



NEW SOUTHBOUND POLICY+ AND THE FUTURE OF PHILIPPINES-TAIWAN RELATIONS

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Photo: A Philippine flag is hoisted at the top of a cliff on Mavulis Island in Batanes. Source: Gretchen Ho, One News PH

The New Southbound Policy (NSP), initially [unveiled](#) in 2016 under the auspices of former Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), marked the beginning of a new chapter in Taiwan's foreign policy framework. The NSP is designed to boost Taiwan's economic ties and foster regional integration with ASEAN member-states, South Asian countries, Australia, and New Zealand. While aimed at building mutual trust and a sense of community with its neighbors, the NSP is also Taiwan's calculated

response to dynamic global conditions and a “new driving force” towards a more prominent role in charting the future of the Indo-Pacific region. Almost a decade since the unveiling of the NSP, Taiwan has yet to fully unleash its potential and tangibly materialize the policy's endgame.

Taiwan Looks Further South

Since assuming office in May 2024, President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) is equally committed to continue the efforts of his predecessor in strengthening Taiwan's position at home and abroad. To this end, a reinvigorated NSP was recently launched in this year's [Yushan Forum](#) in Taipei on March 17-18, 2025 with the theme “New Southbound Policy+: Taiwan, the Indo-Pacific, and a New World.” The [New Southbound Policy+ \(NSP+\)](#), Taiwan's integrated diplomacy framework under President Lai, expands and deepens the NSP through introducing six proposed NSP+ corridors.

The first three corridors are based on digital technology and semiconductor, health, and resilience. These corridors shall be primarily led by concerned Taiwanese government agencies and will highlight Taiwan's leading role in technological innovation, economic progress, and social resilience. The other three corridors namely the think tank corridor, the non-governmental organizations corridor and the youth corridor, are aimed at building more robust civil society networks through increasing the volume of people-to-people connections within and beyond Taiwan's neighborhood.

Despite the fact that the Philippines and Taiwan lack official diplomatic relations since the Philippines adopted the [One China Policy](#) in 1975, they have since maintained unofficial ties spanning economic and trade concerns as well as cultural and educational exchanges through their respective [representative offices](#) in Manila and Taipei. The launching of the NSP+ presents a golden opportunity for the Philippines and Taiwan to explore more areas of cooperation that would mutually benefit Filipinos and Taiwanese alike.

Enduring Ties that Bind

The Philippines is Taiwan's closest neighbor to the south. [Mavulis Island](#), the Philippines' northernmost tip, is merely 98 kilometers (61 miles) away from Taiwan's Lesser Orchid Island. More notably, the indigenous peoples of Taiwan and the Philippines have a shared [Austronesian heritage](#). As of 2024, more than [160,000 Filipinos](#) reside and work in Taiwan representing the third largest group of migrant workers. Filipinos led the number of Southeast Asian [tourists](#) who visited Taiwan in 2024. [Taiwanese investments](#) in the Philippines ranging from real estate, retail, financial services, and manufacturing had amounted to more than US\$73 million in 2023. The ties that bind the Philippines and Taiwan run deeper than geographical proximity, they span cultural affinity, economic partnership, and cultural exchange.

The constantly evolving geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region brings with it unprecedented challenges that both Taiwan and the Philippines have to face head-on. The increasingly [aggressive behavior](#) of China across the Taiwan Strait and in the South China Sea has been posing serious risks to the territorial integrity and security of the Philippines and Taiwan. All the same, worsening climatic conditions such as typhoons have been battering the Philippines and Taiwan in recent years. Located along the [Pacific Ring of Fire](#), both are inevitably exposed to frequent seismic events, including earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

These geopolitical and climatic challenges pose a common and existential risk to the Philippines and Taiwan. Only by standing together and side by side can both be better equipped to overcome these challenges than when facing them apart. The NSP+ broadens Taiwan's Indo-Pacific policy by creating a virtuous cycle that fosters positive interactions with neighboring countries including the Philippines. The resilience corridor, for instance, offers synergistic initiatives in enhancing disaster governance in the region. Within the NSP+ framework, the Philippines and Taiwan could make their ties more enduring.

Shared Values, Shared Future

Beyond the common challenges and struggles, shared values bind the Philippines and Taiwan. While Philippine foreign policy is firmly anchored on the [three pillars](#) of enhancing national security, promoting economic security, and protecting Filipinos' rights and welfare abroad, the Philippines has long been committed to [democratic principles](#) and consistently aligns itself with nations that uphold democracy and freedom. In that regard, Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo, in a recent statement, [emphasized](#) that "respect for the rule of law safeguards global peace and security" and that the Philippines shall steadfastly uphold peace, equity, justice, and human rights.

The Philippines' values-based foreign policy coincides with the move of further warming relations with Taiwan. This is attested when Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. [congratulated](#) Taiwanese President Lai for his electoral victory in January 2024. President Marcos quipped that he was "[looking] forward to close collaboration, strengthening mutual interests, fostering peace, and ensuring prosperity for our peoples in the years ahead." President Marcos' salutations signified a monumental shift in the Philippines' posture towards Taiwan.

In various ways, the NSP+ concretizes the Philippines' aspirations for a stronger partnership with Taiwan. The NSP+ is in accord with President Lai's ["Shin-Lai"](#) (信賴) or trustworthy diplomacy which is based on the values of democracy (freedom), peace (international stability and security), and prosperity (inclusive growth and people's welfare). Guided by these values, President Lai's foreign policy moves away from transactionalism and towards [reciprocalism](#). President Lai's diplomacy sends a bold yet inviting message: "Taiwan can help Asia, and Asia can help Taiwan."

Moving into the future, the relations between the Philippines and Taiwan should be defined less by existential risks stemming from geopolitical and climatic circumstances. Rather, their ties should be guided primarily by shared values of a democratic way of life and the freedoms that enable human flourishing and progressive societies. Circumstances are never static and are always subject to change.

Values, when crystallized and applied consistently, provide a more lasting and stable foundation on which relations between the Philippines and Taiwan are built.

It should be less about only seeking what one could gain from the other but should be more about simultaneously seeking the good of the other while ensuring the best bargain for oneself. Cooperation, after all, is not a zero-sum game as both could be better off in the end. As the NSP+ signals the dawn of endless possibilities, the Philippines and Taiwan should realize that they need each other more than ever before.