



新南向政策在東南亞的成就、挑戰與展望
**Taiwan's New Southbound Policy in Southeast Asia:
Success, Challenges and Prospects**

Ivy Kwek^{1*}

摘要 新南向政策將在今（2021）年 8 月邁向 5 週年。雖然政策形成初期著重於降低依賴單一市場，總統蔡英文推動下的新南向旗艦計畫，自 2016 年至今已轉型成全面的對外鏈結計畫，不再限於貿易與投資領域。事實上，新南向政策已就緒擔負起台灣在印太地區的區域戰略。台灣和新南向政策能為東南亞與印太區域帶來諸多貢獻。在後疫情時代，東南亞與印太區域，將更需要共同努力以及有意義的合作，達成更好的復甦。所有行為者（特別是中型國家）需要共同努力，協力形塑共享的願景。隨著新南向政策邁入新的階段，將有望提供新的動能，近一步推進台灣在區域中的角色。

Abstract Come August, Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP) will mark its fifth year anniversary. Even though an earlier aim of the policy was to reduce reliance on a single market, the flagship policy launched by President Tsai Ing Wen in 2016 has now evolved into a comprehensive outreach program that looks beyond just trade and investments. Indeed, it is poised to be Taiwan's regional strategy in Indo-Pacific. Taiwan and the NSP have much to offer to Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. In the post-pandemic era, the region needs more collective efforts and meaningful cooperation to achieve a better recovery. All players, middle powers especially, need to work together and help forge that common vision. As the NSP heads into a new phase, it is with hope that it can be provided a new jolt of energy to propel Taiwan's role in the region further forward.

^{1*} Ivy Kwek is research director of Research for Social Advancement ([REFSA](https://www.refsa.org)), a Malaysia-based think-tank, and concurrently visiting scholar at the Center of Southeast Asian Studies, National Chengchi University, Taiwan. She was formerly the special functions officer to the deputy defense minister of Malaysia and runs [Projek Pertiwi](https://www.projekpertiwi.org), an online platform that aims to raise awareness on defense and security issues among Malaysian youth. Email: ivykwek@refsa.org.

Come August, Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP) will mark its fifth year anniversary. Even though an earlier aim of the policy was to reduce reliance on a single market, the flagship policy launched by President Tsai Ing Wen in 2016 has now evolved into a comprehensive outreach program that looks beyond just trade and investments. Indeed, it is poised to be Taiwan's regional strategy in Indo-Pacific. To that end, Southeast Asia, which possesses a central geographical location in the region, would have added importance in Taiwan's regional engagement.

Taiwan is no stranger to Southeast Asia. It has long-standing relations and extensive footprints in the region, thanks to the two times Go-South policy in the past three decades. As a region with 655million population that is projected to be the fourth largest economy by 2030, the NSP is right to aim towards tapping into the region's potential.

However, much of the regional dynamics have changed, and it is no secret that a rising China poses a challenge to Taiwan's engagement in the region. Southeast Asia's dealings with Taiwan is increasingly being scrutinised by the watchful eyes of China, especially as cross-straits relations become increasingly tense.

Despite that, relations with Southeast Asia have not only improved but flourished under the NSP. From 2016-2020, overall trade volume between Taiwan and Southeast Asia grew² about 13.6%, whereas students from Southeast Asia studying in Taiwan also increased³ 32% from 23,857 in 2017 to 35,538 in 2020. Taiwan's engagement in the region is also beyond statistical numbers - Thus far, it has also set up 12 Science and Technology Innovation Centres in 10 NSP (7 of which are Southeast Asian countries) that focuses⁴ on medical and biotechnology, environmental sustainability, agricultural technology, semiconductor innovation, artificial intelligence and other areas.

Taiwan has reaffirmed its strong commitment to SEA and the Indo-Pacific region through New Southbound Policy, while SEA has reciprocated. Despite not having official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, Southeast Asian countries and pressure to adhere to 'One China' principle, remained flexible and open in cooperation with Taiwan.

² Kannan R Nair (2021). Taiwan: Renewing a southbound vision. *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/taiwan-renewing-southbound-vision>

³ 僑外生事務，國際及兩岸教育司。

<https://depart.moe.edu.tw/ed2500/News.aspx?n=1F2B596FE760D1FC&sms=F42C4CEA6ED95269>

⁴ Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (2020). 2020 Yushan Forum: facing common challenges through technological cooperation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwX3znuQ9CM>

There are two key takeaways here. Firstly, this reflects SEA's nimbleness and ability to exercise their own agency to navigate great powers. In face of intensified great power competition between the US and China, Southeast Asia has thus far managed to maintain its neutral posture and not succumb to pressure of choosing sides. SEA's primary concern has always been about maintaining regional peace and stability in order to pursue growth and prosperity. In that sense, NSP focuses on pragmatic cooperation and its people-centric approach resonates with SEA countries.

Secondly, this shows that Taiwan's presence is welcomed in the region. Taiwan is being looked up as a model example for COVID-19 management and epidemic prevention, advancement in technology and innovation, digital democracy, as well as its track record of transforming its economy into a high-end manufacturer. NSP's emphasis on innovative industries, medical technology, agriculture and green energy also align with the needs and aspirations of Southeast Asian countries.

However, there remain some challenges. The first is geopolitical. Any overt support for Taiwan would put Southeast Asia in a precarious situation and risk further escalating tensions with China. Interestingly but perhaps unsurprisingly, the most progress are with NSP countries that have adopted more assertive attitudes towards China or have the ability to do so, such as Vietnam and India, to some extent Philippines and Singapore.

Secondly, we must also take note that SEA is not a homogenous group with a different political system, economic performance and also level of existing ties with Taiwan. In this regard, the NSP is right to adapt different strategies for each country but it also makes it a bit challenging to evaluate its success. Thus far, countries that offer cheap labour costs such as Vietnam and Myanmar seem to be doing better in attracting Taiwanese investments. More state-led planning and promotion efforts ought to be given to other middle-income countries such as Malaysia.

Third would be the domestic factor. Southeast Asia has been embroiled in a tough battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, which impeded the governments' ability to look forward and plan beyond securing vaccines and containing viral spread. Even though Taiwan has extended help in terms of masks and medical supplies, the volume pales in comparison with China's "vaccine diplomacy" charm-offensive. Meanwhile, Malaysia has been stuck in the political impasse, and Myanmar has experienced the military coup that has led to a volatile political situation with many bloody protests on the streets. Unavoidably, these factors have put a damper on the progress of NSP.

Taiwan has a stake and a role to play in ensuring peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific and by that extension, Southeast Asia. Going forward, NSP should deepen cooperation in non-traditional security areas such as environmental protection, global health, food security and maritime security. These are areas that affect the region deeply and require multilateral efforts, but often neglected due to a lack of trust and political will between countries.

More importantly, Taiwan needs to up the ante and seek to strengthen partnerships with other like-minded countries. In engaging the region, Taiwan cannot go it alone. Taiwan's 'warm power', though well-received, can unfortunately only go so far. More discussion needs to be had about integrating Taiwan into some of the recent initiatives such as Blue Dot Network spearheaded by US, Japan, Australia, Partnership for Quality Infrastructure spearheaded by Japan, Supply Chain Resilience Initiative by Australia, Japan, India, Horizon by the European Union and Build Back Better World Partnership (B3W) by the G7 countries. These multilateral cooperation will give SEA more options of better quality investments and at the same time, this will take the pressure off Southeast Asian nations from needing to 'choose' between Taiwan and China.

Taiwan and the NSP have much to offer to Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. In the post-pandemic era, the region needs more collective efforts and meaningful cooperation to achieve a better recovery. All players, middle powers especially, need to work together and help forge that common vision. As the NSP heads into a new phase, it is with hope that it can be provided a new jolt of energy to propel Taiwan's role in the region further forward.

建議引述方式：

1. 中文格式：郭艾微（2021），〈新南向政策在東南亞的成就、挑戰與展望〉，《台亞基金會時勢分析》，第6期，頁1-4。
2. 英文格式：Ivy Kwek (2021). Taiwan's New Southbound Policy in Southeast Asia: Success, Challenges and Prospects. *TAEF Currents*, 6, 1-4.

