

Taiwan Trap: New Stories Needed Rethinking Taiwan and China Futures

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Abstract

This article takes a futures approach to the Taiwan/China relationship. It (1) explains the background and the competing international relations theories of the unique relationship between Taiwan and China, and (2) articulates four scenarios for the futures of Taiwan/China.

Keywords: Scenarios, Causal Layered Analysis, International Relations, China, Taiwan

Introduction

US President-elect Donald Trump's brief phone call with Taiwan¹ president Tsai Ing-wen has created an industry of fresh speculation about Taiwan's status: is it an internationally recognised independent nation, a part of 'One China', merely a bargaining chip for trade negotiations between the United States and China, or is it a strictly internal matter (The Economist, 2016)? Tsai Ing-wen has repeatedly called for a disruption to the dominant view that China and Taiwan are bound by eventual unification and has advocated for a new model, "with a new mindset and a new way of doing things" to create "goodwill, and engage in a genuine dialogue and negotiation with Beijing, to create a benign and mutually beneficial economic partnership" (Hsu, 2017, n.p.). The reaction from China has been to specify more conditions under which it would invade Taiwan (Chung, 2017).

A person's deep-rooted beliefs about how they see the future, especially if it is bounded by a particular theory, in this case international relations (IR) theory, can be problematic in that the arguments tend to become absolutist, grounded in who is 'right' or 'wrong', consequently marginalising alternative options. International relations are closely tied to cultural identity, and in the case of Taiwan and China, there is an existential struggle about how 'Chinese' Taiwan is, which extends to very real political and security-related consequences. This paper steps away from the dominant IR theories of Taiwan/China futures and applies a futures approach to create alternative desirable and plausible visions for the future for Taiwan. Futures studies offers a way to decolonise images of a dominant future; to bring alternative voices into a discussion which can then open new possibilities and provide alternative solutions.

The shifting power dynamics and deepening economic integration resulting from China's 'rise' and the west's (particularly the United States') 'decline' is at the heart of how one sees the future of the world order. The Taiwan Strait is considered to be one of the most dangerous flashpoints in international politics, leading one prominent U.S. expert on Asia to refer to Taiwan as, "the only issue in the world today that could realistically lead to war between two major powers." (Kastner, Winter 2015/16, p.54). Re-enforcing this assertion, many Chinese strategists now declare Taiwan a "problem", and a large enough military threat to justify routinely practising joint air-sea invasions of the island (Keck, 2015; Scobell, 2006, p.28).

Previous work explored the challenges for organizational futurists in integrating foresight into organizations (Hines & Gold, 2014). One reason it has been difficult to integrate foresight is that "futurists have a hard time defining success" (Hines, 2003b, p.35). Given that futurists have a hard time defining success, their clients are either left to define it for them or it is left vague. Of course, it is not easy to define and there is not a single right answer. Context is important—it's been suggested that foresight cannot be fully evaluated independently from its context (Georghiou, 2006; Waehrens, 2010).

The previous work noted four specific challenges or barriers to integrating foresight that confront the organizational futurist: (1) foresight competes for attention (2) foresight is perceived as threatening (3) foresight is viewed as intangible and (4) foresight capacity is lacking. The proposed Foresight Outcomes Framework is not a panacea for resolving all these barriers, but it can bring some clarity to what can be expected from foresight in terms of outcomes, as well as helping to address each of the barriers. If it is not clear what foresight can deliver, for example, it is less likely to prevail for attention in competition with projects that can produce recognized results. It can lessen the perceived threat of foresight in clarifying what it can and cannot deliver. It brings greater tangibility to foresight work in not only suggesting broad outcomes, but linking those broad outcomes to specific project-level deliverables. Finally, it suggests the capacities the organization will need to cultivate and develop in order to achieve better outcomes.

The Foresight Outcomes Framework could be used to generally discuss outcomes at the project level, but it is not primarily intended for the detailed evaluation of individual projects. As van der Steen and van Twist (2012) point out, potential project evaluation criteria such as impact and use or adoption are problematic and depend on many factors—readers seeking such a framework are advised to see their excellent work on that topic. It could also be used for similar discussions within the foresight field—it could help the field build a more consistent discourse on successful outcomes, which in turn could inform and benefit future futurists.

The question of Taiwan's future sovereignty is ever present when considering this rising security competition and the increasing risk of conflict between China and the United States, or China and one of its ASEAN neighbours. China has used its rising military power to back up its claims to sovereignty over territory held by Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines in the East China Sea. China has also, quite astonishingly, constructed artificial islands in the Spratly archipelago of the South China Sea, making many of its neighbours question the positive image of the "Chinese Path" of economic development (Pickrell, 2015; UN, 2016). Indeed, some of China's neighbours believe that China's growing economic influence is being used to bully and coerce them (Glosserman, 2016; Harris, 2016). There is further shifting in the region, with the Philippine government – a long-standing US ally – declaring its "separation" from Washington during a visit to China. The Philippines' President, Rodrigo Duterte, received a boost from China for his war on drugs and terrorism in the form of a US\$14 million gift of small arms and fast boats, in addition to a US\$500 million long-term loan for other equipment (Reuters, 2016). Malaysia, too, has signed 14 memoranda of understanding with China worth US\$34.4 billion, including for the purchase of four combat vessels – a first from Malaysia, which traditionally acquires its military hardware from the U.S., Russia and European countries (Japan Times, 2016).

Taiwan and China have engaged in sporadic military conflict since the 1950s, these skirmishes only ending in 1979 when the US dropped its diplomatic relationship with Taiwan in favour of China. But the use of military threats had not completely disappeared by 2005, when the Chinese adopted the Anti-Secession Law, which formalised the conditions under which China would attack Taiwan:

1. “Taiwan independence” forces secede from China in any name
2. A major incident occurs, which would lead to Taiwan’s secession from China, or
3. If all possibility of a peaceful reunification is lost (Hu, 2005).

One issue for international relations theorists for the ongoing stability and health of the Cross-Straits relationship is the tacit “1992 Consensus” or “one China” policy, which states that “there is only one China, but with differing interpretations, allowing both Beijing and Taipei to agree that Taiwan belongs to China, while the two still disagree on which is China’s legitimate governing body” (Albert, 2016, n.p.). It is often taken as a ‘given’ among pundits and policy makers that Taiwan is a part of China, whether historically or culturally. The election of Tsai Ing-wen of the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as president of Taiwan was a historic moment for the island, and a powerful symbol of change to the future relationship between Taiwan and China. Notwithstanding Trump’s recent questioning of “why we have to be bound by a ‘one China’ policy” (Fortune, 2016), the “one China” pillar of the current status quo is being reframed and questioned within Taiwan as a result of the recent presidential election, as there are different interpretations of what that “status quo” means.

Former President Ma Ying-jeou, of the Kuomintang (KMT), the political party that accepts the one China principle, said that the “status quo” concept is maintained by upholding the 1992 Consensus, and further believes that “Taiwan independence” is not allowed by the constitution (Chen & Lu, 2015). When President Ma (KMT) sought rapprochement through closer economic ties with China, many in Taiwan believed that economic agreements, such as the Cross Strait Service Trade Pact and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), would make Taiwan economically dependent on China (Yeh, 2014). The opacity by which these agreements were being negotiated ultimately only brought, “social protests, a student occupation of the legislature and the demise of an economic agreement with China that was intended to be the keystone policy of [Ma’s] second and final term” (Sullivan, 2015, n.p.).

President Tsai does not recognise the 1992 Consensus. Indeed, former KMT Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi said in 2006 that he had “made up” the term in 2000 (Hsu, 2017). The “status quo” is interpreted by President Tsai as, “the right for the twenty-three million people in Taiwan to choose and determine their own future” (Chen & Lu, 2015) and to “ensure that no provocations or accidents take place” with China (Tsai, 2016). President Tsai has further made it clear that, “Our democratic system, national identity, and international space must be respected. Any forms of suppression will harm the stability of cross-strait relations” (Tsai, 2016).

But this raises the question of how long the “status quo” can last as business as usual in Taiwan/China relations. Taiwan’s unique position as a non-recognised yet democratic state that is systematically left out of critical global decision making forums that affect its future points to a serious design flaw in the system itself, as well as with the legacy worldviews and myths that perpetuate Taiwan’s condition. Rising Taiwanese identity will continue to complicate the relationship between China and Taiwan. This outlook is captured by O’Brien (2016, n.p.):

What is very clear from conversations with a range of Taiwan’s citizens is that there is no interest whatsoever in reuniting with the mainland. Taiwan is developing into a mature democracy. Its people view themselves as part of the liberal international economic or-

der and as part of what we used to called the 'free world'. They see Japan, South Korea, America, Singapore and Europe as their friends and peers – not China[...] There is no possibility such a dynamic people will ever willingly throw in with the Chinese Communist Party.

Given China's recent military provocations, the guarantee of a peaceful rise of China can also be called into question. Within international relations, there is a variety of competing theoretical perspectives on the rise of China, and its relationship with the United States in particular, but also with its regional neighbours including Taiwan (Hoffman, 2014). While IR theories might contest the inviolability of their assumptions and epistemologies, knowing well that none is definitively 'right' or 'wrong', there are certain design constraints motivating these theories that have limited their potential.

According to Polak (1973), the future must not only be perceived, it must also be shaped. And the futures of a country are not uniquely shaped by the decisions of political or business elites, or even IR theorists, but by the way in which individuals see the world and thus create the world they want to see (Hoffman, 2014; Inayatullah, 2002). The perspective and language of IR policy makers, researchers and academics preclude other ways of thinking and knowing, providing mechanistic and constrained assumptions which limit emancipatory and aspirational narratives. This article will develop four scenarios of Taiwan/China futures using the Manoa method of four generic images which all have equal probability of happening (Dator, 2009, p.8-10). These images are: (1) Continued growth: the 'official' version of the future in which the task of government is to build a vibrant economy; (2) Collapse: the concern that the economy cannot grow without consequences and that the environment may collapse as a result. There could also be a collapse in resources, morals, ideology, or a failure of will or imagination. Collapse could also come from the outside by invasion by a foreign power; (3) Discipline: when people find that "continued economic growth is undesirable or unsustainable", they will discipline their lives around natural, spiritual, religious, political, or cultural values rather than material pursuits; and (4) Transformation: this welcomes transformation and the emergence of a "dream society". To deepen the analysis and add clarity, the scenarios have been incast with causal layered analysis (CLA). CLA does not claim to argue for any particular truth, but aims to explore how a discourse becomes privileged. CLA has four layers to make sense of how reality is formed: (1) the litany or trends, events and issues that describe the "unquestioned view of reality", (2) the systemic, through which this data is framed, (3) the worldview, which identifies the legitimising assumptions behind the litany and systems, and (4) the myths and metaphors of unconscious archetypes through which perceptions are framed.

The used futures of Taiwan and China

The term 'used futures' refers to what you are doing today that no longer fits with how the world is changing or with your preferred vision. It asks the question, "what are we doing today that's 'used', that doesn't take us to where we wish to go" (Inayatullah, 2015a). Taiwan struggles to gain access to international organisations, including the United Nations, thereby eroding its international competitiveness, ability to voice its opinions on issues of global and regional impact, and the recognition of the legitimacy of Taiwan's political, economic and social achievements (Glaser, 2013, p.1). Only 21 countries recognise the Taiwanese government as the legitimate government of China as a whole.² This should not be any real surprise, because under their respective constitutions Beijing and Taipei are in effect competing governments of the same country, Taiwan being declared a "renegade province" by the PRC. This narrative, then, frames and limits the discussion of the Taiwan/China future around eventual reunification by any means necessary.

In this way Taiwan is not truly free. Nor can it be if the Chinese government's opinion, and perhaps influence on Taiwan's sovereignty, matters more than the views of 23 million Taiwanese. In the last 105 years the only time that Taiwan was ruled by the central government of China was between 1945 and 1949 – the four years that China was ruled by the KMT before its retreat to Taiwan (Cheong, 2000, p.ix). If the Taiwanese do not consider themselves to be Chinese or a part of China, why should the rest of the world? They have fought long and hard for a peaceful democratic revolution that now finds Taiwan viewed as a model for other parts of Asia (CAN, 2016; Chiu & Lin, 2005; DW, 2012).

The toolkit used by international relations theorists is of little use in this dilemma. IR theories rest on a premise that “[a] theory’s ability to predict the future is based on its ability to explain the past” (Mearsheimer, 2014[2001], p.6). According to Bernstein, Lebow, Stain, and Weber (2000), “five decades of well-funded efforts to develop theories of international relations have produced precious little in the way of useful, high confidence results.” “Even the most robust generalisations or laws we can state – war is more likely between neighbouring states, weaker states are less likely to attack stronger states – are close to trivial, have important exceptions, and for the most part stand outside any consistent body of theory” (Bernstein et al., 2000, p.44). In this way Taiwan's future with China is ‘used’, created by IR's reliance on holding onto predicting a particular future based on a narrow western historical empiricist viewpoint rather than focussing on creating futures that people desire. Futures studies does not hold that the future can be predicted, as there are no future facts; what is important is to create maps of alternative futures as a means to shape the world that is desired at levels of both the inner collective and the inner individual (Inayatullah, 2015b).

In a rapidly changing and increasingly connected and complex world, the exclusive use of the IR toolkit and limited thinking by governments blocks the use of new methods to create transformative long-term futures between Taiwan and China. There are two scenarios for the future of China commonly given: either that China is a threat and as such will eventually invade Taiwan, or that China is a harmonious contributor to the economic world order and will ‘integrate’ Taiwan into its economy (Hoffman, 2014). Under both IR theories, linear path dependency is created for Taiwan/China relations that tells us that today is the result of the past and that tomorrow will continue in the same direction regardless of the desires and efforts of its citizens. Offensive realists would have you believe that China is a threat, it can be nothing but a threat and all action taken must be to mitigate that threat by using the means of power, principally military. The theory used to analyse Taiwan/China relations is zero sum: ultimately China will reclaim Taiwan and there is nothing anyone can do to stop it; it's just a matter of time (see Mearshiemer 2005, 2010, 2014, 2014 [2001]).

Liberalists believe that creating an economic interdependence between China and Taiwan and China and the US will enable these countries to avoid conflict. At the extreme level of this belief, this high level of cooperation can only result in win-win results, as economic competition is perceived to be nothing more than a pure public good. Aggressive behaviour from China would damage the gains made in economic reform, and result in losses to trade, foreign investment and technology, and reputation (Fravel, 2010).

The lack of alternatives provided by the main IR theories – which can be boiled down to ‘war or trade’ – is not just a failure of IR, but also of ‘dinosaur’ Taiwanese (and Chinese) politicians to see beyond the “one China” principle and the “Three No’s” policy of the former Ma Ying-jeou government: “no unification, no independence and no use of force”. This has led to a “future – forbidden” society in which the status quo dictates the future. Effectively this means that Taiwan cannot even envisage a future apart from a “steady state” with an illusion of stability and security as given by another (China). But with no innovation, the organism will eventually die. There is as yet no clear indication of what the Trumpian position will be on one China, but David B. Larer of *The Navy Times* has reported that the US Navy is sailing within twelve nautical miles of the Spratly and/or Paracel islands, opening up the possibility of a counter ‘cabbage’ tactic of wrapping the contested

islands in multiple layers of military power in order to challenge China's claim to sovereignty over them (Bishop, 2017; Vuving, 2017).

Historically there has been a 'regime of truth' that pervades both Taiwanese and Chinese political society. The current dominant future paths of Taiwan/China relations are a trap, and are very much dependent on the legacy of the two founding leaders, Mao Tse Tung for China and Chiang Kai-shek for Taiwan, and on the premise that each was the legitimate leader of "China". Taiwan started a process of "de-Chiang Kai-sheking", removing his name from the main international airport, taking his photo out of schools, and, currently, debating whether to remove the island's pre-eminent landmark, the Chiang Kai-shek memorial. Since Taiwan democratised in the 1990s, there has been a gradual re-examination of its most recent history under the rule of the KMT (Hioe, 2015). This has not happened in China. At issue is the continued narrative of "depredations inflicted on China by imperialist Western powers and Japan in the 19th and 20th centuries" (Swaine, 2015). It becomes impossible to reinterpret history when China cannot move past this dominant narrative which locks it into a combative position of "regaining" its lost honour and position as a global power.

The future is unpredictable, but through scenarios we can deconstruct and even challenge the dominant ways of thinking and allow preferred images of the future to emerge. Transformation, rather than just 'more of the same', can then occur. The shape of Taiwan and China's relationship is certain to become more complicated with China's increasing regional wealth, power and confidence and Taiwan's growing identity as an independent and democratic state. The first two scenarios below – "Frenemies" and "Abandon Taiwan" – reflect the current dominant IR narratives. The second two scenarios reflect the important cultural and national 'new normal' that is being created by the younger generation of Taiwanese, unrestrained by old beliefs, policies and processes, so as to create new and transformative futures.

Scenario 1: Continued growth – "Frenemies"

President Tsai was elected in part because of the KMT's inability to improve economic conditions for many in Taiwan. Taiwan's total exports declined to US\$285 billion in 2015 from US\$320 billion in 2014, a drop of US\$45 billion in one year. Economic growth was less than 1 percent in 2015, and Taiwanese wages have not increased since 2008 (Hasijsa, 2016). Taiwan is economically dependent of China: China is Taiwan's top trade partner, accounting for about 40% of exports or roughly US\$130 billion a year. In return, Taiwan is China's seventh largest trading partner, providing China with investments of nearly US\$11 billion in 2012 into key sectors, including technology (Yan, 2015). Tourism is a major industry in Taiwan, with Chinese tourists being the largest inbound group. A record 133 million Chinese tourists are expected to travel outside the mainland in 2016, with the top destinations for these travellers being Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. But tourists from China have dwindled since Tsai Ing-wen took office, her stand on the 1992 Consensus cited as the reason.

Taiwan and China compete in many of the same industries, like electronics, petrochemicals and steel, with 70% overlap in exports; awareness is growing that this increasing economic integration is a threat to Taiwan's self-determination (Rosenthal, 2015). This is no small point. Essential to the Tsai government's commitments is gaining membership in international and regulatory trade agreements, including in the second round of talks for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) (Lin, 2016). Investments in Southeast Asia and India feature in the "go south" policy to reduce reliance on China's economy. Tsai's election commitments included restructuring Taiwan's economy from a manufacturing base to a services economy, strengthening its social safety net, and the promotion of social fairness (Lin, 2016).

China's economy, too, faces a number of challenges. GDP growth slowed to 6.7 per cent for the second quarter of 2016 (Trading Economics, 2016). The policy emphasis in Beijing is placed on stimulating the economy. New bank loans and other forms of credit rose by RMB2.28 trillion (US\$351 billion), the second-highest monthly total since January 2014 (Wildau, 2016). President Xi Jinping is aiming for GDP gains of at least 6.5 percent per year for the next five years so he can deliver on his goal of doubling 2010 income and GDP levels (Bloomberg News, 2015). China's ability to deliver on medium term growth will be a challenge. Chinese companies have debts amounting to RMB18 trillion, an amount equivalent to 170% of gross domestic product (China Economic Review, 2016). According the Zhu Haiblin, chief economist at JPMorgan Hong Kong, "Corporate debt is alarmingly high in China. If credit growth continues to be very strong, while at the same time we don't see a concrete plan to deal with "zombie companies" such as bankruptcies and writing off bad loans, then the situation may get worse" (in Wildau, 2016, n.p.). The Chinese government has recently approved a debt-for-equity swap for struggling companies to reduce corporate indebtedness (China Economic Review, 2016). There is very little likelihood that China will undergo a Lehman Brothers-style finance crisis, as all the debt is domestic and the country has a large current account surplus which allows the government flexibility in handling the high levels of debt (Phillips, 2016). The IMF projects that GDP growth will fall below 6 percent by 2020. Yao Wei, China economist for Societe Generale, estimates that growth will slide to 5 percent in 2019, and Guosen Securities Co. estimates it will take until 2025 for GDP to begin to expand again (Bloomberg News, 2015). While China may be undergoing somewhat slower growth, the outlook remains positive compared to many advanced and emerging economies, as world economic growth between 2014 and 2020 is expected to be between 3 and 4 per cent (Laudicina, Lohmeyer, & Peterson, 2014).

Despite the testing of the one China policy, according to Jean-Pierre Cabestan, head of the department of Government and International Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University and former head of the French Research Center on Contemporary China in Taipei, economic ties between Taiwan and China are now "so close that frosty pragmatism is more likely than outright confrontation" (in Hewitt, 2016, n.p.). As long as Taiwan and China continue to rely on the "one China, two systems" approach, and Taiwan's democracy is not perceived to be a threat to China, the relationship of mutual continued growth can be maintained (Chan, 2016).

Table 1. *Scenario 1: Continued growth – "Frenemies"*

Litany	Economics over politics
System	Treaties and tourists
Worldview	Maintain the status quo
Metaphor	"Little Taiwan" or "Frenemies"

Scenario 2: Collapse – Abandon Taiwan

Both the KMT and CCP consider themselves the legitimate rulers of "China". For the last 8 years, the Ma KMT and CCP governments have progressed a Taiwan/China unification strategy through the use of economic integration and cultural exchange through tourism, the film industry, and education to the media regarding military capabilities. According to Ross Garnaut, resolving the Taiwan "question" is very high on the CCP's agenda "before the entire building collapses" (cited in Cole, 2015, n.p.).

China's leaders are well aware that the "one country, two systems" model has little appeal among Taiwanese. In Taiwan, there is a growing civil society, consisting of student groups and non-profit NGOs, beginning to pressure government to back away from further economic integration

with China. The Black Island Youth Front (so named in response to the KMT's style of passing laws without consultation as though in a 'black box') has evolved into the Sunflower Movement, well known for its three-week occupation of the Legislative Yuan beginning on 18 March 2014 over the KMT government's attempt to pass the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement (CSSTA), which controversially integrated Taiwan further into China's economy without a public reading (Smith, 2014).

There is a growing awareness, too, outside Taiwan (Mazza, 2016) that the Taiwanese will reject any unification – peaceful or not. And why wouldn't they? Taiwan is a dynamic multi-party democracy and it is preposterous to suggest that they should willingly give up their hard won freedoms to join with China, a decidedly un-free country, ranked 144th in the world in the 2017 Index of Economic Freedom.³ Some in the Chinese Communist Party's leadership know that the only way that unification can be achieved is through force and coercion (Blumenthal, 2016). And China now believes it can successfully invade Taiwan and prevent the United States from intervening (Fuell, 2014). According to Zhao (2016), Jin Carong, a professor at Renmin University, has developed a four-stage strategy of "observe, pressure, confront and conflict" to deal with Taiwan. The strategy would include unravelling the 23 trade, investment, aviation and tourism accords with Taiwan and taking away the island's remaining 21 diplomatic partners. If President Tsai continues to refuse the 1992 consensus in the last year of her first term, according to Zhao, China would confront Tsai with explicit military threats. China would wage war in 2021 if Tsai were to be re-elected and continue this course. It is believed by Jin that the US would not dare intervene and that the "Taiwan issue would be finally resolved" (Zhao, 2016).

Tucker and Glaser (2011) have also identified a prevailing narrative among influential pundits in Washington that the United States needs to walk away from its relationship with Taiwan. "Taiwan has been characterised as a strategic liability, an expensive diversion, and most often, an obstacle to more important U.S.–China relations" (Tucker & Glaser, 2011, p.23). In a similar vein, Mearsheimer (2014) believes that, "the continuing rise of China will have huge consequences for Taiwan, almost all of which will be bad" (p.31). While Mearsheimer recognises the historical and strategic importance of Taiwan for the United States, he believes there would be a reticence in Washington to protect Taiwan. Reasons for this reticence include fear of nuclear escalation, as well as the U.S.'s inability to defend Taiwan from growing Chinese military force (Mearshiemer, 2014).

Table 2. *Scenario 2: Collapse – Abandon Taiwan*

Litany	Only one legitimate ruler of "China"
System	One country, two systems
Worldview	Taiwan is a strategic liability
Metaphor	The elephant in the room

Scenario 3: Discipline – "a country of the ocean", Aboriginal self

Taiwan, called *Pakan* by the original inhabitants, is recognised as the birthplace of all Polynesian Aborigines in Asia, stretching from Madagascar Island in the west to Easter Island in the east, and from Taiwan in the north to New Zealand in the south (FAPA, n.d.). There are 16 recognised aboriginal groups in Taiwan, with a population of 533,600, or 2.28 percent of the total population. Archaeological evidence confirms their presence dating back 12,000 to 15,000 years (Executive Yuan, 2014). Taiwan's aborigines lived independently before the island was invaded and colonised by outsiders, first by the Dutch (1624–1662), and then by the Spanish (1626–1642) (Munsterhjelm, 2002). More recently, Taiwan's aborigines were categorised by different Confucian, Christian and nationalist civilising projects, and according to their degree of Sinicisation they

were referred to as either “cooked” (*shufan*) or “raw” barbarians (*shengfan*); they have never been dealt with on their own terms (Tischer, 2010). Before Japanese colonisation, there was no concept of individually owned land or private property. Japanese names were also forced upon the Taiwanese aborigines during the 1934 *kominka* movement. This renaming continued when the KMT government took over, as did the banning of native language or any other method of transmitting identity and traditions (Teyra, 2015).

The Chinese narrative suggests that Taiwan is culturally (and uniformly so) a part of China without recognising Taiwan’s aboriginal history (Tischer, 2010). However, the majority of Taiwanese are native born and have no historical relationship with mainland China (Wang, 2007). Taiwan does not consider itself part of China, nor do the people living in Taiwan consider themselves to be Chinese; they are Taiwan and Taiwanese respectively (Hoffman, 2014). Taiwanisation and the establishment of “Taiwanese identity” is more than just a political project, it is the future of social, ethnic and cultural identity that will see Taiwan and the Taiwanese become identifiably less Chinese and more aware and accepting of the importance of how aboriginal identity discourse supports the idea of self-determination for the people of Taiwan.

In 1998, a new imagination of Taiwanese cultural identity began to emerge inspired by aboriginal writers such as Syaman Rapongan, envisioning Taiwan as “a country of the ocean” *vis-à-vis* China, a country of the vast land (Chiu, n.d.). Imaging Taiwanese culture against Chinese culture in such a way suggests that Taiwan and China have little in common. Both aborigines and Taiwanese will need to coevolve a new authentic identity that is more than “pro-Taiwan”, “anti-KMT” or “anti-China”. While it is the Japanese and the KMT who taught the aborigines that they were Taiwanese, a more *Pakan* identity – one that incorporates aboriginal identity with the democratic and individual rights of modern Taiwan – is emerging.

On 1 August 2016, President Tsai Ing-wen – who is of Hakka and Aboriginal descent – issued a formal apology on behalf of the government to Taiwan’s indigenous people for the discrimination and neglect they have suffered over the past 400 years (Focus Taiwan, 2016). According to Munsterhjelm (2002, n.p.): “The origins of Taiwan’s Aboriginal Peoples are a contentious and politically charged issue due to the Taiwan’s Independence issue”. The fact that Taiwan’s aborigines are of Austronesian (Malay-Polynesian) supports the Independence movement, but with greater recognition and greater cultural representation there may well be a shift in the new Taiwanese cultural imaginary in the direction of arguing that many Taiwanese are descendants of aborigines (Li and Liu, as cited in Chiu, n.d.). During the Qing Dynasty, many Chinese migrants took aboriginal women as their wives and acknowledged the importance of their matrilineal aboriginal roots rather than the traditional Sinocentric determinant of identity, their patrilineal descent (Chiu, n.d.). Adding to this is the growing migration of workers and spouses from Southeast Asia to Taiwan. The number of migrant, mostly male, workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, stood at 550,000 by the end of 2014. The number of immigrant, mostly female, spouses from Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Cambodia had reached 140,000 by the end of 2014 (Tsay, 2015). Immigration from the Austronesian Southeast Asian countries to Taiwan has increased the existing multicultural configuration in Taiwan, and this is expected to continue. Perhaps with the support of these new migrants, culturally similar to Taiwanese aborigines, Taiwan will be able to reclaim its aboriginal identity to allow it to develop outside the China/Taiwan historical narrative and perhaps once more become a “country of the ocean”.

Table 3. *Scenario 3. Discipline – “a country of the ocean”, Aboriginal self*

Litany	Connect to Taiwan’s ‘real’ past
System	Integrate aboriginal beliefs into society and politics
Worldview	Co-evolve a new identity
Metaphor	A country of the ocean

Scenario 4: Transformation – The Switzerland of Asia

Supposing the current paradigms of Taiwan/China given by IR are closed, a new vision of transformation and transcendence becomes indispensable. Transcendence means creating a new reality (Galtung, 2000), and so the goals of both Taiwan and China in terms of their relationship must be redefined. For China, unifying with Taiwan, by force or otherwise, is a core element of national identity (Mearsheimer, 2014). For Taiwan, the goal is to maintain peace and stability and to develop their democracy.

Many of the younger generation in Taiwan believe that the political conflict between Taiwan and China is “manufactured by politicians for political gain” and ignores the important issues of economics, employment and education (Rigger, 2001). The long-term growth rates of both Taiwan and China are declining; average salaries in Taiwan have stagnated for more than a decade, birth rates have fallen and their societies are rapidly aging. According to the IMF’s house price-to-wage ratio, China has seven of the world’s top ten most expensive cities for residential property (Shephard, 2016). In China, young professionals under 34 years old have been dubbed the “do not buy generation” (Floracruz, 2015). Similarly in Taiwan, particularly Taipei, it is said that to afford a house you can “neither eat nor drink” for over fifteen years (Chen, 2015). Accumulation of wealth in Taiwan is increasingly reliant on capital gains from the housing market rather than on real production (Chen, 2015).

The neoliberal economic framework is being challenged by the spread of networked digital information and communications technologies. This is breaking down traditional political and business hierarchies into network or peer-to-peer models; this will profoundly change the nature of international politics and economics. Charles Kupchan, an eminent international relations theorist, believes that, “the twenty first century will not be America’s, China’s, Asia’s or anyone else’s; it will belong to no one[...] For the first time in history, the world will be interdependent – but without a centre of gravity or global guardian” (Kupchan, 2012, p.3).

Former Vice-president of Taiwan Annette Lu has a vision of Taiwan as a neutral country – the Switzerland of Asia (Chen, 2016). By becoming a neutral country, Taiwan is then free to seek peaceful relations with other countries while simultaneously not threatening China. This is a bold vision.

Lu further believes that:

...the whole world should support Taiwan to remain a beacon for democracy, for liberty. In the past couple of years, we noticed that more and more Chinese who visit Taiwan learn about democracy in Taiwan because we share the same language and the same culture. Quite naturally, the Chinese are curious to know if Taiwan can have democracy, why can't the Chinese have [it]? On the other hand, if Taiwan is taken over by China, then there is no hope at all (Eubulletin, 2016).

Of course Switzerland is not the only neutral country: Sweden, Austria, Costa Rica, Finland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Panama, Turkmenistan and the Vatican could all serve as models and act as initial supporters of a neutral Taiwan. Lu believes that the spirit and principles of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, signed by 50 countries, serve as an appropriate model (Vincenti, 2016). Gilley (2010) suggests that Taiwan’s neutrality could be modelled on Finland’s 1948 agreement with Russia “not to join alliances challenging Moscow or serve as a base for any country challenging Soviet interests” (p.48). Substitute the words Beijing and Chinese for Moscow and Russian and the forgone security guarantee from the US will act to mollify Taiwan’s geopolitical threat to China, one of China’s primary concerns. Transformation can only occur when China’s worldview of Taiwan is in line with this new vision. This is not an impossible task, as some might assume; Beijing has shown its willingness to change its position on Taiwan according to its own changing concerns.

According to Gries (2010, p.51) China “has incrementally moderated from ‘liberation’ to ‘peaceful unification’ to ‘one China’ to ‘anti-independence’ since Mao’s era”.

Table 4. *Scenario 4: Transformation – The Switzerland of Asia*

Litany	Politics getting in the way of the ‘real’ problems: economics, employment and education
System	International laws and constitutional reform
Worldview	Avoid potential regional conflicts
Metaphor	The Switzerland of Asia

Clearly a great deal of thought and negotiation needs to occur for this vision to become a reality. No other neutral state has the same historical or geopolitical situation as Taiwan. Most importantly, the Taiwanese would need a guarantee that their hard won freedoms and democratic governance will not be threatened. If Taiwan declares its neutrality through legislative means, it will also need to insure interdependence with the relevant international legal frameworks and with multi-lateral treaties. If Taiwan changes its constitution, giving up claims to China, renouncing military action except for self-defence, this will also need to be recognised and supported by other nations (Yao, n.d.).

Discussion and Conclusion

Which future for Taiwan and China?

The first two scenarios for talking about Taiwan’s future with China are based on economic and strategic power ontologies and represent the current IR reference points. Both of these scenarios are seen to be the ‘disowned self’, the other pushing away its opposite, allowing no other stories to be developed. This is a mistake. Decision makers are “socialised in the strategic culture they produce, and thus can be constrained by symbolic myths which their predecessors created”, and thus they “cannot escape the symbolic discourses they manipulate” (Johnston, 1995, p.32). There are new myths and metaphors unambiguously being created, particularly in Taiwan, with new mindsets that challenge the status quo of Taiwan as an economic colony of China or Taiwan as a problem too difficult to solve. For China, either scenario will do to fulfil its aspiration of reclaiming Taiwan. In China’s eyes, any move toward Taiwan’s independence is a crime and a cause for immediate termination of the discussion. As long as China views Taiwan as a breakaway province and treats it as a delinquent – despite its political pluralism, right to vote, and civil liberties including freedom of the press and of assembly, association and religion – Taiwan will continue to struggle diplomatically and economically. For Taiwan, integration with China is a dystopic thought: it may be ‘free’, but it cannot establish true independence.

Building positive and preferred futures for Taiwan and China has been weighed down by the “baggage of history”, but there are signs that this is changing. Clinging to old identities is no longer seen as useful, and in Taiwan a new hybrid consciousness is emerging that is challenging the historically and culturally constructed notions of what it means to be Taiwanese.

Scenario 3 – the “Aboriginal self” allows Taiwan to recover its Austronesian identity, not as a crass appropriation for political purposes, but as an authentic recognition and inclusion of Taiwan’s original inhabitants. Taiwan’s aboriginal connection with other Austronesian peoples of the Pacific is real, not imagined. Taiwan as an Austronesian ocean nation can become a model for other countries, offering its own identity, heir to centuries of trade networks to the south and beyond. and an inclusive multicultural form of decision-making (Turton, 2017). Much progress has been made

in recent years, but Taiwan's policy makers need to go further and enter into a genuine dialogue to give greater autonomy and inclusion to indigenous people.

Scenario 4 – the “Switzerland of Asia” offers Taiwan and China, as well as the rest of the Asia-Pacific, as chance to overcome their legacy of colonialism, war and hostility. Bold steps would be needed by both countries, and the power politics of “one China, two systems” would have to be abandoned. Taiwan as a neutral state also aligns with Scenario 3. Taiwan would then be able to become a melting pot of Austronesian peoples in the region, as well as providing political and economic stability. Former Vice-president Annette Lu has launched a campaign to urge the Taiwanese government to hold a referendum in 2018 on making Taiwan a neutral state. Whether the referendum passes, let alone happens, the conversation will have begun, and from this new possibilities can emerge.

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Notes

1. In this article, ‘Taiwan’ refers to the Republic of China (ROC) and ‘China’ to the People’s Republic of China (PRC).
2. São Tomé and Príncipe severed diplomatic ties with the ROC (Taiwan) on 21 December 2016.
3. <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/china>

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