

**Taiwan's African Footprint:  
Contributions and Contestations in the Shadow of China**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines Taiwan's historical and contemporary engagement with Africa, analyzing its contributions to and contestations on the continent against the backdrop of China's growing influence. Despite losing formal diplomatic recognition from all but one African nation, Taiwan has maintained a significant, if diminished, presence in Africa through economic, cultural, and unofficial ties. The study traces Taiwan's evolving relationship with African countries from the 1960s to the present, highlighting its early developmental assistance programs, agricultural cooperation initiatives, and medical missions. It explores how Taiwan's "pragmatic diplomacy" and economic outreach have allowed it to preserve some influence even as China's economic and political clout on the continent has expanded dramatically. The paper argues that Taiwan's experience in Africa offers insights into the complex interplay of diplomacy, development, and great power competition in the Global South. By examining specific case studies of Taiwan's projects and partnerships in various African nations, it illuminates both the contributions Taiwan has made to African development and the challenges it faces in maintaining relevance on a continent increasingly oriented toward China. The analysis considers the implications of Taiwan's African engagement for cross-strait relations, Taiwan's international space, and the future of China-Africa-Taiwan dynamics.

**Keywords:** Taiwan-Africa relations, China's influence, pragmatic diplomacy, economic cooperation, geopolitical competition

## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Background on Taiwan-Africa Relations**

Taiwan's engagement with Africa has been a complex and dynamic process spanning over seven decades, characterized by shifting diplomatic alliances, economic partnerships, and geopolitical contestations. The roots of this relationship can be traced back to 1949, when the Kuomintang (KMT) government retreated to Taiwan following the Chinese Civil War (Chen, 2022). As newly independent African nations emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, both the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland sought to establish diplomatic ties with these countries (Kironska, 2022).

Initially, Taiwan enjoyed considerable success in forging relationships with African nations. At its peak, the ROC maintained formal diplomatic relations with approximately 30 African countries (Kironska, 2022). This success was partly due to Taiwan's economic prowess and its alignment with Western powers during the Cold War era. Taiwan's approach focused on providing technical assistance, agricultural cooperation, and economic aid to its African partners (Nkhoma, 2021).

However, the geopolitical landscape shifted dramatically in 1971 when the United Nations passed Resolution 2758, recognizing the PRC as the sole legitimate representative of China (Chen, 2022). This event marked a turning point in Taiwan's African diplomacy, as many countries began to switch their recognition to Beijing. The subsequent decades saw a gradual erosion of Taiwan's diplomatic presence on the continent, with China's growing economic influence playing a crucial role in this shift (Kironska, 2022).

Despite these challenges, Taiwan continued to pursue engagement with Africa through various means. It adopted a strategy of "pragmatic diplomacy", focusing on unofficial ties, economic cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges (Kironska, 2023). Taiwan also leveraged its expertise in areas such as agriculture, healthcare, and technology to maintain relevance and goodwill among African

nations (Nkhoma, 2021).

The competition between Taiwan and China for diplomatic recognition in Africa intensified in the 1990s and early 2000s, often characterized as "dollar diplomacy" (Rich and Banerjee, 2015). Both sides used economic incentives to woo African countries, leading to several instances of nations switching allegiances multiple times. However, China's rapid economic growth and increasing global influence in the 21st century have made it increasingly difficult for Taiwan to compete on this front.

Today, Taiwan's official diplomatic presence in Africa has been reduced to a single ally, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). Nevertheless, Taiwan continues to maintain unofficial relations with several African countries through trade offices, cultural exchanges, and development cooperation initiatives.

Taiwan's engagement with Africa has evolved significantly over seven decades, marked by substantial contributions and persistent contestations, particularly in the face of China's growing influence on the continent. This complex relationship has been shaped by global geopolitical shifts, economic considerations, and the ongoing cross-strait tensions between Taiwan and China. Despite the challenges, Taiwan has demonstrated resilience and adaptability in its African engagement, continually seeking new avenues for cooperation and mutual benefit. As the geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, Taiwan's relationship with Africa remains a crucial aspect of its broader strategy for international recognition and economic diplomacy.

## **B. Thesis Statement**

The thesis of this paper is that Taiwan's African footprint, while diminished in terms of formal diplomatic ties, continues to be significant through economic, cultural, and unofficial channels. Despite the challenges posed by China's economic and political ascendancy in Africa, Taiwan has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in maintaining its presence and relevance on the continent.

This paper argues that Taiwan's approach to Africa, characterized by targeted

development assistance, technical cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges, offers an alternative model of engagement that contrasts with China's large-scale infrastructure projects and resource-focused investments. By examining Taiwan's historical and contemporary interactions with African nations, we can gain insights into the nuanced interplay of diplomacy, development, and great power competition in the Global South.

Furthermore, this study contends that Taiwan's African engagement has implications that extend beyond the continent, influencing cross-strait relations, Taiwan's international space, and the broader dynamics of China-Africa-Taiwan relations. By analyzing Taiwan's contributions and the contestations it faces, we can better understand the challenges and opportunities for middle powers in navigating an increasingly multipolar world order.

## **II. Historical Context**

### **A. Taiwan's Early Engagement with Africa (1960s-1971)**

Taiwan's early engagement with Africa from the 1960s to 1971 was characterized by a focus on agricultural and technical assistance programs, coupled with efforts to secure diplomatic recognition from newly independent African states.

In 1960, Taiwan launched Operation Vanguard, marking the beginning of its agricultural assistance to Africa. This initiative involved dispatching agricultural missions to help modernize African agricultural production (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 2023). Taiwan's approach emphasized providing technical training and assistance to newly independent countries, with the first technical cooperation agreement signed with Liberia in 1960 (Kironska, 2022).

Taiwan's strategy centered on sharing its agricultural expertise, particularly in rice cultivation. The success of these programs was evident in the increased rice production in Libya and the "miracle of rice cultivation in the Libyan desert", which impressed many African countries. Taiwan also focused on technical training, initiating courses for agricultural technicians heading to Africa. Between 1962 and 1972, eighteen such courses were held, training a total of 1,229 people

(ICDF, n.d.).

Diplomatically, Taiwan's efforts bore fruit. Between 1960 and 1963, Taiwan received recognition from 13 out of 23 African countries, while China only secured recognition from five. By 1969, Taiwan had diplomatic relations with 22 African states, and its support at the UN from African countries rose from three in 1955 to 21 in 1969 (Kironka, 2022).

This period represented the peak of Taiwan's influence in Africa, with 29 technical missions stationed across the continent by 1969 (ICDF, n.d.). However, this era of diplomatic success was short-lived, as geopolitical shifts in the early 1970s would soon alter the landscape of Taiwan-Africa relations.

## **B. The Impact of UN Resolution 2758 (1971)**

The adoption of UN Resolution 2758 on October 25, 1971, marked a pivotal moment in Taiwan's international standing. This resolution recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) as "the only legitimate representative of China to the United Nations" and expelled "the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek" from the UN and its associated organizations (Winkler, 2012; Hale, 2023).

The impact of Resolution 2758 was profound and far-reaching for Taiwan:

1. **Diplomatic isolation:** Taiwan lost its seat at the UN and was subsequently excluded from many international organizations, especially those affiliated with the United Nations (Winkler, 2012).
2. **Shift in African allegiances:** 26 out of 39 African nations voted in favor of the PRC's restoration, significantly altering Taiwan's diplomatic landscape in Africa (Odot, 2024).
3. **Legal ambiguity:** While the resolution addressed the issue of China's representation, it did not explicitly mention Taiwan or determine its status (Jerzowski, 2024; Wu and Lin, 2024).
4. **Basis for PRC claims:** China has since used Resolution 2758 as a foundation for its "One China" principle, asserting that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China (Jerzowski, 2024; Wu and Lin, 2024).

5. **International participation challenges:** The resolution has been used to justify Taiwan's exclusion from various UN bodies and international forums (Drun and Glaser, 2022).
6. **Ongoing contestation:** Taiwan and its allies continue to argue that Resolution 2758 does not legitimize PRC sovereignty over Taiwan, leading to ongoing diplomatic tensions (Wu and Lin, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 2024).

The aftermath of Resolution 2758 continues to shape Taiwan's international relations and its struggle for recognition in global affairs.

### **C. Taiwan's "Dollar Diplomacy" Era (1970s-1990s)**

Following the loss of its UN seat in 1971, Taiwan adopted a strategy known as "dollar diplomacy" to maintain its international presence, particularly in Africa. This approach involved using economic incentives, such as loans, aid, and investments, to secure diplomatic recognition from developing countries (Kironska, 2022; Winkler, 2011).

During this period, Taiwan's economic power enabled it to win recognition from several African countries in need of financial assistance. The practice often led to a bidding war between Taiwan and China, with some African nations switching allegiances multiple times to gain more benefits (Kironska, 2023; Fabricius, 2018).

Notable examples of Taiwan's dollar diplomacy include (Fabricius, 2018):

1. A \$50 million loan to Niger in 1992, resulting in diplomatic recognition.
2. A \$35 million loan to Gambia in 1995, also leading to recognition.

The competition for diplomatic allies sometimes reached extreme levels. Countries like Senegal, Liberia, and the Central African Republic switched their recognition between Taiwan and China up to five times each (Kironska, 2023).

However, this approach had its limitations. As one scholar noted, "Taiwan's maintenance of diplomatic relations with these countries is mostly via notorious

'dollar diplomacy' or 'chequebook diplomacy'" (Taylor, 2002). The strategy was often criticized for being unsustainable and potentially corrupting.

#### D. China's Rising Influence and Taiwan's Declining Diplomatic Presence

As China's economic and political influence grew globally, particularly from the late 1990s onwards, Taiwan's ability to maintain its diplomatic allies in Africa diminished significantly (Figure 1)(Kironksa, 2022).



**Figure 1: Taiwan vs. China in Africa**

Source: "Sino-African Relations", *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sino-African\\_relations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sino-African_relations).

Several factors contributed to China's increasing appeal to African nations:

1. **Economic power:** China's rapid economic growth allowed it to offer more substantial financial incentives than Taiwan (Kironksa, 2023).
2. **Trade opportunities:** China became Africa's largest trading partner, with trade increasing by 700% during the 1990s (Wonacott, 2011).
3. **Investment and infrastructure:** China's ability to fund and implement large-scale infrastructure projects across Africa made it an attractive partner (Stein and Uddhammar, 2021).
4. **Political influence:** China's permanent seat on the UN Security Council



added to its diplomatic weight (Fabricius 2018).

As a result, many African countries that had previously recognized Taiwan switched their allegiance to China. Some notable shifts include (Anthony *et al.*, 2013; Fabricius, 2018):

- South Africa in 1998;
- Liberia in 2002;
- Senegal in 2005;
- Chad in 2006; and
- Malawi in 2008.

By 2024, Taiwan was left with only one diplomatic ally in Africa: Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). This dramatic decline in formal diplomatic relations forced Taiwan to adapt its approach, focusing more on unofficial ties and economic cooperation through entities like the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA).

The shift in diplomatic landscape reflects the broader changes in global power dynamics and the increasing importance of China in international affairs. It also highlights the challenges Taiwan faces in maintaining its international space and recognition in the face of China's "One China" policy.

### **III. Taiwan's Contributions to African Development**

#### **A. Agricultural Cooperation**

##### **1. Case Study: Increased Rice Production in Libya**

Taiwan's agricultural cooperation with Libya in the 1960s stands out as a notable success story, particularly in increasing rice production in the desert region of Wadi es Shatti, Fezzan province.

In 1961, Taiwan sent its first agricultural technical mission to Libya as part of a two-year project to grow rice in the saline lands of Wadi es Shatti (Kironka,

2022; Taiwan Today, 1962a). This initiative was groundbreaking, as it aimed to cultivate rice in an area previously considered unsuitable for such crops. The Taiwanese team, consisting of 14 farmers, faced the challenge of transforming desert land into productive rice fields (Taiwan Today, 1962a; 1962b).

The project employed innovative techniques to overcome harsh desert conditions. Taiwanese experts introduced new rice varieties suitable for the local climate and soil conditions. They also implemented advanced irrigation methods to efficiently use the limited water resources available in the desert environment. The team provided training to local Libyan farmers, sharing their expertise in rice cultivation techniques, pest management, and efficient use of fertilizers (Hsieh, 2001; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 1962).

The results of this cooperation were remarkable. Within two years, the Taiwanese mission successfully demonstrated that rice could be grown in the Libyan desert. This achievement was often referred to as the "miracle of rice cultivation in the Libyan desert," which impressed many African countries (Hsieh, 2001). The success of this project not only increased Libya's rice production but also showcased Taiwan's agricultural expertise on the international stage.

The Libya case study became a model for Taiwan's subsequent agricultural cooperation projects in Africa. It demonstrated Taiwan's ability to adapt its agricultural knowledge to diverse and challenging environments. Moreover, it highlighted the effectiveness of Taiwan's approach, which combined technical assistance, hands-on demonstration, and training of local farmers (Taiwan Today, 1962c).

This successful cooperation in Libya played a significant role in enhancing Taiwan's diplomatic relations with African countries during the 1960s and early 1970s. It established Taiwan as a valuable partner in agricultural development, particularly in rice production, which was crucial for many African nations seeking to achieve food security (Liu, 2009).

## **B. Healthcare Initiatives**

### **1. Medical Missions and Capacity Building**

Taiwan has made significant contributions to healthcare initiatives in Africa through medical missions and capacity building programs. These efforts have focused on providing direct medical services and enhancing local healthcare capabilities.

Taiwan's medical missions have been instrumental in delivering healthcare to underserved areas in Africa. Since 1996, Taiwanese medical teams have worked with hospitals in countries such as Burkina Faso, Eswatini, and São Tomé and Príncipe, benefiting over 100,000 people through cooperative programs (Embassy of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2015). These missions typically involve teams of healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and public health personnel, who provide a range of medical services and health education (Weng *et al.*, 2015).

In addition to direct medical care, Taiwan has prioritized capacity building to strengthen local healthcare systems. The Taiwan International Healthcare Training Center, established in 2002, has trained more than 1,600 public health personnel from 68 countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 2020). This initiative demonstrates Taiwan's commitment to sharing its healthcare expertise and supporting long-term improvements in global public health.

Taiwan has also launched specific programs targeting chronic diseases in African countries. For example, in 2024, Taiwan initiated a project with Eswatini to strengthen metabolic chronic disease prevention and control systems. This four-year plan aims to increase community screening and referral rates for high-risk groups, with a goal of raising the treatment rate for newly diagnosed diabetes and hypertension patients to 50 percent (Yang and Ko, 2024).

Furthermore, Taiwan has fostered partnerships between its universities and African institutions to enhance public health education and research. The National Taiwan University has collaborated with universities in Malawi, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Namibia to offer training in environmental health, occupational hygiene, biostatistics, epidemiology, and preventive medicine (Ruwoko and Waruru, 2024).

These healthcare initiatives showcase Taiwan's commitment to global health and its ability to contribute meaningfully to improving healthcare outcomes in Africa, despite its limited diplomatic recognition on the continent.

### **C. Technical Training and Education Programs**

Taiwan has made significant contributions to technical training and education programs in Africa, leveraging its expertise in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to support African countries in developing skilled workforces.

One notable initiative is the "African Elite Talent Cultivation Programme", which includes the "Intensive Training Course for African Elites for the Agricultural Sector." This program, organized by the National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, brings together experts and representatives from various African countries for comprehensive training in agricultural technology and practices (Ministry of Education, R.O.C., 2024).

Taiwan's approach to technical education emphasizes practical, hands-on learning. The country has invested heavily in creating industry-level production line bases and cross-disciplinary practical training sites to ensure students gain real-world skills. This model has been shared with African partners, helping to bridge the gap between education and industry needs (Ministry of Education, R.O.C., 2011).

Taiwan Tech has also launched cross-border digital collaborative learning programs, such as the initiative involving Taiwanese and Kenyan students. These programs focus on emerging technologies like AI and digital tools, promoting international academic collaboration and cultural exchange (Taiwan Tech, n.d.).

Furthermore, Taiwan's technical missions in African countries, such as Eswatini, provide training to improve administrative efficiency and strengthen employees' skills in various sectors (ICDF, 2018). These missions demonstrate Taiwan's commitment to long-term capacity building in partner countries.

Taiwan's TVET model, which emphasizes aligning education with industry needs, could serve as a valuable reference for African countries seeking to develop their technical education systems. The focus on practical skills, industry

collaboration, and adaptability to emerging technologies makes Taiwan's approach particularly relevant to Africa's development goals (ACT Afrique Group, 2021).

#### **D. Economic Investments and Trade Relations**

Taiwan's economic investments and trade relations with Africa have evolved significantly over the years, despite the challenges posed by limited diplomatic recognition. The country has pursued a strategy of "pragmatic diplomacy" to maintain and expand its economic presence on the continent.

Taiwan's trade with Africa, while not as substantial as China's, remains significant. South Africa stands out as Taiwan's largest trade partner in Africa, with bilateral trade reaching USD \$1.06 billion from January to November 2019. Taiwan enjoyed a USD \$17.6 million trade surplus, with exports to South Africa reaching USD \$539.6 million and imports from South Africa constituting USD \$522 million during this period (Schultz, 2019). However, bilateral trade relations have since faced volatility due to diplomatic tensions and shifting economic priorities. While South Africa gained \$131.1 million surplus, with Taiwan's exports of \$676.4 million against imports of \$807.5 million (Ministry of Finance, R.O.C., 2024), ongoing political pressures and China's influence pose risks to future collaboration.

To facilitate trade and investment, Taiwan has established several mechanisms:

1. The Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) operates offices in Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Algeria, aiding in fostering economic ties (Gargiulo, 2024).
2. The Africa Taiwan Economic Forum, established in 2003, aims to address trade imbalances between Taiwan and Africa and promote intercultural communication and tourism (Kironksa, 2022).
3. The Taiwan Africa Business Association (TABA), founded in 1997, fosters trade between Taiwan and Africa by establishing business networks and facilitating information exchange (Chen, 2024).

Taiwan's investments in Africa are notable, particularly in South Africa. As of 2017, approximately 800 Taiwanese factories and companies were based in South Africa, providing an estimated 40,000 local jobs and about USD \$1.69 billion in cumulative direct investment annually (Schultz, 2019).

Taiwan has also shown interest in expanding its economic presence in other African countries. For instance, Taiwan's state-owned oil company, Taiwan CPC, has expressed interest in business operations in Somaliland, citing the country's potential in petroleum, natural gas, and mineral industries (Hagi, 2024).

Despite these efforts, Taiwan's economic engagement with Africa faces challenges, primarily due to China's growing influence on the continent. However, Taiwan continues to seek opportunities for deeper investment ties and trade relations with African nations, leveraging its expertise in areas such as agriculture, healthcare, and technology.

### **E. Taiwan's Model of "Pragmatic Diplomacy"**

Taiwan's model of "pragmatic diplomacy" emerged as a response to its unique international position and the challenges posed by China's growing influence. This approach, developed in the late 1980s under President Lee Teng-hui, emphasizes flexibility and creativity in maintaining and expanding Taiwan's international presence despite limited formal diplomatic recognition (Kironska, 2022).

Key aspects of Taiwan's pragmatic diplomacy include:

1. **Establishing unofficial ties:** Taiwan focuses on building relationships with countries through representative offices, trade missions, and cultural exchanges, even without formal diplomatic recognition (Kironska, 2023).
2. **Economic and technical cooperation:** Taiwan leverages its economic strength and technical expertise to foster partnerships, particularly in areas such as agriculture, healthcare, and technology (Kironska, 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2007).
3. **Participation in international organizations:** Taiwan seeks involvement

in global and regional bodies, often under alternative names or designations, such as "Chinese Taipei" in the Olympics (Chien, 1993).

4. **People-to-people diplomacy:** Taiwan emphasizes cultural exchanges, educational programs, and grassroots connections to build international goodwill (Nyelade, 2024).
5. **Flexible nomenclature:** Taiwan adapts its official designations and titles in international contexts to navigate political sensitivities (Nyelade, 2024).
6. **Focus on shared values:** Taiwan highlights its democratic system and commitment to human rights to align with like-minded countries (Lin, 2024).

This pragmatic approach has allowed Taiwan to maintain a degree of international presence and influence despite its diplomatic isolation. For instance, Taiwan has successfully joined organizations like APEC and applied for GATT membership. The strategy has also enabled Taiwan to preserve economic and cultural ties with countries that officially recognize China, such as its trade relationship with South Africa.

However, pragmatic diplomacy faces ongoing challenges, particularly as China's global influence grows. Taiwan must continually adapt its approach to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape and maintain its international space.

## **IV. Contestations and Challenges**

### **A. Competition with China's Economic and Political Influence: A Game Theory Analysis**

Taiwan's competition with China for influence in Africa can be analyzed through the lens of game theory, providing insights into the strategic decisions and outcomes of this complex geopolitical rivalry.

The relationship between China, Taiwan, and African nations can be modeled as a multi-player game with asymmetric payoffs. China, with its vast economic

resources and global influence, holds a significant advantage. Taiwan, despite its limited diplomatic recognition, leverages its expertise in areas such as agriculture and healthcare to maintain relevance.

One applicable model to China-Taiwan relations is the Prisoner's Dilemma, which can explain the complex dynamics of their interactions, particularly in the context of international recognition and diplomatic competition. Here is how the model applies:

1. **Players:** China and Taiwan are the primary players in this scenario.
2. **Strategies:** Each player has two main strategies:
  - **Cooperation:** Engaging in peaceful dialogue, reducing military tensions, and pursuing economic cooperation.
  - **Defection:** Increasing military pressure, seeking international isolation of the other party, and pursuing unilateral actions.
3. **Payoff Matrix:**
  - If both cooperate: Moderate benefits for both (economic growth, stability)
  - If both defect: Negative outcomes for both (increased tensions, economic disruption)
  - If one cooperates and the other defects: The defector gains a significant advantage, while the cooperator suffers losses.
4. **Dominant Strategy:** In the short term, defection often appears as the dominant strategy for both parties, as it offers the potential for unilateral gains.
5. **Nash Equilibrium:** The equilibrium tends towards mutual defection, even though both parties would be better off if they cooperated.

This model explains several aspects of China-Taiwan relations:

1. **Military Buildup:** Both sides continue to invest in military capabilities, reflecting the 'defection' strategy.
2. **Diplomatic Competition:** China's efforts to isolate Taiwan diplomatically and Taiwan's attempts to maintain international recognition represent competitive strategies.



3. **Economic Interdependence:** Despite political tensions, economic cooperation persists, showing elements of the ‘cooperation’ strategy.
4. **International Pressure:** Third-party involvement (e.g., the U.S.) can alter the payoff matrix, potentially encouraging cooperation.
5. **Long-term vs. Short-term Strategies:** While defection might seem advantageous in the short term, both sides recognize the potential catastrophic consequences of escalation, leading to a delicate balance.

The Prisoner’s Dilemma model thus illustrates why China and Taiwan often engage in competitive behaviors even when cooperation might yield better overall outcomes for both parties (see, e.g., Li, 2020).

Another relevant model is the Matching Pennies game, where China and Taiwan compete for influence in specific African countries or sectors. In this zero-sum game, one player’s gain is the other’s loss. China’s strategy might focus on large-scale infrastructure projects, while Taiwan concentrates on targeted development assistance (Mwadi Makengo, 2021).

The game becomes more complex when considering repeated interactions and the potential for cooperation or defection. Taiwan’s “pragmatic diplomacy” can be seen as an attempt to change the game’s structure, moving from a zero-sum competition to a scenario where both Taiwan and African nations can benefit, even without formal diplomatic ties (Ngo, 2024).

China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) further complicates the game by creating a network of countries economically tied to Beijing. This strategy aims to gradually erode U.S. global leadership and, by extension, Taiwan’s international space (Academia Sinica, 2024).

Taiwan’s remaining diplomatic allies in Africa, particularly Eswatini, represent a subgame where Taiwan’s has managed to maintain a Nash equilibrium despite China’s pressure. The stability of this equilibrium depends on factors such as the strength of personal relationships between leaders and the perceived value of Taiwan’s specific contributions (Rich and Banerjee, 2015).

In conclusion, game theory analysis suggests that China’s economic and

political advantages create a challenging environment for Taiwan in Africa. However, Taiwan's targeted approach and focus on niche areas of expertise allow it to maintain some influence, even as the broader game tilts in China's favor.

## **B. The "One China" Policy and Its Impact on Taiwan-Africa Relations**

The "One China" policy has significantly shaped Taiwan-Africa relations, serving as a major obstacle to Taiwan's diplomatic efforts on the continent. This policy, which recognizes the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the sole legitimate representative of China, has been a cornerstone of Beijing's foreign policy and a key factor in its diplomatic competition with Taiwan.

China's insistence on the "One China" principle has led to a dramatic reduction in Taiwan's official diplomatic presence in Africa. As of 2024, only Eswatini maintains formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, down from approximately 30 African allies at its peak. The policy has effectively forced African nations to choose between relations with Beijing or Taipei, with most opting for the former due to China's growing economic influence.

Beijing has actively leveraged its economic and political clout to enforce the "One China" policy in Africa. This has included pressuring countries to downgrade Taiwan's diplomatic status, as seen in South Africa's recent decision to relocate Taiwan's unofficial embassy from Pretoria to Johannesburg (Bhattacharya, 2024). China has also used initiatives like the FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to strengthen its ties with African nations, further isolating Taiwan (Odota, 2024).

In response, Taiwan has adapted its approach, focusing on unofficial ties and economic cooperation through entities like the TAITRA. However, these efforts are consistently challenged by China's diplomatic pressure and economic incentives, making it increasingly difficult for Taiwan to maintain a significant presence in Africa.

## **C. Case Study: South Africa's Switch from Taipei to Beijing (1998)**

South Africa's switch from recognizing Taiwan to establishing diplomatic

relations with the People's Republic of China in 1998 serves as a significant case study in the impact of the "One China" policy on Taiwan-Africa relations.

Prior to 1998, South Africa was Taiwan's last remaining major ally and the largest country among 30 nations that still maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The two countries had enjoyed robust economic ties, with Taiwan being South Africa's largest foreign investor and seventh-largest trading partner in 1995 (Schultz, 2019).

However, pressure from Beijing and changing geopolitical dynamics led to South Africa's diplomatic shift. In 1996, President Nelson Mandela announced that South Africa would sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan at the end of 1997. This decision came after China threatened to prevent South Africa from maintaining a consulate in Hong Kong after the British handover in 1997 (Schultz, 2019).

Mandela initially attempted to pursue a "Two Chinas" policy, seeking to maintain relations with both Taiwan and mainland China (Shinn and Eisenman, 2023). However, this approach was incompatible with Beijing's One China policy, and China's growing economic influence ultimately swayed South Africa's decision (Williams, 2018).

The switch had significant implications for Taiwan's diplomatic presence in Africa. Following South Africa's decision, several other African countries followed suit, further isolating Taiwan diplomatically on the continent.

Despite the diplomatic setback, Taiwan and South Africa have maintained unofficial ties through liaison offices, continuing economic and cultural exchanges. This case highlights the challenges Taiwan faces in maintaining its diplomatic presence in Africa in the face of China's growing influence and insistence on the One China policy.

#### **D. Taiwan's Efforts to Maintain Relevance Through Unofficial Ties**

Despite its diminishing official diplomatic presence in Africa, Taiwan has made concerted efforts to maintain relevance through unofficial ties. This strategy involves establishing representative offices, fostering economic cooperation,

and engaging in cultural exchanges.

Taiwan currently maintains three representative offices in Africa: South Africa, Nigeria, and Somaliland. These offices, while not official embassies, serve as channels for economic and cultural interactions. The TAITRA has expanded its presence, operating offices in Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Algeria to promote trade and investment opportunities (Kironksa, 2022).

To address trade imbalances and promote economic ties, Taiwan established the Africa Taiwan Economic Forum in 2003. This platform, jointly held by African embassies, trade offices in Taiwan, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aims to inform potential Taiwanese investors about opportunities in Africa and foster intercultural communication (Kironksa, 2022).

Taiwan has also leveraged its expertise in agriculture, healthcare, and technology to maintain relevance. For instance, the International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF) has dispatched agricultural, educational, and medical missions to various African countries, including Cameroon, Senegal, and Rwanda (Tsou, 2020).

Furthermore, Taiwan has initiated programs like the Taiwan Youth Overseas Service, which sends young specialists in agronomy or medicine to assist in local development projects (Tsou, 2020). These grassroots initiatives, while smaller in scale compared to China's investments, aim to create lasting connections and goodwill at the community level.

Through these multifaceted approaches, Taiwan strives to maintain a presence in Africa despite the challenges posed by its limited diplomatic recognition.

## **V. Current State of Taiwan-Africa Relations**

### **A. Eswatini: Taiwan's Sole Remaining African Diplomatic Ally**

Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland, remains Taiwan's sole diplomatic ally in Africa, maintaining official relations since 1968. This enduring partnership has withstood significant pressure from China and represents a crucial foothold for

Taiwan's diplomacy on the continent.

The relationship between Taiwan and Eswatini is characterized by strong economic cooperation and development assistance. Taiwan has provided substantial support in various sectors, including rural electrification, healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Notable projects include the renovation of the Mbabane Government Hospital and the construction of the King Mswati III International Airport (Odota, 2024).

Economic ties between the two nations are formalized through the Eswatini-Republic of China (Taiwan) Economic Cooperation Agreement (ECA), which provides duty-free market access for over 100 product lines (Odota, 2024). In 2023, bilateral trade between Taiwan and Eswatini totaled US\$8.85 million, representing a 16.6% increase compared to 2017 (Ministry of Economic Affairs, R.O.C., 2024).

Despite these strong ties, Eswatini faces ongoing pressure from China to switch its diplomatic recognition. Beijing has threatened economic isolation and diplomatic pressure if Eswatini does not align with the "One China" policy (Odota, 2024). However, Eswatini's government has consistently reaffirmed its commitment to Taiwan, with King Mswati III playing a crucial role in maintaining this relationship (Tiezzi, 2024).

The stability of this diplomatic alliance is closely tied to Eswatini's political structure as Africa's last absolute monarchy. While this ensures continuity in foreign policy decisions, it also raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of the relationship, particularly in the face of pro-democracy movements within Eswatini (Odota, 2024).

## **B. Taiwan's Representative Offices in Africa**

Taiwan maintains representative offices in three African countries: South Africa, Nigeria, and Somaliland. These offices serve as unofficial embassies, facilitating economic, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges in the absence of formal diplomatic relations.

In South Africa, Taiwan operates the Taipei Liaison Office in the Republic of

South Africa, located in Pretoria. However, the South African government has recently requested its relocation to Johannesburg, citing pressure from China. Taiwan has resisted this move, arguing it violates a 1997 agreement (Yeh, 2024; Yang and Yeh, 2024).

Nigeria hosts the Taipei Trade Office in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, situated in Lagos. This office was relocated from Abuja in 2017 following pressure from China, resulting in a reciprocal move of Nigeria's office in Taiwan from Taipei to New Taipei City (Yang and Yeh, 2024; Bureau of Consular Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 2024).

The Taiwan Representative Office in the Republic of Somaliland, established in 2020, is located in Hargeisa. This office represents a unique case, as Somaliland is not internationally recognized as a sovereign state. The relationship with Somaliland offers Taiwan a strategic foothold in the Horn of Africa and has sparked interest from the United States while drawing criticism from China (Hagi, 2024; Bureau of Consular Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 2024).

These representative offices play a crucial role in maintaining Taiwan's presence in Africa, despite the challenges posed by China's diplomatic pressure. They focus on promoting trade, investment, and cultural exchanges, demonstrating Taiwan's pragmatic approach to international relations in the face of limited formal diplomatic recognition.

#### **D. Economic and Trade Initiatives**

Taiwan has implemented several economic and trade initiatives to maintain its presence in Africa despite limited diplomatic recognition. These efforts focus on fostering business relationships and promoting trade opportunities.

##### **1. TAITRA Offices in African Countries**

The Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) has established a network of offices across Africa to facilitate trade and investment. Currently, TAITRA operates five offices on the continent, located in Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Algeria (Taiwan External Trade Development Council, 2024). These offices serve as crucial points of contact for Taiwanese businesses

seeking to explore opportunities in African markets and for African companies interested in engaging with Taiwanese partners.

## **2. Africa Taiwan Economic Forum**

The Africa Taiwan Economic Forum (ATEF) was established in 2003 as a joint initiative by African embassies, trade offices in Taiwan, and Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ATEF, 2024). The forum aims to address trade imbalances between Taiwan and Africa while promoting intercultural communication and tourism. ATEF serves as a platform for potential Taiwanese investors to learn about opportunities in Africa and facilitates information exchange between Taiwanese and African businesses (Schultz, 2019).

These initiatives demonstrate Taiwan's commitment to maintaining economic ties with Africa despite diplomatic challenges. By focusing on trade and investment, Taiwan seeks to preserve its relevance on the continent and create mutually beneficial relationships with African partners. These efforts also align with Taiwan's broader strategy of "pragmatic diplomacy," which emphasizes unofficial ties and economic cooperation in the face of limited formal diplomatic recognition.

## **D. Taiwan's "Africa Plan" under President Tsai Ing-wen**

President Tsai Ing-wen's "Africa Plan" (非洲計畫) was initiated following her April 2018 visit to Eswatini, Taiwan's sole remaining diplomatic ally in Africa. The plan aims to strengthen Taiwan's economic presence on the continent and enhance bilateral investment and trade relations, particularly with South Africa, Mozambique, and Eswatini.

Key aspects of the Africa Plan include:

1. Strengthening Taiwan's business layout in Africa by coordinating efforts between government agencies, representative offices, and businesses.
2. Boosting bilateral investment and trade with focus countries.
3. Organizing investment seminars to discuss market opportunities, emerging commercial sectors, and investment climates in target African

nations.

The plan serves as a response to declining Taiwan-Africa trade relations over the past decade. It seeks to revitalize economic ties that had seen significant drops in both imports and exports since 2011.

To support the Africa Plan, various initiatives have been implemented:

1. The Taiwan-Africa Trade Promotion Office (TATPO) was established in March 2016 to coordinate resources of multiple government units working on Taiwan-Africa trade.
2. Investment seminars, such as the southern Africa investment seminar held in Taipei in July 2018, bring together officials and businesses to explore opportunities.
3. The Taiwan-Africa Business Forum, held in November 2019, provided a platform for African and Taiwanese businesses to discuss trade and investment prospects.

President Tsai has pledged to revise the Africa Plan, indicating an ongoing commitment to strengthening Taiwan's engagement with the continent despite diplomatic challenges (Schultz, 2019; Focus Taiwan, 2018; Ho, 2023).

## **VI. Comparative Analysis: Taiwan's Approach vs. China's Engagement**

### **A. Development Paradigms and Aid Models**

Taiwan and China have adopted distinctly different development paradigms and aid models in their engagement with Africa, reflecting their contrasting approaches to international relations and economic cooperation.

Taiwan's approach emphasizes targeted development assistance, technical cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges. Its aid model focuses on sharing agricultural expertise, healthcare initiatives, and technical training programs. Taiwan's development paradigm is characterized by its "pragmatic diplomacy," which seeks to maintain relevance through unofficial ties and economic



cooperation despite limited formal diplomatic recognition (Davies, 2007).

In contrast, China's development paradigm is rooted in its own experience of economic growth and modernization. China's aid model is often described as the "Beijing Consensus," which emphasizes innovation, equitable development, and self-determination (Schlein, 2018). This approach is characterized by:

1. **Infrastructure-led development:** China invests heavily in large-scale infrastructure projects across Africa.
2. **Resource-backed loans:** China often provides loans in exchange for access to natural resources.
3. **Non-interference policy:** China's aid comes with "no political strings attached," avoiding conditions related to governance or human rights (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P.R.C., 2024).
4. **Mutual benefit:** China frames its aid as mutually beneficial, serving both the recipient's and China's economic development goals (Xinhua News Agency, 2024).

While Taiwan's aid tends to focus on smaller-scale, targeted interventions, China's approach is more expansive and integrated with its broader economic and geopolitical objectives. China's model has gained significant traction in Africa due to its scale and alignment with many African countries' development priorities, though it has also faced criticism for potentially creating unsustainable debts (Yuan *et al.*, 2022).

## **B. Perceptions of Taiwan and China Among African States and Societies**

Perceptions of Taiwan and China among African states and societies are complex and multifaceted, shaped by historical, economic, and political factors.

African states generally view China more favorably than Taiwan due to China's economic influence and diplomatic pressure. China is seen as a beneficial partner contributing positively to economic development, with its large-scale investments and infrastructure projects aligning with many African countries' development priorities. However, some concerns exist about China's economic

practices, with accusations of predatory behavior and unsustainable debts (Otele, 2023).

At the societal level, perceptions are more nuanced. A study across 24 countries found that Taiwan is generally viewed more favorably than China, with a median of 48% having a favorable view of Taiwan compared to 28% for China. However, in sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya, larger shares of adults rate China positively and Taiwan negatively (Huang and Clancy, 2023).

Chinese migrants in Africa often face negative perceptions, with concerns about job competition and social exclusion. There are also complaints about Chinese non-compliance with local laws, particularly regarding labor practices (Li and Musiitwa, 2020).

Taiwan's historical engagement through agricultural aid and technical assistance programs has left a positive legacy in some African countries. However, its diminishing diplomatic presence has reduced its visibility and influence.

Overall, while China's economic power has secured favorable perceptions among African states, societal views remain mixed, with both positive recognition of development contributions and concerns about economic practices and social integration.

### **C. How Taiwan Could Counteract the Economic Impact of China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) in Africa?**

China's GSI is part of a broader strategy that includes military exercises and infrastructure projects in Africa, which enhances their influence. Taiwan needs to find areas where it can offer something different. China focuses on large-scale infrastructure and military collaboration (Nantulya, 2024). Taiwan might not compete on scale but could focus on niche sectors.

With only Eswatini recognizing Taiwan in Africa, the GSI's emphasis on enforcing the "One China" policy could pressure remaining partners to sever ties. This could eliminate Taiwan's official channels for trade negotiations and development projects, such as agricultural aid in Eswatini (Ahmed, 2020).

Furthermore, China's support for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) under the GSI (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, 2024) could marginalize Taiwan from Africa's integrated markets, limiting access to a market of 1.4 billion people. Also, China's zero-tariff policies for 33 African nations and dominance in infrastructure (e.g., ports, railways) under the BRI would make Chinese goods and services more competitive, overshadowing Taiwan's exports like electronics and machinery (Hagi, 2024). And African nations prioritizing GSI-aligned projects (e.g., energy, telecoms) may reject Taiwanese firms. For example, China control of Djibouti's ports could reroute trade flows, increasing costs for Taiwanese businesses reliant on African raw materials like cobalt and copper (Funairole *et al.*, 2024).

Additionally, China's export of 5G, surveillance systems, and BeiDou navigation could crowd out Taiwanese tech firms. African adoption of Chinese standards might exclude Taiwanese companies from emerging digital markets (Krukowska, 2024; Green *et al.*, 2024). While Taiwan's niche programs (e.g., Taiwan-Africa Vegetable Initiative) are impactful (Ahmed, 2020), China's scale in infrastructure and BRI-linked projects could reduce African reliance on Taiwanese expertise (Vines and Wallace, 2023). On the other hand, Taiwan's semiconductor industry depends on African minerals (e.g., cobalt from the DRC) (Funairole *et al.*, 2024). China's control over critical logistics hubs (e.g., Djibouti) (Nantulya, 2024) could disrupt Taiwanese supply chains, raising production costs. And China's growing influence over African energy projects (e.g., oil in Angola, renewables in Ethiopia) (Pigato and Tang, 2015) might limit Taiwan's access to alternative energy sources, exacerbating reliance on volatile global markets.

Furthermore, China's expansion of Confucius Institutes and scholarships (Nantulya, 2018) could reduce African interest in Taiwanese programs like the Elite Scholarship Program (Ahmed, 2020), weakening people-to-people connection that underpin economic collaboration. The GSI's emphasis on "win-win cooperation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P.R.C., 2024) contrasts with China's portrayal of Taiwan as a separatist entity. Successful GSI implementation could legitimize China's framing, isolating Taiwan further in multilateral fora.

In countenance, Taiwan could focus on high-value sectors where Taiwan excels, such as semiconductor manufacturing, agro-processing, and green tech to maintain relevance. Taiwan could also partner with democracies (e.g., the US, Japan, EU) through initiatives like the Prosper Africa (van Oudenaren, 2024) to counterbalance Chinese influence. Taiwan could also expand trade offices and digital platforms in non-recognized states (e.g., Nigeria, South Africa) (Arukwe, 2022) to sustain economic ties despite diplomatic constraints.

Is it imperative for Taiwan to maintain strong trade relationships with African countries as it offers Taiwan significant long-term economic benefits, despite China's growing influence in the region? First of all, Africa's population of 1.4 billion and rapid urbanization presents untapped potential for Taiwanese exports, particularly in electronics, machinery, and green technologies. For example, as mentioned above, Taiwan's exports to South Africa reached \$539.6 million in 2019, with key products including electronics, bicycles, and industrial materials (Schultz, 2019). And by investing in AfCFTA member states (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana, Eswatini), Taiwanese companies can produce locally and access tariff-free markets across 54 African countries. This strategy is critical as Taiwan cannot join AfCFTA directly (Jiang *et al.*, 2020).

And as Africa's reserves of cobalt, copper, and rare earth minerals are vital for Taiwan's semiconductor and renewable energy industries, it is crucial for Taiwan to partner with resource-rich nations like South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which could secure supply chains amid global competition (Kramer *et al.*, 2024). Also, Taiwan's expertise in agro-technology, demonstrated through initiatives like the Taiwan-Africa Vegetable Initiative (TAVI), can boost African agricultural productivity while ensuring Taiwan's access to raw materials like coffee and cocoa (Jiang *et al.*, 2020).

Geopolitically, diversifying trade to Africa reduces Taiwan's reliance on China, which accounts for over 40% of Taiwan's exports. Expanding ties with African nations like Somaliland and Nigeria creates alternative economic partnerships. Taiwan's "Economic Miracle" framework—emphasizing SME growth, vocational training, and sustainable industrialization—positions it as a democratic

alternative to China's debt-heavy infrastructure projects (Ahmed, 2020).

In specific sectors, Taiwan can export 5G infrastructure, telemedicine platforms, and smart city solutions to Africa's growing tech hubs. For instance, Taiwan's collaboration with Eswatini on digital governance at the Royal Science and Technology Park (RSTP) showcases this potential (Schultz, 2019). And setting up production bases in countries like Egypt or Ghana allows Taiwanese firms to bypass tariffs and export to global markets under trade agreements like the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) (Jiang *et al.*, 2020).

Programs like the Elite Scholarship for African lecturers and vocational training initiative (e.g., in Eswatini) build long-term human capital ties, fostering future business networks (Schultz, 2019). And Taiwan's investment in African solar, wind, and off-grid energy solutions align with global decarbonization trends, opening doors for renewable tech exports and joint ventures (Jiang *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, even without formal recognition, Taiwan's trade offices in Nigeria, South Africa, and Algeria facilitate economic engagement. For example, Taiwan-Nigeria trade hit \$830 million in 2021, with growth in machinery and automotive parts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, R.O.C., 2022). And aligning with U.S. initiatives like Prosper Africa or Japan's infrastructure projects creates multilateral opportunities, amplifying Taiwan's impact in sectors like health care and agriculture (Jiang *et al.*, 2020).

Now, what strategies Taiwanese businesses can take with respect to China's GSI? Generally, they could enhance their adaptation to African markets through strategic sectoral focus, localized partnerships, and innovative approaches.

## **1. Sector-Specialized Engagement**

Taiwan should leverage its technical expertise in sectors where African demand aligns with Taiwanese strength:

- **Agriculture & Food Security:** Expand initiatives like the TAVI to improve crop yields and address malnutrition. Introduce advanced agro-processing technologies for value-added exports (e.g., solar-dried fruits, packaged goods).

- **Healthcare & MedTech:** Partner with African nations on telemedicine platforms, medical equipment supply, and chronic disease management systems, as seen in Eswatini's metabolic disease prevention program.
- **Renewable Energy:** Invest in off-grid solar solutions and wind energy projects, particularly in rural areas, to support Africa's green transition while exporting Taiwanese green tech.

For example, Taiwanese textile firm Derlon in South Africa automated production to counter competition from Chinese imports while maintaining quality and employment stability (Wang, 2000).

## 2. Localized Partnerships and Market Entry Strategies

- **Joint Ventures:** Collaborate with African SMEs to navigate regulatory environments and cultural nuances. For instance, Musket Group partnered with Nigerian firms to capture 30% of the PC market under Zinox brand (TechCentral, 2010).
- **Leverage AfCFTA:** Establish production hubs in countries like Eswatini or Ghana to access tariff-free markets across 54 African nations. Focus on intra-African trade opportunities in sectors like machinery, plastics, and automotive parts.
- **Digital Economy:** Use e-commerce platforms to bypass logistical barriers. The MOFA has promoted digital marketing tools to connect Taiwanese SMEs with African buyers.

## 3. Workforce Development and Talent Cultivation

- **Vocational Training:** Implement programs like Eswatini Technical and Vocational Skills Certification Enhancement Project to build local technical capacity.
- **Educational Exports:** Expand scholarships (e.g., Elite Scholarship Program) for African students in Taiwan, focusing on STEM fields to foster future business leaders.
- **Local Talent Management:** Recruit African alumni of Taiwanese universities for managerial roles, bridging cultural gaps and enhancing operational efficiency.

## 4. Mitigating Competition from China

- **Differentiate Through Quality:** Emphasize sustainable, high-quality projects over China's large scale infrastructure model. For example, Taiwan's Power Pack Africa in Eswatini focuses on eco-friendly packaging solutions (Taiwan News, 2023).
- **Strategic Alliances:** Align with democracies like the U.S. (Prosper Africa) or Japan to pool sources for infrastructure and tech projects, offering alternatives to Chinese financing.
- **Niche Market Focus:** Target underserved sectors like SME financing, agro-tech, and digital governance, where Taiwan's "Economic Miracle" model resonates with African development goals.

## 5. Government and Institutional Support

- **Trade Promotion:** Utilize TAITRA and Taiwan-Africa Business Association (TARA) to organize trade missions and market seminars. For example, the 2024 Taiwan-Africa Business Forum in Lagos connected Nigerian firms with Taiwanese electronics and clean energy companies (Blessing, 2024).
- **Financial Incentives:** Expand the Taiwan Export-Import Bank's presence in Africa to provide low-interest loans and risk mitigation for SMEs.
- **Infrastructure Assistance:** Support smart city projects and logistics hubs to address Africa's infrastructure gaps, as seen in Taiwan's collaboration with Eswatini's Royal Science and Technology Park.

## 6. Adaptation to Regional Challenges

- **Security and Stability:** Engage in grassroots CSR initiative, such as healthcare missions in Malawi or educational programs in Somaliland (Saxafi Media, 2024), to build community trust.

We have witnessed some successes from the above strategies. Taiwan-Africa trade surged 70% from \$4.65 billion (2018) to \$7.81 billion (2024), driven by electronics, machinery, and agro-exports (Blessing, 2024). Further growth is achievable by targeting high-potential markets like Nigeria and Kenya. As Taiwanese firms in South Africa employ approximately 40,000 locals (Naki, 2022), replicating this model in manufactured hubs (e.g., Egypt, Ghana) could amplify impact. And maintaining Eswatini as a diplomatic and expanding unofficial ties (e.g., Somaliland office) demonstrates Taiwan's ability to sustain

influence despite China's pressure.

Therefore, Taiwanese businesses can thrive in Africa by combining sectoral specialization, localized partnerships, and strategic differentiation from Chinese competitors. Success hinges on leveraging Taiwan's technological edge, fostering human capital, and aligning with Africa's developmental priorities through sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships.

## **VII. Future Prospects and Implications**

### **A. Potential for Taiwan's Continued Engagement in Africa**

Despite facing significant challenges, Taiwan has demonstrated resilience in maintaining its presence in Africa. The establishment of the Africa Taiwan Economic Forum and the implementation of President Tsai's "Africa Plan" indicate Taiwan's commitment to strengthening its economic ties with the continent. Taiwan's focus on targeted development assistance, technical cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges offers an alternative model of engagement that could appeal to African nations seeking diverse partnerships.

Taiwan's relationship with Somaliland presents a potential gateway for expanding its influence in East Africa. If successful, this partnership could serve as a model for Taiwan to engage with other African nations, particularly in areas such as technical assistance, trade, and cultural exchanges.

### **B. Implications for Cross-Strait Relations and Taiwan's International Space**

Taiwan's efforts in Africa have broader implications for its cross-strait relations and international standing. China's aggressive diplomacy and economic influence have significantly reduced Taiwan's official diplomatic presence in Africa. However, Taiwan's pursuit of unofficial ties and economic cooperation demonstrates its adaptability in maintaining international relevance.

The ongoing competition between Taiwan and China in Africa reflects the larger geopolitical tensions between the two. As China continues to pressure African nations to adhere to its "One China" policy, Taiwan may face further challenges



in maintaining its foothold on the continent (Neema, 2024).

Furthermore, by maintaining and developing relationships with African nations, Taiwan can demonstrate its *de facto* sovereignty and international relevance, challenging China's efforts to isolate it diplomatically. It can also create a counterbalance to China's influence in Africa, potentially giving Taiwan more leverage in cross-Strait discussions. Taiwan's sole diplomatic ally in Africa, Eswatini, provides a foothold for Taiwan's diplomatic presence on the continent. Additionally, Taiwan's unofficial ties with countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Somaliland offer opportunities for economic and cultural engagement.

On the other hand, expanding ties with African nations could reduce Taiwan's economic dependence on China, strengthening its negotiating position. It can also provide access to new markets and resources, enhancing Taiwan's economic resilience. This economic engagement, particularly in sectors like technology, agriculture, and healthcare, showcases Taiwan's capabilities as a partner in development.

Also, through targeted initiatives in Africa, Taiwan can build goodwill and enhance its international reputation, potentially leading to increased support in global fora. Taiwan can differentiate itself from China by emphasizing its democratic values and sustainable development approach. Taiwan's education programs, such as scholarships for African students and partnerships with African universities, contribute to building long-term relationships and fostering a positive image.

However, Taiwan still faces significant obstacles in leveraging its African engagement. China's economic and diplomatic influence in Africa far outweighs Taiwan's, limiting the impact of Taiwanese initiatives. Many African countries adhere to the "one China" policy, restricting official engagement with Taiwan (Bhattacharya, 2024). Recent diplomatic setbacks, such as South Africa's request to relocate Taiwan's representative office, highlight the precarious nature of Taiwan's position. And, as a counter-counterbalance, Taiwan's engagement in Africa, particularly through economic and development projects, may intensify competition with China for influence on the continent. This could lead to

heightened tensions between Taiwan and China as they vie for economic and development partnerships. And Taiwan's increased involvement in Africa could prompt China to redouble its efforts in pressuring African countries to isolate Taiwan diplomatically (see, especially, Kironska, 2022).

Furthermore, Taiwan's development assistance and cultural exchanges in Africa could be seen as a challenge to China's soft power efforts on the continent. This may lead to increased investment in similar programs to maintain its influence (see, e.g., Neema, 2024). In view of foreseen broader tensions, African countries may use the China-Taiwan rivalry to their advantage, potentially exacerbating tensions between Beijing and Taipei as they compete for influence (Oxford Analytica, 2017). While Taiwan's involvement in Africa projects may create additional friction with China, it also represents an opportunity for Taiwan to maintain some level of international engagement despite its diplomatic isolation. However, as Kironska argued, given China's dominant economic and political position in Africa, Taiwan's influence is likely to remain limited (Kironska, 2022).

Nevertheless, Taiwan's engagement in Africa could potentially strengthen its position in cross-strait negotiations and expand its international space. By demonstrating its value as a partner in areas such as healthcare, agriculture, and technology, Taiwan may garner support from African nations in international fora (Holmedahl, 2024).

The future of Taiwan's engagement in Africa will likely depend on its ability to offer competitive and attractive partnerships, navigate the complex geopolitical landscape, and leverage its strengths in targeted sectors. While challenges persist, Taiwan's continued efforts in Africa remain crucial for its broader strategy of international engagement and recognition.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

Taiwan's engagement with Africa has undergone significant transformations over the past seven decades. From its peak of diplomatic recognition by nearly 30

African nations, Taiwan has seen its official presence dwindle to a single ally, Eswatini. Despite this diplomatic retreat, Taiwan has demonstrated remarkable adaptability, shifting towards pragmatic diplomacy and unofficial ties to maintain its relevance on the continent. Through targeted development assistance, technical cooperation, and economic initiatives, Taiwan continues to contribute to African development and foster relationships beyond formal diplomatic channels.

Taiwan's persistent efforts in Africa underscore its determination to maintain international space in the face of China's growing influence. This engagement reflects broader geopolitical dynamics, highlighting the complex interplay between economic diplomacy, development assistance, and great power competition. Taiwan's approach offers an alternative model of partnership for African nations, potentially influencing perceptions of cross-strait relations on the global stage. As international politics continue to evolve, Taiwan's ability to navigate its relationships in Africa will remain a crucial aspect of its broader strategy for international recognition and influence.

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