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#### **Introduction: Strait Talk and Changing Cross-Strait Relations**

By: Adrienne Wu and Ava Shen

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People-to-people connections are undisputedly important when de-escalating conflict. A 2016 news release by Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (大陸委員會) stated that "Normal cross-strait exchanges and interaction are conducive to improving the feelings and well-being of the people on both sides, as well as to the soundness of cooperation on global functional issues." Still, despite this acknowledgement, the number of opportunities for Taiwanese and Chinese people to connect as individuals have been steadily decreasing. In recent years, the number of mainland Chinese students studying in Taiwan has fallen drastically, with the total reaching zero during the height of the COVID-19 pandemroic and rebounding to just 2,523 in 2023. This is less than 10 percent of the number of students in 2015, in which 34,114 mainland Chinese students were studying in Taiwan.

Some of the few remaining opportunities for interaction end up prioritizing political narratives, rather than allowing the individuals themselves to shape the conversation. For instance, although Ma Yingjeou's (馬英九) April delegation of college students allowed its participants to visit various locations in China, the trip also reiterated pro-unification themes <u>such as accepting the "1992 Consensus" and that both sides of the strait are "one country, one people."</u> Another recent example of this could be seen in February when two fishermen from an unmarked, illegal Chinese fishing vessel died while fleeing from the Taiwan coast guard. People's Republic of China (PRC) Taiwan Affairs Office Spokesperson Zhu Fenglian (朱鳳蓮) <u>blamed</u> the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) directly for its handling of the incident. The Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) also used the incident as an opportunity to position their own party as being better equipped to handle cross-Strait relations: <u>stating</u> that "the KMT has dialogue channels with

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the mainland side ... but we are not the ruling party," and urging the DPP to establish dialogue with Beijing—ignoring the fact that the DPP, even as recently as Lai Ching-te's victory speech, has extended several olive branches to Beijing without any success.

Now that the DPP has secured four more years as the ruling government, the same tensions and political stalemates are guaranteed to continue. In the face of limited people-to-people exchanges and strong incentives to hijack cross-Strait narratives for political gain, non-partisan forums such as Strait Talk, which analyzes the cross-Strait relationship through a humanizing lens and fosters direct dialogue, are even more essential for understanding and de-escalation.

#### Strait Talk and Interactive Conflict Resolution

Strait Talk (海峽尋新) is a non-partisan dialogue workshop that empowers young people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait to collaborate in transforming the Taiwan Strait conflict. It was established in 2005 by a group of undergraduate students at Brown University when cross-Strait tensions were high after the Chinese government passed the Anti-Secession Law, which codified Beijing's policy of resorting to unpeaceful means to achieve reunification if necessary. Each symposium features young delegates representing the PRC, Taiwan, and the United States; the delegates go through a series of conflict analysis and resolution workshops over several days led by facilitators who come from either side of the Taiwan Strait or the United States. It is one of the world's first (and longest running) initiatives that enables direct dialogue on politics and identity between young people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait and the United States, with the goal of moving toward mutual peace and understanding. It has held chapters at universities in Hong Kong, Taipei, and Berkeley, California. Active dialogues are now held annually at George Washington University, Brown University, and the University of Alberta, Canada.

Although war has not been seen in the Taiwan Strait since the 1950s, the Strait Talk symposium defines the cross-Strait relationship as a conflict—one that cannot be resolved without addressing its complex, deeply-rooted causes. The symposium utilizes the method of interactive conflict resolution (ICR). First developed by John Burton in the 1960s, ICR is defined by Ronald J. Fisher as "small-group, problem-solving discussions between unofficial representatives of parties [...] involved in protracted social conflict." [1] Protracted social conflict refers to conflict that is ongoing and caused by the "denial of elements necessary to the development of all people," such as "security, distinct

identity, [and] social recognition of identity." [2] Additionally, discussions that take place during ICR workshops are "directed toward mutual understanding of the conflict and the development of collaborative actions to de-escalate and eventually resolve it." [3]

Strait Talk analyzes the Taiwan Strait conflict through exploring what people from Mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States (the three conflicting parties) fundamentally need, rather than analyzing the problem through a geopolitical lens or positions represented by government policies. One benefit of ICR is the emphasis that it places on "mutual recognition and consensus building," which allows the participants to share their grievances and acknowledge the challenges that each group faces as a result of the conflict.

Overall, ICR is commonly divided into three phases: education, dialogue, and consensus. First the delegates learn about conflict resolution studies. Then they share their personal experiences of collective trauma resulting from the conflict—often these grievances center around identity, politics, and their shared history. Lastly, they aim to achieve a consensus of real-world policy proposals that can be used to resolve and de-escalate the conflict.



Image: Strait Talk dialogue participants in Taipei, circa 2018. (Image source: Author Ava Shen)

#### From Conflict Resolution to Conflict Engagement

Strait Talk has strived to adapt in the face of stark geopolitical realities in recent years, as shown by a sustained freeze in official cross-Strait communication and an increased level of Chinese military operations in the Taiwan Strait. Strait Talk has shifted its emphasis from conflict resolution to conflict engagement. The symposium facilitators are under no illusion that the cross-Strait conflict can be easily resolved. Rather, they aim to empower

delegates to stay engaged in this conflict through their individual action plans, which are incorporated into their professional and personal lives. These plans have the potential to foster connections and conditions that are conducive to the eventual resolution of the cross-Strait conflict. This approach makes conflict resolution seem less daunting and identifies concrete, actionable opportunities for young people to contribute to their vision of cross-Strait peace.

#### History and Storytelling at Strait Talk

The exercises "Walk Through History" and "Personal Storytelling" are highlights among the conflict analysis activities at Strait Talk. The first is designed to compare official PRC, Taiwanese, and American historical narratives regarding the cross-Strait relationship to assess the differences in historical memory among the three sides. Each delegation writes down eight historical events that its members believe are the most important in shaping the trajectory of cross-Strait relations. Facilitators then arrange all 24 historical events in a chronological order on the floor of a room and lead the delegates in a silent walk-through of the timeline they constructed together. Dr. Tatsushi Arai, founding Strait Talk facilitator and associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Kent State University, published a longitudinal study in 2023 of twenty historical timelines from symposia held between 2005 and 2021. His study illustrates that social memory of the cross-strait conflict is historically constructed, subjective, and always changing, which implies the realities of the conflict as experienced by the conflict's parties are always shifting. [4]

Personal Storytelling is designed to humanize the cross-Strait conflict through stories shared by the delegates on their personal relationship or history with the Taiwan Strait conflict. The combination of official and personal histories aims to provide the delegates with a well-rounded view of the conflict. Many past participants of Strait Talk remember the exercise as an emotional experience wherein the Taiwan Strait conflict is transformed into something vivid that concretely affects people's lives.

This special issue of the *Global Taiwan Brief* features articles written by Strait Talk alumni. Authored by delegates from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, the articles show how cross-Strait tensions impact global cooperation in humanitarian aid and climate change policy, how cross-Strait fatigue has resulted in growing support for a third choice in Taiwanese politics, and why strategic empathy is important for resolving this conflict.

The main point: Enduring tensions across the Taiwan Strait have made dialogue, including those at the grassroots level, indispensable. Strait Talk, a non-partisan dialogue workshop that brings together young people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait and the United States, provides a unique platform to analyze and engage with the cross-Strait conflict through a people-centric lens.

[1] Ronald J. Fisher, *Interactive Conflict Resolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 142.

[2] Ibid 5.

[3] Ibid 8.

[4] Tatsushi Arai, "Engaging Conflict History and Memory Across the Taiwan Strait: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Conflict Timelines from Interactive Conflict Resolution (ICR) Dialogues," *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 39, no. 1, Winter 2023, 35-70. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/nejo.12422">https://doi.org/10.1111/nejo.12422</a>.

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# Sustainable Development and Public-Private Collaboration: Opportunities and Challenges for Taiwan in US-China Relations

By: Jack Huang

Jack Huang has over seven years of experience with the United Nations and global NGOs, specializing in international project management, sustainable development goals (SDGs), and impact building.

#### The Reality of an International World Filled with Conflicts

Taiwan is an indispensable partner in the international community's implementation of sustainable development goals. From both a geopolitical perspective and economic performance, Taiwan plays a crucial role. According to Global Finance's 2023 ranking, Taiwan, after adjusting for purchasing power parity (PPP) and gross domestic product (GDP), ranked 14<sup>th</sup> among 193 countries and territories, surpassing Japan and South Korea in Asia. In the same year, Taiwan climbed to the 10<sup>th</sup> position in the "Democracy Index" published by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), leading as the first in Asia; while the United States regressed to 29<sup>th</sup> as a "Flawed Democracy," and China remained beyond 100<sup>th</sup> under an "Authoritarian" regime. *The Economist* characterized 2023 as an "Age of Conflict," with United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres noting that "various prob-

lems have become more complex, more deadly, and more difficult to resolve." Addressing these issues requires a broader perspective and integrated solutions. The <u>17 sustainable development goals</u> advocated by the United Nations compel us to re-examine the relationships between environment, economy, and society, and to integrate resources from both the private and public sectors to tackle these complex and transboundary challenges.

### US-China-Taiwan Relations and Taiwan's International Participation

Taiwan, as part of the global supply chain, is affected by events of all magnitudes. Any instability in Taiwan would undoubtedly impact other economies to varying degrees. Taiwan's civil power also plays an important role in many places-whether it be businesses, non-profit organizations, or individuals who can integrate into local communities and establish good examples of "global localization." Indeed, Taiwan often faces many challenges when participating in international affairs through official channels, as Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations. In terms of foreign relations, Taiwan is caught between two major powers, the United States and China, and must consider the stance of the "big brother." China maintains a consistent position that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China, while the United States oscillates between the official "One-China Policy" and the unofficial position of "strategic ambiguity." The larger framework behind this is the game between Beijing and Washington, with both sides contemplating what kind of US-China relationship would best suit their desired world order.

In making international friends, Taiwan may find it difficult to break through its current international political predicament officially—but if it can find the right measures, through its rich and dynamic civil organizations, it still has many opportunities to support international affairs and contribute to the global sustainable development goals. Taiwan can take advantage of the global competition and cooperation between the United States and China to establish projects that genuinely impact local communities, economies, and even geopolitics. These projects not only help people and governments in developing regions, but also enhance the Taiwanese people's opportunities to participate in sustainable development.

The slogan "Taiwan Can Help" is very inspiring and filled with politically correct purposes, but most of the world's unresolved problems cannot be solved by Taiwan alone, nor can they be resolved by the unilateralism of the United States or China alone. These issues include climate change, poverty and famine, wom-

en's rights, and the global refugee crisis.

#### Taiwan's Involvement in Complex International Issues

In addressing these complex global challenges, Taiwan has taken proactive steps to contribute through strategic international collaborations and targeted initiatives. By working alongside allies and leveraging its unique position, Taiwan seeks to make a meaningful impact on the international stage. One such example of Taiwan's commitment is the establishment of the Taiwan Center in Reyhanli, Turkey.

The Taiwan Center in Reyhanli, Turkey was established in 2019, officially named the "Taiwan-Reyhanli Centre for World Citizens." It was initially "invited" by the US government, with allies contributing USD \$400,000 per unit, to attempt to alleviate the Syrian refugee problem in the Middle East. Under the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP, 民進黨) administration in Taiwan (and its continued rule after the early 2024 elections), Taiwan's foreign policy has always been pro-US. Naturally, Taiwan's government responded to such an invitation, resulting in the first installment of startup funding. The fund was commissioned in the small town of Reyhanli, located on the Turkey-Syria border, to establish a multi-functional refugee center focused on emergency shelter and educational training. Over time, the center successfully launched multiple projects, and continued to receive regular donations from the public and support from other international organizations.

Coincidentally, in facing the most challenging international issues, "The Taiwan Center" provides an interesting case study of the challenges Taiwan NGOs face in being caught between the United States and China. The center primarily focuses on the Syrian refugee issue, especially in the Turkish-Syrian border area. Why Turkey? According to the data from the United Nations Refugee Agency, Turkey is the single largest refugee-receiving country in the world, having hosted over 4 million refugees (mostly from Syria) in the past decade. While the European Union (EU) champions human rights and humanitarianism, it is not keen on having a continuous influx of refugees coming to Europe. Thus, it reached an agreement with the Turkish government: the EU provides 1 billion euros annually as "settlement fees" in exchange for Turkey's promise to "strictly guard its borders" and keep refugees within its territory as much as possible, preventing them from affecting the stability and peace of Europe. On the surface, the EU upholds humanitarianism but is unwilling to provide a safe haven for Middle Eastern refugees in Europe.

On the other hand, the United States also hopes to extend its

influence into the Middle East. It invests necessary resources in the region, not only to compete with China and Russia for regional influence—but more importantly, to create a more stable Middle East situation, which is certainly beneficial to the global interests of the United States and Europe. However, establishing direct US outposts is risky; institutions labeled "American" can easily become targets of terror attacks or require extensive costs to maintain security. Therefore, besides operating official and unofficial institutions directly, the US government often achieves specific objectives through the role of "allies." For example, to establish a series of pro-American non-profit organizations in the Middle East, such as schools, hospitals, vocational training centers, and cultural exchange centers, the United States can provide necessary assistance, but the actual execution is carried out by other US allies, thereby spreading "American influence" without bearing the relative risks

The refugee issue is extremely complex for Europe, the United States, and even China. The refugee crisis inevitably impacts the politics, society, and economy of host countries and neighboring regions, and even breeds serious problems like human trafficking and the growth of terrorism, thereby severely damaging peace and sustainable development. The influx of large numbers of refugees into developing countries could also exacerbate internal political conflicts. Such a trend is evident in Europe, where countries like Germany and Sweden have experienced political shifts and the rise of far-right movements in response to the large influx of refugees. In Germany, the arrival of over a million refugees in 2015 led to significant political backlash and the strengthening of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. Similarly, Sweden has seen increased support for the Sweden Democrats, a party known for its anti-immigration stance, as a result of its refugee policies. In contrast, although the United States does not have "refugees" directly entering its territory, the "immigrants" coming from its borders are quite similar in essence. All countries urgently need more effective and longterm solutions to address the immediate needs of emergency medical care and resettlement, as well as subsequent education, equal rights, community rebuilding, and economic development.

#### Opportunities and Challenges of the Taiwan Center

For most international organizations or foreign aid projects operating on an "annual budget" basis, they often find themselves in a predicament of "doing as much as the budget allows this year, and doing nothing if there's no money next year." Beyond the initial endowment of USD \$400,000, the Taiwan Center's ability to successfully operate and provide services to Syrian ref-

ugees largely depends on strategic management methods and creative, dynamic solutions from small and medium enterprises in Taiwan. These include establishing small-scale women's cooperatives, introducing appropriate vocational education training, transplanting mature and accessible social enterprise models, and embracing the circular economy, waste recycling, renewable energy, and water resource recovery.

For both enterprises and non-profit organizations, "sustainability" means not only covering numerous United Nations goals, but also ensuring that projects and organizations themselves have a sustainable operating mindset. Thanks to the continuous efforts of the founding team, the Taiwan Center has gradually gained international recognition, and become the first sustainable community in Turkey to genuinely address the Syrian refugee crisis. It continuously creates job opportunities locally through small donations and profits generated by social enterprises, indirectly promoting stability along the borders and socio-economic development in the region. This demonstrates the contribution of Taiwan's civil society to international sustainable development and its ability to build resilient local communities, pragmatically promoting collaboration between the public and private sectors in facing contemporary challenges.

Although the center has not actually received any resources from the United States (besides the initial startup funding), and has not received support from the governments of Taiwan or Turkey, it has largely established a model of civil participation in international affairs. Precisely because of Taiwan's unique international status, negotiations with the local government in Turkey could be more flexible and less colored by Taiwan's official stance, allowing for more successful execution of projects. On the other hand, Taiwan possesses rich upstream and downstream industrial chains and a mature NGO ecosystem, making it easy to integrate resources from enterprises and social organizations to execute complex international aid work overseas.

Humanitarian construction and sustainable development work in the Middle East and West Asia region are meaningful and align with the United States' use of allies to maintain regional stability, serving its geopolitical interests. Although the scope of the projects is not large, once they achieve results, they naturally attract close attention from China. Since proposing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, formerly known as "One Belt, One Road," 一帶一路) in 2013, China has been determined to establish a new model of international cooperation different from that of the Western-led model. Originating from China and extending along the ancient Silk Road trade routes to Europe, the Middle East and West Asian regions have become a strategically

contested area.

The activities of various overseas organizations, infrastructure projects, and non-profit organizations in the region inevitably operate in the shadows of great power games. For example, the local government of Reyhanli, where the Taiwan Center is located, once received a letter from the Chinese Embassy in Turkey, requesting a detailed report on the activities of this Taiwan-named refugee center. Furthermore, there were indirect implications that the "Taiwan Center" should be renamed "Taipei Center" according to international conventions to be more appropriate. Thus, although the "Taiwan Center" strives to do good humanitarian work without involving issues of Taiwan's sovereignty or the question of independence versus unification, it still draws attention from Chinese diplomatic missions.

Politics and diplomacy can be both complicated and simple. The controversy over the name of the Taiwan Center was surprisingly resolved in a straightforward manner. After several communications and coordination with relevant departments in Turkey and consulting experts familiar with cross-Strait diplomatic affairs, it was suggested to simply apply the concept of "One China, different interpretations." What does this mean? The full name "Taiwan-Reyhanli Centre for World Citizens" is a general term, and every participant or observer can use their preferred abbreviation: for Taiwanese, it is the Taiwan Center; for Americans, it can be called the World Citizens Center; and in Turkish media reports, it is often referred to as the Reyhanli Center. This is the ultimate embodiment of "One China, different interpretations."

With this issue settled, the center can continue to focus its efforts and resources on promoting various refugee services, implementing sustainable development and humanitarianism. In many practical aspects, for those individuals and communities in need of help, the most important thing is to survive and have stable and safe economic and social development, regardless of whether the resources provided come from China, the United States, or Taiwan. On the other hand, complete "depoliticization" in international affairs is almost impossible. How to skillfully handle the balance among different powers may be the most troublesome issue for Taiwan. Taiwan can undoubtedly come up with great ideas and integrate the capabilities of the public and private sectors, as well as organizations and groups willing to create an impact. However, given the ever-changing nature of international politics, ensuring projects are sustainable in operation always encounters different opportunities and challenges.

#### Conclusion

I would like to recall my participation in the 2011 Strait Talk forum, which discussed Taiwan's international participation and the potential impact of US-China relations. During the forum, representatives from China and Taiwan had considerable debates over sovereignty issues, with the United States typically playing the role of the central elder brother. At that time, a question was raised: Why must we discuss all issues within the framework of "nationalism"? Can we have the opportunity to step out of the concept of "nation" to examine the problems we face and consider possible solutions? This is naturally a naive, even somewhat foolish assumption, but looking at modern history, didn't humanity only begin to distinguish between "yours and mine" based on "nationhood" just over 400 years ago? In many places, the people who make up a nation do not necessarily come from the same ethnicity, historical identity, culture, religion, language, lifestyle, etc. So, why does the discourse of nationalism need to be prioritized over any other classification?

There was no answer at the time, and it may not be easy to find one. However, I hope this can provide a direction for sustainable development, regardless of whether the name "Taiwan" is necessary to help people or communities in other regions.

The main point: Despite Taiwan's limited ability to participate in international fora, Taiwan has the resources and ability to make significant contributions to international development. Still, these problems cannot be solved by Taiwan alone and transnational cooperation with other partners is sometimes hindered by nationalistic tensions and the sensitive issue of Taiwan's sovereignty status.

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# The Taiwan Carbon Strait Talk: Exploring Collaboration and Conversation in Nature Across the Strait

By: Shu-Pei Lin

Shu-Pei Lin is a developer for Beyond Value Chain Mitigation Projects at PUR—a project developer in Nature-based Solutions with over 40 projects across 30 countries.

With years of preparation towards its climate goals, the Taiwanese government has decided to take a step further to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, with the <u>Climate Change Response Act</u> (CCRA, 氣候變遷因應法) established in 2023. The CCRA has a relatively stronger focus on the reduction side of the issue,

setting regulations and boundaries related to the carbon topic. Meanwhile, this article explores the aspect of removal, specifically focusing on nature-based solutions, and the potential of a new conversation between the two parties across the Taiwan Strait on this matter. However, in order to delve into topics such as the companies' agricultural value chain (scope 3) and others' beyond value chain mitigation (see below) and to uncover less discussed aspects of the issue, a comparison between carbon neutrality and net zero, as well as offsets and BVCM, will be necessary.

#### **Comparing Terms**

The term "carbon neutral," according to the <u>European Parliament</u>, is defined as: "having a balance between emitting carbon and absorbing carbon from the atmosphere in carbon sinks. Removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and then storing it is known as carbon sequestration." Carbon neutrality is often criticized as "greenwashing" because corporations appear to conduct business as usual on one side, while purchasing carbon credits to achieve the "carbon neutral" status. Carbon sequestration is often achieved through either technological or natural means.

Technology-based projects aim to eliminate carbon directly from the atmosphere via air capture, while nature-based solution projects aim to reduce or avoid emissions through nature restoration projects. These include regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, conservation, marine restoration, and reforestation, among others. The term "net zero" is defined by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) as reducing at least 90 percent of emissions, after which removals are allowed to balance the remaining emissions. Thus, unlike carbon neutrality, net zero requires companies to take action on the reduction side, minimizing their carbon footprint to the lowest possible level first. A relevant example would be Apple, which unveiled its first carbon-neutral watch in 2023. However, this move was soon scrutinized by the media and criticized by the EU as misleading, and an example of greenwashing. The Taiwanese Climate Change Response Act aligns with the reduction perspective by setting limitations for larger emitters, compelling them to reduce their carbon footprint.

Carbon offsetting is commonly utilized by companies as an investment in carbon removal initiatives to make "compensation" claims, rather than prioritizing the decarbonization of their own business. This approach differs from what the SBTi now encourages, which is for companies to take actions outside of their value chain, known as "beyond value chain mitigation" (BVCM).

BVCM refers to "mitigation action or investments that fall outside a company's value chain, including activities that avoid or reduce GHG emissions, or remove and store GHGs from the atmosphere." BVCM considers those leading companies, perceived as sustainability leaders in their industry, not only actively working towards decarbonization of their own operations, but also choosing to invest in activities beyond their value chain to contribute to the global goal of addressing the climate crisis, making "contribution" claims. As it is widely recognized that the SDGs are set for 2030, and SBTi net-zero targets are established for either 2030 or 2050 for most companies, delaying removal actions until the completion of reduction is not feasible, particularly given our proximity to 2030. Achieving a 90 percent reduction may require considerable time for companies, whereas removal actions such as Nature-based Solutions entail decades-long processes, due to the time it takes for trees to mature. Therefore, the SBTi has emphasized the importance of companies taking immediate action to ensure that we are on schedule and following the correct path to stay within 1.5-2 degrees of global warming. Companies would benefit from BVCM projects for many reasons, such as talent acquisition and retention, securing access to finance, and brand differentiation (see image below). [1]

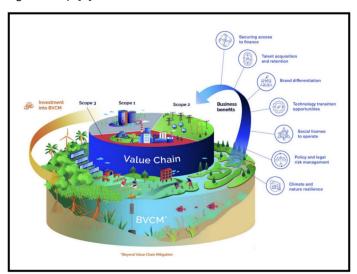


Image: BVCM (Image source: Science Based Targets)

Taiwan's Ministry of Environment (MOE) has <u>announced</u> that entities can produce carbon credits or offset their emissions in the voluntary carbon market with high-quality credits (both reduction or removal) as part of Taiwan's Net-Zero transition strategy. The National Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan has also emphasized that nature-based solutions for both land use, and oceans and coasts are promoted to strengthen the adaptability of the environment and maintain a dynamic ecological equilibri-

um. Even though the atmosphere seems positive and nature-related actions are encouraged, relevant regulations on the use of the credits and the project details still lack clarity. In <u>Article 24</u>, "Entities with newly installed or modified Emission Sources that reach a certain scale shall offset their increased GHG emissions based on a certain percentage of increased emissions," it also mentions that the central competent authority retains the right to determine specific regulations, without further clarification. This would certainly leave a question mark for companies about taking action to implement long-term nature projects.



Image: Taiwan's 2050 Net-Zero Transition 12 Key Strategies (Image source: <u>Climate Change Administration, Ministry of Environment</u>)

#### The Concept of Insetting and Value Chains

The concept of insetting may be less widely known to the public, but it does provide a more impactful and sustainable approach for many companies with agricultural value chains. As mentioned earlier, companies are encouraged to implement nature-based solution projects beyond their value chain (outside of their scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions). However, the complexity has increased for companies that source largely from nature as part of their scope 3 emissions (such as Nespresso, Hershey, Vans, Burberry, et al). The concept of insetting involves implementing nature-based projects within one's agricultural value chain, and these companies' on-farm emissions can sometimes constitute a significant portion of their scope 3 emissions. For example, Hershey's 2022 ESG Report has indicated that: "66% of Hershey's Scope 3 emissions come from agriculture." If these companies already source from farms, it would represent a best practice for them to implement projects on their farms (within their value chain) rather than at the community level, landscape level, or further afield. As the International Platform for Insetting (IPI) mentions: "Insetting is a way for companies to harmonize their operations with the ecosystems they depend upon and transition to a more sustainable business model."

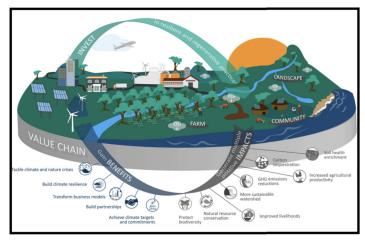


Image: The process of insetting (Image source: <u>International</u>

<u>Platform for Insetting</u>)

Whether through insetting, BVCM or other methods, companies must fulfill their obligations regarding carbon-related regulations established by their governments. Conversely, governments are required to report their <u>nationally determined contributions</u> (NDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as requested by the Paris Agreement, which mandates each country to prepare and communicate their post-2020 climate actions. Consequently, governments have begun implementing domestic regulations on companies, enabling both the government and companies to work towards the same goal.

In Taiwan, the concept of value chain and insetting projects remains a step ahead of the current discussion. While relevant regulations and details related to the purchase of carbon credits in the voluntary market, and the use of nature-based projects remain uncertain, the even more complex execution of insetting projects is not yet on the table.

#### **Cross-Strait Connections**

Questions related to carbon footprints are beginning to arise in Taiwan—an island with a population of 24 million that is not a member of the United Nations, and which heavily depends on China economically. Despite Taiwan's exports to China falling to their lowest share in 21 years, they still accounted for 35.25 percent of the total in 2023. Many of Taiwan's food and beverage giants, including Uni-President, Master Kong, Want-Want Group, Wei Chuan Foods Corp, Standard Food, and DaChan Food, still have substantial operations in, and largely source their agricultural ingredients from, China. However, China claims Taiwan to

be a part of its territory, raising questions about whether China will include the efforts of Taiwanese companies as part of its own NDC, given that China cannot forcibly establish regulations in Taiwan. Alternatively, will Taiwan independently fulfill its NDC obligations despite not being a part of the United Nations?

In fact, China will not incorporate Taiwan's NDC, while Taiwan has committed to communicating its intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) independently. However, concerns persist regarding the transfer of carbon and the corresponding adjustment, despite the substantial operations of Taiwanese companies in China. The entire topic still presents a significant question mark, and actions won't likely be taken by companies until a clue is revealed. Nevertheless, the climate issue operates differently than political issues—it cannot wait. Butterflies won't be able to tell the difference between Taiwan's deforested land and China's deforested land; all they know is the loss of habitat and biodiversity. Immediate conversations regarding carbon removal, value chain, and beyond value chain mitigation are strongly required due to the urgency of the climate crisis. A platform or guidance should be established for companies across the Taiwan Strait to follow so that everyone can work towards the same goal before it is too late. Failure to act swiftly and decisively risks irreversible damage to our planet's ecosystems and future generations.

#### How Strait Talk Can Help

A productive and fruitful conversation requires a deep level of understanding and empathy between the two parties, especially in the context of the cross-strait relationship between Taiwan and China, given the intricate interconnection between them. Drawing from my experience at <a href="Strait Talk">Strait Talk</a> at George Washington University in 2023, the event could serve as a mirror for the two parties to reflect on their current conversational approach.

The 2023 GW symposium of Strait Talk was crafted in a distinctive manner. Rather than the typical cross-strait style conferences marked by debates and presentations, all the candidates were gathered in the same space for days, fostering profound mutual comprehension before engaging in discussions. Each delegate shared their backstory regarding cross-Strait issues, including personal anecdotes, emotional connections, pivotal moments, insights into the topic, and aspirations for the future. This method cultivated a distinctive and meaningful rapport among the delegates, nurturing connections through an indepth appreciation of each other's narratives. Even in disagreement over an event or topic, we could readily grasp the roots of disagreement, given the depth of insight we had into one an-

other. While reaching a final agreement posed challenges, we all acknowledged that we were collectively striving toward the same objective in this endeavor. It was inspiring to realize that we could cooperate, despite differing political perspectives, as we recognized that nothing outweighed the significance of basic human needs, particularly peace and stability.

To be more precise, a specific segment of the event tasked candidates with collaborating to propose solutions aimed at improving cross-strait relations. Among these proposals, a notable suggestion emerged: the establishment of a cross-Strait cap and trade market. This system would enable companies from both sides to trade carbon credits, thereby fostering climate-conscious initiatives, bolstering business collaboration, attracting foreign investments, and providing clear operational guidelines. While facing scrutiny from other candidate groups regarding the logistical intricacies and feasibility, there is unanimous agreement on its potential as a promising avenue to initiate dialogue, particularly given the urgent need for climate action.

#### **Conclusion**

Despite the numerous challenges that remain uncertain regarding the carbon issue, and the inevitable complexity of cross-strait issues between Taiwan and China, it is crucial to recognize that the climate crisis demands urgent attention. The loss of nature will have a far greater impact than any of us can comprehend. Urgent communication between the two sides on climate matters is essential, given the ticking clock and the limited time we have to mitigate temperature rise. If we can engage in conversations with a profound understanding of each other—much like the approach of Strait Talk—perhaps nature will remain nature, and butterflies won't have to endure the loss of nature anymore.

The main point: While Taiwan's most recent legislation responding to climate change focuses more heavily on the reduction of carbon emissions, including other methods—such as nature-based solutions—will be necessary to mitigate the climate crisis further. Tense cross-Strait relations and Taiwan's absence from international organizations also create complications when bringing both Taiwan and China up to date with current climate change regulations. To protect the environment, Taiwan and China need to cooperate more, starting with cross-Strait dialogue.

[1] More details about the discussion regarding environmental attribute credits can be found in this <u>paper</u> written by Andrew Nobrega, Chief Product Officer from <u>PUR</u>.

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## **Building Strategic Empathy for Great Power Competition**

By: Daniel Rice

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There is little doubt amongst the nations of the world that we are actively in, or are entering into, a new period of great power competition. While US-China competition and Russia hold the spotlight, other nations—or groups of nations such as India, the European Union, ASEAN, or the African Union—have their own growing influence and impact on global governance. Indeed, modern global power competition involves the interlocking and overlapping interests of all stakeholders in complicated webs of relative influence. To call what we see today in the global geopolitical landscape a "new Cold War" would be dramatically underselling the complexity of the situation.

Modern great power competition will be unlike those of the past. However, even as technologies and the domains in which competition occurs evolve, fundamentally, great power competition boils down into a competition of the beliefs and will of civilizations, their people, and their leaders. The will and beliefs of a civilization and its people are often harnessed by a country's leadership and crafted into a grand strategy comprised of different narratives. Underpinned by culture and language, these narratives are then applied to the different levers of national power: diplomacy, information, military strength, and economic influence (DIME) under the overall DIME framework of national power.

#### Strategic Empathy

When holistically looking at this new global competition, most of it occurs outside of conventional military power and across the non-military levers of power—i.e., diplomacy, information, and economics. However, there are lessons that can be drawn from the military realm that can help to both facilitate healthy competition and reduce tensions amongst nations. One such concept is that of <a href="strategic empathy">strategic empathy</a>. Strategic empathy is a tool used to attempt to gain an understanding of your adversary's beliefs, will, and intentions such that you are better able to anticipate and proactively engage or contest your adversary. In other words, strategic empathy is a tool that facilitates the interpretation and understanding of a competitor's narratives,

and how those narratives create limits to actions or are applied to push forward their grand strategy.

In this context, strategic empathy can be a powerful tool in more accurately interpreting a nation's strategy and actions. Pairing strategic empathy with <u>cultural competence</u> and linguistic capabilities further strengthens the ability of a government to address the various global stakeholders that they deal with on a regular basis. In the United States, the State Department Foreign Service and Foreign Affairs Officers within the military lead the government's efforts in this regard. However, the cadre of individuals within these organizations is relatively small, and building this cross-cultural capability has significant barriers to entry. The time and financial investments required to build language proficiency and to socialize one individual in a culture can be too costly or take too long to be relevant. At the same time, opportunities for individuals to engage with their counterparts, and in certain cases their competitors, are scarce. Yet, even with the costs, there is a track record within the United States of investing in building strategic empathy and applying it to great power competition. During the Cold War, the United States spent thirty years developing a core of government officials, dubbed Kremlinologists, whose role was to interpret the actions of the Soviet Union for decision-makers within the government. While not a silver bullet solution, strategic empathy may have been key to dissolving the US-Soviet tensions during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In the modern context, we are currently witnessing Sino-US relations rapidly becoming more tense—yet the institutional capacity for strategic empathy is only beginning to be built, or else exists on an individual and not institutional level.

#### **Growing Cross-Strait Tensions**

Sino-US competition is by far the most complex international challenge that all nations face. The stakes are immeasurably high and the potential flashpoints are numerous. Amongst the potential flashpoints for conflict, none is more pressing than the China-Taiwan-US relationship. At its most basic, the tripartite relationship is based on an unfinished civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) and the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨). Over the years this frozen conflict has left the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan developing along disparate, yet intertwined paths, with the United States as a quasi-unofficial guarantor of peace across the strait. Largely static until recently, this political dance has been called the "cross-Strait status quo." But, this relationship and the status quo amongst the three sides is gradually changing. As the PRC's national power grows, Xi Jinping has doubled down on the narrative of unifying Taiwan with the PRC. Adding to this tension,

the growing capabilities of the People's Liberation Army serve sionals involved in policy or international affairs to immerse to pressure Taiwan into unification, deter Taiwan's diplomatic themselves in building strategic empathy between Chinese, Taiefforts, and to deter the United States from its traditional role wanese and American colleagues at the grassroots level. From in the relationship.

Developments in the military domain, particularly around Taiwan, have radically increased the potential for a military conflict between the United States and the PRC, with Taiwan entrenched Personally, I had the privilege of attending two of the dialogues. in the front lines of this potential clash. Even though tensions Although there were many events during the dialogue that were are rising and the status quo is changing, there does not need to impactful—especially the "walk through history"—the portion be outright conflict between the three parties. In fact, peaceful that struck me most in both dialogues was individual storyresolution of the situation—regardless of the outcome—is likely telling. Falling later in the forum, the storytelling block occurs the preferred course of action for all three parties. Unfortunate- once barriers are dropped and participants feel safe to discuss ly, the three parties are mired in political narratives that have their own views, family ties, or otherwise personal connections limited or outright eradicated channels for constructive com- to the cross-Strait relationship. It is in those moments, hearing munication. Complicating this cross-Strait issue is the larger Si- about the individual identities, fears, beliefs, and views of the no-US competition that often frames Taiwan as a component of different sides of the China-Taiwan-US relationship, that what the bilateral competition, as opposed to an independent actor is often very sanitized in policy discussions becomes more viswith its own agency. Under the circumstances, strategic empacreral. Understanding each individual's ties to the larger problem thy may be a key in creating forums for constructive dialogue, or set instantly puts into perspective the foundational experiences at the very least establishing mutual understanding of the diffi-that shape each side's stance in the current dilemma. In a short culty of the problem and of the individual perspectives behind period of time, and through the Strait Talk process, strategic each side. From the building blocks of understanding it may be empathy is built and immediately becomes a valuable tool for possible to avoid outright conflict.

Competition occurs across all aspects of DIME, and a lack of stra- From the United States' perspective, Sino-US competition and success story in this regard is the growing non-profit Strait Talk.

#### Strait Talk as an Avenue for Strategic Empathy

Strait Talk (海峽尋新論壇) is an organization that aims to promote peace across the Taiwan Strait by engaging youth from Taiwan, China, and the United States in constructive dialogue founded in international conflict resolution methodologies. In practice, this forum creates the opportunity for young profes-

the dialogue, participants carry forward the knowledge and personal connections that they create, applying them to their work—which often involves cross-Strait issues.

creating constructive ways to de-escalate cross-Strait tensions.

tegic empathy creates a significant strategic gap within our own the US-Taiwan relationship are not ephemeral. These complex government that is both dangerous and difficult to overcome. relations will be seminal in the next few decades of policy to-At its core, strategic empathy is an attempt to peel away the wards the Indo-Pacific and more broadly towards the globe. layers of official policies and to understand the human element. As such, we will need to equip our whole-of-government deciof the situation. To build strategic empathy requires exposure to sion-makers and staffers with better tools to be able to navigate other peoples and cultures in a "safe" space—"safe" meaning these relationships. One such way is to encourage the prolifcircumstances in which individuals feel secure enough to open eration of Strait Talk and other track two or informal dialogue themselves up, sharing their views and vulnerabilities without mechanisms, and to facilitate our own participation in these threat of ridicule or exploitation. Creating a "safe" space also forums. Additionally, these organizations should not be conrequires the willing participation and acceptance of participants strained to only policy-related fields. Private industry and public towards building understanding and keeping an open mind. In entities can benefit from understanding the US-China-Taiwan official channels, this is an immensely difficult task to achieve, relationship and its importance to the different facets of our nabut in unofficial channels there are growing opportunities to tion. Building strategic empathy from the grassroots up can help build institutional strategic empathy from the ground up. One inform our strategic decisions, our reactions, and help us better navigate regional and global competition. Without it, we may be left planning or executing policy in a silo. As most planners know, planning in isolation is not a very successful proposition.

> The main point: The US-China-Taiwan relationship is one of the most complex and difficult components of modern great power competition, and requires a more holistic and human-centric understanding to facilitate constructive dialogue. Building strategic empathy at the grassroots level and across the public and

private sectors can help the United States, China, and Taiwan to What would Taiwanese do when they are under the severe may occur.

### What Do the Taiwanese Really Need? Unfolding Public Sentiment Amidst Taiwan's increases, and the possibility of military conflict in the Taiwan **Emerging Populist Politics**

By: Chenxi Shen

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For Taiwan, 2024 could become a year of external threats and internal challenges, in which non-traditional political voices rise to the highest level. In the presidential election in 2024, the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP, 民進黨) candidate Lai Ching-te (賴清德) won, giving a victory to Taiwan's green camp. However, the result of this electoral cycle shows that the traditional blue-green party divisions in Taiwan are breaking down, giving way to the emergence of non-traditional political figures. Lai Ching-te's victory was quite slim, winning with merely 40.05 percent of the popular vote—as compared to former president Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), who won with 56.12 percent in the 2016 presidential election and 57.13 percent in 2020. Instead, the percentage of "Third Party/Independent" voters grew to 26.46 percent, reaching the highest point ever. During the election season, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP, 台眾黨) won 8 seats in the Legislative Yuan. The rate of support for Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) reached 31.9 percent in polling in November 2023, which even surpassed the support rate of Lai Ching-te for around one week.

For me, 2024 marks the beginning of my personal academic journey exploring Taiwan, and Strait Talk was instrumental in setting me on that path. During the Strait Talk conference, as a representative of mainland China, I engaged in a conversation with a Taiwanese girl who studies in Washington DC. She explained to me the challenges that she faced in asserting her Taiwanese identity globally, including bullying during her university years. This encounter prompted me to reevaluate Taiwan's international identity crisis within the context of cross-Strait relations. One year after Strait Talk, I decided to pursue a Ph.D. in Hong Kong, focusing on Taiwan's domestic electoral trends. Today, the manifestation of Taiwanese political identity extends beyond individual concerns to broader societal grievances, which are reflected in recent voting patterns.

build mutual understandings from which constructive dialogue deprivation of political identity? Taiwan has cultivated a "Taiwan Subjectivity" (台灣主體性) during the process of its decolonialization and democratization, especially since the early 2000s. Yet, the cultivation of this imagined community does not bring Taiwanese more hope. As international marginalization worsens, the economic integration with mainland China Strait escalates. The most crucial task for Taiwan alarmists used to be building a self-conscious nation state, in order to survive and to avoid annexation. [1]

> Times have changed, and since then a distinctive Taiwanese identity is no longer at the forefront of discussion. After seeing how the Chinese Communist Party suppressed the Hong Kong protests in 2019, it is evident that Taiwan's own imagined communities and distinct sense of identity can only exist in a bubble. Counterintuitively, this anxiety has pushed Taiwan's domestic elections in a direction where voters prefer political figures with less polarized policies. These figures usually emphasize the living standard of Taiwanese people, such as better economic conditions and environmental-friendly facilities—presented as quasi-populist campaigns—mainly because people wish to have an alternative choice to save them from this struggle without interrupting their current social conditions.

#### The Rise of the TPP

A charismatic figure with a non-political background, Ko Wen-je is a non-traditional politician. Also referred to as "Professor Ko," Ko Wen-je is a former trauma surgeon with a doctoral degree in medical science. In 2014, Ko transitioned to politics, winning the Taipei mayoral election as an independent candidate. His leadership style, often characterized as pragmatic, focuses on public health, urban development, and social issues. Ko's non-traditional political approach and his dedication to improving Taipei's infrastructure have made him a special figure in Taiwan's political landscape. As the president of the Taiwan People's Party, Ko Wen-je aims to provide voters with "an alternative choice" in Taiwan politics.

However, political commentators have criticized Ko Wen-je and his TPP for being politically opportunistic and having no clear political positions like the DPP and Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨). From their perspective, the success of the TPP should be largely attributed to Ko Wen-je's personal charisma. In fact, the TPP, as a newborn party founded in 2019, does not set clear goals for Taiwan's overall development, especially in relation to its lack of economic plans and clear political agendas. Although Ko Wen-je and his TPP claim themselves to be an independent party that populism represents a denial and fatigue with the fatal dilemma is neither green nor blue, the key question of "reunification-ver- of "independence-versus-unification." Taiwanese people wish sus-independence" and Taiwan's diplomatic dilemma must be for another choice that ensures Taiwan's national security and answered if this party expands its presence in Taiwan politics. sovereignty without bringing on an economic crisis. As such, Once Ko and his party reach greater prominence, they may turn populism in Taiwan is not only the reflection of the inequality out to choose to walk the same familiar paths of the DPP or the brought by the international trade or social modernization pro-KMT.

#### Populism as an Alternative Choice

This is not the first time that non-traditional politicians have appeared in Taiwanese politics. During the electoral cycle of However, do these populist politicians really grant Taiwanese 2018-2020, the unexpected rise of Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) from genuine alternative options? Han Kuo-yu won Kaohsiung when the Kuomintang's Pan-Blue camp, whose charisma resembles he claimed to revive Taiwan, but he lost the presidential elec-Ko Wen-je and whose political agenda is also quasi-populist, tion when there was suspicion that he had connections with great again." [2] The performance of Han Kuo-yu also follows sical Taiwanese politicians have followed. The Hong Kong prothe demagogy of populism and the pursuit of Taiwanese peo- tests contributed to Han Kuo-yu's failed election and resulted ple's daily interests, attracting the working class in Taiwan's tra- in Taiwan's increased distrust towards the PRC's "One Country, ditional deep green cities like Kaohsiung.

From a general perspective, the emergence of populist figures in Taiwan is reminiscent of populist movements in other global liberal democracies, emphasizing political opportunism and responding to the so-called public desire that politics should respond to the people's general will. Global populist movements focus on income inequality and industrial inequality. For Unfortunately, the world has not granted Taiwan a third opexample, Spain's Podemos party emerged from anti-austerity tion. Annette Lu (呂秀蓮), the former vice president of Taiwan, protests to address economic difficulties and income inequality following the 2008 crisis. Italy's 5-Star Movement criticizes this neutral option seems unworkable in light of an extremely economic inequality and advocates policies such as a universal strong-willed Beijing, which will perceive anything other than basic income. Industrial inequality is also a key focus for populist movements. France's Yellow Vests movement has protested for an alternative. against fuel taxes and living costs, highlighting the economic disparity between urban and rural areas. In Brazil, a truckers' strike in 2018 highlighted the plight of an important industrial sector and led to policy changes.

improvement of public health or the economic struggle of the green politicians like Lai Ching-te hesitate and choose framings working classes. These Taiwanese populist politicians rise from that seem to confirm Beijing's stance. nonpolitical backgrounds and win elections by appealing to the grievances and aspirations of common people through a political dimension. [4]

votes do not play a part in solving social problems. [5] In Taiwan, blue camp. By that time, we shall find out whether Ko Wen-je's

cess, but also the urgent need to balance "Taiwan subjectivity" with cross-Strait relations.

#### Is There Really a Third Choice?

pushed forward populist discourse similar to "make [the] ROC Beijing—that is, he again chose an old option that other clas-Two Systems" framework. As Beijing becomes more authoritarian domestically and assertive internationally, the number of Taiwanese who support unification have dropped to a very low percentage. Yet, the pro-independent vote is not dominant, either. Instead, the most prominent choice is maintaining the status quo forever, showing the public's hopes for a third choice.

> called for a third choice, the Taiwan neutrality option. But even unification as separatist or pro-independent, leaving no room

The choice in cross-Strait relations for Taiwan, therefore, is false binary, choosing from either "submitting to Beijing" or "not submitting." When Lai Ching-te was elected, he simultaneously confirmed that he would not claim Taiwan's independence and Both Ko Wen-je's political agenda and Han Kuo-yu's slogan ca-that "there is not such an independent route." Facing the direct ter to the experiences of common people, either through the military threat that Taiwan can never compete with, even deep

Han Kuo-yu's failure demonstrates that the selection of a crucial path for cross-Strait relations casts aside the benefits gained from having a pragmatic political agenda and being charismatic. As highlighted by David Cayla, a French economist, populism Although Ko Wen-je and his TPP have not yet touched this seneffectively offers individuals "an alternative choice" to regain sitive diplomatic topic, he will face this option once he and his control over the trade market, particularly when they feel their party have grown large enough to compete with the green or independent route is an alternative option for Taiwanese or just the old routes that DPP and KMT have already walked upon.

What could Taiwanese youngsters do under this predicament? Perhaps it is time to stay calm, face Taiwan's domestic social grievances, and build up Taiwan's confidence. Like a famous quote in the early 2000s, when Taiwan was still a confident body, we need to "establish youngsters on Taiwan, have concern for the mainland, and open young people's eyes to the world" ("立足台灣、胸懷大陸、放眼世界"). [6] Participating in events such as Strait Talk is helpful, for it grants us chances to not only critically rethink Taiwan's current security challenges and international recognition dilemma, but also to express ideas and sentiments to wider groups of people who can actively influence and change the world.

The main point: Fatigue and anxiety over having to choose between "unification" and "independence" has led Taiwanese voters to pursue an alternative choice by voting for non-traditional politicians, such as Ko Wen-je. However, it's unlikely that Ko truly represents a third choice, and Taiwanese people are faced with the difficult task of re-evaluating Taiwan's current dilemmas regarding security and identity if they want to find a true alternative.

- [1] Daniel C. Lynch, "Taiwan's Self-Conscious Nation-Building Project," *Asian Survey* 44, no. 4 (July 2004): 513–33, https://doi. org/10.1525/as.2004.44.4.513.
- [2] Frédéric Krumbein, "Populist Discourses in Taiwan and the Case of Han Kuo-Yu," *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*, July 24, 2023, 1–35, https://doi.org/10.1163/24688800-20231313.
- [3] Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–63, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x.
- [4] Ernesto Laclau, "Why Constructing a People Is the Main Task of Radical Politics," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 646, https://doi.org/10.2307/3877130.
- [5] David Cayla, *Populism and Neoliberalism* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 126.
- [6] Stéphane Corcuff, "The Symbolic Dimension of Democratization and the Transition of National Identity under Lee Teng-hui," in Stéphane Corcuff, ed., *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), pp. 73–101.