

## **Introduction: Southeast Asia and Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP)**

Karl Chee Leong *Lee*\* and Nur Shahadah *Jamil*<sup>o</sup>

Institute of China Studies, Universiti Malaya

Welcomed to the December 2023 Issue of *International Journal of China Studies* (IJCS) in 2023. Unlike the previous June 2023 Issue, this is the first Special Issue published under the watch of the new Editorial Board of IJCS. As part of IJCS' agenda to feature current and pressing issues revolving around the Greater China region, we are encouraged by the great interests surrounding Taiwan and its international roles to run a Special Issue pertaining to the island nation's relations with Southeast Asia. Given such unprecedented development, this Special Issue is deliberated with the two following objectives.

### **Objective 1: Provide Timely Assessment for New Southbound Policy (NSP)**

As the Tsai administration approaching its final months of governance in Taipei, it is a timely effort to update our readers on Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP) as implemented for the past eight years. But instead of examining all the six major sectors of cooperation within the NSP

---

\* Karl Chee Leong is Editor-in-Chief of *International Journal of China Studies* (IJCS) and Senior Lecturer for the Institute of China Studies (ICS), Universiti Malaya. His research focuses on Taiwan-Southeast Asia relations, Taiwan's soft power diplomacy, Indo-Pacific semiconductor politics and Chinese provincial diplomacy in the ASEAN region. His latest publications include the edited book published by Routledge, *Taiwan and Southeast Asia: Soft Power and Hard Truths Facing China's Ascendancy and Special Issue* (Vol. 54, Issue 2, 2023) in *Asian Affairs* journal, *Looking South: Comparing the Regional policies of Taiwan and South Korea*. He can be reached at <karlcllee2021@um.edu.my>.

<sup>o</sup> Nur Shahadah Jamil is the Guest Editor for this Special Issue and a member of IJCS Editorial Board. She is also a co-convenor for the East Asian International Relations (EAIR) Caucus, which is a research platform for exchange, engagement and empowerment among foreign affairs professionals and international relations scholars in Malaysia. Her research concentrates mainly on China's foreign policy, South China Sea, Southeast Asian responses to Belt and Road Initiative and East Asian Security. She is currently serving as Senior Lecturer at Institute of China Studies (ICS), Universiti Malaya and can be contacted through <shahadah@um.edu.my>.

(Lee, 2022: 237-243), this Special Issue assesses the foreign economic policy from five different perspectives. From Taiwanese view to the Southeast Asian outlook of Taiwan and their bilateral relations, the NSP has been evaluated for its achievements and limitations through individual articles with specific focus on public diplomacy, non-state collaboration, trade relations, non-traditional security cooperation and social identity among intermarriage children.

Among the five articles, both Tonny Dian Effendi and Alan Hao Yang approaches the two different aspects of cooperation from the Taiwanese perspectives – the former examining the contradictory reporting of NSP news and Southeast Asian countries among the Taiwanese media while the latter highlighting disaster preparedness as the most recent sector of cooperation between Taiwan and Southeast Asia. While there are notable successes in Taiwan’s public diplomacy and disaster preparedness cooperation at home and abroad, both authors also acknowledge the limitations of NSP’s projection power due to various factors on the ground. Among them are the island nation’s absence of official diplomatic ties with Southeast Asia and the societal perceptions of Southeast Asian migrant workers within Taiwan itself.

The other three authors, meanwhile, provide their assessments of Taiwan’s NSP through the contexts of bilateral relations between the island nation and three selected Southeast Asian countries. In Thean Bee Soon’s article, the focus is on the long-standing trade ties between Taiwan and Malaysia, and in which the author recognises soft power as a critical leverage to achieve more favourable outcomes than without it. Echoing Soon’s mixed outcome of the Taipei’s NSP push in Southeast Asia is Ratih Kabinawa who points to the asymmetrical nature of Taiwan-Indonesia talent exchange cooperation – a manifestation of many factors that include insubstantial participation among the Taiwanese social actors in building collaboration with the Indonesian counterparts. Finally, Yufita Ng agrees that the NSP resonates with the second generation of Taiwanese-Indonesian intermarriage families (who are based in Taiwan) but at the same time, she also acknowledges that two-way cultural exchanges have yet to take place in the Taiwanese society despite the articulation of foreign economic policy by Taipei. Like both Effendi and Yang, the other three authors provide a balanced view of the achievements and limitations of the NSP since 2016.

## **Objective 2: Comprehend Taiwan's and Southeast Asia's Adaptations to the US-China Rivalry**

Meanwhile, this Special Issue also seeks to comprehend how Taiwan and Southeast Asia, important stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region, adapt to the current geopolitical rivalry between the US (and its coalition) and China in safeguarding their respective interests in the long-run. For Taiwan, its NSP is being framed by the current President Tsai Ing-wen, as the core of the Indo-Pacific strategy — a strategy in response to the emergence of China in the international order — as pursued by the US and its coalition partners in East Asia, namely, Japan, South Korea and even India (Tsai, 2023). Beyond the island nation's position as the strategic link within the first island chain of defence as emphasised by the American military strategists (Barranco, 2022: 40), Taiwan's roles within the Indo-Pacific strategy have spanned across the economic and socio-cultural sectors as well. The fact that Taiwan possesses strong economic and socio-cultural connections to the developed bloc in the Western hemisphere as well as the developing Southeast Asia in the south, has made the island nation a vital link between these two blocs.

As for Southeast Asia, its adaptation to the US-China global rivalry involves Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) own articulation of Indo-Pacific strategy, ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), that amalgamates the principles espoused by the US-led coalition of powers and China. Not only does the AOIP share openness, transparency, and upholding of international law (rules-based order) as actively pursued by the US-led coalition, the same document also called for the emphasis of dialogue, cooperation and friendship as the other principles long shared by China, in guiding the regional bloc's quest for its own Indo-Pacific strategy (AOIP, 2021: 2-3). In other words, leveraging the best from the two rival camps remained to be ASEAN's best bet in safeguarding its own interests as the third party within such rivalry.

Drawing on the convergence of interests between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries within the US-China rivalry, this Special Issue features one article that examines how Taiwan and Vietnam responded to the securitization of industrial supply chain as vigorously pushed by the US-led coalition since 2021. Authored by Tam Sang Huynh, this article explores on the potential of middle power realignment between Taipei and Hanoi through the reinforcement of semiconductor cooperation with an eye on achieving a resilient supply chain in the region. Through harmonising the

Taiwanese prowess in chip manufacturing and the Vietnamese advantages of governmental support for semiconductor self-reliance, proximity to the Chinese market and low-cost workforce, the author calls for the implementation of specific industrial-training measures to establish a resilient regional supply chain without China being the dominant actor in it.

### **Rejuvenation of IJCS**

With the new line-up in the Editorial Board, we are in full gear for the rejuvenation of IJCS. We welcome good-quality manuscripts from scholars around the world and for those who wish to contribute special issues to IJCS as guest editors, could contact the Editor-in-Chief, Karl Chee Leong Lee at [karlcllee2021@um.edu.my](mailto:karlcllee2021@um.edu.my). The editorial board will be very happy to develop the articles to the standards that are expected of the international scholarly community. Last but not least, starting from January 2024 onwards, we will be running short critiques on the affairs revolving Greater China – written by distinguished authors who come from different backgrounds and are looking to convey fresh ideas, concepts or views to the wider intellectual community. This will be our new path in engaging with the scholarly community around the world.

For this Special Issue, we express our utmost appreciation to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Malaysia for providing us with an in-kind sponsorship that greatly assists us in the publication stage.

### **References**

- ASEAN Secretariat (2019, June 22), *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*. <[https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific\\_FINAL\\_22062019.pdf](https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf)>.
- Barranco, John B. (2022, November 22), *Taiwan: The Key to Containing China in the Indo-Pacific*. Atlantic Council. <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/taiwan-the-key-to-containing-china-in-the-indo-pacific/>>.
- Tsai, Ing-wen (2023, October 11), *President Tsai Addresses Opening of 2023 Yushan Forum*. Office of the President of Republic of China (Taiwan). <<https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6619>>.

Lee, Karl Chee Leong (2023), "Conceptualising Taiwan's Soft Power Projection in its New Southbound Policy", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 2, pp. 231-249.