiveness of the navy. An additional output of the educational value from this fictional vignette is the ability of it to be modified by the NCSC or other staff entities for analysis of concepts being employed in current operational plans.

Use for the Evaluation of Existing Concepts

There has been reported debate within the ROC Navy regarding the operational design approach for the defense of Taiwan at sea. The nexus of this debate is whether to employ the [“Over-all Defense Concept” strategy](#) championed by Admiral Lee Hsi-min (李喜明) (the former ROC Chief of Staff, now retired), which advocated for a more asymmetric approach in the maritime domain; or that of a more conventional naval approach oriented towards presenting a credible deterrent to “gray zone tactics and day-to-day pressure from the PRC.” [8] Criticisms to both approaches have been reported, but the most current *Taiwan Quadrennial Defense Review*, published in 2021, reflects tenets of both approaches. (See discussion of the 2021 QDR [here](#).)

At the Navy Headquarters level, the fictional war game could be modified to perform as an alternative futures game. [9] Through this war game approach different vignettes would be developed, depicting future conditions associated with the operations design approaches being debated. [10] The intended outcome for this approach would be for the participants to be able to evaluate the outcomes associated with the alternative futures depicted, in order to understand which is a more viable approach—or, whether both approaches should be used in some capacity. [11] For example, a series of alternative futures war games could be conducted in which a force structure is modified to suit both an asymmetric or conventional approach, to evaluate different operational designs for the defense of Taiwan’s maritime domain.

A potential starting point for these war games could be the “four challenges” laid out in Admiral Lee’s white paper on the defense of Taiwan in the maritime domain. [12] These “four challenges” are: “gray zone aggression,” “full-scale invasion,” “limited defense resources,” and “how much time we still have.” [13] Each of these challenges presents a potential alternate future option, which could be explored using a fictional vignette. Applying this fictional vignette to these differing approaches affords both planners and commanders the opportunity to limit the influence of any existing bias they might have towards one approach or the other. Furthermore, an outcome of such games gives insights into the advantages and disadvantages of each approach—and whether any aspects of these approaches could

be applied with one another to improve an overall defense design approach.

Experiential Value

A fictional vignette affords the operational staff of the ROC Navy the ability to build on strategic level war games by exploring force constructs, concepts of operations, and operational design considerations. Here there are experiential aspects that can benefit both commanders and staff by allowing them to go through development of operational plans, where the vignette can highlight certain aspects of the process. As an example, a commander could choose to have his or her staff develop an operational design approach to solving the problem in the vignette.

Such use of a vignette could afford commanders the ability to experiment with differing guidance to planning teams—which, as demonstrated from the example above, can yield potentially unexpected results providing solutions that might be outside of what commanders might be currently thinking about. [14] Staff personnel can leverage the vignette to examine existing concepts of operations, with the potential for uncovering differing approaches for employment of flotillas in response to their specific tasking and geographic considerations.

The Role of the ROC Naval Command and Staff College

The staff at the NSCS is well suited to be the designer of refined scenarios for strategic and operational level use, as well as a resource with which tactical level flotillas can work in the design of tactical focused vignettes. Furthermore, the cataloging of developed plans from all levels of such war games could also be analyzed by staff at the NSCS to identify trends or new approaches for solving planning problems. However, such analysis is only of value if the findings are prepared in a manner that is of use to commanders and staffs at all levels—which is to say, actionable items that can be evaluated for incorporation in the real-world war games conducted by Taiwan naval forces throughout the year.

A Different Way to Look at a Problem

The use of war game vignettes cannot replace the current training curriculum of Taiwan's naval forces, and their ability to address the emerging threats and environmental conditions associated with PRC aggression. However, the potential uses of war gaming in this paradigm can serve to enhance the readiness of Taiwan naval staffs, as well as that of the navy overall. At a time when the challenges of reality for the ROC Navy are growing more complex and dangerous, stepping back from this reality to

examine these challenges with fictional scenarios may provide new solutions to old problems.

The main point: The ROC Navy and its Naval Command and Staff College are adopting the use of war games and associated vignettes that can improve the readiness of Taiwan's naval forces, and potentially present new solutions to the challenges that ROC military forces are facing in dealing with aggressive PRC military operations on a day-to-day basis.

[1] Briefing titled "Introduction of ROC NPP," presented by the ROC Naval Command and Staff College, June 2023.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Holmes Liao, "Taiwan's Intangible, Potentially Disastrous Defense Problems, *National Defense Magazine*, 12 May 2023, www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2023/5/12/taiwans-intangible-potentially-disastrous-defense-problems.

[6] Briefing titled "Introduction of ROC NPP," presented by the Taiwan Naval Command and Staff College, June 2023.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Tim Fish, Taiwan's Navy Caught Between Two Strategies to Counter Chinese Threat, *USNI Press*, June 7, 2023, 1, 3. <https://news.usni.org/2023/06/07/taiwans-navy-caught-between-two-strategies-to-counter-chinese-threat>.

[9] Burns, Shawn W., David Della Volpe, Robin Babb, Nick Miller, and Gordon W Muir, *War Gamers Handbook: A Guide for Professional War Gamers*. (2015).

[10] Ibid

[11] Ibid.

[12] Admiral (ret.) Lee Hsi-min, "Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept: Theory and the Practice—Draft Remarks," Hoover Institute, September 27, 2021

https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/210927_adm_lee_hoover_remarks_draft4.pdf.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Porcupine or Honey Badger?: The "Overall Defense Concept" and Asymmetry in Taiwan's Defense Strategy By: Lt.

Gen. Wallace ‘Chip’ Gregson (USMC, ret.) and John Dotson, *Global Taiwan Brief*, Vol. 8, Issue 10, 2023. <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/05/porcupine-or-honey-badger-the-overall-defense-concept-and-asymmetry-in-taiwans-defense-strategy/>.

The US Congress and Taiwan: Measuring American Support Quantitatively and Qualitatively

By: Billy Stampfl

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Cross-Strait relations have become increasingly prominent in American politics over the past five years, catalyzed in part by the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) bellicose approach to Taiwan. This growing interest has been demonstrated by events like then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s [2022 Taiwan visit](#) and then-Speaker [Kevin McCarthy’s meeting](#) with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) a year later. Simultaneously, the US Congress has passed—or proposed—a variety of bills related to Taiwan, China, and the Indo-Pacific more broadly. Lawmakers in recent years have been much more likely to propose Taiwan-related legislation, with bills targeting issues like cybersecurity resilience, tax agreements, and invasion prevention. But has the increase in new bills resulted in any meaningful laws? Has congressional attention done anything to improve Taiwan’s defense capabilities, increase the island’s market access in trade, or counter China’s campaigns to steal Taiwan’s diplomatic partners?

In this article, I assess trends in Taiwan-related legislation in the United States Congress from 2009 to the present, finding that bills that deal with Taiwan, China, and the Indo-Pacific have been introduced more frequently than ever before. [1] Yet, over the same timeframe, there has been no concurrent increase in the number of Taiwan-related bills that became actual law, suggesting that Congressional support for Taiwan—and the legislative focus on Indo-Pacific issues generally—may be more symbolic than substantive at the moment.

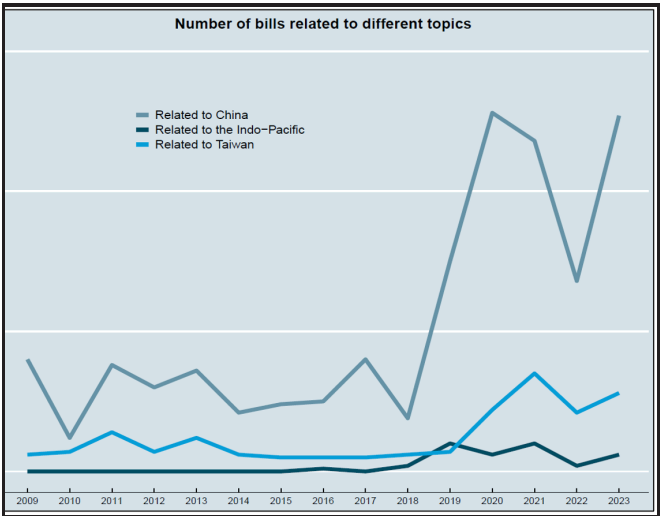
Despite this tentative conclusion, there are reasons to believe that American support for Taiwan has become more significant. For one, several Taiwan-related bills have passed Congress in the last five years, demonstrating that important laws will continue to impact the US-Taiwan relationship in the future. In addition,

there are bills in the pipeline—all introduced in 2023—that stand to help Taiwan if passed, signaling durable Congressional interest in cross-Strait issues.

Finally, I identify further proof that American support for Taiwan is more substantial than some observers might think: more lawmakers visited Taiwan in 2023 than any time in the past five years. While the impacts of Taiwan-related bills have been limited thus far, lawmakers have signaled their interest through trips to Taipei and meetings with Taiwanese officials.

Trends in the Number of Taiwan-Related Bills Introduced by Congress

Taiwan-related bills are being introduced more frequently than ever before. Since 2017, 124 bills have been introduced that explicitly mention Taiwan in the bill’s title or description, compared to 62 such bills from 2009 to 2016. The same is true for bills that mention China—and, to a lesser extent, for ones mentioning the Indo-Pacific in general.



Number of bills introduced by Congress related to different topics		
Related to...	Time period	
	2009-2016	2017-2023
Taiwan	62	124
China	226	575
Indo-Pacific	1	36

Graphics: The number of bills introduced by Congress mentioning Taiwan, China, or the Indo-Pacific between 2009 and 2023. (Source: Compiled by the author, from Legiscan)

Trends in the Number of Taiwan-Related Bills That Have Be-

come Law

However, this upward trend disappears when restricted to bills that eventually became law. Congress has approved five pieces of legislation that mentioned Taiwan in the bill’s title or description since 2017, compared to four in the eight years prior. China-related laws were actually passed more frequently in the 2009-2016 period, and no bills that mentioned the Indo-Pacific have been signed by the president in the last six years.

Number of bills passed by Congress related to different topics		
Related to...	Time period	
	2009-2016	2017-2023
Taiwan	4	5
China	12	10
Indo-Pacific	1	0

Graphic: The number of bills mentioning Taiwan, China, or the Indo-Pacific passed by Congress between 2009 and 2023. (Source: Compiled by the author, from Legiscan)

Taiwan-Related Laws That Have Been Passed since 2018

Though there has been no material increase in the number of Taiwan-related laws passed since 2009, there are still reasons to believe that Congress’ impact on Taiwan has been positive and meaningful. For one, the laws passed since 2018, while few in number, have been substantive: they include legislation implementing a US-Taiwan trade agreement, and two laws introduced as explicit rebuffs to Chinese aggression.

The Taiwan Travel Act

The most significant piece of Taiwan-related legislation passed during the Trump Administration was the [Taiwan Travel Act](#) (TTA), a 2018 upgrade to the 1979 *Taiwan Relations Act*. The TTA removed restrictions on travel for high-level American officials, allowing them to visit Taiwan and their counterparts to visit the United States. Though the bill was largely symbolic—it uses the word “should,” not “must,” to describe suggested policy changes—the law nevertheless demonstrated the US government’s interest in upgraded contacts with Taiwan, and cleared the way for more American delegations to visit the island starting in 2018.

Like the *TAIPEI Act* two years later (see further below), the TTA’s larger impact can be understood from the context surrounding its passage. China [lobbied heavily against the bill](#), including a [let-](#)

[ter to Congress](#) from the Chinese ambassador that called the legislation “a provocation against China’s sovereignty, national unity and security interests.” The American response was uniform, as multiple lawmakers denounced China’s heavy-handed attempts to interfere with the country’s democratic process. Thus, the TTA was not just meaningful for its policy implications, but also because it offered US politicians an opportunity to stand up to Beijing.

The Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act

The [TAIPEI Act](#), passed in March 2020, had the objective of improving US-Taiwan relations and encouraging other countries and international organizations to strengthen their ties with the island. The law advised the president to expand bilateral economic dealings with Taiwan; outlined American intentions to assist Taiwan in gaining entry to international organizations; and required that the secretary of state produce annual reports to Congress explaining the executive branch’s progress on these provisions. Though the legislation lacked mandatory requirements for the president, Congress’ control of appropriations means that the executive is incentivized to faithfully adhere to the *TAIPEI Act*’s guidelines.

Beyond the substance of this law, the context in which it was passed—in response to PRC efforts to prevent Taiwan’s inclusion in international organizations, and to poach the island’s diplomatic partners—also matters. Between January 2016 and May 2019, Taiwan [lost five diplomatic partners to Beijing](#). Later, Taiwan’s [exclusion from the World Health Organization](#) (WHO) amid the spread of COVID-19 robbed the scientific community of important contributions from Taiwanese researchers. Put simply, there were real-world developments that instigated passage of the *TAIPEI Act* in 2020. Support for the law from both Congress and President Donald Trump signaled a renewed willingness to affirmatively back Taiwan in the face of Chinese coercion.

The US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade First Agreement Implementation Act

Signed into law by President Joseph Biden in August 2023, the [United States-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade / First Agreement Implementation Act](#) covered several critical trade issues: to include good regulatory practices, matters affecting small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), anticorruption initiatives, and multinational cooperation. Though it did not produce any new market access commitments, it solidified Congressional interests by bolstering ties with Taipei and reining in the

executive branch's unilateral authority on trade pacts. In regards to the latter point, Congress introduced and passed this measure in early summer 2023 as a first step towards implementing an intended larger trade agreement. It was consequently a signal from the legislative branch that trade agreements are not unilateral affairs on the part of the executive—rather, they require approval from Congress. Overall, passage of this trade legislation was a net positive for Taiwan, as it has the potential to materially improve US-Taiwan trade relations while ensuring that any future trade agreement between the two nations will be durable and not liable to change with each new US presidential administration.

Visits to Taiwan by Members of Congress

In addition to legislation like the *TAIPEI Act*, the *Taiwan Travel Act*, and the *21st Century Trade Implementation Act*, American delegations to Taiwan have occurred far more frequently in recent years, portending stronger relations between the two nations. Since 2019—excluding 2020, when the pandemic began—the number of lawmakers traveling to Taiwan has risen each year. Though then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's August 2022 trip stole most of the headlines, there were two other Taiwan delegations in 2022, followed by five in 2023, when more lawmakers traveled to the island than in any of the preceding five years.

Frequency of US Congressional delegations to Taiwan		
Year	Number of distinct delegations	Number of lawmakers on
2018	2	6
2019	1	1
2020	0	0
2021	3	14
2022	3	19
2023	5	32

Graphic: The number of Congressional delegations to Taiwan since 2019, as well as the number of total lawmakers taking part. (Source: US Senate; The Wall Street Journal; Radio Free Asia; FAPA; American Institute in Taiwan; CNBC; PBS; The Diplomat; Office of the President, Taiwan; Taiwan News)

Even if lawmakers are not necessarily passing more Taiwan-related legislation, more frequent travel to Taipei points to a legitimate and lasting Congressional interest in the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait.

Bills Introduced in 2023

In a final display of Congressional support for Taiwan, there has been a flurry of Taiwan-related legislative activity recently. In the past year alone, the following draft bills have been put forward:

- [*Taiwan Peace through Strength Act of 2023*](#)
- [*Sanctions Targeting Aggressors of Neighboring Democracies \(STAND\) with Taiwan Act of 2023*](#)
- [*Taiwan Tax Agreement Act of 2023*](#)
- [*Taiwan Cybersecurity Resiliency Act of 2023*](#)
- [*Taiwan Protection and National Resilience Act of 2023*](#)
- [*Taiwan Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2023*](#)
- [*Taiwan Invasion Prevention Act*](#)

Since one of the main points of this analysis is that recent legislation relating to Taiwan has been more symbolic than substantive, it would be foolish to conclude that the bills above represent anything more than sustained Congressional interest in Taiwan. However, durable interest in any policy issue is significant. Further, while it is impossible to predict what percentage of these bills will pass, the raw increase in numbers is impressive. 28 Taiwan-related bills had been introduced as of early September 2023, seven short of 2021's record (lawmakers introduced 35 Taiwan-related bills that year). The takeaway is clear: over the past five years, members of Congress have signaled a greater interest in Taiwan issues and an increased willingness to use staff and committee time on advancing Taiwan-related legislation.

The main point: While the US Congress is introducing more bills related to Taiwan, China, and the Indo-Pacific than ever before, relatively little of this legislation has been passed into law. Still, three of the major laws that have been signed since 2018 have had meaningful effects in terms of advancing US-Taiwan relations.

[1] For this analysis, the author used Legiscan's database of all Congressional bills introduced from 2009 to the present.