



An Overview of India-Taiwan Relations: Why Taiwan Matters?

Speaker: Dr. Fang Tien-sze, Visiting Fellow, Observer Research Foundation

Chair: Prof. Alka Acharya, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies

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Fang Tien-sze introduced his topic by emphasising Taiwan's geographical proximity to India while at the same time, pointing out how it is the psychological factor that makes the two countries seem distant. Having lived in India and interacted with the Indian populace for quite some time, his view is that there is a very limited understanding between the two nations. He identified four important years that served to demarcate India-Taiwan relations into four broad periods, namely the pre-1949 era; the year 1949; the year 1995; and finally the present i.e. the year 2015.

The speaker sought to remind the audience about how India and Taiwan had friendly relations until as late as 1949. He cited the instance of Chiang Kai-shek's visit to India in 1942 to carry out discussions with the Indian leaders for the future of India as well as of Asia. He recalled Chiang Kai-shek's 'very good relations' with the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. He had been one of the first to support Indian independence and had even sent an ambassador to India in 1947, who happened to be the first and the last. The speaker pointed out the irony about how while Taiwan supported India's independence at the cost of its relations with the British, it did not receive similar treatment from India. The speaker labelled Taiwan as a victim as India supported the PRC in 1949, by going against Taiwan's interests and thereby, straining the relationship between the two. Even during the Cold War, the relationship continued to remain bitter. It was only in 1991 that as India launched the Look-East policy, that it rediscovered Taiwan. The speaker remarked that the year 1995 marked the year of reconnection between the two nations as both of them set up offices in each other's capital cities. However, until date, India continues to follow one-China policy, which constrains their relationship. What remains a big question is India's say on Taiwan's membership in the MRCEP (2014), given its one China policy remaining unaltered. The speaker called upon India to consider pursuing its own interests instead of getting influenced by third parties.

Highlighting shared concerns and interests, the speaker went on to speak about the traditional and non-traditional security issues in India-Taiwan relations. He argued that China is a common threat to both India and Taiwan under the rubric of traditional security threat. He quoted a few Indian leaders who directly or indirectly referred to China as a threat to India. He sought to qualify his argument by giving the example of how more than 1100 missiles of China are targeted at Taiwan despite improvement in China-Taiwan relations. In this context, he suggested military security cooperation between the two countries. He further stated that

India-Pakistan relationship is similar to that of Taiwan-China relationships, referring to Pakistan and China as threats and India and Taiwan being their respective targets. This proves both countries have mutual concerns and India and Taiwan can share their experiences and concerns to deal with such security issues. The speaker made an interesting point by saying that India and Taiwan share a certain 'DNA' factor, which makes Taiwan know China better than any other country in the world, as is the case with India and Pakistan. They share a past, a history that is very valuable for understanding each other better. Hence, Taiwan can cooperate with India and help it gain a better insight into Chinese strategies. Additionally, Taiwan could help in teaching Indian students Mandarin Chinese. The two countries can also exchange intelligence information. Taiwan is also a potential hub for India-China studies. Lastly, the speaker suggested that India should also consider sending a military attaché to Taipei.

The speaker then elaborated on the non-traditional securities, which were further categorised into economic, cultural and educational securities.. Within the economic arena, the speaker highlighted how Taiwan's IT sector with brands like Asus, Acer, HTC and Foxconn has made its presence felt in the Indian market. Some IT companies including Foxconn have even formed alliances with Indian companies to invest in India. However, the speaker pointed out that the amount of investments is still low as compared to the Taiwanese investments in Cambodia or Vietnam, thereby leaving open a wider scope for further enhancements in the domain of investments. Likewise, the speaker further noted that India's agricultural sector can derive benefits from Taiwan's highly developed food processing sector. Taiwan has the technology and India has surplus raw materials. This import-export can, hence, be mutually beneficial. The speaker proposed the example of extensive bamboo cultivation in India which can be exported to Taiwan to produce bamboo charcoal. In this way, according to the speaker, Taiwan can help in bringing economic security to the people of India.

The speaker then apprised the audience about his views on the cultural security shared by India and Taiwan. He began by highlighting the cultural similarities between the two countries. As distinct from Western culture, both India and Taiwan lay emphasis on strong family-ties. In addition, most of the people in Taiwan are Buddhists while most Indians are Hindus, bringing them closer in terms of religion. The speaker further underlined that both the countries are soft economies that are based on the principle of a free democracy with a strong civil society. The Taiwanese are also attracted to Indian culture and traditions. The Asian Indian Festival is being organised in Taiwan over the past eleven years. Indian movies, Yoga and Indian food are also very popular in Taiwan. In an effort to welcome Indians to visit their nation, the government of Taiwan has simplified the norms for Indian citizens to visit and stay in Taiwan. Since February 2010, it has made it non-mandatory for a citizen of India to have a visa to Taiwan, given that the person holds a visa to other countries like UK, USA, Japan, Canada etc. for a period of 30 days.

Regarding the shared concerns in the education sector, the speaker pointed out the complementarity in higher education in both nations. While in India, the number of students going for higher education is more than the number of educational institutes, in Taiwan, the number of educational institutes offering higher education is more than the number of

students opting for higher education. This mismatch in both the countries could be balanced by sending more Indian students to Taiwan for higher studies. For this purpose, Taiwan also provides scholarships to Indian students in various educational domains. The speaker revealed that many Indian students study in Taiwan, though the majority deal with natural sciences and not social sciences. He concluded his presentation by emphasizing that both India and Taiwan share mutual concerns and interests and in view of the growing importance of India in Taiwan's policy-making, a healthy partnership between India and Taiwan is certainly possible. However, this will not happen automatically and joint efforts are required from both ends. A strong support is needed from both Indian and Taiwanese governments. He also believes that India needs to review its foreign policy and rethink its support for the 'one China policy'. He summed up by expanding on the acronym of TAIWAN – Taiwan and India Will Ally Naturally.

Discussion

The discussion involved a host of interesting questions covering the various aspects of the presentation. A pertinent question on Taiwan and the India-China boundary dispute was raised – what would the KMT's policy be if it were still in power in mainland China instead of the CPC? This question was asked in the context of the fact that Taiwan's take on Tibet has been consistent with that of Beijing. The speaker responded by saying that Taiwan has always kept itself aloof from India-China border issues and hopes that the border issues are resolved peacefully. On the view of Taiwan on Tibet, the speaker mentioned that the Taiwanese are sympathetic to the Tibetans and have respect for Dalai Lama. This was followed by questions about the scope and areas of cooperation between India and Taiwan. According to the speaker, Taiwanese companies have recruited many Indian students, mainly in the field of technology and natural sciences and that there is a huge scope for further improvement. A few questions also revolved around the issue of 'one China policy'. The speaker replied by saying that Taiwan's 'one China policy' is different from that of Beijing's and that both relate to separate political identities.

Another interesting query related to the Taiwanese perspective on the political agenda of China with respect to Asia in the coming decade. The speaker responded by saying that China will become more and more nationalist and assertive and that China strives to become a great power. A few members of the audience were interested in knowing the causes behind the regression of the Taiwanese scholarship policy for Indian students. The final set of questions pertained to the assertiveness of the PRC and America's take on China-Taiwan affairs. The speaker answered by saying that without resistance from other countries, China can go on asserting as far as it wishes. He said that USA prefers the present situation between China and Taiwan to pursue its personal interests.

Report prepared by Ms. Sukanya Roy, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.

About the Speaker

Dr. Fang Tien-sze is currently a Visiting Fellow at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, and Assistant Professor at the Center for General Education, National Tsing Hua

University, Taiwan. He received his Ph.D. degree from the Department of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE), UK. He worked as Officer in the Department of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan, during 1996-1998, Assist Research Fellow at Prospect Foundation in Taiwan (2004-2005), and Assistant Director, Science and Technology Division, Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in India (Taiwan's representative office in India) from 2005 to 2011. He is the author of *Asymmetrical Threat Perceptions in India–China Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2014). His recent research interests include China-India relations, Taiwan-India relations and cultural diplomacy policy.

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