

The Tibet question through the looking glass of Taiwan: comparative dynamics and sobering lessons

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This paper evaluates the Tibet question through the looking glass of Taiwan, by considering four dimensions of comparative dynamics between the two cases of Taiwan and the Tibetan government-in-exile (TGIE) in relation to China: territorial, economic, ethnic and cultural. Of the four, the paper argues, Taiwan has high convergence with China in the economic, ethnic and cultural dimensions, and managed divergence in the territorial dimension. The TGIE, on the other hand, has high divergence with China in all four dimensions: territorial dispute, economic incongruence, ethnic estrangement, and cultural gulf. Further, the TGIE is ideologically and sentimentally charged by this divergence and thrives by exploiting it. It therefore should have few incentives to see the lessons of Taiwan applied in resolving the Tibet question.

Keywords: Taiwan; Tibet question

Casting Taiwan and Tibet in the same category may strike many Chinese as stretched. After all, it has been a prevailing view in mainland China that, unlike Taiwan, Tibet is already under its sovereign control, hence the two cases are not comparable. But Tibet is distinct from the infamous ‘Tibet question’. The latter concerns the contention over the historical and political status of Tibet, cultural politics of identity, and international politics of ethno-cultural representation.¹ For Tibetan exiles, the Tibet question involves Tibetan sovereignty versus Chinese occupation, identity and nationalism, and cultural autonomy. For these exiles and their Western supporters, the issue can also be about Western images of Tibet and Tibetan-ness. For Beijing, the Tibet question is one of separatism.

In this paper, I use the term in a narrow sense. The Tibet question in my usage refers to the political representation embodied by the so-called Tibetan government-in-exile (TGIE) located in Dharamsala, India. The Dalai Lama, as the theocratic (i.e. spiritual as well as political) leader of the TGIE, is the personal embodiment of the TGIE since 1959. This narrow use eschews the historical, political and cultural connotations of the term as used by the exiles, as well as the political denial of the term by Beijing. At the same time, my use strips the Tibetan question to its core: politically the TGIE is the Tibetan question, for without its existence, sustained by key exiles and outside support, there would not likely be the larger Tibetan question. Goa, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and even Hawaii are among the examples.

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¹Anand, ‘The Tibet Question’.

Defined as such, we see four important parallels between Taiwan and Dharamsala. First, the two cases are legacies of China's civil war, and represent illegitimate, governments-in-exile to China, as both fled the mainland at the time of China Communist Party's (CCP) assumption or exercise of power. Second, both threaten China's conception of sovereignty and pose separatist concerns. Third, both cases are also legacies of the Cold War, and have enjoyed political support in Western capitals – especially in the US. Finally, both constitute security issues for China and contain important dimensions of international relations, even though they are deemed internal affairs by China. Granted, the TGIE, administrating about 110,000–130,000 people, is no comparison to Taiwan in size and weight. But successful internationalization of the TGIE agendas has magnified its influence and intractability. The two cases have thus become parallel in another important dimension: a situation of 'asymmetrical stalemate' vis-à-vis China: a situation where 'neither side can force a unilateral solution to a conflict even though one side is significantly stronger'.² Not surprisingly Taiwan (especially under the Democratic Progressive Party [DPP]) and the TGIE sympathize with each other's causes, and the latter receives financial support from the former.

Given deepening ties and improved relations across the Taiwan straits, the parallels between the two cases would seem to forebode well for relations across the Himalayas. Indeed, 'Taiwan's Success Could Show the Way for Tibet' is the title of an article in the *YaleGlobal* online magazine, written shortly after riots in Tibetan regions in March 2008. Its author, who reported for BBC from Taiwan, argues that the Taiwanese–Chinese relationship, characterized by avoidance of direct political control but close economic relations, could stand as a model for eliminating conflicts in Tibet, with Tibet serving as a natural partner of a global supply chain connecting India and China.³ The TGIE itself held up Taiwan as parallel to Tibet, when its envoys asked Beijing for the 'One Country, Two Systems' offer that Beijing had been floating for Taiwan.⁴ Not surprisingly, of course, Beijing rejected and rejects the comparability.

There is indeed a major problem with treating Taiwan and Tibet as parallels. As in almost all Western media and many academic discourses, Tibetan exiled leaders are taken to speak for Tibet and all Tibetans. Ethnic Tibetan scholars in China, however, object. As one of the most prominent among them insists, the Dalai and his fellow exiles cannot and do not speak for all 6-plus million Tibetans, nor do Tibetan monks for all religious or secular Tibetans, nor does the Dalai's Gelupa sect for all branches of Tibetan Buddhism. Most of all, the majority of Tibetans in China do not share the exiles' political goals, even while many may revere the institution of the Dalai Lama.⁵ A prominent Tibetan scholar, based in the West, also sees 'a gulf between Tibet and exiles', especially due to a 'patronizing attitude' on the part of Tibetan exiles, whose overdeveloped nationalism leads them to see themselves as 'true representatives' of Tibetans and those inside Tibet as passive victims.⁶ Given that it is impossible to know the extent to which the exile leaders speak for Tibetans

²Womack, 'Resolving Asymmetrical Stalemate'.

³Hawksley, 'Taiwan's Success'.

⁴Goldstein, 'The United States, Tibet', 151.

⁵Rigzin, 'Tibet'.

⁶Shakya, 'The Gulf'.

within China, and given that they do not administer Tibet, it is plausible to limit my discussion to the TGIE as parallel to Taiwan.

So what are the lessons of Taiwan, for the narrow Tibet question? The crux of those lessons is the palpability of economic integration despite political tensions in a paired conflict. Economic integration also helps build mutual trust and understanding. A related lesson is the incentive of national economies of scale for a small economy like Taiwan's.⁷ Is such non-political interaction and integration likely or possible with Dharamsala? As a matter of fact, an interexchange of people and ideas, at the cultural level, has already become regular among the Tibetan monastic communities on both sides.⁸ But this religious exchange can be politically sensitive, as some monasteries are seen by Beijing as tied closely to separatism and related demonstrations, thus rendering it unconstructive for improving trust and understanding across the Himalayas. What this paper intends to explore is whether the interexchange of people and activities is also possible, at the economic level, much as it is across the Taiwan straits?

I argue that at the official level, the TGIE has achieved a 'negative dependence' on China, in the sense that its existence as an exile community and 'exile as livelihood' have depended much on being a political representation antithetical to China.⁹ It therefore has few incentives for economic interaction, which may reduce its political leverage and undermine its representation of the Tibetan question. At the unofficial level, émigré groups from Tibetan regions of China represent hopeful linkages, though at ad hoc and low levels. Thus, while Taiwan's lessons are highly probable, they are as yet of limited promise in moving the stalemate between Beijing and Dharamsala. The economic drivers and incentives in this paired conflict remain weak. The remainder of the paper will contrast the dynamics of the Taiwan versus the TGIE cases vis-à-vis China: differences in the two cases on territorial, economic, ethnic and cultural matters in relation to China. I will show how these differences explain why Taiwan can gravitate economically towards China, while Dharamsala cannot do so.

The territorial issue: domestic versus foreign exile

Territorial difference is the first reason why the TGIE will find it harder to reconcile with the status quo and re-prioritize political goals towards the economic. Unlike Taiwan, the TGIE is based in a foreign country. While Taiwan may not be physically in the embrace of its homeland proper, it nonetheless could be felt and built as homeland by the Kuomintang (KMT) contingent without a total sense of dispossession. Dharamsala, by contrast, sharpens this sense even while its viability and influence depend precisely on it.

When first exiled, the KMT regime did take Taiwan as a temporary shelter rather than long-term homeland. Its initial estimate was that it would take three years to defeat the Communists (CCP) on the mainland and five years to recover the entire country. Its slogan was to 'prepare in the first year, start fighting in the second, and

⁷Pranab Bardhan notes that global economic integration has allowed Taiwan to value the mainland China connection less than it otherwise would. But the current international financial crisis has strengthened this connection for Taiwan. See Bardhan, 'Method in the Madness'.

⁸Shakya, 'The Gulf'.

⁹The phrase 'exile as livelihood' is from AFP, 'Dharamsala'.

conquer in the third'. Operationally, these objectives were put into action in the early years, though a few minor military conflicts failed to win full-scale victory over the CCP. Only US protection secured the island itself from unification with the mainland. Institutionally, the KMT re-established the various government bodies that it had in its previous capital, Nanjing, giving both structural and psychological pretense of continuity. Externally, the KMT hanged on tenuously to international recognition by retaining China's seat in the United Nations until 1971, when US support waned. The loss of sovereignty and territory, in 1949 as in 1971, was, however, blunted in other ways. In cultural and linguistic terms, Taiwan was still a homey milieu. Politically the KMT dominated the local residents, not the other way around. All these should enhance a sense of belonging.

Moreover, well before the formal end of its territorial claims, Taiwan had already shifted to focus on economic development. In elevating the economic game, rather than remaining single-minded about the territorial game, the KMT benefited from two unique heritages. One was the lessons from its defeat on the mainland, which facilitated socio-economic reforms on the island. Another was the blend of geopolitical and geo-economic forces favoring economic growth. Among the latter, Bruce Cumings has noted the Japanese colonial legacy of an imperial production and transport network in its East Asian regional economy; and after 1945, a diffuse American hegemony replacing the Japanese system but retaining elements of the prewar model: strong states directing economic development, with Taiwan and South Korea serving as receptacles for Japan's declining industries.¹⁰ William Overholt has reminded us that America's Cold War strategy had it right by not only emphasizing military protection but also prioritizing economic development to stem the social base of Communist revolutions.¹¹ Taiwan has certainly benefited from this economic orientation.

Taiwan's success in the global chain of production, in turn, has lent itself to bridging with China eventually, once the latter opened up to the global economy. The timing and division of labor could not be more perfect. First, between 1965 and 1975, the retail revolution in the US led most of the major US retailers to begin to source products in East Asia, a period when Taiwan became a major sourcing site and part of the post-war industrialization of the New Industrialized Economies.¹² By the 1970s, when Taiwan's territorial contention became domestically and internationally irrelevant, it had already become secure enough economically and had a viable model rivaling the mainland. By the 1980s when China opened up, it became a natural destination for Taiwanese private investment and an ideal receptacle for declining industries in Taiwan, for economic as well as cultural and linguistic reasons. Though Taiwan's economic success has bolstered separate or separatist identities, it also helps to temper a long-term sense of territorial or national loss and its attendant bitterness.

The reversal of territorial aspirations in Taiwan's case, by contrast, is matched by no comparable circumstances in the TGIE's case. The foreign base of the TGIE sentimentally sustains the territorial dream. Situated at McLeod Ganj, in upper Dharamsala of India, the TGIE site was offered by Nehru for the 14th Dalai Lama and his followers after they fled from Tibet in 1959. Established the following year, it

¹⁰Cumings, 'Origins and Development'.

¹¹Overholt, *Asia, America*.

¹²Hamilton, 'Remaking the Global'.

is officially known as the Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (CTA) and has exercised many governmental functions in relation to the Tibetan exile community in India, which has grown from over 60,000 to twice that size. Upon his flight here, the Dalai Lama scrapped the agreement he had reached with Mao's new government accepting Tibet's 'liberation', and declared pursuit of independence. Like the KMT, the TGIE's initial urge for territorial recovery was militant and for the next decade, it conducted armed sabotage in Tibetan regions with the ideological, financial and logistical support of the US. As with the KMT, the waning of US support after 1971 effectively ended the TGIE's territorial designs through military strategies.¹³

The legal ambiguity of Tibet's historical status also fuels the TGIE's sentimental hold and political use of the sovereignty issue. As a neutral line of analysis holds, the Western concepts of suzerainty and sovereignty do not accurately describe the historical relationships between China and Tibet, yet both sides use these concepts to stake their claims, resulting in irreconcilable interpretations.¹⁴ The Dalai's new initiative since the early 1980s, renouncing independence and embracing autonomy, has been much lauded as a gesture of peace and reason. Yet his continued insistence on Tibet's past status as 'fully independent' betrays little change in substance: the claim allows him to speak of the 'Chinese invasion of 1950' and 'illegal occupation' since then, and of Tibet today as 'still an independent state under illegal occupation'.¹⁵ Such assertion of historical and independent Tibet, moreover, was made by the Dalai Lama at key international forums.¹⁶ And in his sentimental moments, he clearly expresses genuine longing for independence.¹⁷

The official literature of the TGIE reflects a similar pattern of inconsistency between public rhetoric and formal literature. One can attend a moderate talk by the Dalai or his envoys at a Western forum, while simultaneously receiving TGIE pamphlets asserting historical and continued claims of nationhood and independence. Assuming that the TGIE will survive the 14th Dalai the person, its official positions must be taken more seriously than the Dalai's public rhetoric. Here, the CTA explicitly claims that Tibet is a distinct nation with a long history of independence, and considers Beijing's rule of Tibet an illegitimate military occupation. It claims jurisdiction over the entirety of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and Qinghai province, plus two Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and one Tibetan Autonomous County in Sichuan Province, one Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and one Tibetan Autonomous County in Gansu Province, and one Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province.

What matters about the CTA's claims is that, the Dalai's side has made their recognition a foundational premise of its talks with Beijing. Their rejection by Beijing, on grounds of veiled irredentism, bolsters in turn the TGIE's international cause and support. While it may not be a deliberate strategy of the TGIE to engineer Beijing's rejection, the end result is that prolonged stalemate strengthens, rather than weakens, the TGIE's exile as *raison d'être*. The synonymy of Dharamsala with the

¹³Goldstein, 'The United States, Tibet'.

¹⁴Anand, 'The Tibet Question', 287–94.

¹⁵Office of Tibet, *Tibet Briefing*.

¹⁶e.g. the Dalai's 'five-point scheme for Tibetan peace' made in his speech to the US Congressional Human Rights Commission in 1987; and his 'seven-points new scheme', made in his speech in the hallway of the European Parliament at Strasburg in 1988.

¹⁷Gyatso, *Autobiography*.

Dalai Lama and Tibetan exiles has allowed it to become a tourist town, attracting (mainly) Western visitors and admirers to its temples and Buddhist teachings. Tourism is also the mainstay of the TGIE's economy, even though it employs just a fraction of the exile community. Any substantive interaction with the mainland economy, such as trading or investment, would likely undermine Dharamsala's cultural appeal and international representation.

From the territorial point, thus, the lessons of Taiwan have yet to be relevant. The TGIE has normative and sentimental as well as tactical and practical incentives to remain preoccupied with territorial assertions and not ready to reorient towards conventional economic development as Taiwan has done since the 1960s.

The economic issue: development versus exile as livelihood

On first look, the TGIE should have had as urgent needs as Taiwan did in the 1960s for economic development. Like the KMT, the monastic elite should have had lessons to learn from Mao's popularity among the impoverished Tibetan masses. Like the KMT, the TGIE should have had to pursue economic independence, especially after the US cut support and funding in the mid-1970s. In attacking China's developmental programs, the TGIE would do well to showcase its viable alternatives, much as Taiwan can confidently do so. Yet while Taiwan has achieved economic miracles, Dharamsala remains an impoverished place for the majority of its settlers.

Judged by the TGIE's own data, economic conditions are dire in Dharamsala. According to the CTA's Tibetan Demographic Survey, unemployment rates are as high as 75%. The CTA can provide jobs for just 5% of the 1000+ college graduates it educates annually. Tourism-related sectors make up much of the rest. The exile community has outgrown the land allotted by India in the early years. Raised literacy has elevated expectations among the younger generations, making economic difficulties less tolerable than for the early settlers. Self-segregated policies, which discourage Tibetans from attending Indian schools or learning Hindi, protect Tibetan culture and language at the expense of language skills for job opportunities outside the exile community. Substance abuse among the unemployed and idle has become widespread, so much so that the exile government itself has to provide treatment programs. Frustrated émigrés from China, who endured much hardship to trek their way there, cannot wait for the first chance to return to China.¹⁸ Monthly arrival of émigrés from Tibetan regions has been down by half since 2006.¹⁹

Those who question the materialist bias of China's modernization efforts, thus, might first examine their own 'neo-Orientalist' assumptions, be they Westerners or the Tibetan diaspora. As a Tibetan Chinese scholar argues, to expect Tibetans to remain content in their frozen ways, in the name of preserving culture and tradition, is unrealistic as well as unfair to them. For all their religiosity, Tibetans are not above human needs to solve basic problems of food, shelter, transport, education, health care and employment, and to improve living standards as best possible.²⁰ The TGIE itself has not been above profiting from its exile status, either in the form of its tourist economy or external funding.

¹⁸Singh, 'Tibetan Exiles'.

¹⁹Robinson, 'A Tibetan Exile'.

²⁰Rigzin, 'Tibet'.

Details of the TGIE's funding are far from clear, as one seasoned author and columnist on Asian economies writes. Structurally, the TGIE is reported to have seven departments and several other special offices. Under the Department of Financing are grouped charitable trusts, a publishing company, hotels in India and Nepal, and a handicrafts distribution company in the US and in Australia. Together the TGIE was involved in running 24 businesses, but it decided in 2003 that it would withdraw from them because such commercial involvement was inappropriate (it's not clear if it actually has). Fiscally, the TGIE claimed an annual revenue of US\$22 million several years ago, according to one Western investigator's direct inquiries with the TGIE's Department of Finance for details of its budget. Of that amount, US\$7 million was for politically related expenditure, the biggest item; US\$4.5 for administration, the next biggest item; and nearly US\$2 million for running the government-in-exile's overseas offices.²¹

Details about external aid and funding are equally unclear, though financial support from foreign governments, NGOs and private donations are widely cited. American government aid, through the CIA during the Cold War and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) thereafter, is legendary. According to declassified US intelligence documents released in the late 1990s, for much of the 1960s, the CIA provided the Tibetan exile movement with US\$1.7 million a year for operations against China, including an annual subsidy of US\$180,000 for the Dalai Lama, or US\$15,000 a month.²² By 1969, the CIA announced the withdrawal of its aid for the Tibetan revolutionaries, while funding for them from the Indian and Taiwanese governments and US subsidies for the Dalai Lama continued until 1974, two years after President Richard Nixon normalized US relations with China. US subsidies to the Dalai Lama, paid to him personally, were used in all or large part for TGIE activities, principally to fund offices in New York and Geneva, and to lobby internationally. The CIA also quietly paid to resettle the survivors.²³ While such external funding may not have been the life support for the exile community as a whole during the Cold War, it arguably provided life support for the exiles' guerrilla warfare and international activities, thus filling a critical part of the TGIE's financial needs.

These and other funding needs have continued or resumed from the US and other Western countries in new terms. With the end of CIA operations in Tibet, President Ford ended the US government's involvement with Tibet as part of its Cold War strategy. But the next phase of the US relationship with the Dalai Lama and his people was to be cast in terms of a contest between human rights and political engagement with China. After the Dalai Lama was finally granted a visa by President Jimmy Carter to visit the United States in 1979, the Tibetan cause found new sponsors in a bipartisan group of senators, members of Congress, and congressional staff assistants who worked with the Dalai Lama's entourage to focus the attention of successive US administrations and a responsive world community on the Tibet situation.²⁴ A large part of this freedom work is now actively supported by the NED whose own first acting president admitted that 'A lot of what we do today

²¹Bachman, 'Behind Dalai Lama'.

²²Mann, 'CIA Funded'.

²³Knaus, Orphans.

²⁴Ibid., 78.

was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA'.²⁵ Its 'new' emphasis on overt funding of geostrategically useful groups, as opposed to the covert funding, appears to have leant an aura of respect to the NED's work, and has enabled them, for the most part, to avoid much critical commentary in the mainstream media.²⁶

Funded by the US Congress, the NED seems to have been instrumental in promoting US interests rather than democracy. It helped impose polyarchal arrangements on four countries, Chile, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and Haiti.²⁷ It has been behind US-backed Color Revolutions, destabilizing countries from Eurasia to Myanmar, backing opposition groups and global public relations campaigns.²⁸ The NED provides funding to a plethora of pro-TGIE Tibet groups, Tibet Fund, Tibet Information Network, Tibetan Library Society, Tibetan Review Trust Society, and Voice of Tibet. Their activities in the West or India, in turn, have done much to aid the TGIE's global publicity campaigns.²⁹ Among the most notable private funding, the New York based Tibet Fund channels many donations for the TGIE. Set up in 1981 by Tibetan refugees and US citizens, it has grown into a multimillion-dollar organization that disburses US\$3 million each year to its various programs.³⁰ Importantly, according to Professor Tsering Shakya, exile organizations in India that receive funding from NED and other Western sources operate in India but not in Tibetan regions of China. Additionally, Chinese Buddhist communities of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore have been the most significant source of contribution to exile monasteries.³¹

The exile economy, thus, offers few inducements for China, unlike Taiwan's investment prowess and export links. Chinese strengths in these areas could have much relevance for Dharamsala, for modernizing its dismaying infrastructure, setting up trading or manufacturing, employing the well-educated but unemployed youths, and enabling China, Chinese Tibetan regions and Dharamsala to be natural partners of a global supply chain connecting India and China. But the only likely agents of such initiatives, and at very low and ad hoc levels, are émigré Tibetans from China. As long as the TGIE is seen as separatist, Beijing would not have any interest in bolstering Dharamsala economically.

The ethnic issue: distant siblings versus distant cousins

Ethnically, the divergence between Taiwan and the TGIE seems obvious: the people across the Taiwan straits are mostly Han Chinese, while those in Dharamsala are not. The DPP's argument about a separate Taiwanese ethnicity and identity may echo that of the TGIE's about a Tibetan identity separate from China, but the ethnic affinity across the Taiwan strait has more resemblance to that between Tibetans across the Himalayas. This inter-ethnic divergence is instrumental to the greater ease of human interaction and exchange across the Taiwan straits than those between Beijing and Dharamsala.

²⁵Ignatius, 'Innocence Abroad'.

²⁶Barker, 'Democratic Imperialism'.

²⁷Robinson, Promoting Polyarchy.

²⁸Sussman, 'Myths of Democracy'

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Shakya, 'The Gulf'.

In highlighting the ethnic differences in the two cases, I do not mean to concur with the claim that ethnic identity is ‘a crucial source of both solidarity and enmity’.³² Rather, I find more convincing the alternative explanations for empathies towards in-group members and antipathies for out-group members. One such theory is that ethnic peers tend to work together not because of discriminatory preferences but because of efficiency: shared language, information, and social networks make it easier to collaborate to achieve collective ends. Another theory is that co-ethnics may share assumptions and norms about trust and reciprocity, especially in environments where formal institutions are weak.³³ These perspectives, indeed, provide plausible explanations for why the Taiwanese and mainland Han Chinese could work together.

The so-called Taiwanese, above all, are still Han Chinese in linguistic and cultural terms, if not always political ones. Arguments about long-term inhabitants being a separate ethnic group or the enforcement of a separate sense of ‘Taiwanese’ under the KMT’s early harsh rule do not challenge these basic continuities.³⁴ Whatever the distance between the Taiwanese, Taiwan’s mainlanders, the ‘new Taiwanese’, and the mainlanders in mainland China, they are still less distant from one another than the linguistic and cultural gulf between the Tibetan exiles and mainland Chinese. Moreover, the continuing process of cross-ethnic mixing with ethnicities from within and outside Taiwan, combined with the disappearance of ethnic barriers due to a shared socio-political experience, has led to the emergence of ‘Taiwanese’ as a larger ethnic group.³⁵ At the individual level, the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese usually converse comfortably, and even if local dialogues can sometimes be formidable, cultural barriers are few and the written language remains the same. Deeper ethnic identity may also be suddenly awoken, as was in the aftermath of the Sichuan earthquake of 2008, when the tragedy drew an outpouring of support and donation from across the population in Taiwan. Thus mainland and Taiwanese can be distant sometimes, but remain siblings.

Furthermore, Taiwan has an effective constituency with mainland backgrounds and orientations. Though numerically small at 13% of the population, the mainlanders symbolized by the KMT had had a monopoly over political power for over four decades, as well as over the legitimate version of official Chinese culture.³⁶ Since its liberalization in the 1980s, the KMT has broadened its social and popular base to remain the leading mainstream party. Without its internal fragmentation, it would have continued its political dominance in electoral politics. Even when the KMT lost control of the executive branch from 2000–2008, it continued to dominate in the legislative branch and local politics. Politically and electorally, the KMT’s strength has served as a check on the independence impulse of the DDP and on the latter’s effort to desinify Taiwan. Culturally and linguistically, Mandarin proficiency remains a symbol of high culture and status among the general population on the island, thanks to the mainlanders’ dominance

³²Muller, ‘Us and Them’.

³³Habyarimna et al., ‘Better Institutions’.

³⁴Corcuff, ‘Taiwan’s “Mainlanders”: A New Ethnic Category’; and Corcuff, ‘Taiwan’s “Mainlanders”, New Taiwanese?’.

³⁵Harrell and Huang, ‘Introduction’.

³⁶Wachman, *Taiwan*.

in the establishment circles and earlier social formations of ‘ethnicity’ and social class.³⁷

Additionally, the ethnic appeal of the DPP may also be suspect, as careful research has shown. With political liberalization since US de-recognition, the ‘tang wai’ movement deployed concepts of ‘Taiwanese identity’ against the authoritarian KMT government, often using extreme tactics to build a short-term ethnically charged opposition to the KMT.³⁸ But the concept of a ‘Taiwanese people’ was manipulatively politicized by opponents of the KMT. As David Yang observes, the seemingly ethnic base of the political opposition against the KMT was in fact class oriented: the local Taiwanese support for the DPP was less due to ethnic identity than grievances about equalities. For political and historical reasons the local Taiwanese happened to form the bulk of the lower classes. Because ethnic appeals were more inclusive than class ones, the DPP found them politically useful, even if empirically inaccurate.³⁹

Like the DPP, Dharamsala thrives by capitalizing on and politicizing the ethnic issue. As masterly put by Brantly Womack, the Dalai Lama as an exile leader ‘represents a group whose special identity as exiles is founded on a mutual rejection between themselves and China, and whose external support and sympathy is also related to an antipathy for China’.⁴⁰ This rejection and antipathy are passionately reinforced by a number of strategies and tactics: perpetuated myths about Tibetan history and current realities;⁴¹ a TGIE school curriculum that inculcate a deep sense of dispossession in the new generations of exiles; the Dalai’s exhortation of young exiles to remember national tragedy and avenge history; and most of all, reflex demonization of China. Dharamsala’s physical isolation and lack of contact with the outside world help reinforce a self-perpetuated sense of the Other.

Notably, Dharamsala’s education is bilingual, in Tibetan and English, but the teaching of the Chinese language is emphatically excluded, adding to barriers of understanding and communication. Even Tibetan émigrés from China may experience rejection and antipathy if their ways and tastes are deemed Chinese.⁴² A close observer of the exile scene, a Tibetan Chinese scholar, notes a disturbing difference between the younger generation of Tibetans reared in China and those reared in Dharamsala: the former do not exude any feeling of ethnic hatred for the Han Chinese, while the latter can be full of it.⁴³ The same is true of the contrast between the Greater Chinese (Han and minority groups) and the exiles. This may signify the failure of Dharamsala’s educational system as a source of intellectual enlightenment and Buddhist values.⁴⁴ Or it may have to do with the intensity of the ideology and nationalistic sentiment developed among the exiles.

³⁷Gates, ‘Ethnicity and Social Class’.

³⁸Edmunson, ‘February 2.18 Incident’.

³⁹Yang, ‘Classing Ethnicity’.

⁴⁰Womack, ‘Resolving Asymmetrical Stalemate’, 452–3.

⁴¹See Sautman, ‘Colonialism, Genocide’; Sautman, ‘Introduction’; Sautman, ‘Is Tibet China’s Colony?’; Sautman, ‘Tibet and the (Mis-) Representation’; Sautman, ‘Tibet: Myths and Realities’; Sautman and Dreyer, ‘Demographic Annihilation’; Sautman and Dreyer, ‘Introduction’.

⁴²Shakya, ‘The Gulf’ and Interviews with Tibetan émigrés from China conducted by the author, New York city, 2008 and 2009.

⁴³Interviews with Tibetan émigrés from China conducted by the author, New York City, 2008 and 2009.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Dharamsala, like Taiwan, can also be said to have a mainland China constituency: the émigrés from Tibetan regions of China who arrive routinely. But unlike the mainlanders in Taiwan, these Tibetan mainlanders tend to be marginalized and powerless groups in Dharamsala. Contrary to TGIE rhetoric and Western assumptions, they are rarely political or religious refugees. While these émigrés came from Tibet in the 1980s or 1990s, in the recent decade Tibetan émigrés are usually from interior provinces such as Qinghai and Sichuan. This is because, Professor Tsering Shakya writes, ‘senior lamas who left Tibet have established monasteries in India and wherever they are, that place is seen as the legitimate seat of the lama’, so that ‘most (émigrés) came because their local lamas were in India and they needed to go there to obtain religious education and initiation’ according to Tibetan Buddhist traditions.⁴⁵

By another account, recent émigrés, often less-well-to-do young men from remote mountains and children of more conservative families, are attempted by words of the mouth that the Dalai Lama will ‘take care’ of them in India. Just as frequently, they are tempted by accounts of successful passage to greener pastures in Western countries, through India and Nepal as transit points. On arriving in India, these émigrés will indeed be taken care of – free schooling, room and board – but only for three years. Then they are usually out on the street or on the dole. The staggering unemployment rate offers little job prospects in the exile community. Lack of skills and Hindi limits finding jobs in the Indian economy. Many émigrés have been disappointed, and reduced to waiting in frustrated anticipation of returning to a promised homeland. The frustration can fuel radicalism for some. Others make their way to the West.⁴⁶ It has become such an attractive path to exit the hardship of the mountains that entire extended families have settled in the US this way, taking advantage of its generous political refugee law. Some mountain communities have few young men left, not unlike the poor countryside of coastal Fujian province.⁴⁷

The trans-regional experience of the exile community in Dharamsala can help create a pan-ethnic identity and politically, the demand for ‘greater Tibet’. As Womack has noted eloquently, the exile community is the most concentrated trans-regional and cross-stratum group of Tibetans anywhere, which is impossible in Tibet itself; and living in such a microcosm of ‘greater Tibet’ unites the exiles in their projected aspirations and sense of victimhood by China.⁴⁸ Beijing’s own post-Mao policies have also aided. With the restoration of monasteries and the monastic clergy, part of Hu Yaobang’s ‘remedying past wrongs’ campaign, class identity – which held the Tibetans’ allegiance for the Chinese state in the Mao era – has yielded to the de-classed religious and ethnic identity.⁴⁹ Market reforms, meanwhile, have made losers of many uneducated Tibetan youths and nomads. If identification with the ‘collective’ and ‘commune membership’ has sustained the loyalty and support of older Tibetans for Beijing, younger Tibetans left behind by market

⁴⁵Shakya, ‘The Gulf’.

⁴⁶Singh, ‘Tibetan Exiles’ and Interviews with Tibetan émigrés from China conducted by the author, New York city, 2008 and 2009.

⁴⁷Interviews with Tibetan émigrés from China conducted by the author, New York city, 2008 and 2009.

⁴⁸Womack, ‘Resolving Asymmetrical Stalemate’.

⁴⁹Wang, ‘Reflections’.

reforms can cite the gulf between the Han Chinese and themselves as a leading source of frustration and heightened ethnic consciousness.⁵⁰

At the same time, private accounts of Tibetan Chinese émigrés also tell a more complex story. In Dharamsala, sorrowful nostalgia and disappointment among adult émigrés are common, as is psychological attachment to families in China. TV channels from back home – Sichuan, Qinghai and Tibet – are available. Sichuan produce fills up street shops. Encounters with Chinese visitors can elicit friendliness and homesickness.⁵¹ New York city, where thousands of Tibetans have settled, tensions between India-born exiles and Chinese born émigrés are just below the surface. While the two groups may mingle on the important cultural and religious occasions,⁵² they do not share political goals or many earthly preferences. Over 90% of the Tibetan Chinese are hard-working immigrants concerned with making it economically in their new surroundings, rather than with anti-China or separatist activities. They may display the Dalai's photos in their homes to show overt reverence, or mere conformity, but privately disobey his orders of not celebrating the New Year in protest of China. Known disagreement with pro-Dalai supporters can result in the latter harassing their businesses until they close down. These Tibetan Chinese find it culturally more comfortable with other Chinese immigrants, even for such sensitive matters as marriages.⁵³ Professor Shakya confirms the gulf between Chinese and exile Tibetans: 'Even when the two groups meet in neutral places in the West, there is often little interaction between them. I frequently have to attend two parties in one evening, one organized by long-term diaspora groups, another by those coming from Tibet, since they cannot even agree on what music to play.'⁵⁴

Despite the gulf, the Tibetan Chinese émigrés can be an encouraging source of agents for economic and human interaction across Himalayas. With their cross-community and cross-regional ties across linguistic, cultural and social lines, they can best play the role of the investors and traders, bridging economic ties while avoiding political tensions. Their linkages at once to their ethnic brethren in India and their Han relatives and neighbors in China render the relations between Han Chinese and Tibetan exiles closer than the latter would like to admit: distant cousins, although estranged for now.

The cultural issue: secular modernism vs politicized spirituality

Culturally, the gap in spirituality between the Han Chinese and Tibetans seems such that it can render any divisions between the mainland and Taiwanese Chinese insignificant. On a closer look, however, the Tibetan tradition of religion as the source of identity, value orientation and governance system may have some resemblance to the traditional Chinese polity and belief system based on Confucianism. The politicization of spirituality by the TGIE, however, can render the spiritual matter inflexible and defensive. Thus the exiles' defense of Tibet and

⁵⁰Common Alliance Legal Research Center, *An Investigative Report*.

⁵¹Anon., 'Visiting'.

⁵²Two occasions bring Tibetans together annually in North America: The Tibetan New Year in the spring and the Dalai's birthday in June.

⁵³Interviews with Tibetan émigrés from China conducted by the author, New York city, 2008 and 2009.

⁵⁴Shakya, 'The Gulf'.

Tibetan-ness is frequently tied to critiques of China's modernization efforts. Is it possible for exiles to value economic interaction as a matter of earthly practicality?

The lack of religious difference between China and Taiwan has deprived those asserting a separate Taiwanese identity or culture of one of the most potent political weapons. A largely secular orientation, or a lack of the centrality of religion, is a shared but underappreciated trait across the Taiwan straits. The infusion of Dutch, Japanese and American influences, even if making Taiwanese culture distinct, has still been secular, and importantly, modernizing. At most, the Taiwanese culture may be described as one with Chinese characteristics or Chinese culture with Taiwanese characteristics.⁵⁵ A shared secular orientation easily allows the two sides to have consensus on economic interexchange and progress, once China abandoned the socialist path. Importantly, the PRC was never antithetical to modernization or economic development itself, but only the capitalist path to it. Granted, it took the Chinese nation considerable time to come to terms with modernization, and there had been qualms about 'Westernization' along the way, but both the Republic of China (ROC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have embraced and celebrated the socio-economic as well as cultural modernization, without a sense of loss of identity or culture.

The Tibetan theocracy, on the other hand, had never undertaken the Chinese equivalent of the modernizing movements to reform its traditional polity and value system. Clergy obstructed modernization attempts by the 13th Dalai Lama, out of fear it might disturb the prevailing power structure.⁵⁶ It is ironic that the surviving power structure, still theocratic and embodied in the Dalai Lama, is now romanticized and idolized by the post-materialists of the West. At a time when 'cultural preservation' is the rallying point for Western support for Tibet, it is interesting to recall that imperial China was ridiculed and brutalized by Western powers and later Japan, for failing to reform and modernize. China's current developmental drive is but part of the long string of modernizing efforts since its forceful opening by Western powers: the Self-strengthening Movement of 1860s to 1890s (Yangwu yundong), the Reform Movement of 1898 (Wuxu bianfa), the Revolution of 1911 (Xinhai geming), the New Culture Movement (Xinwenhua yundong), the May Fourth Movement of 1919 (Wusi yundong) and most recently, Deng's 'four modernizations' Movement, 1978 – present. In my first visit to Taiwan, in the early 1990s, one sponsored trip was to the KMT government communication bureau. There I was shown an official documentary showcasing Taiwan's economic achievements. The first few words remain fresh in my mind: after a century of suffering in the hands of foreign powers, 'the Chinese people finally made it – in Taiwan'.

With its preoccupation with Tibet's political status and religious identity, the TGIE seems to care little about developmental issues, except to attack China's efforts. The Dalai Lama indicates that he is not against modernization in Tibetan regions but only its inequity and destructiveness, although he offers no alternative program to lift Tibetan masses out of poverty in his own town and beyond. The monastic class has historically been viewed in Chinese Marxist terminology as 'parasitic', an idle class living off monastic land, serf levies and devotees' contributions. Ranging between 10% to as high as 40% of the young male population in old Tibet, the monastic class – whose upper strata alone had the right

⁵⁵Kehoe, 'Taiwanese Identity'.

⁵⁶Barnett, cited in Lehman, *The Tibetans*.

to own land and receive education – has been blamed for the extreme destitution of ordinary Tibetans under the old theocracy. Though reduced to 2% of the population now, monks still number over 150,000 in China's Tibetan regions, and their 'idle' lifestyle may not always be a positive model for those young Tibetans struggling to make it in the market economy.⁵⁷ Yet the exiles worry about the limits placed on monastic recruitment (age requirements, i.e. 18 and older), rather than skill development for unemployed Tibetan youths.

The TGIE has not only become prisoner of its own cultural politics, but also that of its Western admirers. The so-called international (primarily Western) support for the TGIE's cause is based on 'a particular representation of Tibetans as inherently spiritual and peaceful people'⁵⁸ and the image of 'Tibet as a defenseless underdog, a spiritual society that was minding its own business, only to get crushed under the jackboot of an aggressive, materialistic overlord'.⁵⁹ But *Excotica Tibet* is more about the West's self-image than about Tibet, as Anand notes, and for many Tibetophiles, 'the idea of Tibet is of something the West lost and should strive toward'.⁶⁰ Western writings and emotions about Tibet can be at times 'conservative protests against modernism, the masses, and the changing world order'⁶¹ and at other times, 'counter to the globalizing tendencies' of modernization.⁶² And much of what is behind the support for Tibetans 'may not be actual support for the Tibetans, but unconscious support for Western ideas of what is right for Tibetans'.⁶³ It is a form of 'neo-Orientalism' and even 'latent cultural imperialism', as Anand puts it. Yet to garner sympathy and international support, Tibetan elites in the diaspora have themselves invested heavily in such neo-Orientalist strategies for their own tactical purposes, by adopting a Western representation of what 'Tibetan-ness' is as their own self-image.⁶⁴

To the extent that among the exiles, preservation of traditional culture and nationalism are 'the main dynamics behind the politics of resistance',⁶⁵ thus, the volition to value economic development and interaction will remain weak. It would be, after all, antithetical to the diaspora's imagined or engineered self-image, and its political cause.

Conclusion

In evaluating the lessons of Taiwan for the Tibet question, this paper has considered four dimensions of comparative dynamics between the Taiwan and TGIE cases in relation to China. Of the four, Taiwan has high convergence with China on economic, ethnic and cultural dimensions, and managed contention on the territorial dimension. The TGIE, on the other hand, has high divergence with China on all dimensions: territorial dispute, economic incongruence, ethnic estrangement, and cultural gulf. The TGIE is ideologically and sentimentally charged by this divergence

⁵⁷Rigzin, 'Tibet'.

⁵⁸Anand, 'The Tibet Question', 299.

⁵⁹Schell, *Virtual*, 206.

⁶⁰Anand, 'The Tibet Question', 297.

⁶¹Bishop, *Dreams of Power*, 15.

⁶²Neilson, 'Inside Shangri-La'.

⁶³Barnett, 'Effectiveness of Parliamentary Initiatives', 281.

⁶⁴Anand, 'The Tibet Question', 295, 299.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 299.

and thrives by exploiting it. It therefore should have few incentives to see the lessons of Taiwan applied.

Nevertheless, Tibetan Chinese émigrés, with cross-regional, cross-ethnic and cross-linguistic ties with both mainland and exile communities, present a potential source of economic – and along with it – neutralizing human and cultural linkages. Three modest policy recommendations are thus in order for China. First, make it easier for Tibetan Chinese émigrés to travel back to China, even after illegal exodus. While they can trek back to Tibetan regions in China without travel documents, just as they trekked out, those who have migrated to Western countries face more procedural hurdles: the lack of a passport to travel back to China. This would only weaken their ties to China. Second, reassure India about Tibetan Chinese émigrés. Understandably India has increasingly turned away the illegal migrants. But with the understanding they won't likely stay long and will be allowed back, India may show some flexibility. Third, sponsor organized tours for exile youths to visit Tibetan regions of China, to volunteer as short-term teachers in bilingual schools, or even to learn Chinese, if the TGIE would allow them. Being in physical contact with Tibet will help dispel misconceptions, ease the sense of dispossession, and temper the demonization of China.

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