



***SHIN-LAI DIPLOMACY: HOW IS
TAIWAN INCHING CLOSER TO ITS
IDEALISTIC BLUEPRINT OF WARM
POWER?***

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Photo: President Lai Ching-te hosts the opening ceremony of the Yushan Forum 2025 and poses for a group photo with distinguished guests. Source: Ministry of the Office of Foreign Affairs Republic of China (Taiwan)

*“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” from
Ode to the West Wind by Percy Bysshe Shelley*

Launched in 2016 as a legacy of President Tsai Ing-Wen, the New Southbound Policy (NSP), with an emphasis on the P-P-P-P Configuration—which reflects the joint efforts and cross-sector collaboration among Taiwan’s public sector (government), private sector (businesses and enterprises), and people sector (NGOs and civil society organizations), has served as a cornerstone that contributes to upholding the cross-

sectoral collaboration among the public, private, and people sectors (Hsiao & Yang, 2022). The policy is characterized by placing weight on the concept of “warm power”, which centers on Taiwan’s approach “to share warmth with the stakeholders in need” (Hsiao & Yang, 2022, p. 2) meanwhile enabling Taiwan to be an *indispensable* player in collaboration with value-based partners. These are considered the prerequisite motto and the key policy element for Taiwan’s survival in this turbulent era.

Given that Taiwan has experienced decades of being subjected to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) institutional constraints, which hinder the strait’s foreign relations and international engagement, the NSP turns out to be a strategic initiative that engenders a turnaround for Taiwan’s geopolitical landscape within the region. The NSP back then was the key factor that met the urgent needs of Taiwan’s connectivity reorientation through *steadfast diplomacy* (Hsiao & Yang, 2022, p. 6).

Arguably, one of the most novel orientations of Taiwan in realizing its strategic objectives of the policy is the recognition of relevant partners of Taiwan’s crucial role within the regional discussion. In the recently inaugurated Yushan Forum 2025, organized by the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (TAEF), the introduction of the NSP+ developed by President Lai Ching-te has marked a new historic milestone by the addition of the new six corridors/strategies involving the government and non-government organs working in digital technology, healthcare, disaster governance, and resilience. It also includes specialized corridors for collaboration with think tanks, NGOs, and youth engagement. In the opening remarks of the Yushan Forum this year, Lai expressed a call for more exchanges and cooperation among countries in the region with Taiwan’s engagement. This includes a wide spectrum of areas, notably “smart healthcare, smart transportation, and resilient supply chains for semiconductors” (Taiwan Television (台視新聞 TTV NEWS), 2025) for regional peace and prosperity in an era of expanding authoritarianism. Lai will carry the torch of former president Tsai’s *steadfast diplomacy* with long-lasting like-minded partners and *strategize the NSP with*

innovative elements (Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation, 2024, p. 16).

One of the prominent topics that spurred vibrant discussion at the forum was the *Taiwan Image Forum* which centers on attitude surveys conducted in the NSP partner countries regarding Taiwan and its businesses' local performance. By 2025, Taiwan has implemented this annual survey in up to six partner countries including Vietnam (2016), Indonesia (2020), Thailand (2021), Singapore (2022), Malaysia (2023), and the Philippines (2024) respectively. The result reveals a high rate of positive appreciation by the involved countries, particularly the resilient adaptability facilitated by technological advancement with emphasis on Taiwan's *honesty, innovative [sic], complying with regulations, and trustworthy characteristics* (Alan Hao Yang, personal communication, March 18, 2025). The survey also unveils that Taiwan and its businesses, compared to the top ten to top fifteen foreign investors of the surveyed countries, occupy the top ranks in Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia (Alan Hao Yang, personal communication, March 18, 2025). Accordingly, the surveys disclose the favorability of the stakeholders of NSP to engage in cooperation with the straits.

One can see that flash points are showing that the NSP+ is following its original mission consistently and rigorously. The coming to office of President Lai marked the first-ever third straight presidential term by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) since Taiwan's first direct presidential election in the 1990s, which increasingly enhanced the leading role of the DPP. The party simultaneously has an acronym that coincides with President Lai's new proposed corridors with the dual principles of *democracy, peace, prosperity and development, people, and partnership* (Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation, 2025). This appears to hold high the banner of Lai's *value-based* or *Shin-lai (trustworthy)* diplomacy (Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation, 2024, p. 17).

Interestingly, the new core value concentration of President Lai's NSP+, namely the *Shin-Lai (信賴/trustworthy)* (Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation, 2024, p. 15) at the same time happens to correspond

with the term *shin-Lai (新賴/new-Lai)*, which appears to symbolize and emphasize Lai's new foreign diplomacy. These key traits of Lai's new policy expose his implicit aspirations for an international position for Taiwan and its survival in this era of upheaval. Those ambitions were articulated with a focus on the *practice of economics and technologies* (Alan Hao Yang, personal communication, March 18, 2025) as the center of the NSP+ six corridors, which largely contributes to nurturing the connectivity between Taiwan and its neighbor countries.

NSP+ is also impressive in amplifying its agenda to a broader dimension, namely from Asia to the Indo-Pacific region. Plausibly, this is assumed to be feasible for Taiwan as it has been concerned and longed for a solid cornerstone for years. Specifically, Taiwan has been recognized by its partners for its success in fostering cooperation with the United States and Japan, as well as for the increasing reciprocity and constructive engagement of other countries participating in the NSP. Also, the NSP+ appears to stand in line with the Indo-Pacific policy of Taiwan as it comprises approaching states like India and Australia, which are proactive Quad advocates of the Indo-Pacific (Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation, 2024).

On the whole, the strategic NSP+ orientations seemingly align with Lai's former statements during his presidential campaign with an emphasis on economic and technological promotion. Particularly, those are now clearly on track with his reinforcement in the *six core strategic industries* (六大核心戰略產業) and the *five trusted industries* (五大信賴產業) (Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation, 2024, p. 16), which disclosed President Lai's strategic vision in enhancing Taiwan to a higher vital position in the international system with unique economic traits. With diversified collaboration pathways with 16 partner countries, the ultimate goal of the NSP+, eventually, is to diminish Taiwan's economic reliance on China's market and reduce focus on the West, which Taiwan has step by step attained recently.

Yushan Forum 2025 concluded in mid-March, coinciding with the beautiful blooming of azaleas in

Taipei. During the event, promising commitments were reaffirmed, potential memoranda of understanding (MoUs) were discussed, and a hopeful vision for the future of Taiwan and its strategic partners was strongly conveyed. Yet, key questions remain: to what extent can the NSP+ shift the currently limited reciprocity from partner countries, given their longstanding favorable connectivity with China? The strait's turnaround Indo-Pacific policy embraces both potential benefits alongside looming menaces. Taiwan, with its limited international recognition, in others' lexicon, is barely regarded as a strategic competitor to China. Its expansion—particularly with an emphasis on economic and technological cooperation with regional partners—may catalyze rising cross-strait tensions and further intensify China's assertion of economic power. While paving the way for further open dialogues and cooperation across Asia, the new corridors of the NSP+ are expected to stimulate more mutual benefits between Taiwan and its neighboring partners with more substantive and pragmatic contributions in fostering a solid foundation for launching new action plans. If achieved, the vision of a resilient and peaceful future in the region would no longer be out of reach for Taiwan.

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