



SOFT POWER IN TAIWAN'S NEW SOUTHBOUND POLICY (NSP): ASSESSING THE FLAGSHIP PROGRAM FOR INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION AND COOPERATION (IIC)

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ABSTRACT

As one of the five flagship programmes under Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP), industrial innovation and cooperation is arguably the largest sector within the foreign economic policy implemented by the Tsai Ing-wen administration since 2016. Encompassing high-tech industries such as manufacturing (semiconductor and processing), Internet of Things (IoT), transportation, equipment- and machinery-making, green, and circular economy, the NSP's Flagship Program for Industrial Innovation and Cooperation (IIC) seeks to utilise technology and knowledge as the two soft resources, to achieve Taiwan's four sectoral aims of promoting export of system integration solutions (SIS), establishing Indo-Pacific supply chain partnerships, providing assistance to SMEs and boosting the image of Taiwan and its industries. While the articulation of such flagship programme certainly showcases Taiwan's strategic foresight for this large sector, assessing the process of its soft power projection overseas has yet to gain traction in the current scholarship. In filling such a research gap, this article seeks to provide a multi-variate assessment of the IIC Flagship Program during the eight years of the Tsai administration. Through adaptation of general soft power concept by Joseph Nye and in particular, Taiwanese soft power's notion by Lin Bih-jaw, this article argues that Taiwan's soft power projection overseas via the IIC Flagship Program is achieved through thrusting the soft resources (technology and knowledge) into the high-tech entry points of cooperation which then allowed Taipei to achieve the four sectoral aims with specific conversion strategies.

Keywords: Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP), Flagship Program for Industrial Innovation and Cooperation (IIC), soft power, technology, knowledge

INTRODUCTION

On 19 July 2024, Taiwan's foreign minister, Lin Chia-lung formally announced Taipei's intention to continue with the New Southbound Policy (NSP) following the absence of such foreign economic policy in the inauguration address given by the new president, William Lai Ching-te's on 20 March (Chau 2024; Lai 2024). In his press briefing with foreign reporters, Lin has vowed to rely on "technology, capital and talent" as the three keys to his economic diplomacy that seeks to deepen Taiwan's existing trade and commercial ties with the NSP countries (Chau 2004). That technology, capital, and talent have been specifically named for the implementation of the

foreign economic policy, invariably shows that Taiwan will continue to utilise these three soft resources to project its soft power in the NSP countries in the coming years—a development that has been bearing tangible outcomes in specific partners in the region since 2016.

Within the current scholarship community, the works on the NSP have been multi-variated at best. As early as 2017, prominent Taiwan scholar, Alan Yang Hao gave a comprehensive picture on the rationales of the NSP as viewed by the previous Tsai Ing-wen administration. In what Yang (2017) conceptualised as relocating Taiwan's role and capacity in the ASEAN-led community and regional network, reinventing community awareness and mutual benefits, reinvigorating Taipei's partnerships with regional stakeholders and reforming Taiwan in several important sectors that affect the island's engagements with the NSP partners—all these 4Rs (relocate, reinvent, reinvigorate, and reform) served as the bases for the NSP to be pushed as a dynamic and multi-faceted engagement approach with the countries further to the South.

Marston and Bush (2018), meanwhile, see trade and investment, tourism and student exchanges as the three sectors that will be the most critical for the success of the NSP. With Southeast Asia being touted by scholars as the core of the NSP, they acknowledged that progress has also been made in the diplomatic sphere. Beyond the statistics that point to the increase of trade and investment, tourism and student exchanges, the conclusion of the new Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA) which Taiwan signed with the Philippines in 2017, has demonstrated the willingness of the Southeast Asian nation to undertake government-to-government cooperation with Taipei despite the People's Republic of China (PRC's) attempt to impede such undertaking (Marston and Bush 2018). That said, Marston and Bush (2018) cautioned on China being the main impediment to Taipei's quest to replicate such foreign policy victory in other Southeast Asian countries.

On the other hand, Kennedy et al. (2018) highlighted the interpersonal connections that the NSP seeks to foster in the NSP countries—a fact that does not receive adequate attention due to the heavy focus on the policy's economic aims, namely, diversifying and reinvigorating Taiwan's economy. With the “people-centred” notion being emphasised through the NSP, they argue that Taiwan is embarking on a long-term view to realise its two goals of regional integration and economic diversification (Kennedy et al. 2018: 26). Then, with a focus on the case of Indonesia, Andoko et al. (2022) delve into the soft resources which Taiwan employed to project its soft power within the agricultural flagship programme. Built on strong cooperation in the agricultural sector since the 1970s, the implementation of the NSP has clearly expanded Taipei's agricultural cooperation with Indonesia in technological sharing and capacity-building. Beyond the Agribusiness Development Centre (ADC), bilateral agreement on agricultural technical cooperation and “University Farm” before the start of the NSP, new cooperation projects are also executed by both Taipei and Jakarta, namely, the Greenhouse Prototype for Rice Superior Variety Development and Taiwan-Indonesia Cooperation in the Integrated Agricultural Area Pilot Project (Andoko et al. 2022). By treating Taiwan as an official cooperation partner despite the absence of diplomatic relations, it is not just reflective of the mutual trust that Jakarta formed with Taiwan over the decades but more importantly, the attractiveness of the island's agricultural technology and knowledge to the Indonesian counterpart.

Apart from these optimists in the NSP's projection power, there are other scholars who are cautious about the effectiveness of such foreign economic policy. Instead of viewing the NSP as a means to gain diplomatic breakthroughs in the relations between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries, Ngeow (2017) argues that the policy should be interpreted as a pathway to increase mutual connection between both sides and with that, give greater stake to the latter for cross-

strait stability. Such cautiousness is also shared by Huang (2018) who views that Taiwan's successful push for the NSP is conditioned upon the ability of the then Tsai administration to foster amicable relations with Beijing—without which, it will be difficult for such foreign economic policy to become fruitful in the region. With her case study on Vietnam, Lee (2021) also found that unlike Taipei's bilateral education cooperation with Hanoi, the island's economic diplomacy via the NSP, has been rather limited in lieu of the fact that Taiwanese investments in the Southeast Asian country have been driven by market forces instead of the state.

Last but not least, there are also efforts by scholars to dissect Taiwan's projection of soft power in the NSP countries in recent years. For instance, Yang (2023) illustrates the P-P-P-P cross-sectoral partnership as Taiwan's comprehensive approach to strengthen the societal resilience of the NSP countries against natural disasters. With the leadership of the public sector (first P), the creation of business opportunities by the private sector (second P), the interface and supportive network of the people sector (third P), the partnership (fourth P) that is formed by these three social actors will enable Taiwan to project what Yang (2023: 39–40) termed as the “warm power” in the NSP countries through the sharing of technology, knowledge, and best practices.

By comparison, Lee (2023a: 237) offers the most relevant conceptualisation of the process surrounding Taiwan's soft power projection overseas. In correlation with the three overarching aims of the NSP—identifying the new direction and driving force for Taiwan's new stage of economic development, redefining Taiwan's important role in regional development and creating future value for Taiwan's engagements in the region—Lee posits that technology, knowledge, foreign educational policy, foreign tourism policy, culture and humanistic values are the soft resources employed by Taipei to attract the NSP countries into official cooperation (Lee 2023a: 237–238). In spite of its conceptual contribution to the study of NSP's soft power projection, it is largely based on the macro-level outlook of the process surrounding Taiwan's soft power projection overseas. As such, the study overlooks the variations among five individual flagship programmes that ranged from agricultural to civil society sectors.

As elucidated earlier, all existing scholarly works have yet to provide a sectoral (micro-level) overview of Taiwan's soft power projection overseas based on the NSP's individual flagship programme(s). This is particularly pertinent for the largest flagship programme within the NSP, the Flagship Program for Industrial Innovation and Cooperation (IIC). Thus, this article is set to tackle such a research vacuum through the development of a conceptual model that seeks to examine the process of Taiwan's soft power projection overseas on a sectoral basis.

EVOLUTION OF TAIWAN'S FOREIGN ECONOMIC POLICIES (1994–2016)

Being an internationally marginalised nation neighbouring an emerging China, Taiwan is confronted with two regional political-economic predicaments that are not coveted by other countries. On the regional political front, Taiwan is facing international ostracisation ever since the removal of the Republic of China [(ROC) Taiwan] from the United Nations (UN) in 1971. In the following years, the strict rejection of international co-existence between the Chiang Kai-shek-Chiang Ching-kuo (hereafter, the Chiangs) administrations and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government in Beijing and Washington's move to cease all diplomatic ties with Taiwan, eventually led to the global termination of bilateral ties with Taipei and adoption of different variations of One China policies around the world. By 1990, Taiwan was left with a small group of diplomatic allies that continued to recognise Taipei as a legitimate government in the world.

Aside from the regional political structure, Taiwan is also facing shifting dynamics in the regional economy. With China further liberalising its economy in the 1990s, it has become the centre of economic gravity in the world and attracted waves of investments from foreign countries. As one of the earliest investors in China, the Taiwanese businessmen (*taishang*) had been increasing their investments in the mainland to take advantage of the economic liberalisation efforts by Beijing. This has generated apprehension in Taipei as the then President Lee Teng-hui's support towards indigenisation movement of Taiwan, had placed it in a confrontational position with Beijing which saw such political leaning as conflicting with their long-term pursuit of Chinese unification (Lee 2023a: 233–234). In other words, there was a fear in the then Lee administration (1988–2000) that the Taiwanese economy might become overly dependent on its neighbour across the Taiwan Strait.

Confronting these two structural impediments at the regional front, Lee embarked on his “pragmatic diplomacy” (Chen 2004)—an approach that departed from the One China-principled line as firmly adhered to by the Chiangs administration. As stated by Chen (2004) and Ngeow (2017: 100), Lee's pursuit of such a diplomatic approach was geared towards expanding the island's international space and preventing Taipei from being fully isolated from international affairs. As far as Southeast Asia is concerned, the region is not only Taiwan's closest neighbours in the south with long-standing people-to-people interactions with the island but, at the same time, another important economic base for Taiwanese trade and investment besides the Chinese mainland. It was within such intermingling of push and pull antecedents that Taipei formally implemented its Go South Policy (GSP) in January 1994 after four months of deliberations in the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) and the Legislative Yuan (Wang 2014).

In general, the GSP was carried out with two aspects in mind. Economically speaking, five measures were implemented to strengthen Taiwan-Southeast Asia economic relations: relocations of Taiwanese manufacturing plants from mainland China; expansion of employment opportunities in Southeast Asian countries; integration of Taiwanese resources with Southeast Asia; tapping into the upcoming ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA); and locking Taiwan into the regional economic architecture (Liu 2005: 17). As for the political aspect of GSP, the then Lee administration is banking on the higher tide of Taiwanese investments into Southeast Asia as an enabler for broader diplomatic engagements. As explicated by Hsu (2017), these included high-level lobbying and arrangements for official visits by Taiwanese representatives to Southeast Asian countries and kickstarting negotiations for bilateral investment or trade agreements for greater bilateral cooperation.

Building on the Lee administration's GSP, the Chen Shui-bian government (2000–2008) also implemented its own version of GSP which now included the signing of free trade agreements (FTAs) as the new policy aim and highlighted Taiwan's soft power projection for the first time in the island's contemporary history (Chen 2004; Ngeow 2017). In what is known as GSP 2.0, it targeted thirteen countries (ten ASEAN countries, India, Australia, and New Zealand) for which Taiwan was to strike FTAs with and to attract them into establishing official cooperation through the utilisation of new soft resources— democracy and civil society (Chen 2004; Hsu 2017; Ngeow 2017). Though such policy is legitimate in the eyes of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration, which was seeking to join the wave of regional economic integration in the early 2000s and looking for tacit recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty and national identity among regional neighbours, it fell short of producing tangible successes as Taiwanese businessmen were largely clinging to the Chinese market whereas Southeast Asian countries also tried to avoid any ideological confrontation with Beijing given the need to pursue economic integration with China (Ngeow 2017: 108–109).

Unlike the “offensive diplomacy” carried out by the Chen administration, the Kuomintang (KMT) government led by Ma Ying-jeou, architected its own strategy of “viable diplomacy” that prioritised improving relations with Beijing to lessen the diplomatic impediments for Taipei’s pursuit of regional economic integration with Southeast Asian neighbours (Ngeow 2017: 106–109; Ma 2008; *Taiwan Today* 2015; Huang 2018: 49). Whether by its unswerving framing of Chinese culture and economic cooperation as Taiwanese soft power or avoiding the naming of its foreign economic policy for fear of antagonising Beijing (*Global Times* 2011; Hsu 2017), the Ma administration (2008–2016) had apparently encountered lesser Chinese opposition in its quest for economic integration with regional countries. While the Ma administration was unsuccessful in realising Taiwan’s participation in the “10+3+1” framework of East Asian regional economic integration with ASEAN countries, China, Japan, and South Korea, it nevertheless, made small gains by signing economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with Singapore and New Zealand during its eight years in power (Ngeow 2017: 112; Huang 2018: 49). This is not to mention that there was an average rise of Taiwanese investments in Southeast Asia each year during the Ma administrative era eight years in power (Ngeow 2017: 112).

From the GSP to 10+3+1 framework, it is not an overstatement to claim that these foreign economic policies representative of Lee, Chen, and Ma administrative eras, produced meagre results at best. Despite certain achievements in the increasing value of Taiwanese investments and the signing of EPAs with a few trading partners in Southeast Asia, these foreign economic policies are still far from achieving what they sought to achieve in the first place—expansion of Taiwan’s international space in the region (especially, regional economic architecture) and reduction of overdependence on the Chinese market. When former President Tsai Ing-wen rose to power, she spared no time to tackle these two regional political-economic predicaments through her trademark NSP.

SOFT POWER AND NSP’S FLAGSHIP PROGRAM FOR INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION AND COOPERATION (IIC)

In contemporary Taiwan, the concept of soft power has been intertwined with the practice of diplomacy. The most authoritative of all has been the definition used by Lin Bih-jaw, a prominent international relations scholar who was later appointed as the Secretary-General to President Tsai from May to October 2016. An advocate of Joseph Nye’s theory of soft power, Lin highlighted soft power—the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading and eliciting positive attraction to obtain preferential outcomes—as an answer to Taiwan’s international ostracisation that is deliberated by Beijing to shrink the island’s international space (Lu 2007; Nye 2011). Regardless of the different facets of soft power which Taiwan sought to project as evidential by the Chen and Ma administrative areas explained earlier, soft power remains to be the most practical means for Taipei to achieve what it could not, in an international system that is unfavourable to the island nation as a “normal state”.

As alluded by former President Tsai in her first inauguration speech in 2016, Taiwan’s marginalisation in regional economic affairs and overdependence on the Chinese market, remained to be the two external predicaments faced by Taipei today [Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan) 2016a]. In tackling these two predicaments in the region, she called for the implementation of NSP as a pathway to Taiwan’s economic transformation and regional economic participation [Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan) 2016a]. In a span of three months, guidelines for the NSP were swiftly approved by the presidential office, with three overarching aims being identified for the pursuit of such policy: (1) to redefine Taiwan’s

important role in Asia's development; (2) to identify a new direction and driving force for the island's new stage of economic development; and (3) to create future value for regional cooperation [Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan) 2016b; Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Brunei Darussalam (TECO Brunei) 2016]. By framing the NSP as a foreign economic policy without articulating regional political aims, it demonstrates that the Tsai administration continued to place economic cooperation with regional countries as the core pursuit while at the same time, circumvented the political sensitivity surrounding their official cooperation with Taiwan through the means of soft power. In other words, the NSP is an economically-driven policy that relied upon Taiwan's soft power projection in the host countries to achieve the policy's three overarching aims.

As highlighted by Lee (2023a), the Tsai administration has revitalised Taiwan's soft power projection from two aspects: the institutionalisation of soft power into a government policy; and the broadening of soft resources used for such power projection overseas. By embedding soft power into The Guidelines for the NSP (or The Guidelines) in August 2016, the Tsai administration has firmly institutionalised soft power into Taiwan's foreign policy practice. Within The Guidelines, soft power is tapped as the overarching link among the four key links that seek to connect Taiwan with NSP countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Oceania (TECO Brunei 2016).¹ All efforts to implement the foreign economic policy by different Taiwanese state and non-state actors, therefore, were being directed to observe such priority in fostering strategic connectivity with the eighteen NSP countries (Guidelines for the NSP 2016).

Also, the NSP has shown the broadening of soft resources being employed to project Taiwanese soft power in the NSP countries. As opposed to the political values and Chinese culture touted by the Chen and Ma administrations, the Tsai administration has been broad-based in that both long-standing and newly-emerged soft resources are being relied upon for power projection. Aside from culture, technology and people are also being utilised in five different sectors targeted by the NSP, namely, medical care, education, technology, agricultural cooperation and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Chen 2004; *Global Times* 2011; Guidelines for the NSP 2016). With such a diverse group of soft resources and sectors, the Tsai administration has demarcated itself from its predecessors which certainly lack such organisation as demonstrated by the NSP.

Deriving from the NSP's Practical Approach Moving Full Steam Ahead (2017) as explained in the last section, there are altogether five flagship programmes being planned to generate positive benefits to both Taiwan and NSP countries in the shortest possible time (Office of Trade Negotiations Taiwan 2017: 5–13). They are comprised of:

1. Flagship Program for Regional Agricultural Development (RAD);
2. Flagship Program for Medical and Public Health Cooperation and the Development of Industrial Chains (MPHCDIC);
3. Flagship Program for Industrial Talent Development (ITD);
4. Flagship Program for Industrial Innovation and Cooperation (IIC); and
5. Flagship Program for the NSP Policy Forum and Youth Exchange Platform (NPFYEP). (Office of Trade Negotiations Taiwan 2017: 5–13)²

Given the magnitude and difficulties of assessing each of these five flagship programmes, this article is set to assess the largest flagship programme of the five, the IIC Flagship Program. Being conceptualised as a cross-industrial sectoral programme, the IIC involves a myriad of high-tech industries, with the likes of manufacturing (semiconductor and processing), Internet of Things (IoT), transportation, equipment- and machinery-making, green, and circular economy (Office

of Trade Negotiations Taiwan 2017: 5–13). In addition to that, these industries are also those in which Taiwanese SMEs are making their footprints as important business players within their respective specialisations. As such, assisting Taiwanese SMEs has also become one of the sectoral aims as outlined by the 2017 Practical Approach Moving Full Steam Ahead (Office of Trade Negotiations Taiwan 2017: 5–13).

In assessing how Taiwan's soft power is projected abroad through NSP's IIC Flagship Program, this research develops its own analytical model through the adaptation of Nye's conceptual framework. As such, three empirical cases are selected based on the following five criteria: (1) depth of Taiwan's economic relations with these NSP countries; (2) their flexibility in observing the One China Policy which allowed a deeper level of engagements with Taipei; (3) broad and extensive engagements between the social actors from both sides; (4) the distinctive characteristics of the individual project/event; and (5) tangibility level of Taiwan's soft power projection through such project/event. Among the NSP countries, it is clear that Thailand, India, Malaysia, and Vietnam satisfied these five criteria in one way or another. Having said that, their level of flexibility in observing the One China Policy, remains to be the primary criteria in regulating their variations of industrial innovation and cooperation with Taipei.

In dissecting such intricate phenomenon, three empirical cases are selected in this article; Taiwan-Thailand smart city cooperation, Taiwan-India semiconductor cooperation, and Taiwan Excellence's marketing. All these cases represent the wide spectrum of those NSP countries which officially cooperated with Taiwan in the IIC Flagship Program as well as those that have yet or disinclined to cooperate with Taipei in the same flagship programme. Whereas the Taiwan-Thailand smart city cooperation and Taiwan-India semiconductor cooperation represent bottom-up and top-down evolutions of bilateral collaborations, respectively, Taiwan Excellence's marketing is entirely a business-oriented initiative that is not expected to spearhead any substantial official cooperation between Taipei and the NSP countries. But the utility of Taiwan Excellence's marketing lies in enticing all NSP countries, including those that are hesitant or unwilling to cooperate officially with Taipei such as Malaysia, to at least encourage regular business cooperation between its local business communities with that of Taiwan's.

As shown in Figure 1, the process of Taiwan's soft power projection starts from the four sectoral aims of the IIC Flagship Program: establishing Indo-Pacific supply chain partnerships; promoting export system integration solutions (SIS); providing assistance to SMEs; and boosting the image of Taiwan and its industries. This group of four sectoral aims, thus, is the independent variable for the analytical model. The article then examines the dependent variables, which include utilisable soft resources (technology and knowledge), entry points of cooperation in different sectors (provision of technologies and dissemination of knowledge) and diverse conversion strategies to convert soft resources into achieving the sectoral aims of IIC Flagship Program. In this sense, this article postulates that Taiwan's soft power projection overseas via the IIC Flagship Program is achieved through thrusting the soft resources (technology and knowledge) into the high-tech entry points of cooperation which then allowed Taipei to achieve the four sectoral aims with specific conversion strategies.

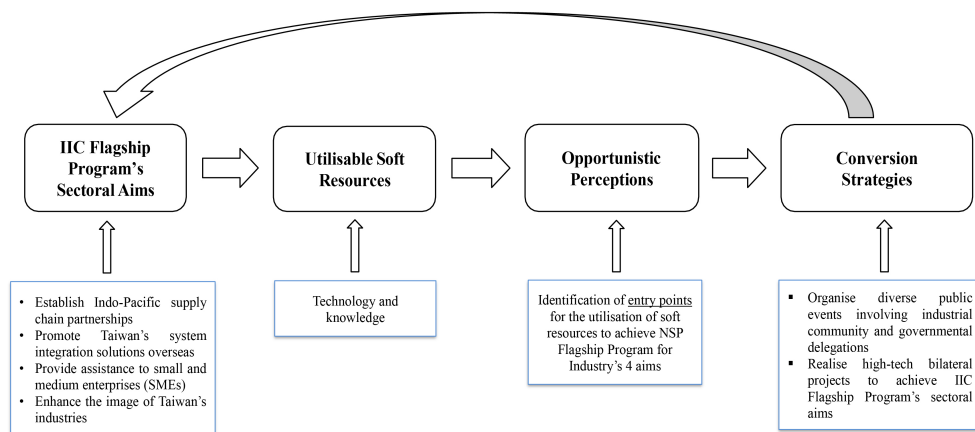


Figure 1: Taiwan's soft power projection via the NSP's IIC Flagship Program.

Case 1: Taiwan-Thailand Smart City Cooperation

As the first smart city cooperation project for Taiwan in Southeast Asia, the Taipei Smart City@AMATA project is an exemplary demonstration of the island nation's breakthrough in projecting its soft power in Thailand. While the project is relatively unknown to the international community, this is certainly not the case for both Taiwan and Thailand. But for Taipei, the bigger impact of such a project hinged on the possibility that it becomes a model in that Taiwan can replicate in other Southeast Asian countries that are hesitant or unwilling to embark on official cooperation with Taipei.

Such emphasis is not unfounded as Thailand, like Malaysia and Brunei, has disproportional relations with Taiwan. In economic terms, Thailand and Taiwan are strong trade partners in which the former has been one of the top five Southeast Asian countries for the latter's exports and imports. Prior to the launching ceremony of the AMATA City Chonburi Project 2 (to which Taipei Smart City@AMATA is located) in December 2019, Thailand was Taiwan's fifth largest trading partner in Southeast Asia in 2018, with a total trade value of USD10.8 billion (USD6.2 billion exports and USD4.6 billion imports) (Department of Statistics Taiwan 2024a; 2024b). Such a trend continued the next year when Thailand rose to become Taiwan's fourth largest partner in Southeast Asia, despite recording a 9.1% decrease in the overall bilateral trade for 2019 (Department of Statistics Taiwan 2024a; 2024b). As of 2023, Thailand remained the fourth largest trading partner of Taiwan, with a total trade value of USD16.2 billion (Department of Statistics Taiwan 2024a; 2024b).

Similarly, Taiwan is also one of the long-standing sources of foreign direct investments (FDIs) for Thailand and this is reflected in the figures provided by the Bank of Thailand. In that particular year of 2018, Taiwan's FDIs to Thailand were reportedly at USD1.7 billion (Bank of Thailand 2024). Although such figure was dwarfed by those from other major trading countries, Taiwan was still the ninth largest source of FDIs for Thailand in 2018, behind Japan, China, ASEAN, European Union (EU) countries, Singapore, US, and Hong Kong (Bank of Thailand 2024). Five years later, Taiwan rose by two spots to be the seventh largest foreign investor for Thailand. From these trade and investment figures alone, it is clear that Taiwan and Thailand enjoyed strong economic ties in spite of the absence of diplomatic relations between the two nations.

Having said that, political ties between Taiwan and Thailand do not have the same proportion as that of the bilateral economic ties. As noted by Chan (2023), as one of the traditional partners

of Taiwan in Southeast Asia, Thailand's engagement approach vis-à-vis Taipei has been disproportionately informal and low key. This explains the reason Thailand has shied away from updating the BIA that was reached with Taipei since 1996. It was only until recently in June 2024, that the then Srettha administration decided that updating the BIA will serve a larger purpose which also includes attracting Taiwan's semiconductor investments and training provision into the country for it to be part of the new economy's global supply chain (*The Nation* 2024; TECO Thailand 2024b; Wu and Yeh 2024).

Within this context, it is comprehensible that both Thai and Taiwanese business communities are the earliest drivers for the deepening of cooperation between the two economic partners. A milestone of such a private sectoral partnership is the establishment of the Taiwan-Thailand Industrial Collaboration Summit (TTICoS) in 2017 after decades of close business ties between the two sides (Industrial Development Administration Taiwan 2022). Since then, TTICoS has become an annual platform for bilateral industrial cooperation and representatives from industry, government think tank as well as academia come together to discuss different industrial cooperation, ranging from food to smart city industries (Industrial Development Administration Taiwan 2022). At this juncture, it is important to recognise that the Taiwan-Thailand industrial stakeholders had explored and identified various collaboration opportunities, and what was needed back then was institutional support from their governments to realise these potential collaborative initiatives.

Such a need has not gone unanswered by Taipei and Bangkok. Considering the strong need to support business collaborations between both business communities, Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) and Thailand's National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), the two government agencies in charge of technological development and external cooperation, signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on innovative application cooperation (*Taiwan Today* 2017). Notwithstanding the fact that such cooperation is short of ministerial-level affairs as evidentiary in the Taiwan-India economic partnership, it nonetheless, signified Bangkok's willingness to engage in a lower-level of official cooperation with Taiwan on innovative applications, the technologies needed for the development of Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) (*Taiwan Today* 2017). This then created the opening for Taiwan to pursue niche and high-impact cooperation with its Thai counterpart in the EEC eventually bringing to the fruition of the Taipei Smart City@AMATA demonstration project in 2021.

Located in Chonburi Province, which is one of the three provinces of the EEC, the 75-million-baht Taipei Smart City@AMATA demo project is the outcome of business collaboration between AMATA Group (Thailand) and Sinotech Engineering Consultants (Taiwan) (AMATA Corporation 2021). For the Taiwanese government which has been promoting its system integration solutions (SIS) overseas, such private sector-driven project fits perfectly into the IIC Flagship Program's first sectoral aim as outlined within the NSP. Fuelled by the MoU signing between AMATA and Sinotech, official delegations from Taipei regularly flew to Thailand to organise forums with the Thai industrial counterparts and participate in the annual TTICoS. The most noteworthy of these developments has been the active promotion of Taiwan's ten market-ready SIS by the Industrial Development Bureau (IDB), an agency under the MOEA (*FutureIoT* 2019). Among the SIS being promoted in the Smart City Industrial Forum that was jointly held with the Thai Internet of Things Association (TIOT), were the drone technology to improve smart city applications, smart transportation, smart security, smart energy conservation, smart retail, and so forth (*FutureIoT* 2019). Collectively included within Taiwan's Smart Integration Partnership Alliance (SIPA), these are the cutting-edge technologies that are to be promoted for their overseas adoption, including in Thailand where a prototype smart city in Southeast Asia is to be built with Taiwan.

Within the prototype Taipei Smart City@AMATA project, the joint venture company, AMATA Sino Development Company will be tasked with building an entirely new smart city coloured by Taiwanese technologies, innovations, and cultures. Like other smart city projects, AMATA is currently building with different partners from all over the world, and this smart city is not made up of a city alone, but also integrates the commercial and mixed development sites within it (AMATA Corporation 2021). Hosting a factory, R&D site, and exhibition centre among others, the prototype Taipei Smart City@AMATA project is being tapped as the early hub for Taiwanese suppliers entering the Thai market with their smart building and city products, integrated systems, and total solutions (Chicony Power Technology 2019).

Taking advantage of the strong interest from Thailand and building on the AMATA-Sinotech private model of collaboration, Taiwan's IDB went further by establishing the government-initiated Thailand-Taiwan Smart Park (TTSP) with its Thai counterpart, the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (DEPA) (Institute for Information Industry Taiwan 2022). Situated in Pathum Thani Province, the TTSP is the first overseas demonstration park for Taiwanese suppliers to share their smart city solutions—air quality monitoring and artificial intelligence (AI) analysis, energy consumption checks, artificial IoT (AIoT), technology-based global positioning system, and smart building solutions—with the Thai manufacturers while at the same time, it acts as a consulting centre for local Thai producers to learn more about these solutions (Institute for Information Industry Taiwan 2022). Unlike the prototype Taipei Smart City@AMATA project which focuses on technological sharing, the whole TTSP project is planned in a broader sense in that both technology and knowledge are being leveraged by Taiwan for its soft power projection in Thailand.

Case 2: Taiwan-India Semiconductor Cooperation

In contrast to the disproportional relations between Taiwan and Thailand, the former's relations with India are relatively proportional in economic, cultural, and political spheres.³ This is despite Taiwan's bilateral trade with India is smaller than that of Thailand's. But what sets Taiwan-India relations apart is the increasingly profound engagements between both governments in every sphere that started as early as 1991 when the Narsimha Rao administration initiated the Look East Policy to forge closer cooperation with Southeast and East Asian countries [Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in India (TECC India) 2024]. It proved to be rewarding for both trading partners when they agreed to embark on the ambitious semiconductor cooperation in January 2024.

According to the statistical figures released by Taiwan's Ministry of Finance, the island's bilateral trade with India has been on a steady increase ever since the Tsai administration implemented the NSP in the region. From 2018 to 2023, the bilateral trade value gradually increased from USD7.0 billion to USD8.2 billion, a 17.1% increase within six years (Department of Statistics Taiwan 2024a; 2024b). More importantly, within the same period, Taiwanese investments to India recorded a more than five-fold increase, from USD21.9 million in 2018 to USD124.9 million in 2023 [Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade India 2019; 2024]. Such an uptick is reflective of the growing interest among the Taiwanese government and businesses to venture into the emerging market of India; following the US-China geopolitical rivalry, Washington's high-tech ban on the Chinese market and increasing domestic risks for those operating their businesses in the second largest economy.

Apart from the close economic ties between Taipei and New Delhi, there is also a similar depth of political relations between the two governments. As early as May 2005, the First India-Taiwan Economic Consultation (ITEC) was held in New Delhi in which both the deputy economic

ministers met to discuss bilateral cooperation in the economic sphere [International Trade Administration (ITA) Taiwan 2016; TECC India 2024]. Since then, the ITEC has become an annual event and this remains to be the most important platform for the interactions of senior officials until today. In the next 18 years, India successfully signed several official documents with Taiwan: MoU on Science and Technological Cooperation (2007); BIA (2018); Mutual Recognition of the Respective Authorized Economic Operation (AEO) Programs (2018); and MoU on Labour Force Cooperation (2024) (ITA Taiwan 2016; TECC India 2024; TECO Thailand 2024a).

With the deterioration of bilateral ties with China and the reconfiguration of a high-tech supply chain that surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic years (2020–2022), the Modi government has shown even greater interest in venturing into semiconductor cooperation with Taiwan considering the latter an indispensable leader in the midstream and downstream levels of semiconductor supply chain. Riding on the strong political ties between Taipei and New Delhi, both governments took the ambitious step of promoting industrial collaboration by working to build a semiconductor fabrication plant in Dholera in January 2004 [Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (PSMC) 2024]. Planned as an AI-enabled state-of-the-art fab that deploys data analytics, next-generation factory automation, and machine learning, to achieve maximum efficiency of chip production, the semiconductor project is to be executed as a collaboration between PSMC (well-known legacy chips' maker) and Tata Electronics (the largest conglomerate in India with businesses in diverse sectors) (Tata Group 2024).

Within the cooperation model, Taiwan has designated PSMC to assist Tata Electronics in building and operating the entire fab for India to produce mature-node chips domestically. Essentially, it denotes that PSMC is to share its 28-nm chip-making process (a chip technology) with Tata Electronics on top of building the capacity of local Indians (knowledge dissemination) to be able to operate and manage the high-end semiconductor fab (Tata Group 2024).⁴ As revealed by Tata Group, the total investment for the fab is up to USD11 billion and poised to generate 20,000 skilled jobs in the state of Gujarat (Tata Group 2024). With the projection of manufacturing up to 50,000 wafers per month, the fab is expected to manufacture chips for applications such as power management integrated circuits (IC), display drivers, microcontrollers (MCU), and high-performance computing logic—the component products used in automotive, computing and data storage, wireless communication and AI industries (Tata Group 2024).

For Taiwan, such ambitious project serves to achieve the IIC Flagship Program's second sectoral aim, namely, establishing Indo-Pacific supply chain partnerships with “safe and friendly” countries and in this case, it is India. In other words, Taiwan is looking to boost the resilience of the global semiconductor supply chain with an eye to preventing Beijing from dominating such a chain. For India, such assistance from Taiwan will help the country to realise its national vision for the creation of an indigenous semiconductor ecosystem (“Make in India, For the World”) and transforming Tata Electronics into the first domestic chipmaker will gear towards that vision (Sood 2024).

Case 3: Taiwan Excellence's Marketing

The third empirical case, the marketing of Taiwan Excellence, meanwhile, presents an entirely different case than the previous two. Unlike Taiwan-Thailand smart city cooperation and Taiwan-India semiconductor cooperation which are implemented with tangible projects in the pipeline, the Taiwan Excellence's initiative has evolved into a marketing event (Taiwan Excellence Pavilion) though it originated from the Taiwan Excellence Awards which started since 1993 (Taiwan Excellence 2024). This explains the reason that despite the event being organised by

Taiwan's Bureau of Foreign Trade and Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA), it has negligible political association and as such, it has become a neutral and pragmatic platform for all NSP countries, including those that possess close economic ties with Taipei but are hesitant or unwilling to build official cooperation with Taipei.

Since its arrival to the NSP region in 2017 (Taiwan Excellence 2017), the Taiwan Excellence Pavilion has proven itself as a vital marketing event in showcasing the island's best features to a regional audience. From its ambitious start in Indonesia to today's cross-country marketing event, the Taiwan Excellence has been manoeuvred with multiple strategies to project the island nation's soft power abroad, namely, developing the image of Taiwanese industries as technological innovators, facilitating the exports of these technologies for the Taiwanese SMEs and enabling them to build cooperation with the local businesses in the region. All of these strategies, of course, are to convert Taiwan's technology and knowledge (soft resources) into achieving the two sectoral aims of the IIC Flagship Program: providing assistance to SMEs and boosting the image of Taiwan and its industries.

The best example of all is Malaysia, the country in which Chan (2023) terms it as one of the traditional partners of Taiwan that confined its bilateral ties with Taipei to informal and low-key engagements. With negligible official cooperation with Malaysia but with close economic ties with Taiwan—Malaysia is Taiwan's second largest Southeast Asian trading partner in 2023 (USD24.9 billion) while the latter is the former's fifth largest foreign investor in the same year (USD0.6 billion)—pursuing “blue ocean” collaborations with the Southeast Asian country remains to be Taipei's best approach to cater to the economically- and socially-intertwined partnerships between both sides (Department of Statistics Taiwan 2024a; 2024b; Malaysian Investment Development Authority 2024; Lee 2023b: 97). The marketing of Taiwan Excellence, therefore, should be understood within such a context in which the strong existence of business-to-business (B2B) exchanges can be further enhanced through the provision of technologies and dissemination of knowledge as the two entry points into the Malaysian market.

Ever since the Taiwan Excellence Pavilion made its maiden arrival in Malaysia seven years ago, the event has garnered substantial participation from the Malaysian business community who wish to understand, appreciate and purchase Taiwanese high-tech products as well as to foster new collaborations with their counterparts in Taiwan. In particular, the introduction of the Taiwanese Technology Aesthetics concept to the Malaysian companies in Taiwan Excellence's product launch event in 2023, had generated enthusiasm among the local crowd on Taiwanese aesthetic living with the use of innovative technologies (Taiwan Excellence 2023a). While the local participants had their first-hand learning of the reverse osmosis filtration system, YouBike 2.0E electric-assisted bicycle, 10-second filter replacement, WIFI remote control and magical suction cup technology—technologies that boost the quality of life for individual consumers—there were also strong interests by two Malaysian private entities, StonBike and a representative of several international banks, to collaborate with Taiwan's YouBike in bringing its latest bicycle model into Malaysia (Taiwan Excellence 2023a).

Similarly, NSP countries that have relatively closer official cooperation with Taipei are also taking a high interest on Taiwanese high-tech products through the Taiwan Excellence pop-up store. In Thailand, a total revenue of 35.3-million baht was generated from the 49 Thai-Taiwanese business match-ups within the Taiwan Excellence Pavilion in 2023 (Taiwan Excellence 2023b). As for the Taiwanese innovative products that attracted Thai buyers and collaboration partners, they include information and communications technology (ICT) solutions, high-end electronics, and environmentally friendly products and solutions related to the Bio, Circular, Green (BCG) economic development model for sustainability (Taiwan Excellence 2023b). A total of 4,045

visitors were reported to be at the event, a figure that demonstrated the popularity of Taiwan Excellence among the local Thais.

Vietnam, on the other hand, continued to engage Taiwan in its annual VIETWATER Expo after having the Taiwan Excellence Pavilion hosted at the expo's site in 2017 (Taiwan Excellence 2018). Appearing for the second consecutive year in 2018, the Taiwan Excellence Pavilion allowed Vietnamese visitors to learn and experience a wide range of Taiwanese high tech, innovative products that will define the sustainable future of the water industry. To name a few, they included home appliances (LCW Water Purifier), enterprise equipment (Ketech's Water Quality Monitor), energy-saving ECO-TEC, image sensor technology, and FBR-Fenton water treatment technology (Taiwan Excellence 2018). Experiencing the same water industry crisis as Vietnam, Taiwan is also seeking to disseminate its knowledge to the Southeast Asian country through the seminar Innovation in the Shape of Water: Towards a Sustainable Future jointly conducted by the representatives of the five Taiwanese brands. Alongside technological showcase, it should be noted that knowledge dissemination was also part of the Taiwan Excellence Pavilion's activities in Vietnam that year. As the third largest Southeast Asian trading partner for Taiwan (USD17.9 billion) and the first investment destination for Taiwanese businesses in Southeast Asia (USD2.2 billion) as of 2023 (Department of Statistics Taiwan 2024a; 2024b; *Vietnam Investment Review* 2024), Vietnam's selection for Taiwan Excellence Pavilion is clearly instrumented to further expand bilateral cooperation from the current ITD Flagship Program in which Hanoi is already a major partner for Taipei. Such marketing aim, thus, is starkly different from the case of Malaysia, which has negligible official economic cooperation with Taiwan as a whole and Thailand's, with Bangkok evolving into a cooperation partner with Taipei in the NSP's IIC Flagship Program (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1: NSP's IIC Flagship Program

Cases	IIC flagship program's strategic aims	Utilisable soft resources	Entry points	Conversion strategies
Taiwan-Thailand Smart City Cooperation	Promote Taiwan's system integration solutions abroad	1. Technology 2. Knowledge	1. Provision of technologies 2. Dissemination of knowledge	1. Allowing Taiwanese-Thai business communities as early driver of bilateral cooperation. 2. Supporting business collaboration incentives through ITRI-NSTDA's MoU Innovative Application Cooperation (2017) and organising different forums. 3. Bolstering private collaboration prototype project, Taipei Smart City@AMATA (2021). 4. Follow-up setting up of TTSP between Taiwan's IDB and Thailand's DEPA (2022).
Taiwan-India Semiconductor Cooperation	Establish Indo-Pacific supply chain partnerships			1. Fostering official cooperation with India through India-Taiwan Economic Consultation (ITEC), MoU on Promotion of Industrial Collaboration (2017), Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA) (2018), etc. 2. Designating PSMC to assist Tata for mature node chip fab in Gujarat (2024).

(continued on next page)

Table 1: (continued)

Cases	IIC flagship program's strategic aims	Utilisable soft resources	Entry points	Conversion strategies
Taiwan Excellence's Marketing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide assistance to Taiwan's SMEs 2. Enhance the image of Taiwan's industries 			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing the image of Taiwanese industries as technological innovators. 2. Facilitating provision of technologies by Taiwanese SMEs to local companies in NSP countries. 3. Enabling Taiwanese SMEs to build cooperation with local companies of NSP countries.

CONCLUSION

From the three cases assessed in this article, it is conclusive that both Taiwan-Thailand smart city cooperation and Taiwan-India semiconductor collaboration produce the most tangible outcomes within the IIC's Flagship Program. In both cases, Taiwan's soft power projection is achieved through the utilisation of soft resources (technology and knowledge) to achieve the sectoral aims of the IIC Flagship Program. Apart from the Taiwanese technologies (smart city's integration system and legacy chips' fabrication process) making inroads into Thailand and India, Taipei is also imparting its cutting-edge knowledge of these two technologies to the locals in the two countries.

Furthermore, the two cases showcase Taiwan's breakthroughs in innovative projects that made the island an indispensable cooperation partner for both Thailand and India. Be it the hybrid model of a residential-industrial smart city or the mature node chips' fabrication plant, these two projects are themselves the innovations of Taipei's economic cooperation with the NSP countries. Not only India becomes the first developing country in the world to receive Taiwan's chip-making assistance, Thailand has also carved itself as the first Southeast Asian cooperation partner for Taipei's smart city project. The sole difference, however, stems from the varied approaches as demonstrated by Thailand and India in their engagements with Taipei. Whereas Bangkok started its bilateral engagements with Taipei in a bottom-up manner (from business to government levels) that led to the fruition of smart city cooperation, India-Taiwan semiconductor cooperation presents an entirely different picture in which such critical strategic collaboration is only possible due to long-standing official (deputy ministerial level) engagements between Taipei and New Delhi since 2005. In both cases, Taiwan is able to reach official cooperation agreements with Thailand and India; the side (diplomatic) achievement that allowed Taipei to participate in these two countries' domestic industrial developments.

As compared with the two smart city and semiconductor cooperation projects, the Taiwan Excellence Pavilion has produced indirect outcomes considering its positioning as a promotion event of Taiwanese cutting-edge technologies. Having said that, it remains to be a neutral and pragmatic platform for Taipei to attract business partners, buyers and a wider audience not just in NSP countries that are actively seeking cooperation with Taiwan but, also those that are hesitant or unwilling to cooperate with the island nation such as Malaysia. With less visibility of the Taiwanese government in the promotion event, it allows the business communities (including those from the SMEs) from both Taiwan and NSP countries to interact freely with each other and establish business cooperation from thereon. This is particularly important given the fact that certain NSP countries are relatively cautious about Taiwan's quest to pursue official cooperation with external partners. Taiwan Excellence Pavilion, therefore, helps to alleviate such concern

but without disrupting Taipei's soft power projection to the local business communities who in turn, are attracted to collaborations with the Taiwanese counterparts or make purchases of the Taiwanese technologies.

Going forward, it is worthwhile to observe the upcoming developments surrounding Taiwan's cooperation with NSP countries. As recently revealed by Taiwanese foreign minister, Lin Chia-lung, the Lai administration is mulling the establishment of an industrial zone in one of the NSP countries within Southeast Asia, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines (Chau 2024).⁵ Aside from Vietnam which has strong industrial talent cooperation with Taiwan in recent years, Thailand's active search for Taiwanese semiconductor investments is also placing the country as yet another prospective host for the industrial zone's initiative as pushed by Taipei. With Bangkok's signing of the updated BIA with Taiwan in June 2024, the path is set for Thailand to embark on the stiff competition with its neighbours for Taiwanese high-tech investments that include not just the semiconductor industry but, also big data and AI industries as well (Chau 2024; TECO Thailand 2024b; Wu and Yeh 2024).

More importantly, whichever country successfully becomes the host for the industrial zone, may eventually be upgraded into a player within the global tech supply chain as Taiwanese high-tech companies are expected to cluster in the Taiwan-initiated zone. In short, Southeast Asia may witness another case of tangible cooperation between Taiwan and one of the three short-listed countries for Taipei's industrial zone project. This may very well contribute to Taiwan's soft power projection in Southeast Asia considering that this industrial zone project is also the first of its kind that integrates semiconductor, big data, and AI industries.

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NOTES

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¹ The other three key links include supply chain links, regional market links and people-to-people links. The supply chain links involve industrial linkages between Taiwan and NSP countries, regional market links pertain to regional market integration and people-to-people links consist of cultural and tourism exchanges. The soft power links, meanwhile, encompass all of the three key links and this explains the reason behind technology, people and culture are the overarching soft resources being employed in five different sectors.

- ² Each of the flagship programmes has its own sectoral aims. More such information is available in Practical Approach Moving Full Steam Ahead (2017, 2018, and 2019) documents posted on Executive Yuan's website: <https://www.ey.gov.tw/otnen/F39BD446BE012C0F>
- ³ There is a list of cultural exchanges between Taiwan and India for the past ten years or so. As this aspect is not the focus of this article, relevant information on this can be accessed at the TECC in India website: https://www.roc-taiwan.org/in_en/post/39.html
- ⁴ Skills' training is also one of the capacity-building deliverables to which Taiwan has been providing to countries that host the semiconductor fabs. However, it is part of the ITD Flagship Program within the NSP. For this reason, the article will not focus on this deliverable as the research focus is confined to the IIC Flagship Program.
- ⁵ The Lai administration is also planning the New Southbound Fund to finance projects/programmes related to semiconductors, big data, and AI cooperation. It is modelled upon Taipei-backed funds in Central and Eastern Europe. Also, the expected industrial zone in Southeast Asia is also part of Taiwan's efforts to build similar industrial zones in Japan and the Czech Republic. It is clear that the East Asian, Central and Eastern European and Southeast Asian regions are targeted by Taipei for the expansion of its high-tech industries in the world. This is on top of the US, Germany, and Japan being the latest to host the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) chip fabs.

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