ANALYZING TAIWAN'S CHANGING RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA: EFFECTS ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND MENTAL HEALTH

Maresh Chougule

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the present research article is to explore the nexus between democracy, human rights, and mental health of Taiwan citizens. Present cross-sectional study provides a cutting edge of understandings and perspectives of people about Democracy and Geopolitical Dynamics in Taiwan.

Theoretical Framework: Geopolitical factors explored in the study include Cross-Strait Relations, Historical Events, International Relations, and the overarching theme of Democracy. These factors are pivotal in shaping Taiwan's position on the global stage and influencing its democratic governance. The study provides an insightful examination of how these factors intersect and impact the nation's political landscape.

Research Method: The research methodology adopted for this study involved in-depth interviews with representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and a focus group discussion at a university in Taiwan. The discussion brought together 12 students from diverse academic backgrounds, including political science, social work, public administration, and disabled studies, along with three professors. This diverse representation ensured a multifaceted examination of the subject matter.

Findings: In analyzing the data, the researcher has navigated the complexities of the participants' opinions and experiences. The qualitative findings have been presented in a structured manner, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness between democracy and geopolitical factors in Taiwan. The researcher has critically engaged with the data, highlighting key themes, patterns, and insights that emerge from the participants' narratives.

Research practical and social implications: The paper serves as a reflection and narration of the participants' viewpoints, emphasizing their unique perspectives on Taiwan's geopolitical challenges. By focusing on the qualitative data, the researcher aims to shed light on the intricate dynamics that define Taiwan's relationship with the broader geopolitical context.

Originality/value: The present research article is based on research funded by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, delves into the intricate interplay between democracy and geopolitical factors in Taiwan. Conducted by the Social Policy and Development Programme at the Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand, this qualitative study unfolds as a narrative exploration. The primary aim is to unravel the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders engaged in the complex web of Taiwan's geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: Democracy, Human Rights, Geopolitics, Taiwan, Cross-Strait Relationship.

ANALISANDO A MUDANÇA DA RELAÇÃO DE TAIWAN COM A CHINA: EFEITOS NA DEMOCRACIA, DIREITOS HUMANOS E SAÚDE MENTAL

RESUMO

Propósito: O objetivo do presente artigo de pesquisa é explorar a relação entre democracia, direitos humanos e saúde mental dos cidadãos de Taiwan. O presente estudo transversal fornece uma ponta de entendimento e perspectivas das pessoas sobre Democracia e Dinâmica Geopolítica em Taiwan.

1 Social Policy and Development Programme, Faculty of Social Administration, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand. E-mail: drmahesh@tu.ac.th Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7946-4160
Estrutura Teórica: Fatores geopolíticos explorados no estudo incluem Relações Transversais, Eventos Históricos, Relações Internacionais e o tema abrangente da Democracia. Estes fatores são fundamentais para moldar a posição de Taiwan no cenário global e para influenciar a sua governação democrática. O estudo fornece uma análise criteriosa de como esses fatores se cruzam e impactam o cenário político da nação.

Método de Pesquisa: A metodologia de pesquisa adotada para este estudo envolveu entrevistas aprofundadas com representantes de organizações não governamentais (ONGs) e uma discussão em grupo focal em uma universidade em Taiwan. A discussão reuniu 12 estudantes de diversas origens acadêmicas, incluindo ciência política, trabalho social, administração pública e estudos sobre deficiência, além de três professores. Esta representação diversificada assegurou um exame multifacetado do assunto.

Constatações: Ao analisar os dados, o pesquisador navegou pelas complexidades das opiniões e experiências dos participantes. Os achados qualitativos foram apresentados de forma estruturada, oferecendo aos leitores uma compreensão abrangente da interconectividade entre democracia e fatores geopolíticos em Taiwan. A pesquisadora tem se envolvido criticamente com os dados, destacando temas-chave, padrões e percepções que emergem das narrativas dos participantes.

Pesquisa implicações práticas e sociais: O artigo serve como uma reflexão e narração dos pontos de vista dos participantes, enfatizando suas perspectivas únicas sobre os desafios geopolíticos de Taiwan. Com o enfoque nos dados qualitativos, a pesquisadora busca lançar luzes sobre as intricadas dinâmicas que definem a relação de Taiwan com o contexto geopolítico mais amplo.

Originalidade/valor: O presente artigo de pesquisa baseia-se em pesquisa financiada pela Fundação Taiwan para a Democracia, aprofunda-se na intricada interação entre democracia e fatores geopolíticos em Taiwan. Realizado pelo Programa de Política Social e Desenvolvimento da Faculdade de Administração Social da Universidade Thammasat em Bangcoc, Tailândia, este estudo qualitativo se desenrola como uma exploração narrativa. O principal objetivo é desvendar as perspectivas e experiências das principais partes interessadas envolvidas na complexa teia da paisagem geopolítica de Taiwan.

Palavras-chave: Democracia, Direitos Humanos, Geopolítica, Taiwan, Relação Cruzada.
Investigación de implicaciones prácticas y sociales: El artículo sirve como reflexión y narración de los puntos de vista de los participantes, enfatizando sus perspectivas únicas sobre los desafíos geopolíticos de Taiwán. Al centrarse en los datos cualitativos, el investigador pretende arrojar luz sobre la intrincada dinámica que define la relación de Taiwán con el contexto geopolítico más amplio.

Originalidad/valor: El presente artículo de investigación se basa en una investigación financiada por la Fundación de Taiwán para la Democracia, profundiza en la intrincada interacción entre la democracia y los factores geopolíticos en Taiwán. Realizado por el Programa de Política Social y Desarrollo de la Facultad de Administración Social de la Universidad Thammasat en Bangkok, Tailandia, este estudio cualitativo se desarrolla como una exploración narrativa. El objetivo principal es desentrañar las perspectivas y experiencias de las principales partes interesadas involucradas en la compleja red del panorama geopolítico de Taiwán.

Palabras Clave: Democracia, Derechos Humanos, Geopolítica, Taiwán, Relación A Través Del Estrecho.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Taiwan has a rich and complex history, influenced by various factors such as geography, politics, and culture. Here is a brief overview of some key events and developments in the history of Taiwan, Indigenous peoples: The island of Taiwan was initially inhabited by Austronesian-speaking indigenous peoples, who have lived on the island for thousands of years. Chinese colonization: In the 17th century, Chinese settlers from Fujian and Guangdong provinces began to settle in Taiwan. This led to the development of a distinct Taiwanese identity, blending indigenous and Chinese influences. Japanese rule: From 1895 to 1945, Taiwan was ruled by Japan as a colony. During this period, Japan modernized Taiwan's infrastructure and economy and suppressed local culture and language. Chinese Nationalist rule: After World War II, Taiwan returned to Chinese Nationalist rule under the Kuomintang (KMT) government led by Chiang Kai-shek. The KMT government retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after losing the Chinese Civil War to the Communists and established a martial law regime that lasted for nearly four decades. Democratization: In the 1980s and 1990s, Taiwan underwent a process of democratization, with the lifting of martial law, the establishment of multi-party elections, and the promotion of civil liberties and human rights (Chen, 2015). According to Freedom House, "Taiwan Country Report, (2021), Fundamental to the restoration of democracy is a correct understanding of what it is. The word democracy has been applied, rightly or wrongly, to states of all types, from the “Democratic People’s Republic” of North Korea to the freest polities in Scandinavia. December 2021 joint op-ed by the Russian and Chinese ambassadors to the United States called both of their dictatorships “democratic.”
Misappropriation of the word is a testament to democracy’s widespread appeal. Yet this unfortunate practice has generated confusion, allowing opponents to simultaneously claim democratic credentials and argue that actual democracies are ineffective or hypocritical. Moreover, it has contributed to a misperception that all democracy requires is the regular performance of elections. Democracy means more than just majority rule, however. In its ideal form, it is a governing system based on the will and consent of the governed, institutions that are accountable to all citizens, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for human rights. It is a network of mutually reinforcing structures in which those exercising power are subject to checks both within and outside the state, for example, from independent courts, an independent press, and civil society. It requires an openness to alternations in power, with rival candidates or parties competing fairly to govern for the good of the public, not just themselves or those who voted for them. It creates a level playing field so that all people, no matter the circumstances of their birth or background, can enjoy the universal human rights to which they are entitled and participate in politics and governance. Democracy is also more than just an ideal. It is a practical engine of self-correction and improvement that empowers people to constantly, peacefully struggle toward that ideal. When one part of the system falters, the others can be used as tools to repair and strengthen it. This unique and inherent capacity for self-correction is what makes democracy so successful at delivering long-term stability and prosperity. No democracy in the real world is perfect, and those demanding democracy in places like Cuba and Hong Kong are not demanding perfection. What they desire are the freedoms and the institutions that will allow them to create a better life and a more just society over time.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The evolving relationship between Taiwan and China has significant implications for democracy and human rights in both countries. The study of this relationship is important because it can provide insights into the challenges and opportunities that arise when two entities with different political systems and values interact with each other. Here are some key rationales for studying Taiwan's evolving relationship with China and its implications for democracy and human rights:

1. Historical context: Taiwan has a unique history that has shaped its relationship with China. Taiwan was a colony of Japan for 50 years before being returned to China after World War II. However, in 1949, the Nationalist government fled to Taiwan after losing the Chinese Civil War to the Communists. Since then, Taiwan has maintained de facto
independence from China, but China continues to claim Taiwan as part of its territory. Studying this historical context can help us understand the political and cultural factors that have shaped Taiwan's relationship with China.

2. Economic implications: China is Taiwan's largest trading partner, and Taiwan is deeply integrated into China's supply chains. As economic ties between Taiwan and China deepen, there are concerns that Taiwan's economy could become overly dependent on China, which could limit Taiwan's ability to pursue its own economic and political interests. Studying the economic implications of Taiwan's relationship with China can help us understand how Taiwan can maintain economic growth while preserving its political and social values.

3. Human rights implications: China's human rights record is well-documented, and there are concerns that Taiwan's relationship with China could compromise Taiwan's commitment to human rights. For example, there are concerns that Taiwan could be pressured to extradite people to China, where they may face unfair trials and other human rights abuses. Studying the human rights implications of Taiwan's relationship with China can help us understand how Taiwan can balance its commitment to human rights with the economic and political pressures it faces from China.

Studying Taiwan's evolving relationship with China and its implications for democracy and human rights is important because it can provide insights into how two entities with different political systems and values can interact with each other. This can help us understand the challenges and opportunities that arise when two countries engage with each other economically, politically, and culturally, and can inform policies that promote democracy and human rights in Asia and beyond.

Taiwan is a democratic country with a strong record of promoting human rights. Several studies have explored Taiwan's path toward democracy and the challenges it faces in this area. Here are some of the most famous studies on democracy and human rights in Taiwan:

1. "Taiwan's Democratization: Forces and Factors" by Richard C. Bush (1994) This study explores the various factors that contributed to Taiwan's transition to democracy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It examines the role of civil society groups, opposition parties, and international pressure in pushing for democratization, and analyzes the challenges that arose during the process.

2. "Human Rights and Democratization in Taiwan" by Jacques deLisle (1997) This study examines Taiwan's human rights record during its democratization process, focusing on the period from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. It discusses the challenges Taiwan
faced in protecting human rights while transitioning to democracy, including issues related to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

In addition to these studies, Taiwan faces several challenges related to its relationship with China. The ongoing dispute between Taiwan and China over Taiwan's sovereignty continues to be a major obstacle to Taiwan's democratic development and human rights protections. As China increases its economic and military influence in the region, Taiwan faces mounting pressure to maintain its autonomy and democratic values. Many scholars have explored the complexities of cross-Strait relations and the impact they have on Taiwan's democracy and human rights.

3 METHODOLOGY

To justify the objectives of the study, the study opted the qualitative research design for data collection and analysis. The in-depth interview and focus group discussion were used mainly to collect the data. Focus group discussion on a technique where a researchers assemble a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perception, and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Hayward, Simpson, & Wood, 2004; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1996). One in-depth interview and one focus group discussion were conducted. The respondents of the study have informed about the objectives, methodology, confidentiality, nature of questions to be asked, voluntarism and anytime withdrawal, recordings of the responses and informed consent. The concept note, objectives and other details of the study are well translated and explained to the participants. All the necessary clearances about ethical considerations have been approved by the human research ethics committee of Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand (Project No. SSTU-EC 147/2566, Approval no. 149/2566 dated 19th December 2023). After all the iterations the final version of the consent form and checklists for in-depth interview and focus group discussion was used for actual data collection. In-depth interview and focus group discussion was recorded and further translated into English for further processing. Then the thematic analysis is used to describe and reflect on the content gathered.
4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Key factors influencing Taiwan's relationship with China in political, economic, and social dimensions:

1. Political Factor

   **Election and Political Factors:** The conversation highlights the impact of elections and political parties on Taiwan-China relations. The political orientation of different parties, such as the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), can shape cross-strait policies and influence public opinion.

   The Views on reunification and Independence in the conversation emphasizes the divisive nature of reunification or independence. **International Recognition:** The lack of Taiwan recognition by major powers highlights a political challenge. Political recognition on the global stage is crucial for Taiwan's autonomy and security. The researcher quotes and unquote.

   [Participant number 1, FGD discussion time: 5.03 to 5.14]
   ['I've heard that some young people are also worried that relatively speaking, Taiwan seems to be unsafe in life, and of course the international cross-strait relationship is at risk of war']

   **Democracy and Deliberative Democracy:** Political Engagement: The conversation touches upon the engagement of young people in politics. The level of political participation and engagement, particularly among the younger generation, can influence policy decisions and the political landscape. Deliberative Democracy: The participants suggested a desire for more deliberative democracy, where citizens actively participate in policy discussions. This reflects a growing interest in inclusive decision-making processes that involve the public in shaping policies related to social well-being. **International Relations:** International Isolation: The conversation mentions a perceived sense of international isolation. How Taiwan positions itself globally and its ability to engage with the international community are essential factors influencing its relationship with China. **Global alliance:** Taiwan's alliances with other countries influence its geopolitical standing. Countries that support or recognize Taiwan contribute to its international legitimacy, impacting the dynamics with China. The researcher quotes.

   [Participant number 6, FGD discussion time: 0.23 to 0.36]
   ['It's like when we go abroad, everybody thinks Taiwan is dangerous to visit and I don't know what you personally think of the current political tensions.']
Public Opinion and Anxiety: Public anxiety and perceptions of potential threats, such as the possibility of war, can impact the public's stance on cross-strait relations. Public opinion, shaped by media and political discourse, can influence government policies. **National Identity:** The issue of national identity, particularly how Taiwan views its relationship with China, is highlighted. The conversation suggested that the question of reunification or independence is a major point of contention, leading to divisions within Taiwanese society. **Military Concerns:** Individuals with military experience discuss concerns about the defense budget and the perceived inadequacy of military resources. There's was a focus on the practical aspects of potential war and its impact on equipment and national defense. The researcher quotes from the focus group discussion, time 8.33 to 8.45.

[Participant number 7, FGD discussion time: 8.33 to 8.45]
[I don't know for things like maybe be because of military situation probably for international tensions that will have more of an impact on people in the military]

Public Participation: The conversation touches upon the importance of public participation in policy decisions, highlighting the need for citizens to be more engaged in discussions and deliberative democracy. **One-China Policy:** Both the PRC and Taiwan claim to represent the legitimate government of China. The PRC adheres to the One-China policy, asserting that there is only one China, and Taiwan is a part of it. Taiwan, on the other hand, maintains its independence in practice but does not officially declare sovereignty. Some of the quotes form the focus group discussion which highlights on the political tensions between Taiwan and China were. In a group discussion participant number 8 explains in the following way,

[Participant number 8, FGD discussion time: 4.38 to 4.51]
[Seeking a more stable opportunity, away from war or something, then on the other hand, if they want to stay in the country, they may think that because I am in trouble today, the country is in trouble, the country is oppressed by China]

2. Economic Factors:

Trade Relations: Economic ties and trade relations play a crucial role. The economic dimension is hinted at when discussing how voters might consider their economic well-being and the country's future trajectory when choosing political parties. Economic policies and trade agreements can impact the overall relationship between Taiwan and China. Resource Allocation: The allocation of resources, specifically the defense budget, is mentioned in the
context of military tensions. Economic considerations, particularly defense spending, can influence strategic decisions and perceptions of security. **Economic Competition:** Economic competition, particularly in high-tech industries, adds another layer to their relationship. Both regions are major players in the technology sector, and competition in this domain can affect their economic ties. **Economics and Trade:** Despite political tensions, economic ties between Taiwan and China have grown significantly. Cross-strait economic interactions, trade, and investments have increased, contributing to Taiwan's economic development.

[Participant number 2, FGD discussion time: 12.48 to 1.01]
* I don’t know exactly this concept of Global War is deeply rooted in the hearts of Taiwanese people because of our understanding of the international situation, international news doesn’t know.

[Participant number 6, FGD discussion time: 1.01 to 1.06]
* It’s more money-oriented, and that's probably the most popular thing that we've been doing lately, electronics, and they're making more money, so what I'm just thinking about is.

**Job Opportunities:** Economic challenges such as job scarcity and inflation are mentioned as factors influencing the younger generation. Economic stability and opportunities impact the choices and perspectives of the people. From the focus group discussion, it was revealed that most of the young people will try to move and migrate from Taiwan to more safer country due to the Political Economical situation. In the discussion participant Number 1 has expressed the views as follows.

[Participant number 1, FGD discussion time: 2.03 to 2.07]
* Go to a foreign country, go to visit, go to research and then, gradually, follow the development of other countries. Probably after graduation, you will be able to get a job. Then, get a different visa.

3. Social Factors:

**Generational Divides:** The conversation touches upon generational differences in political preferences. Younger generations may have different attitudes and preferences compared to older generations. Understanding these generational dynamics is crucial for shaping political discourse and policy choices. **Social Stability:** The perception of Taiwan as a safe place to live is discussed as a social factor. The sense of safety and stability within the country influences people's decisions regarding their future. **Cultural Exchange:** Cultural and people-to-people exchanges can foster understanding and goodwill. These exchanges can have
a positive impact on the overall relationship, helping to bridge differences and build trust. Some participants also thought that few cultural exchanges might bring peaceful solutions, like participant number 4 said.

[Participant number 1, FGD discussion time: 1.27 to 1.36]
[the overall situation in Taiwan is the political, economic, cultural, and social situation, we need more cultural exchange, that might could help.]

These factors demonstrate the multifaceted nature of Taiwan's relationship with China, encompassing political, economic, and social dimensions. The perspectives shared by the speakers underscore the complexities of generational dynamics and the evolving socio-political landscape in Taiwan.

Role of international actors, such as the United States and other countries, in influencing Taiwan's relationship with China and its implications for democracy and human rights.

Analyzing the role of international actors in the context of Taiwan-China relations involved considering various factors, including diplomatic recognition, economic ties, and geopolitical dynamics in the focused group discussion. The key points discussed were as follows.

**Diplomatic Recognition:** The diplomatic recognition of Taiwan is a contentious issue. Most of the countries officially recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) over Taiwan. The influence of major powers, particularly the United States, in supporting or withholding diplomatic recognition affects Taiwan's international standing. **Economic Relations:** Economic ties, including trade and investment, play a crucial role in shaping international relations. The economic strength of Taiwan and its ability to engage in global trade partnerships impact its position in the international community. **Geopolitical Dynamics:** Taiwan's geopolitical location in East Asia adds complexity to its relations with China and the rest of the world. It is influenced by regional power struggles and alliances. **Security Considerations:** The security environment in the Asia-Pacific region, especially the Taiwan Strait, is a significant factor. The United States has historically played a role in maintaining stability and security in the region, and any changes in this role can impact Taiwan. **Democracy and Human Rights:** International actors often express concerns about democracy and human rights in Taiwan. Support for Taiwan's democratic system and human rights practices can enhance its global image and legitimacy. **Global Public Opinion:** Public opinion and awareness about Taiwan's situation on the global stage can influence the policies of international actors. Public support for Taiwan may lead to increased diplomatic and political backing. **Multilateral**
Organizations: Taiwan's participation in international organizations is limited due to objections from China. Efforts by international actors to advocate for Taiwan's inclusion in relevant forums and organizations can impact its global influence. Security Alliances: Taiwan's security is closely linked to its relationships with countries that have security alliances in the region, such as the United States. The strength and commitments of these alliances can influence Taiwan's security posture. In the Focused Group Discussion various aspects related to Taiwan, including its political mobilization, participation in international affairs, isolation by China, engagement with the United Nations, NGO development, social enterprises, and challenges faced by the third sector were discussed. The interview touches upon Taiwan's unique position, its proactive stance in international matters, and the evolving role of NGOs and social enterprises in the country. The participants pointed out Taiwan's isolation by China and emphasizes Taiwan's proactive efforts to participate in international conventions, showcasing a progressive spirit. The conversation delves into the development of NGOs in Taiwan, noting their growth but highlighting challenges due to the lack of legal support and a mature environment for social enterprises. In the latter part of the conversation explore the dynamics of NGOs in Taiwan, their challenges in a developing legal environment, and the role of government and corporate support. It also touches upon the society, where big institutions receive more resources compared to smaller ones. The discussion concludes with an exploration of Taiwan's democratic model, its comparison with neighboring countries, and the potential role of NGOs in influencing social policies at national and international levels. The interplay of these factors shapes the international context for Taiwan and affects its ability to maintain its democratic system and protect human rights. Analyses considered the broader geopolitical landscape and strategic interests as a key international factor.

5 CONCLUSION

The relationship between Taiwan and China spans political, economic, and social dimensions, presenting a complex tapestry of interactions and challenges. In the political sphere, divergent views on reunification versus independence, coupled with international recognition issues, shape Taiwan's autonomy and security concerns. Economic ties are robust, yet competition and resource allocation debates add layers of complexity. Socially, generational divides and cultural exchanges influence public sentiment and policy discourse. The impact of these dynamics on Taiwan's democracy and human rights is profound. Geopolitical concerns affect daily life and political mobilization, while historical events shape the trajectory of
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democratic development. Despite challenges, Taiwan's proactive engagement in international affairs and civil society empowerment underscore its commitment to democratic values. To navigate these challenges, international support is essential. Diplomatic backing, economic engagement, and security cooperation can strengthen Taiwan's resilience and promote regional stability. Advocating for human rights and multilateral engagement can amplify Taiwan's voice on the global stage. In essence, the multifaceted nature of Taiwan-China relations requires nuanced approaches and collaborative efforts. By prioritizing democracy, human rights, and diplomatic engagement, stakeholders can foster a more stable and prosperous future for Taiwan while safeguarding its democratic principles amidst external pressures.

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