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What's In the New US-Taiwan "Agreement on Reciprocal Trade"?

By: Riley Walters

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On February 12, officials from the United States and Taiwan signed an [Agreement on Reciprocal Trade \(ART\)](#) (台美對等貿易協定) in Washington, DC. The ART is the most significant trade agreement between the United States and Taiwan in decades, and perhaps the closest thing the two countries will ever have to a bilateral trade agreement. The ART will eliminate or reduce trade barriers, and up to 99 percent of tariff barriers. It reflects a desire by both sides to promote the US-Taiwan economic partnership through increased investment and commercial opportunities. But getting the ART approved by Taiwan's legislature will be the greatest challenge before seeing this deal go into force.

What Are the Major Provisions of the ART?

The ART is a comprehensive agreement that covers tariff and non-tariff barriers, and regulatory and enforcement issues. It further outlines economic and national security measures, investments goals, and future purchase commitments of American goods. The deal only goes into force once it has been through the internal procedures of each country—which in Taiwan's case means approval by its legislature, the Legislative Yuan (LY) (立法院).

Here are some highlights of the agreement:

Tariff Reductions

Taiwan is expected to reduce 99 percent of its [tariff barriers](#) on products from the United States.

The process will be a phased implementation over a three-year period, with the majority of tariffs expected to be eliminated once the deal goes into effect. Imports of products such as passenger vehicles, which currently have a 17.5 percent tariff, will be expected to drop to zero immediately. The tariff rate on more politically sensitive agricultural products [1]—such as ducks, guinea fowl, and fresh oranges—will drop by at least 50 percent

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immediately. A 12.5 percent tariff on swine products is expected to drop by 50 percent over three years. Meanwhile, Taiwan's existing tariffs on rice, clams, oysters, and chickens will remain unchanged.



Image: US and Taiwan officials—including US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick (left), US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer (second from left), Taiwan Representative to the United States Yui Tah-ray (center), and Taiwan Vice-Premier Cheng Li-chiun (second from right)—at the signing ceremony for the US-Taiwan Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (Feb. 12, 2026). (Image source: [Office of the US Trade Representative](#))

Non-Tariff Reductions

Safety standards have often been seen as a non-tariff barrier for American exports to Taiwan. However, many such standards issues have been eased or eliminated in the ART. For example, Taiwan has agreed to accept vehicles that are compliant with U.S. Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. It will accept medical devices that are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.

Further, Taiwan will ensure that its safety standards for food and agricultural imports conform with internationally recognized standards: to include [historically sensitive products](#) in US-Taiwan trade negotiations including beef, pork, and animal byproducts. There are also provisions relating to removing barriers to trade for bison, poultry, dairy, aquatic products (excluding catfish), potatoes, and agricultural biotechnology, including more reasonable limitations on future import restrictions on poultry products potentially affected by avian influenza.

Figure 1: Tariff Rates on Major Products Per the Agreement on Reciprocal Trade

ART: Taiwan's Tariff Changes			
Staging Categories	Staging Categories' Tariff Change	Number of Commodities Affected	Example of Commodity (<i>with current tariff rate</i>)
EIF	Reduce current tariff rate to zero	6,300+ products	Passenger vehicles (17.5 percent), Virginia tobacco (13 percent), tomatoes (10 percent), guitars (10 percent), knives (10 percent), glassware (8 percent), fishing rods (5 percent)
A	Current tariff rate is already zero	2,800+ products	Smartphones, personal computers, semiconductor manufacturing equipment, elevators, construction vehicles
Z	Current tariff rate remains unchanged	27	Rice (NT\$45/KGM), rice flour (NT\$49/KGM), chicken meat (20 percent), oysters (20 percent), garlic (NT\$27/KGM), dried red beans (NT\$22/KGM)
R2-R10	Current tariff rate reduces to between 2 percent and 10 percent	39	Pork belly (40 percent), duck meat (30 percent), guinea fowl meat (25 percent), refrigerated trucks (17.5 percent), electrical apparatus for switching or protecting electrical circuits (10 percent), numerically controlled horizontal lathes (6 percent)
RH & RH3	Current tariff rate reduces by 50 percent (either immediately or over three years)	27	Swine carcasses and parts (12.5 percent), swine feet and stomach (15 percent), fresh oranges (20 percent), fresh grapes (20 percent), turkey meats (15 percent), gaskets and similar joints of metal sheeting (5 percent), co-axial cable (5 percent)

Source: Compiled by the author, per information in: [AIT-TECRO ART Tariff Schedules sanitized.pdf](#)

Economic and National Security Cooperation

While Taiwan already has export controls and investment screening, the ART goes further to ensure that the United States and Taiwan coordinate more closely on these issues. Taiwan will align its export controls with respect to the US Foreign Direct Product Rule (FDPR) on semiconductors and equipment. It will ensure Taiwan maintains “robust research security measures,” including entering into no agreements with the PRC regarding technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and quantum computing. Taiwan will also maintain and apply a comprehensive mechanism to review inbound and outbound investment.

Regulatory Alignment

On more technical trade matters, Taiwan will ensure transparency and fairness with respect to the protection or recognition of geographical indications—which link products to specific geographical places of origin. Taiwan will ensure there are no digital service taxes on American companies, while also ensuring the free transfer of data across trusted borders. The two countries will expand rare earth recycling opportunities. And Taiwan will crack down on illegal logging, unregulated fishing, and illegal wildlife trade.

Enforcement Enhancement

Taiwan will provide a robust standard of protection for intellectual property, including providing effective systems for civil, criminal, and border enforcement of intellectual property rights. It will ensure that these systems combat and deter the infringement or misappropriation of intellectual property, including online. Taiwan will also work towards enforcing internationally recognized labor rights, including the protection of unions. It will also eliminate any form of forced or compulsory labor, particularly in distant water fishing.

\$85 Billion in Purchase Commitments

Between now and 2030, Taiwan agrees to purchase from the United States \$44.4 billion worth of liquid natural gas (LNG) and crude oil; \$25.2 billion worth of power equipment, power grids, materials, generators, storage facilities, marine equipment, steel-making equipment, and other relevant equipment; and, \$15.2 billion worth of civil aircraft and engines.

\$500 Billion Investment Companion

On January 15, 2026, officials from the US and Taiwan signed an [investment agreement](#) that will see \$250 billion in new direct investment in the United States by Taiwanese semiconductor and technology enterpris-

es, and \$250 billion in credit guarantees by the government in Taiwan for additional investments. These investments will focus on building and expanding advanced semiconductor, energy, and artificial intelligence production, as well as the supply chain and ecosystems that support these industries. Taiwan is also expected to facilitate investment in America’s LNG export capacity, and to invest in Taiwan’s own LNG storage capacity—which is then expected to be filled with American LNG.

Unfortunately, neither the ART nor investment agreement mentioned any progress towards establishing a US-Taiwan bilateral tax agreement – despite all the planned investments to be made.

As a part of these trade and investment deals, the US has agreed to reduce tariffs applied on imports from Taiwan. The tariff rate applied under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) will be reduced from 20 percent to 15 percent. A 25 percent tariff rate on Taiwanese auto parts, timber, lumber, and wood derivative products applied under the *Trade Expansion Act of 1962* will be reduced to 15 percent. Tariff rates on generic pharmaceuticals, generic ingredients, aircraft components, and unavailable natural resources will become zero. And future tariffs on semiconductors will be based on a quota system that depends on Taiwanese investment in the United States.



Image: Taiwan President Lai Ching-te (center left), Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim (center right), and other officials at a press conference to discuss the new US-Taiwan trade deal (Feb. 13, 2026). (Image source: [ROC Presidential Office](#))

Implications for Taiwan-PRC Relations

While much of the ART is focused on expanding the US-Taiwan economic partnership, several important efforts are made in the agreement to ensure that neither country expands their partnerships with China, at

least without approval of the other party.

Article 5.4.6 of the ART states that if Taiwan enters into a new bilateral free trade agreement or preferential economic agreement with China, the United States may terminate this agreement and reimpose tariffs. Since the emphasis is on new agreements, it's safe to assume the 2010 *Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement* (ECFA) doesn't affect this deal. However, both Taiwan's and China's desire to get into the *Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership* (CPTPP) would.

Additionally, Article 4.3 of the deal states that if Taiwan enters into a digital trade agreement with China, the United States may terminate the agreement and reimpose tariffs. Article 5.2.7 states Taiwan will phase out the use of existing technology from countries of concern, and not allow technologies from those countries into Taiwan's digital infrastructure: including the country's 5G and 6G wireless networks, subsea cables, cloud systems, internet data centers, imaging technology used at airports and seaports, and cranes used at seaports.

Reactions from the PRC to the trade deal have been [predictably](#) negative.

Challenges Ahead

The ART will require the approval of Taiwan's unicameral legislature before it can move forward—and if recent challenges involving [passage of the defense budget](#) are any indicator, President Lai will have to spend a lot of political capital to get the ART through.

The tariff reductions specifically will require legislative approval, but the LY will want to review the entire agreement—including the companion investment deal, which has yet to be made publicly available. This will represent a significant challenge for the Lai Administration: Lai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) is in the minority in the legislature, with a [coalition of the opposition Kuomintang \(KMT, 國民黨\) and the Taiwan People's Party \(TPP, 民眾黨\)](#) holding a majority of the seats.

In light of how [politically sensitive](#) the ART may be domestically, there will be real difficulties in securing passage. The KMT has criticized the agreement, claiming that it could jeopardize food safety and harm Taiwanese industries (automotive, agricultural, etc.) that are now open to competition with American companies. Local elections in November may also add to the challenge to getting the ART through the LY, especially if

the approval process stalls for very long. As of now, the LY may start its review of the ART in [March](#).

Recent events between the US and [South Korea](#) show that Mr. Trump is not interested in other country's domestic politics where his trade deals are concerned. While trade deals don't typically include a date of implementation, if President Lai can't get the ART through the LY in a timely manner, tariffs on imports from Taiwan will go back up before too long.

Conclusion

The future of US-Taiwan trade relations rests on not just Taiwan's ability to get the deal approved through its legislature, but to also implement the deal in a timely manner. Whether the growing US-Taiwan trade deficit matters anymore is anyone's guess. But the ART contains language indicating that future exemptions from tariffs will depend not just on the trade deal—but also on Taiwan's ability to fund its defense at 3 percent of GDP, streamline defense trade, and develop shipbuilding, among other things.

While the US and Taiwan were on an established path towards a bilateral trade agreement under the [21st Century Trade Initiative](#), those efforts slowed and the US presidential administration changed. The Trump Administration has chosen a different path for US trade policy—one which has led to higher tariffs, but greater U.S.-Taiwan investment and commercial opportunities.

The main point: The United States and Taiwan have signed a new trade deal called the Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART). The ART will reduce or eliminate most tariff and non-tariff barriers on American imports in Taiwan – even for politically sensitive agricultural products. The ART is a companion deal to an investment agreement that was signed in January, which will see \$500 billion in new investment in the United States—much of which will be focused on the semiconductor industry, and artificial intelligence-adjacent industries.

[1] In Taiwan, politically sensitive industries tend to be those with greater political influence—such as farmers and those that work in agriculture. Politicians may also be politically sensitive to certain manufacturing industries, such as the automobile or steel industries.

How Does Taiwan’s Citizenship System Categorize Chinese Immigrants?

By: Jing-han Chen

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In 2025, several cases involving the [revocation of residence rights held by Chinese immigrants](#) drew public attention in Taiwan. Against the backdrop of escalating geopolitical tensions and concerns over potential annexation by the People’s Republic of China (PRC), immigrants from the PRC—who are mostly the spouses of Taiwan citizens—have come under increased scrutiny from both the Taiwanese general public and the government. In April 2025, Taiwanese authorities required Chinese immigrants to [prove that they had relinquished their household registration in China](#).

In Taiwan, household registration functions as a core infrastructure of citizenship, which links individuals to fundamental rights—including access to political rights such as [voting](#). While most foreign nationals are required to [renounce their nationality](#) in order to naturalize in Taiwan, Chinese immigrants are instead asked to relinquish their household registration in the PRC. This raises important questions about Taiwan’s contested sovereignty and citizenship regime: What does the household registration requirement signify in legal terms? And more broadly, how does Taiwan’s citizenship system position Chinese immigrants within its legal framework?

Historical Framework of the Legal Status of Chinese People in Taiwan

The legal standing of Chinese immigrants in Taiwan is reflective of how Taiwan’s legal system has adapted to its contested political status. These issues are rooted in the historical foundations of Taiwan’s legal and constitutional order. Following its defeat in the Chinese Civil War, the ROC government retreated to Taiwan after 1949. Taiwan, which was under Japanese colonial rule until 1945 and subsequently experienced unresolved sovereignty transitions under [international law](#), entered a prolonged period of martial law under the ROC regime that lasted until 1987. Although Taiwan underwent incremental democratization from the late 1980s onwards, this transition did not involve the adoption of a new constitution. Instead, amendments were introduced to the ROC Constitution (中華

民國憲法), redefining the concept of [sovereign people](#) under the constitution.

Through these amendments, full citizenship rights—including voting rights—were effectively limited to individuals holding household registration in Taiwan. This shift has been interpreted as a [transformation of the ROC’s sovereign subject](#) from “Chinese people” to “Taiwanese people.” Nevertheless, under the ROC constitution, individuals living on the “Mainland Area”—that is, persons from the PRC—are still considered “nationals” of the ROC. As a result, a structural gap emerged between the category of “nationals” under the constitutional framework, and “citizens” who enjoy full political rights.

Categorization of Chinese People under Taiwanese Law

Under the constitution, Chinese people are categorized as “People of the Mainland Area,” a status distinct from “People of the Taiwan Area (Free Area).” Their entry, residence, and legal rights in Taiwan are governed by special legislation rather than by general nationality or immigration law.

The primary statute regulating this status is the [Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area](#) (臺灣地區與大陸地區人民關係條例). Article 1 states that the law governs relations between people of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area for reasons of national security and public welfare, under the statutory framework governing cross-strait relations during the period officially described as “prior to national unification.” Instead of explicitly denying Chinese people the status of ROC nationals, the Act substantially restricts their access to citizenship rights by subjecting them to immigration-style controls over entry, residence, and settlement.

This ambiguity is further reflected in the [Immigration Act](#) (入出國及移民法), which classifies individuals into several categories:

- (1) Nationals with household registration in Taiwan;
- (2) Nationals without household registration;
- (3) Foreigners; and
- (4) People of the Mainland Area, as well as Hong Kong and Macau residents.

While the *Immigration Act* primarily regulates the first three categories, certain provisions applicable to nationals without household registration or to foreigners may apply *mutatis mutandis* to “People of the Mainland Area and Hong Kong and Macau residents.” Under the *Immigration Act*, [“nationals without household regis-](#)

tration” are individuals who possess ROC nationality by descent, but have not been incorporated into Taiwan’s household registration system and therefore do not enjoy full citizenship rights. This category mainly covers people born abroad or in cross-Strait exceptional circumstances (children born in the Mainland Area to Taiwanese parents who neither hold household registration in China nor possess a PRC passport). This legal categorization is distinct from “[people of the Mainland Area or Hong Kong and Macau residents](#),” thereby reinforcing the latter’s ambiguous legal position.

Judicial and Administrative Inconsistencies

Ambiguity surrounding the legal status of Chinese people in Taiwan has resulted in inconsistent interpretations between administrative authorities and the courts. A 2023 [state compensation case decision](#) illustrates this tension. In 2018, a Chinese tourist was electrocuted by a malfunctioning streetlight while cycling in Kaohsiung. His family filed a state compensation claim. The Taiwan High Court Kaohsiung Branch (臺灣高等法院高雄分院) ruled that “people of the Mainland Area” should be regarded as ROC nationals for the purpose of state compensation, relying on the [Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area](#), as well as a [1993 Ministry of Justice \(法務部\) administrative interpretation](#) stating that Chinese individuals should be considered ROC nationals.

The ruling triggered public controversy and prompted several [administrative bodies to clarify that people of the PRC are not citizens of Taiwan](#). The Kaohsiung City Government later reached a settlement with the family, and the case was withdrawn from the [Supreme Court \(最高法院\)](#). Subsequently, the Executive Yuan (行政院) issued an [administrative interpretation](#) stating that “people of the Mainland Area” should not be considered ROC nationals and that earlier interpretations should no longer apply.

While recent administrative practice increasingly treats them as foreign immigrants, Taiwanese law neither fully recognizes Chinese people as foreign nationals nor accords them citizenship. Instead, it places them in an exceptional category shaped by unresolved sovereignty, constitutional continuity, and political contingency. While this ambiguity enables policy flexibility, it also exposes individuals to shifting interpretations and legal uncertainty.

Recent History of Legal Ambiguity

The positioning of Chinese people as neither full foreigners nor citizens produces a form of institutional-

ized ambiguity within Taiwan’s citizenship regime. Changes in Taiwan’s political leadership [may alter policies](#) affecting this group. For decades, Chinese marriage migrants [faced stricter requirements](#) than marriage migrants from other countries, including longer residence periods before eligibility for household registration. Following the 2008 presidential election and a change in governing party, the Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) Administration relaxed several restrictions: facilitating Chinese tourism, Chinese [student mobility](#), and shortening the residence period before household registration eligibility for marriage migrants from [eight years to six](#).

More recently, heightened cross-Strait geopolitical tensions have led to renewed scrutiny of Chinese immigrants, including requirements to prove the [relinquishment of household registration in China](#). Such policies carry significant implications for an immigrant’s family life, legal identity, self-identification, and sense of belonging. Rather than resulting from constitutional amendment, these shifts occur through changes in administrative regulation and enforcement practices within the existing legal framework. This regulatory ambiguity enables selective enforcement and allows the state to recalibrate its governance approach without formal constitutional and legal change, shifting the burden of geopolitical conflict onto individual migrants.

Comparative Perspective: Transitional Citizenship Beyond Taiwan

Taiwan is not unique in confronting contested and layered citizenship arrangements following regime change or transformations of sovereignty. Comparable challenges have arisen in transitional regimes, such as in post-conflict and post-Cold War contexts, where states have sought to redefine political membership under conditions of geopolitical tension.

In some cases, these transitions led to entire categories of stateless persons. For example, [Ethiopia denationalized ethnic Eritreans in 1998](#) following armed conflict with Eritrea, rendering many long-term residents stateless. In Estonia, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence, citizenship laws [required residents to demonstrate pre-World War Two Estonian lineage](#). As a result, many Soviet-era migrants were excluded from citizenship and [became persons with undetermined citizenship](#), leading to statelessness. Although Estonia amended its *Citizenship Act* in 2015 and the number of stateless persons has since declined, persons with undetermined citizenship continue to face long-term legal insecurity

and restricted [political rights](#).

Latvia took a [similar approach](#) by creating the legal category of “non-citizens” for Soviet-era migrants. The Latvian government has justified this framework as part of restoring sovereignty after a period of occupation between 1940 and 1991, [arguing that its continuity of statehood was legally preserved](#). This temporary status was granted to persons who had immigrated during Soviet rule and [lost USSR citizenship upon its dissolution](#). However, the non-citizen category has been criticized for producing [durable rights deficits](#), particularly in political participation and access to certain forms of [employment](#). Nonetheless, “non-citizen” status has become a normality of many Soviet-era immigrants.

In addition to its non-citizen population, Latvia was also home to individuals who, despite being long-term residents, were not eligible for non-citizen status and were subject to expulsion. A case before the European Court of Human Rights, *Slivenko v. Latvia* (2003), examined the legality of expelling long-term residents following a regime change. The case concerned the removal of applicants with familial associations to the former Soviet military, whom the Latvian authorities considered ineligible for residence after independence. In its assessment under Article 8 of the *European Convention on Human Rights*, the Court [accepted that Latvia was entitled to pursue legitimate aims relating to national security and public order](#). However, it found that the applicants’ expulsion was not “necessary in a democratic society,” given the absence of any concrete or individualized security threat. The Court emphasized that blanket removal measures based on group affiliation or historical association failed to meet the proportionality requirement, and that expulsion decisions affecting long-term residents with established private and family life [should be grounded in individualized assessments](#). The Court ordered Latvia to pay each applicant €10,000 as compensation for non-pecuniary damage.

Although arising in a distinct legal and political context, *Slivenko* underscores a broader principle relevant to transitional citizenship regimes: appeals to sovereignty and security cannot dispense with the obligation to assess the lived ties, legal expectations, and individual circumstances of those affected.

Although the contexts of Taiwan and Latvia differ substantially, the Latvian experience offers relevant considerations for understanding shifts in citizenship regimes under conditions of political transition. Latvia’s sovereignty is internationally-recognized and its inde-

pendence marked a formal rupture from Soviet rule, whereas Taiwan’s international status remains unsettled. Moreover, Latvia’s non-citizens were largely long-term residents without alternative nationality, whereas modern Chinese immigrants to Taiwan are citizens of the PRC and have not resided in Taiwan long-term before migration. Nonetheless, these comparisons are instructive. *Slivenko* illustrates how sovereignty-based measures affecting long-term residents should remain subject to proportionality and individualized assessments—principles that are equally relevant when evaluating policies affecting Chinese immigrants in Taiwan.

These comparative experiences suggest that transitional citizenship regimes often coincide with historic changes in political sovereignty. However, when temporary or exceptional legal statuses remain in effect over time, they risk becoming an institutionalized form of exclusion.

Conclusion

Taiwan’s citizenship system places Chinese people in a legally-exceptional position that is neither fully foreign nor fully domestic. Rooted in constitutional continuity and unresolved sovereignty, this ambiguity has enabled flexible cross-Strait governance, but at the cost of legal certainty and coherent interpretations of individual rights. Recent requirements for Chinese immigrants to prove their relinquishment of household registration in China illustrate how geopolitical tensions are translated into administrative measures.

Judicial and administrative responses to the 2023 state compensation case further expose the instability of this framework, with shifting interpretations producing unpredictable legal outcomes for affected individuals. Comparative experiences from other transitional citizenship regimes such as Latvia suggest that prolonged reliance on exceptional legal categories risks entrenching exclusion and long-term legal uncertainty. As Taiwan continues to navigate its contested status, clearer legal standards and careful attention to proportionality and individual circumstances are essential to preventing citizenship governance from becoming a vehicle through which geopolitical conflict is deflected onto individuals.

The main point: Taiwan’s current approach to categorizing Chinese immigrants relies on legal ambiguity that enables policy flexibility but produces instability, inconsistent enforcement, and heightened uncertainty for individuals. Such a citizenship regime demonstrates the inherent tension between national security objectives and the protection of individual rights in the con-

text of contested sovereignty.

Would China Adhere to International Humanitarian Law in a Taiwan Contingency?

By: James Jennion

James Jennion is a foreign policy analyst currently based in Taiwan, where he recently completed the Democracy and Human Rights Service Fellowship at the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. He began his career advising the UK Foreign Affairs Committee on China and Indo-Pacific policy, and has since worked for international organizations including Amnesty International and the International Rescue Committee. He is an Associate Fellow of the British Foreign Policy Group and an Advisory Group member of the Standing Group on Atrocity Crimes. He writes in an individual capacity.

With a military that has not seen large-scale active conflict since 1979, much remains unknown about how the armed forces of the People's Republic of China (PRC) would conduct themselves in a modern conflict. While logistics, tactics, and the overall outcomes of a Taiwan contingency are all cause for further analysis, more focus is needed on how the Chinese military would act towards civilians in a conflict. China's aggressive behavior towards Taiwan, and its refusal to rule out a military invasion of the island, mean it is important to consider the possible military conduct of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in relation to [international humanitarian law](#) (IHL)—which, among other things, aims to limit conduct harmful or deadly to civilians in conflict contexts. Taiwan's highly urbanized population means that fighting would unavoidably take place in civilian areas, which means IHL would be highly tested in the event of any conflict. As such, the Taiwanese government and partners should implement rigorous strategies for raising international awareness of the civilian costs of a contingency to build condemnation and promote accountability.

Broadly speaking, China has made reasonable public commitments to international humanitarian law. It is a [party](#) to relevant international treaties, and organisations like the [Red Cross](#) are active within China. In 2018, a PLA official stated that “the PLA has integrated the law of armed conflict into the curricula of its academies and universities, invited the [International Committee of the Red Cross] to provide training, and organized simulation exercises, which achieved positive results.” China is also nominally supportive of related mechanisms, [signing](#) the Arms Trade Treaty in 2020—thereby distinguishing it from many [other](#) authoritari-

an states with which it is often considered aligned. It joined a coalition of states, including France, Brazil, and South Africa, alongside the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in launching a new [initiative](#) aimed at “regalvanizing” support for IHL.

There is, however, a clear gap between nominative commitment and genuine respect for international humanitarian law globally. Ratification of the Geneva Conventions is [near universal](#), with 196 states having ratified or acceded to them. Despite this, violations of international humanitarian law clearly continue to be rampant, with more than [100,000](#) civilians killed in armed conflicts in the past eighteen months alone. As such, outward commitment to IHL cannot be taken as a definitive sign that it would be respected in practice.

China's Stance Towards Taiwan and the Implications for IHL

For all its efforts to cultivate the image of a responsible and rights-respecting power, PRC behavior towards Taiwan provides an entirely different perspective. In 2025, the PLA's Eastern Theatre Command posted a [propaganda video](#) on Chinese social media depicting Taiwan's President, Lai Ching-te, as a bug held between two chopsticks over a burning Taiwan, denigrating him as a “parasite courting ultimate destruction.” Other videos showed Chinese warships and fighter jets encircling Taiwan, and military vehicles patrolling streets.

Chinese government officials have in some ways attempted to downplay the scale of an invasion, [stating](#) that the refusal to swear off the use of force against Taiwan is not targeted against Taiwanese people (“compatriots” or 同胞 in Beijing's parlance) but instead against interfering external forces and what they call a “tiny number of Taiwan independence separatists and their separatist activities.” It is unclear how Beijing would make such a distinction in the event of a kinetic invasion of Taiwan; further, a propaganda piece depicting the entire island of Taiwan engulfed in flames does not suggest a limited or targeted invasion.

International law has rarely acted as a fetter on the Chinese government's commission of human rights violations in cases where such laws and standards conflict with the government's interests. Such violations have a consistent logic to them, almost always carried out (at the systemic level) with the aim of maintaining the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s control. The Tiananmen Square Massacre was ordered in response to mass protests against Communist Party policies; the large-scale detention camps in Xinjiang were publicly justified as a response to, among other things, sepa-

ratist movements in the region. Commentators have [argued](#) that a failed invasion of Taiwan could threaten the legitimacy of Xi Jinping and the CCP; with this factor in mind, it is plausible that even if China's armed forces did not demonstrate the same flagrant cruelty seen in other contemporary conflicts like Ukraine and Sudan, they would still act with ruthlessness in achieving their objectives in Taiwan.

China may try to deflect international criticism of its conduct in Taiwan through its common argument that such matters constitute China's "[internal affairs](#)." China has spent years attempting to build two narratives: first, that Taiwan is an inseparable part of China's territory; and second, that all countries have their [own models](#) for human rights and development, which should not be criticized by outside forces. The Chinese government may attempt to combine these two narratives: if a government may do as it pleases within its own territory, and if Taiwan is a part of China, then China may do as it sees fit in Taiwan. However, even if this narrative were to be accepted, it would not prevent global outrage at atrocities committed by China: the Tiananmen Square Massacre remains one of the most enduring stains on the Chinese government's global image, and an issue to which the regime is highly sensitive.

Another approach may be to adopt a "civil war" narrative: applying the notion that international humanitarian law would not apply in a Taiwan contingency because it is not an international conflict. Taiwan's broad lack of recognition already poses international legal challenges to its response in an invasion (for example, [Article 2\(4\)](#) of the United Nations charter specifically calls for refrainment from threat or force in states' *international* relations). However, [Article 3](#) of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which relates to "Conflicts not of an international character," unambiguously mandates the protection of non-combatants. Many of the incidents that have drawn international outrage in recent decades have occurred outside of direct confrontation between universally recognized states: key examples being the numerous atrocities committed by the non-state armed group Daesh (Islamic State) in the 2010s, and civil wars in Myanmar and Sudan. In short, no matter how Beijing tries to frame the narrative, there is nothing that renders the indiscriminate taking of civilian life permissible under international law, or acceptable within the realm of public perception.

China's International Image

China increasingly cares about its image as it seeks to cast itself as a responsible global player and leader, and by certain [measures](#), positive views of Beijing are increasing internationally. In the military domain, China has also made efforts to [publicize](#) its increasing contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, attempting to portray the PLA as a benevolent and protective force. Much of China's international diplomacy is pursued with the implicit objective of improving China's image, as observed recently through the [Global Governance Initiative](#), a Beijing-led multilateral reform effort that is a key vehicle for promoting China's state-individualized conception of human rights above the notion of universal rights. Clearly, international reproach is enough of a concern to warrant major diplomatic efforts to avoid it.

There are clear cases of international pressure having an influence on China's conduct. In rare cases where the Tiananmen Square massacre has been officially acknowledged, it is portrayed as a "[crackdown](#)" and those who comment publicly or seek to commemorate the massacre are subject to ruthless [censorship](#). Following lengthy denial of their existence, the Chinese government finally admitted the existence of its detention camps in Xinjiang after extensive international criticism. The Chinese Government [moved](#) through several stages: concealing the existence of the camps, acknowledging and downsizing them, downsizing and reframing policies there, and then partially abandoning the practice. Dr Jan Švec, a researcher whose work has focused on China's public response to the camps in Xinjiang, believes that its responsiveness to public pressure was due to both the wish to present itself as a "responsible international actor" to countries in the Global South, and to preserve existing economic and political ties with developed countries [1].

In the wake of international outrage against war crimes committed in recent conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, and beyond, the CCP and PLA leadership may be forced to consider carefully how reckless wartime conduct could ruin their painstaking efforts to cast China as a responsible and leading global power. This image consciousness provides a possible route to accountability, and to limiting the likelihood that the Chinese armed forces commit war crimes in the event of a conflict.

Of course, it is very possible that, in the eventuality that the Chinese leadership does decide to invade Taiwan, concerns such as China's international image will no longer be a factor— especially if the decision is spurred by a domestic crisis that represents a dire threat to the Communist Party's legitimacy. In this case, compelling

other powerful states to action via sanctions against China and other support for Taiwan will be vital. Both situations point to the same response.

Engaging Civil Society and International Support: Lessons from Ukraine

The Taiwanese Government and partners should ensure that the devastating civilian cost an invasion would bring is at the forefront of international messaging efforts, to build international support and add the likelihood of punitive diplomatic and reputational costs into Beijing's considerations. However, should the Chinese government make the decision to invade Taiwan, ensuring the world is aware of the PLA's actions will be vital in building international awareness and outrage, thus compelling states to hold China accountable.

The Taiwanese government has recently ramped up its [prioritization](#) of "[whole-of-society resilience](#)," which involves civilians fulfilling non-combat functions in the resistance of Taiwan in the event of an invasion. Infrastructural [issues](#), such as air raid shelters being inadequately signposted or unfit for purpose, are well known. Civil society initiatives exist to [train](#) Taiwanese people in critical skills such as emergency first aid and countering Beijing-spread disinformation during a conflict scenario. However, introducing rigorous measures to document and report on the civilian and civil costs of an invasion should also be a priority for Taiwanese policymakers.

While frequent comparisons are drawn between the invasion of Ukraine and Taiwan, the former may hold some lessons for the latter in this regard. Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the Ukrainian government has implemented a range of innovative communications approaches to build support among international audiences and to ensure atrocities committed by the Russian authorities are exposed. Ukraine has made extensive use of social media to build international support, before and after the war. Ukrainian volunteers have sought to spread discontent within Russia by trawling through [Russian websites](#) to leave comments critical of the war.

Ukrainian actors have further publicized Russian atrocities online, including a [war crimes reporting portal](#) allowing people to submit evidence and documentation of atrocities committed by Russian Armed Forces; as well as a [database](#) listing the components found in Russian weapons, including the countries of origin and companies that manufactured these components. Dr Švec also suggests the establishment of a monitoring team, comprising people based in Taiwan and abroad,

including China specialists and investigative journalists, who can produce credible documentation of civilian harms to share with international media. [2]

Ukrainian activists have also employed unconventional tools such as memes and humor to build international sympathy and support. A Ukrainian "[PR Army](#)"—a coalition of communications professionals working to connect war witnesses, officials, and experts with the international media—emerged to help shape narratives and build awareness about Russia's atrocities through clear and impactful campaigns. In an unconventional move, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense [handed control](#) of its Twitter account to an NGO staffed by former commercial, government, and civil society strategic communications experts. The account garnered more than 2 million followers through its use of humor to troll Russia's armed forces, and create culturally relevant content—in one case, comparing Russia's claims on Ukraine with historic claims to Japanese territory, driving a surge in supportive engagement in Japan.

Conclusions

Taiwan could learn from these approaches by developing a pool or network of international communications experts whose networks and expertise in social media, campaigning, advocacy, and other areas could be rapidly mobilized in order to drive the narrative and debunk (or "prebunk") China's own arguments in the event of an invasion. Making use of strategic communications experts—a tactic often used instead by autocratic governments looking to sanitize their images—may also be a key step in internationalizing Taiwan's message and positions to help build public support within democracies before and during a contingency. Such partnerships have been [pursued](#) in the United States; doing so in other democracies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific could help build support for Taiwan among public and governmental stakeholders, helping increase the likelihood of a broad coalition of support.

Substantial resources should also be allocated toward social media activism, as a counter to China's aggressive online information shaping. China makes prolific use of online disinformation tactics, with PRC government-funded bots and AI-generated disinformation [proliferating](#) around social media platforms. In the event of an invasion, it is likely that these tools would go into overdrive, flooding social media with disinformation about Taiwan and China's conduct there.

Taiwan should draw on similar tactics—but instead should use such methods to rapidly build awareness of the human costs of a Chinese invasion, rapidly debunk-

ing and rebutting disinformation spread by bad actors, and amplifying genuine stories. Ensuring a substantial budget is available to boost pro-Taiwan social media posts and activities documenting and exposing violations of international humanitarian law will be vital. It will also be necessary to ensure that a strong network of committed, vocal supporters exists in third countries to continue promoting Taiwan's cause in the event of communications disruptions or blackouts, and that provisions are made for rigorous international monitoring and evidence gathering.

The most important measures and tools to protect Taiwan remain robust military spending and development, promoting societal unity and anti-polarization efforts, and continuing to build Taiwan's relations with democratic partners and allies. However, should the worst happen, there must be a clear strategy for ensuring any atrocities or war crimes committed on Taiwan do not stay hidden, and that the world is made aware of them. This will be vital in raising accountability and compelling Taiwan's powerful democratic partners to act.

The main point: While the probable conduct of the PLA in a Taiwan conflict remains unclear, historic examples indicate it would likely be ruthless in achieving its objectives. While strengthening all other forms of defense, Taiwan should also invest heavily in resources and expertise to spread the message that the civilian cost of an invasion would be great, and on ways to spread awareness of possible war crimes to international audiences. This will help deter and drive push-back against Beijing, and boost demands for action from democratic governments.

[1] Analysis provided to the author over email.

[2] Ibid.

Pop Goes the Identity: Tzuyu's Return Concert and the Negotiation of Taiwanese Identity

By: Muhammad Erza Aimar Rizky

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"Taiwan's Daughter is Back." These were the words plastered across the headlines of numerous television news programs in Taiwan on November 21, 2025, on the arrival in Kaohsiung of the K-pop girl group TWICE. The pop music group held concerts on November 22-23 at Kaohsiung National Stadium, the group's first-ever shows in Taiwan. The shows represented a homecoming for Tainan-born Chou Tzuyu (周子瑜)—usually known professionally simply by her first name "Tzuyu"—who was finally able to perform in Taiwan after a decade-long career.

Chou Tzuyu first debuted in 2015 as a member the multinational Korea-based girl group TWICE, which also includes members from Japan and South Korea. Since that time, her career has at times been [overshadowed](#) by the political complications of her identity as a Taiwanese person. One infamous incident occurred in 2016, when Tzuyu was only 16 years old: after [appearing with a Republic of China \(ROC, 中華民國\) flag on a South Korean television program](#), she faced an intense backlash from Chinese netizens who accused her advocating for Taiwan independence. She was subsequently forced to issue a humiliating public apology video affirming the "One China Principle."

The incident proved a clear example of the [difficulties often faced by Taiwan artists and creative industries](#) in the face of Chinese coercive pressure. For many young Taiwanese, the episode also crystalized the risks of cultural dependence on the mainland and reinforced the idea that identity could be policed beyond borders. This turn of events was also spotlighted back home, with Tsai Ing-Wen (蔡英文), the recent president-elect of Taiwan, [referring to the incident in her victory speech](#), saying that it served as a "constant reminder" to herself and Taiwanese about "the importance of our country's strength and unity to those outside our borders."

I argue that Tzuyu's career and public persona have symbolized the modern struggle of Taiwanese identity—especially in terms of how Taiwanese see themselves, and how others outside Taiwan see their identity. As a public figure, Tzuyu's identity cannot be separated from her background, which increased the international appeal of the group (as with the case of TWICE members Sana and Momo, who were both born in Japan).

Celebrating Taiwan's "Princess"

In Kaohsiung, fans gathered early on the first day of the concerts on [November 22](#) to buy merch; and in the afternoon, more than 10,000 people waited outside the stadium to hear TWICE's rehearsal. Foreign fans also

crowded the area, filling the MRT station nearby and taking photos with a big Tzuyu poster there.

On the first day of the concert, Tzuyu [greeted her fans in Hokkien](#), the native Taiwan dialect— and one of the [key features distinguishing Taiwanese identity](#) from the Mandarin-centric priorities of the PRC, which prioritizes Mandarin Chinese. “Hello, I’m Tzuyu. I really missed you guys. Did you guys miss me? Thank you!” She then continued in Mandarin: “This is the first time the other members and I have done a concert in Kaohsiung. I know you waited for me for a long time, and I know you have supported me a lot.” “You guys have really welcomed me home, and I felt all of your warm reception. I’m really happy. Today, let’s have some fun, okay?”

Later, the Kaohsiung city mayor explained that the two-day concert had attracted a total of 180,000 fans and garnered a boost in tourism income of almost NT\$500 million (US\$15 million). On the last day, TWICE teased an additional concert date in Taipei in March 2026, in part due to the massive enthusiasm they received from the Kaohsiung concerts.

The successor of President Tsai Ing-Wen, current President William Lai (賴清德)—who is also from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨)—seized the public enthusiasm by stating that Tzuyu is “[Taiwan’s princess](#),” and welcomed her back home. The DPP historically supports the Taiwanese identity as separate from a Chinese one—which makes Tzuyu’s experience of being punished for expressing connections to Taiwan all the more reason to celebrate this identity on the occasion of the TWICE concert tour.



Image: Chou Tzuyu (center) performs during a concert by the pop music group TWICE in Seoul, South Korea (April 15, 2023). (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

The Struggles Over Modern Taiwanese Identity

The 2016 incident started after [Tzuyu waved a plastic ROC \(Republic of China, Taiwan\) flag in a Korean variety TV show](#), which elicited a strong response from

ultra-nationalistic Chinese internet users. The incident quickly devolved, with Chinese netizens bullying her online before she was made to apologize on camera. The case serves as an apt example of the geopolitical controversies surrounding modern Taiwanese identity. Taiwan, which in the 21st century has increasingly been threatened by its authoritarian neighbor across the Taiwan Strait, must walk a tightrope in dealing with its own international identity because of its extremely sensitive relations with China.

Jonathan Manthorpe, author of *Forbidden Nation: A History of Taiwan*, has argued that Taiwanese identity has long been established, but has been constantly [repressed by external forces](#). Per Manthorpe, this process has included occupation in the Qing Dynasty imperial Chinese era (including tales of the resistance folk hero Koxinga); colonialism by Western trading powers; and the more recent Japanese colonial era (1895-1945) that is still looked upon fondly by some native Taiwanese because of the period’s relative stability. Manthorpe has identified the pre-1949 bloody KMT occupation—which culminated in “the 2-28 Incident,” costing an estimated 28,000 Taiwanese lives—as an example of unfettered persecution and an unhealed wound lingering until today, while highlighting the contentious view of most Taiwanese of its [modern ROC nation-state history](#) after the “White Terror” authoritarian period extending from 1949 until 1987. [1]

Shelley Rigger, a prominent American scholar in Taiwan studies, has echoed Manthorpe’s thoughts by looking into Taiwan’s demographic composition. In the early days of Taiwan’s incorporation into the ROC, there was a [social division in Taiwan](#): there were “Taiwanese” (known in Chinese as *benshengren* or 本省人, people of this province), those whose families had been living on the island anywhere between fifty and three hundred years before 1945; and “Mainlanders” (*waishengren* or 外省人, people from outside provinces), people who arrived after the Japanese surrender in 1945. This dynamic played into the complicated feelings of the *benshengren* towards the *waishengren* during the single-party authoritarian era. The minority *waishengren* (1.5 million people out of 7.5 million island residents in 1949) imposed their will on the island in the fight against Cold War communism: starting from the mandatory language conversion in everyday life from Hokkien to Mandarin, to the forced suppression of native Taiwanese culture in favor of the China-centric focus of the ROC. [2]

However, such analyses are not universally shared, and identity remains a complex issue in Taiwan. There ex-

ists an inherent tension in the matter of a native Taiwan identity, because the majority Han Chinese ethnic population residing in Taiwan shares ethnic, linguistic, and cultural roots with Han Chinese in the PRC. One such evidence of the project could be seen from the Taiwan-centric [history education reform](#) in 2019, with some teachers pushing back on what they called an attempt to “de-Sinicize” school curricula.

Kuang-hao Hou (侯廣豪), a Taiwan-born scholar researching on borderland and ocean studies in political science, has argued from a different viewpoint, seeing Taiwanese identity as a political project by the ruling DPP and [the Taiwan independence movement](#) to construct an enemy—specifically, by labeling the opposition Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) as an external entity in order to win the country’s democratic elections. Hou has even argued so far as to say that this project is manifested in the weaponization of the post-dictatorship restorative justice process, resulting in a democratic erosion in Taiwan. [3]

The majority of Taiwanese today prefer the status quo in Taiwan’s relationship with China—even as [trends in opinion polling](#) in recent years have demonstrated a steady rise in the sense of a “Taiwanese” (臺灣人) identity.

Pop Music and Politics in Cross-Strait Relations

Rigger also argues further that Taiwan has shaped modern China in terms of [everyday life](#), as well. When Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) opened Mainland China’s economy in the 1970s, there was a huge pent-up demand for cultural products, including pop music in Mandarin. Taiwanese musicians fulfilled that demand, with the most notable one being Teresa Teng (鄧麗君). Teresa Teng remains one of the most fondly remembered pop artists in both markets’ history, and her popularity pioneered the wave of Taiwanese music into Mainland China that was popularly called a “counter invasion.” Today, most singers of “Mandopop” draw their inspirations from previous Taiwanese artists—in part because its Hong Kong counterpart “Cantopop” doesn’t use Mandarin in its lyrics, thereby limiting its audience.

Before Chou Tzuyu, there was another case of a pop singer who endured the cost of her identity as a Taiwanese. Her name is A-Mei (阿妹). In 1998, she was one of Asia’s most popular singers. In May 2000, A-Mei performed the ROC national anthem at Chen Shui-bian’s presidential inauguration ceremony in Taipei. Overnight, [A-Mei’s voice and image disappeared from China on instructions from Beijing](#). The backlash to the performance was so severe that it resulted in protests

and clashes outside of her concerts in the PRC. [4]

Conclusions

Some have argued that the [2016 Tzuyu incident galvanized support for the DPP’s Tsai Ing-Wen](#) in the presidential elections by boosting youth support for Taiwanese identity. Previously, the socialization of K-pop fans as activists was demonstrated in Taiwan against a deemed unconstitutional legislation, with many lightsticks [representing K-pop fans’ identities](#) in the demonstrations. The practice spread from South Korea, after massive protests erupted with some K-pop fan groups’ representation in reaction to martial law being enacted.

Taiwanese identity will always be a negotiated process, with a constant struggle involving both internal and external actors. In Taiwan, positive perceptions of this identity will likely stay high, with current conditions of solid economic growth and more freedom of expression as compared to China. For now, most youths in Taiwan are content to celebrate Tzuyu’s return as a way of celebrating their identity.

The main point: The November concert appearance of the K-pop girl group TWICE and the accompanying return of Taiwanese singer Tzuyu, and the massive homecoming reception displayed by fans, shows the resiliency of Taiwanese identity in the midst of increasing Chinese pressure. Tzuyu’s career and public persona have in many ways symbolized the modern struggle of Taiwanese identity, especially regarding the ways in which that identity is perceived, both internationally and by Taiwanese themselves.

[1] Manthorpe, Jonathan. *Forbidden Nation: A History of Taiwan*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

[2] Rigger, Shelley. *Why Taiwan Matters: Small Island, Global Powerhouse*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.

[3] Hou, Kuang-hao. “Warning against Silverfish in Democracy: Decaying Constitutionalism in the Society of Taiwan.” *Chinese (Taiwan) Yearbook of International Law and Affairs*, Volume 41, 2023, December 20, 2024, 202–67. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004719934_009.

[4] The story of A-Mei had a happy ending: she reinvented herself as “Amit” (阿密特), switching genres to rock and rebranding her persona with unapologetic feminist, pro-indigenous Taiwanese, and pro-LGBTQ messages in her albums—claiming massive success and a new fanbase in the process. See: Rigger, Shelley. *The Tiger Leading the Dragon: How Taiwan Propelled China’s Economic Rise*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.

Taiwan and India's Submarine Production—Opportunities for Collaboration

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Major naval acquisition programs can set a state's [grand strategy for decades](#), and this renders submarine construction an extremely high-stakes industry. For countries neighboring China, such as [Taiwan and India](#), submarines are essential to domestic national security strategies. [India](#) and [Taiwan](#) both require a higher number of submarines than they currently possess to deter and fight China. Taiwan also needs more modern ones. Although [India](#) and [Taiwan](#) have expressed a desire to develop domestic production, both are equally reliant on other countries to provide submarine hulls and major subsystems. If Taiwan and India want to increase their defense industrial development, they must invest in initial phases of defense production capacity, rather than simply importing or [reverse-engineering capabilities](#).

To analyze the challenges that Taiwan and India face in submarine production, we must evaluate the industrial base underneath recent domestically produced submarines. Taiwan recently launched its first *Hai Kun* class submarine and completed initial [underwater trials in January 2026](#). Similarly, India's [third Arihant class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine](#) is expected to enter service later this year. These manufacturing milestones, however, should not obscure the extent to which both states remain [dependent on foreign assistance](#) for critical components, hull fabrication, and [long-term sustainment](#) across their submarine fleets.

As a result, efforts to expand domestic submarine capacity will continue to rely on external partnerships, even as both governments pursue greater defense-industrial autonomy. This article investigates how Taiwan and India may leverage collaborative arrangements to mitigate these constraints and advance their submarine production capabilities.

While India and Taiwan are unlikely to sign formal defense cooperation agreements because New Delhi does not formally recognize Taiwan's sovereignty, informal collaboration mechanisms are possible. This article evaluates the two countries' submarine production ecosystems to present paths of informal collaboration—such as through existing capabilities in Taiwan's civilian manufacturing of lithium-ion batteries.

Global Submarine Acquisition Delays

India and Taiwan's pursuit of domestic submarine production is, in part, a response to global production. Multiple constraints have delayed international deliveries. High global submarine demand has not been met by the market's largest suppliers: France, Germany, Russia, and China. In response to delivery delays, countries have opted either to launch new domestic production (e.g., India and Turkey) or enhance their existing programs (e.g., Taiwan, South Korea, and Spain). While the United States—the world's [largest arms exporter by value](#)—does not export its nuclear submarines, Washington has formed a collaborative development agreement with [Australia and the United Kingdom \(AUKUS\)](#). These agreements convey an understanding that Australia will operate [Virginia-class attack subs by the early 2030s](#), and receive [British built AUKUS nuclear-powered subs](#) before Australian domestic manufacturing commences in the 2040s.

Across manufacturers globally, common contributing factors to submarine production delays include [design problems](#), [skilled labor shortages](#), [supply chain entanglement](#), as well as shifting national priorities. With regards to Taiwan's biggest supplier of arms, US domestic production is consistently running behind the [desired rate of output](#). The added pressure to deliver additional *Virginia* submarines to Australia for [AUKUS](#) will likely exacerbate production [difficulties](#), potentially leaving Australia scrambling for submarines if the program falters. One of the reasons for Australia's decision to scrap its initial [Naval Group Contract with France](#) was due to delays in the French attack sub design phase. If America delays on its promises for the *Virginia*-class attack sub, Australia could be left with a capability gap that it was hoping to avoid. With regards to one of India's

top suppliers, [Russia has its own state-level concerns](#) in its construction of the new [Yasen-M](#) class missile boat, which will strain an already [overtaxed industrial base](#). Ongoing production delays with the latest generation diesel-electric [Lada](#)-class submarines has also forced Russia to [upgrade its 1970s era Kilo class](#) diesel-electric submarine. The three [Lada](#) class submarines that have been produced [lack air independent propulsion \(AIP\) systems](#) (whose characteristics are provided below), which renders them technologically obsolete. Thus, despite high demand, the global supply of submarines is low and supply chain challenges riddle the industry.

Since major naval acquisition programs can set a state's [grand strategy for decades](#), this renders submarine construction an extremely high-stakes industry. For countries neighboring China, such as [Taiwan and India](#), submarines are essential to domestic national security strategies. [India](#) and [Taiwan](#) both require a higher number of submarines than they currently possess in order to deter and fight China. Although [India](#) and [Taiwan](#) have expressed a desire to develop domestic production, both are equally reliant on other countries to provide submarine hulls and major subsystems. If Taiwan and India want to increase their defense industrial development, they must invest in initial phases of defense production capacity rather than simply importing or [reverse-engineering capabilities](#).

Cooperative Gains in Submarine Engineering and Design Work

Enhanced collaboration in submarine construction would be a natural evolution of Taiwan and India's [growing cooperation](#) in commercial high-tech manufacturing. Just as cell phones and semiconductors are crucial to Taiwan and India's economic and technological strategies, submarines are vital for their national security. Despite the risk of provoking China, India and Taiwan have shown resilience in [deepening their ties](#) in areas where mutual strategic [interests align](#). Thus, given the two countries' shared need to expand domestic submarine production and their existing experience in cooperative engineering and design, the foundation for further collaboration in the defense sector is already in place. In particular, India stands to gain from Taiwan's expertise in lithium-battery technology in its goal of achieving AIP systems in its submarines.

Diesel-electric submarines operate using batteries and must surface or [snorkel every few days to recharge](#), unlike nuclear submarines. For decades, lead-acid batteries were the standard, but advancements in lithium-ion technology are enhancing the range, speed, and re-

charge time of conventional fleets. Japan's [Ōryū](#) (SS-511), launched in 2020, was the first submarine to fully adopt [lithium-ion batteries](#). Lithium-ion batteries also [enhance the capabilities of air independent propulsion systems](#), allowing submarines to operate for extended periods without surfacing. AIP systems provide an alternative power source while submerged, avoiding the need for atmospheric oxygen through snorkeling or surfacing. Various countries have tested different configurations of this technology. Germany's Thyssen-Krupp Marine System's (TKMS) Type 214 submarine currently holds the record for 14 days of submerged operation without surfacing, powered by a [lithium-ion battery system](#). Similarly, South [Korea's KSS-III](#) Batch-II submarine (including its export variant, the DSME-3000), integrates lithium-ion batteries to power its AIP, showcasing the growing adoption of this technology.

While initially costly, this technology has the potential to revolutionize submarine capabilities. As export variants adopt these innovations, countries looking to extend submarine battery life must either develop lithium-ion technology or collaborate with manufacturers. For India, Taiwan's advanced lithium-ion manufacturing sector presents an opportunity to form technical partnerships that support both nations' submarine development goals.

Taiwan's Technological Offering

Taiwan is well positioned to serve as a technological partner for India. Taiwan is a leader in lithium-ion battery technology and closed-loop recycling systems. Its focus on lithium-ion batteries [began in the 1990s](#), coinciding with its advancements in manufacturing microchips, computer components, and other electronics that have driven Taiwan's economic model. Taiwanese companies have developed advanced battery designs known for their [fast recharge and discharge properties](#).

Furthermore, Taiwanese companies have established the [first closed-loop recycling](#) ecosystem for lithium-ion batteries. This system enables the recycling and recovery of rare earth metals, lithium, and other essential materials for creating new cathode materials. Closed-loop systems hold significant potential for both Taiwan and India, as they offer a way to reduce reliance on Chinese-controlled lithium production and refinement by creating alternative supply chains.

What's In It for Taiwan?

The benefit of collaboration is not a one-way street. Taiwan's submarine program will also benefit from collaboration with India, particularly in the area of refurbish-

ing aging submarine platforms. Other than Taiwan's first indigenous submarine—the [Hai Kun-class](#)—the nation's submarine fleet consists of four diesel-electric submarines: two US-supplied second-hand *Guppy*-class (Guppy III) submarines from the 1950s, and two Dutch-supplied *Zwaardvis*-class submarines (the newest of which was commissioned in 1988). India faces a similar challenge with its diesel-electric fleet of submarines: of which seven are 1980s Soviet-origin *Kilo*-class submarines, and four German *Type-209* submarines of the same vintage.



Image: ROC Navy personnel at the commissioning ceremony for Taiwan's indigenous Hai Kun submarine (Sep. 28, 2023). The Hai Kun class is believed to rely extensively on technologies acquired from other states. (Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Since the 2010s, Taiwan has taken considerable steps to improve its submarine refurbishment capabilities and to build out its design capacity for domestic submarines. These endeavors have culminated in Taiwan's first indigenous submarine, the [Hai Kun-class](#). Despite this progress, Taiwan has remained dependent on the United States for advanced sub-systems and armaments, such as [advanced torpedoes](#) authorized by the Trump Administration in 2017. At the same time, India has insisted on technology transfer through investment agreements, specifically through [localized production](#) of two of the four [Type-214 German submarines](#) and six of the French-made *Scorpène*-class submarines. The key reason for acquiring the *Scorpène*-class platform was its ability to employ the submarine-launched version of the [French Exocet \(SM-39\) anti-ship missiles](#), which the *Type-209* submarines [can also use](#). Such use of foreign components demonstrates the continued importance of international cooperation if India is to advance its domestic submarine production.

Overcoming Barriers to International Cooperation

The domestic and international legal barriers hindering such cooperation are not insurmountable. India's

legal regime governing the export of weapons and related technology centers on the Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies ([SCOMET](#)) list under the [Foreign Trade Act](#). Diesel, electric, and AIP engines fall under entry [6A009](#) of this list. However, the export of data and designs—such as intellectual property related to submarine propulsion or hulls—are not explicitly mentioned in this list. Although the list of states for which India relaxed SCOMET rules for dual-use technologies in 2024 [did not include Taiwan](#), collaboration with Taiwan on dual-use technology is [being discussed](#) in India.

For example, India's [Arms Act of 1959](#), "[Arms Rules of 2016](#)," and "[Defence Acquisition Procedure of 2020](#)" require that any foreign collaboration in defense manufacturing be approved by both the Department of Defence and the Ministry of External Affairs. This requirement presents a problem when partnering with a non-recognized state. Nonetheless, India has signed a series of [commercial agreements](#) with Taiwan. Modifications of existing agreements using the same frameworks may create a path for collaboration even without diplomatic recognition. India and Taiwan therefore have the technological means, security interests, and the legal frameworks for collaborating on submarine development and production.

Conclusion and Policy Options for Taiwan and India

Submarines are essential to Taiwan's and India's national defense strategies. For Taiwan, submarines offer undersea capabilities not provided by other military means: stealth sea denial and anti-access delivery of anti-ship capabilities against Chinese ship movements. For India, submarines are likewise central to sea denial strategies, and hold the potential to establish a credible second-strike nuclear deterrent.

We are not suggesting that India and Taiwan should sign formal defense cooperation agreements to facilitate collaboration on submarine construction. Instead, we suggest that India and Taiwan conduct such cooperation through the frameworks of current economic engagement. This can be done through existing agreements, such as the "[Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement](#)," the "[Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement of 2011](#)," and the "[Bilateral Investment Agreement of 2018](#)." These agreements demonstrate the feasibility of sustained, politically-durable cooperation that is critical for any prospective defense-related collaboration. The success of informal economic mechanisms, therefore, provides a conceptual and empirical foundation for developing flexible cooperative defense initiatives

that preserve strategic ambiguity while advancing mutual security objectives.

The main point: Challenges to submarine manufacturing affect the global marketplace and place a premium on domestic production. India's pursuit of untested technology elevates its risk, while Taiwan's domestically produced system continues to rely on foreign components. Both states can benefit from cooperation on engineering and designs in submarine production. While collaboration on submarine technology would represent a step change from pre-existing economic cooperation, improving domestic production capacity necessitates pursuing mutual gains wherever possible.
