Diplomatic competition between the People’s Republic of China (hereafter ‘China’) and the Republic of China (hereafter ‘Taiwan’) has revived since 2016. The Pacific is a main battlefield as six of Taiwan’s 17 diplomatic allies are from the region. Because providing scholarships to Pacific island countries (PICs) is a significant part of public diplomacy for China and Taiwan, this paper compares scholarship schemes of the two sides.

**China’s scholarship schemes**

China provides three types of scholarships for Pacific students. The first and primary type is bilateral scholarships for China’s eight partner countries in the region: Cook Islands, Fiji, Micronesia, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. China allocates about 20–30 scholarships annually for each country. As Figure 1 illustrates, by 2018, a total of 1,371 students from China’s Pacific allies were awarded scholarships. The number of Pacific students studying in China has grown in the past decade. For example, five ni-Vanuatu students were awarded scholarships in 2009 but the number increased to 23 in 2018. Few students from Cook Islands and Niue have applied for Chinese scholarships as New Zealand and Australia are more common choices.

![Figure 1: Number and percentage of PIC recipients of Chinese scholarships](image)

The second type of scholarship is the China–PIF Scholarship scheme that commenced in 2008. Before 2017, 10 scholarships were offered annually through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to students from all 14 Pacific states; after 2017, this number increased to 20. However, as Pacific students tend to apply for the bilateral scholarship scheme, this second type of scholarship does not actually attract 20 applicants. Also, a large proportion of awardees for the China–PIF Scholarship are from Pacific states recognising Taiwan. In 2018, 13 Pacific students were awarded China–PIF scholarships with five from Kiribati and three from Solomon Islands. Chinese companies operating in Pacific countries provide the third type of scholarship. For example, Huawei and China Harbour Engineering Company offer a limited number of scholarships for Pacific students to pursue tertiary education in information communication technology and civil engineering.

Scholarship awardees study in China under four program types: bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees and visiting scholars (junior or senior level). For students enrolled in Mandarin-taught courses, additional Mandarin study is offered in the first one to two years of programs. Bachelor’s degree courses are taught in Chinese while students/scholars in the other three programs can enroll in either Mandarin- or English-taught courses. Scholarship awardees can apply to study in a range of disciplines at 289 Chinese universities. Scholarships cover tuition fees, dormitory fees and a monthly stipend. The better living conditions for scholarship students (e.g., well-furnished double rooms costing seven times the price of domestic-student dormitory rooms) and their stipend have made them easy targets of resentment for Chinese classmates, most of whom self-fund their studies and share dormitory rooms with five to seven classmates.

**Taiwan’s scholarship schemes**

Like China, Taiwan’s main scholarships are bilateral and offered to its six Pacific allies: Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, as well as ‘friendly’ countries.
In practice, these scholarships are both controlled by MOFA. Compared to the awards China offers its allies, scholarships from Taiwan to Pacific partners are more limited. In 2018, for example, 66 students from Taiwan’s Pacific allies were awarded MOFA scholarships, which was about half the number funded under China’s bilateral scholarships (approximately 130). However, when considering the smaller combined population of Taiwan’s Pacific allies, Taiwan’s scholarships are more generous in terms of per capita awards (1 for every 12,318 allied citizens) than those for China (1 for every 68,586 allied citizens). Taiwan also funds the Taiwan/ROC-PIF Scholarship Scheme for students from all 14 Pacific countries. Yet, between 2001 and 2016, only 78 students had completed studies under this scholarship.

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Endnote

1. Presentation at the University of South Pacific, Port Vila, 8/2/2019.