

Quiet Diplomacy and Strategic Interests: India–Taiwan Engagement under Modi 3.0

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Abstract

For the last 10 years, India–Taiwan relations have expanded, with significant cooperation in trade, cultural exchanges, and strategic planning, all occurring without official recognition because of India’s commitment to the One-China Policy. The rise of tensions in the Indo-Pacific and increasing global concerns about China’s actions has highlighted a renewed strategic significance for India–Taiwan ties under Modi 3.0. This article focuses on how these ties fit within the pragmatic and carefully calibrated foreign policy approach of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It examines the quiet diplomatic mechanisms that sustain cooperation in trade, technology, education, and health, while also assessing India’s cautious handling of Taiwan’s international standing and the frictions across the Taiwan Strait. This article argues that although India does not publicly align itself with Taiwan politically, it leverages the relationship to diversify international partnerships and reinforce regional security. By analysing key developments, treaties, and shared initiatives, the study demonstrates that India’s engagement with Taiwan under Modi 3.0 reflects a broader policy of self-reliance, economic diversification, and calibrated messaging to China. Ultimately, it indicates that India’s approach to Taiwan represents a delicate balance: discreet yet increasingly consequential.

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Introduction

India–Taiwan ties under Modi 3.0 are marked by a phase of hidden yet strategic interactions that are motivated by realism and upheld by multi-alignment and strategic autonomy. While official recognition of Taiwan is not extended by India, it has consistently progressed relations in the important fields of trade, technology, education, and healthcare. Such a gradual strategy demonstrates a larger strategic objective of New Delhi's international relations. India hopes to broaden its international partnerships while modulating its reliance on any one country, all without openly contesting the larger geopolitical setting.¹

The increasing significance of Taiwan in semiconductor supply chains and India's efforts to strengthen its manufacturing and digital sectors have naturally formed strong complementary interests. India conceptualises its partnership with Taiwan as an element of its development in technology and the economy, rather than as an act against China.² It is important to mention that after 2010, India's official statements dropped the customary mentions of the One-China Policy, reflecting a careful evolution without reducing cooperation. Parallel to this, India has attended multilateral dialogues involving Taiwan on a steady but inconspicuous basis, for example, the Yushan Forum.³

This article evaluates how the Modi government's quiet strategy with Taiwan is part of an enduring policy designed to protect national goals, grow India's impact in the region, and manage competition between major powers peacefully.

Historical Roots and Strategic Shifts in India–Taiwan Relations

India–Taiwan relations have a deeper foundation than is often understood, given that contacts between leaders from India and the Kuomintang (KMT) took place well before either country became independent. In the early decades of the 20th Century, All India Congress Committee (AICC) members, known as Indian nationalists, showed solidarity with China's nationalists. Such solidarity became clear when the AICC resolved to condemn the British recruitment of Indian soldiers for action against Chinese revolutionaries in 1925.⁴ In 1927, Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru expressed support for the Chinese struggle against imperialism during the Brussels Congress of Oppressed Peoples. Nehru, in

particular, advocated solidarity between Asian nations striving for freedom, including China. These historical linkages formed the bedrock of India's early interactions with the KMT leadership, which later governed Taiwan. Although formal diplomatic ties were never established due to India's recognition of the One-China Policy, these early expressions of Asian unity continue to influence the evolving dynamics of India–Taiwan relations in the 21st Century.

The course of India–Taiwan relations changed significantly in 1942 with the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek and his wife in India during World War II. The Chinese leaders encountered Indian representatives for the first time when they met Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru's words on All India Radio served to reinforce the harmony between India and China.⁶

Once India gained independence in 1947 and the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949, India chose to recognise the People's Republic of China (PRC) and moved away from the Republic of China in Taiwan. Nehru's decision received criticism from the KMT, which charged him with appeasing the Chinese Communists.

Until the 1990s, interaction was limited, India initiated its 'Look East Policy' during the period to enhance economic cooperation with countries in East and Southeast Asia.⁸ Although, Taiwan was not explicitly mentioned in the policy, it laid the foundation for subsequent unofficial cooperation.

Since the 1990s, India–Taiwan relations have developed progressively through non-formal relations reflective of functional cooperation. The start of India's Look East Policy in 1991 made it easier for Taiwan and India to increase their cooperation. Consequently, offices of representation were opened in 1995. By creating the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in New Delhi and in order to enhance regional engagement, Taiwan established offices in Chennai in 2012, and later in Mumbai in 2024.⁹

Although the Act East Policy was launched in 2014 under Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, Taiwan is not explicitly mentioned in official policy statements. Due to India's continued adherence to the One-China Policy, Taiwan is treated as a non-political partner, with engagement limited to trade, tourism, education, and cultural exchanges.

Strengthening India–Taiwan Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific: A Modi-Era Perspective

The India–Taiwan relationship has quietly advanced, especially since PM Modi took office and emphasised independence, multi-partnerships, and regional cooperation. Since New Delhi set up unofficial ties with Taiwan in 1995 and affirmed the One-China Policy, the two sides have grown their cooperation in economics, culture, education, and technology. New Delhi's approach reflects pragmatic pursuit of its interests while remaining consistent with its core diplomatic stance.¹¹

The evolution of ties between India and Taiwan has been significantly strengthened by Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP), launched in 2016 to diversify its partnerships and reduce overdependence on China. The NSP fits naturally with PM Modi's Indo-Pacific vision, which was presented at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, as well as with India's Act East Policy.¹² The synergies between these frameworks have encouraged deeper engagement in a range of sectors. There has been strong growth in bilateral trade, so that India stands as one of Taiwan's principal trade partners in Asia, with significant Taiwanese investment in the Indian electronics, manufacturing, and technology sectors. More than 200 Taiwanese enterprises now do business in India, a sign that they trust the investment environment there.¹³

Major economic and technological initiatives have been driving the strengthening of relations. Taiwanese investors have increased their presence in India's electronics and high-tech manufacturing sectors because of PM Modi's 'Make in India' campaign. Operating under PM Modi's initiative, Foxconn and other major firms have increased their business in India, helping growth in local manufacturing, job creation, and advancements in industry. In recent years, two-way trade between India and Taiwan has crossed USD 10 bn, placing India in the category of Taiwan's key Indo-Pacific trading partners.¹⁴ The economic relationship is in harmony with Taipei's NSP, which seeks to expand links outside China.

There has been a marked strengthening in technological cooperation since the signing of the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Science and Technology. More than 130 collaborative projects have been undertaken together in biotechnology, renewable energy, disaster management, and digital

infrastructure sectors.¹⁵ Agreements on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the internet of things are expanding the partnership into technology's cutting edge. The ongoing developments in the bilateral partnership correspond to Modi's initiative for homegrown innovation and a digital society.¹⁶

Taiwan and India's strategic partnership receives added value through ongoing education and cultural activities. More than 3,000 Indian students, enrolled in universities in Taiwan, fully participate in and benefit from these academic exchanges and research programs. Several Taiwan Education Centres have been launched by Taiwan in Indian universities in order to encourage Mandarin education and to deepen cultural ties. In answer to these initiatives, Indian universities have established their exchange programs and research collaborations.¹⁷ Matters such as film festivals, performing arts exchanges, and cultural symposiums have added to strengthening the people-to-people dimension – a major highlight of Modi's foreign policy objectives.

From a political and strategic viewpoint, India has been deepening its unofficial contacts with Taiwan.¹⁸ At the Yushan Forum in Taipei in 2023, Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Sujeet Kumar proposed linking Taiwan's NSP with India's Act East and Security and Growth for All in the Region strategies. Moreover, he spoke in favour of a free trade agreement, mentioning India's intention to create a reliable supply chain for semiconductors and to strengthen trade relations with Taiwan's technological sector.¹⁹

Track-II diplomacy has expanded. In 2023, Admiral Karambir Singh, General MM Naravane, and Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria were present at Taiwan's Ketagalan Forum on Indo-Pacific Security as former Indian service chiefs.²⁰ That the retired chiefs came without diplomatic credentials still indicated India's growing worries about China's actions in the Taiwan Strait and its support for partnerships with like-minded nations.²¹

An important turning point was the 2023 signing of a labour cooperation MoU, designed to respond to skilled manpower needs and support the exchange of skills.²² The cooperative cybersecurity workshop held by India, Taiwan, and the United States (US) under the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) is evidence of deepening strategic convergence.²³

Social media has recently become an important platform for building informal diplomatic ties between India and Taiwan. There was notable progress when PM Modi became the first Indian leader to send his condolences through X (earlier known as Twitter) after the 2024 Taiwan earthquake. The gesture was generally considered symbolic proof of solidarity, suggesting an important advance in the expanding relationship between the two democratic nations.²⁴

Leader-led communications on social media highlighted the growing closeness. After PM Modi was re-elected on 05 Jun 2024, Taiwan's Vice President Lai Ching-te extended his greetings. In response, PM Modi emphasised the shared goal of expanding partnership across the Indo-Pacific. These exchanges drew significant public attention and signalled India's gradual shift from its traditional caution on Taiwan.²⁵

Beijing's objections to these activities made clear the geopolitical importance attached to such exchanges. Even so, the rising participation of Indian leaders, experts, and citizens on digital media seems to reflect a growing understanding of Taiwan's strategic significance.²⁶ The use of social media for soft power initiatives is expanding with more significance for India–Taiwan interactions.

India, Taiwan, and the Cross-Strait Conundrum: Strategic Caution amid Geopolitical Uncertainty

Taiwan's sovereignty question is one of the most explosive issues in the geopolitics of East Asia, and its magnitude stems from ongoing tensions between Beijing and Taipei. For the PRC, Taiwan forms an integral part of its territory, and it advocates for unification under the 'One Country, Two Systems' plan. Consequently, the system would only offer minimal self-governance, but would insist that Taiwan permanently abandon full sovereignty. This 2005 law represented Taiwan's formal independence, and consequently institutionalised the probability of a military conflict.²⁷

Against this backdrop, India's gradual shift in its approach toward Taiwan is attracting increased scholarly attention. The common belief that India would side with Taiwan during tensions with China oversimplifies the complexities of its foreign policy. Scholars like C Raja Mohan²⁸ and Harsh V Pant and Yogesh

Joshi²⁹ argue that India's unease with China's assertiveness might foster stronger India–Taiwan ties as a counterbalance to Beijing. Nevertheless, India's diplomatic actions remain largely measured and deliberate, reflective of its nuclear power status.

After 2010, India has avoided publicly affirming the One-China Policy, and this is generally viewed as the result of intentionally unclear practices. This response is not to back Taiwanese independence, but to maintain tactical flexibility in its dealings with China, especially over disputes along the Line of Actual Control.³⁰ Therefore, India's Taiwan policy centres on the ideal of preserving strategic agility.

India's connection with Taiwan should not be seen merely in terms of its dispute with China. In formulating its Taiwan policy, New Delhi is guided by objectives beyond its China-related strategy, including safeguarding supply chains, supporting regional order, and expanding economic ties. Because the global supply chain depends so heavily on Taiwan's semiconductor industry and advanced manufacturing, any instability in the Taiwan Strait could seriously undermine India's own technological and industrial development plans.³¹ According to PM Modi's 2023 Independence Day address, India's goal to become the third-largest global economy in five years is closely linked to its reliable participation in the Indo-Pacific.³²

India continues to view a US-China confrontation over Taiwan with considerable concern. Such a conflict has the potential to destabilise all of Asia, compelling India to make tough long-term choices. As a result, India has engaged with both the US and China quietly on the diplomatic front to promote moderation. Avoiding involvement in a regional crisis likely to disrupt the regional order and jeopardise India's growth is the country's foremost aim.³³

Taiwan's evolution from a regional East Asian issue to a pivotal factor in global power dynamics has made it central to Indo-Pacific trajectories. A crisis in the Taiwan Strait would have repercussions far beyond Asia, potentially destabilising the global order. For India, silence does not imply indifference; it reflects a calculated effort to protect its diverse interests. As India's influence in the Indo-Pacific grows, it must engage proactively rather than remain a passive observer. Strategic involvement, based on foresight and balanced action, is essential to navigate this uncertainty.³⁴

At the same time, New Delhi's approach must balance pragmatism with principle. Taiwan represents not only a geostrategic challenge but also a partner in areas like education, healthcare, technology transfer, and democratic governance. Quiet collaboration between Indian and Taiwanese universities, start-ups, and cultural institutions already demonstrates how cooperation can thrive without provoking open hostility from Beijing. Moreover, India's Act East Policy, which stresses connectivity and integration with East and Southeast Asia, implicitly benefits from stable ties with Taipei. The deepening of people-to-people exchanges, visa relaxations for skilled workers, and participation in multilateral forums—even without official diplomatic recognition—could all serve India's interests. Ultimately, India's Taiwan calculus reflects its larger ambition: to emerge as a responsible stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific, capable of shaping outcomes rather than merely reacting to them.

Conclusion

During Modi 3.0, India–Taiwan cooperation has generated major achievements—deeper economic ties, greater technological cooperation, and broader educational and cultural interactions—all through understated diplomacy. Engagement in forums and secret dialogues has made it possible for India to boost engagement with Taiwan without violating its One-China Policy. For future development, India should prioritise the creation of a structured semiconductor industry cooperation, negotiate a limited Free Trade Agreement, and expand trilateral forums such as GCTF. Supporting academic, defence, and policy exchanges will contribute to the future strengthening of this productive partnership. Through ongoing and well-judged interactions with Taiwan, India will be able to reinforce its access to crucial supply chains, balance growing regional risks, and develop its role in the Indo-Pacific.

Looking ahead, the prospects of India–Taiwan relations extend beyond economic and strategic calculations. Taiwan's expertise in advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, and public health can complement India's developmental agenda under initiatives such as 'Make in India' and 'Digital India'.³⁵ Similarly, India's large consumer base, skilled workforce, and emerging start-up ecosystem offer Taiwanese businesses new opportunities for diversification beyond the mainland Chinese market. Strengthening

linkages in education through student exchanges, collaborative research, and language programs can foster long-term trust and understanding between societies.³⁶ Cultural diplomacy, including tourism promotion and heritage linkages, can further add depth to the relationship. Moreover, cooperation in cybersecurity, AI, and maritime security holds untapped potential, given the shared concerns both partners face in the evolving Indo-Pacific environment.³⁷ For India, engaging Taiwan with foresight ensures that the partnership grows in a manner that is sustainable, mutually beneficial, and consistent with its broader vision of a stable and inclusive regional order”.^{38,39}

Endnotes

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