

Beyond “Mainstream America”: Why Taiwan Needs to Build a Robust US Coalition Across Racial and Class Boundaries**Hsin-I Cheng****The Politics of Broadcast Media in Taiwan: The Problem of the National Communications Commission****Diarra Molock****Signals from the South: An Opening for Stronger Philippines-Taiwan Ties****Thomas Shattuck****The Ramifications of the US-China Trade Conflict on Taiwan and the World****Annie Tseng****Why Taiwan Topped Asia’s Happiness Rankings****Y. Tony Yang****Beyond “Mainstream America”: Why Taiwan Needs to Build a Robust US Coalition Across Racial and Class Boundaries**

By: Hsin-I Cheng

Hsin-I Cheng is a professor in the Department of Communication at Santa Clara University. Her research focuses on immigration related issues from the lens of intercultural and political communication. Cheng is a fellow of the 2023-2025 US-Taiwan Next Generation Working Group in the Institute of East Asian Studies at UC-Berkeley. She can be reached at hcheng2@scu.edu.

In the absence of official diplomatic ties with the United States, people-to-people diplomacy has been a [major contributor](#) to strengthening US-Taiwan relations. [Kadir Jun Ayhan](#), an international relations scholar, defines people-to-people diplomacy as “intentional, political, and transboundary communication-based interactions between groups of people for public, rather than private interests that have or aim to have foreign policy implications.” Programs planned by the Taiwanese government, such as initiatives by the Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC, 中華民國僑務委員會), and those planned by non-state actors, such as scholarship exchanges, intend to enhance outside understanding of Taiwan through people-to-people diplomacy. Because US-Taiwan relations have heavily relied on unofficial interactions, the individuals who forge these interpersonal relationships deserve a closer examination.

“Mainstream America” has been the primary target of Taiwanese government and civic groups’ attempts to garner support. For example, when the Director-General of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Los Angeles published an opinion piece in the *Beverly Press* calling for US support for Taiwan’s membership to the United Nations, the [World Journal](#) (世界日報)—a widely circulated newspaper in Chinese characters—highlighted the *Beverly Press* as being “influential for having readers primarily from *mainstream* [emphasis added] American society”. The *Beverly Press*’s readership is mostly from the Beverly Hills and West Hollywood areas, in which approximately 70 percent of the residents are non-Hispanic White Americans. Similarly, the Director of the Cultural Center at Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in Washington, DC [advocated for](#) the importance of cultivating Mandarin-speaking Taiwanese Americans who could become “the bridges between Taiwan and the *mainstream* [emphasis added] American society.” The [Building Bridges](#) program, a project under OCAC that aims to cultivate student cultural ambassadors, also highlights the young ambassadors’ achievements for being recognized by “overseas

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Global Taiwan Institute
1836 Jefferson Place NW,
Washington DC 20036
contact@globaltaiwan.org

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Taiwanese communities and *mainstream* [emphasis added] society” The Mandarin-language phrase “gaining support from mainstream America” (“爭取美國主流社會的支持”) is frequently used by many community leaders in Taiwanese American circles. Such an audience is undoubtedly important. However, much broader, sustained support for Taiwan is needed.

Risk 1: Framing Taiwan Strait Tension as A Domain for White America

The phrase “mainstream America” is frequently uttered yet rarely defined; it carries both a clear and vague image. To many Americans, mainstream America often refers to Americans who are White, Judeo-Christian, and middle- or upper-class. [Researchers](#) have found that many marginalized Americans view themselves as excluded from this designation. These Americans perceive “mainstream America” as White American, located in the north of the United States, with the power and resources to decide the fate for the rest of society. This perception is also absorbed by many Taiwanese who, as a consequence of [US media](#) influence, see America as White. The terms “mainstream America” and “White America” often become synonymous in the eyes of these observers.

A [2024 study](#) based on a diverse sample by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs showed that only 36 percent of Americans believed that the United States should defend Taiwan if China invades. Taking this finding alongside the Carnegie Endowment’s 2023 [American Statecraft Program Report](#) regarding Black Americans’ attitudes toward US military support for Taiwan, it is clear that there is a pressing need to extend Taiwan’s outreach beyond “mainstream America.” In the Carnegie Endowment report, only two out of ten Black Americans support the United States playing an active role in response to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. A [YouGov poll](#) in August 2022 found that other racial minorities, such as Hispanics, also showed a low level of support or familiarity regarding whether the United States should help protect Taiwan militarily from China. In 2022, Hispanic/Latino Americans accounted for almost one-fifth of the US population. Black Americans made up 14.4 percent of the nation’s population, [a 32 percent increase](#) since 2000. As US population demographics are projected to become “majority minority” by 2044, rhetoric and practices that emphasize gaining support from primarily-White, “mainstream America” could unintentionally exclude a large and growing number of minority Americans.

Risk 2: Turning Taiwan’s Security into An Elite-Only Issue

A [2023 Pew report](#) showed that Americans are increasingly concerned about China-Taiwan tensions. According to the report, concern is “up 4 percentage points since October 2022 and 19 points since February 2021.” The report simultaneously pointed out that Americans with more formal education are more likely to be worried about a Taiwan Strait conflict than less-educated Americans. In the [Carnegie En-](#)

[dowment’s 2023 report](#), this trend is replicated among African Americans and immigrant Black communities—support for active US intervention overseas increases with levels of income and education. It is encouraging that Taiwan has directed more American attention toward China’s increasing aggression toward the island nation. However, if knowledge of Taiwan’s security and the willingness to offer it support is primarily found among more educated, higher-income Americans, there is a risk that Taiwan’s situation will become a concern only for Americans with more resources.

This risk could be further amplified by the fact that Taiwanese Americans, due to their educational achievements, tend to associate with middle- and upper-middle class Americans. According to USAFacts, [80 percent of Taiwanese Americans](#) hold a bachelor’s degree. Meanwhile, [37.7 percent of the overall American population](#) held a bachelor’s degrees in 2022. Furthermore, the median Taiwanese American household income is 67 percent higher than that of the median US household. These socioeconomic classifications undoubtedly impact Taiwanese Americans’ interpersonal relations and social circles. Researchers such as Hsiang-Shui Chen and Catherine Kai-Ping Lin have documented how community leaders and intellectuals with Taiwanese immigrant backgrounds successfully lobbied US politicians for their causes. [1] Instead of only strengthening Taiwanese Americans’ ties to more resourceful and powerful Americans, those who promote Taiwan need to expand their strategy to include a broader democratic constituency. In current US society where polarization is exacerbated by social class, the Taiwanese government and community leaders need to promote support for Taiwan beyond the selective social and professional networks surrounding most Taiwanese Americans.

Given President Donald Trump’s transactional policies toward Taiwan, including threats of [increased tariffs](#) and [forceful demands](#) towards Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造股份有限公司)—a situation that Blanchette and DiPippo coined as “[strategic anxiety](#)”—it is urgent for all Taiwanese to expand their reach and establish deep, sustained interpersonal relationships beyond the American elite. Such people-to-people interactions would carry broad implications for the political atmosphere in the United States.

Policy Recommendations

As a two-pronged remedy in addressing the risks outlined above, the Taiwanese government should generate policy documents and practices to broaden outreach to more Americans. As a cabinet-level council of the Executive Yuan, the OCAC has service locations across Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe and the Americas—including 14 cultural centers across the United States connecting overseas Taiwanese and their offspring to Taiwan. Working with local Taiwanese communities, the OCAC supports functions such as annual Lunar New Year celebrations and festive events during Taiwan American Heritage Week in May. In addition,

it offers Mandarin and Taiwanese language classes aimed at second- and third-generation Taiwanese immigrants. The council also shares logistical information regarding overseas compatriot status and provides business consultations. Given that the OCAC is the primary agency for Taiwan's people-to-people policy, and has a small budget (only 0.06 percent of the 2025 central government budget), it is prudent to combine on-the-ground activities with data-informed policy to bridge any gaps regarding outreach to communities in the United States that have little exposure to Taiwanese history and contributions.

First, the OCAC should create a mechanism to solicit, evaluate and implement suggestions for policy framing. A council of multidisciplinary researchers conducting scholarship that is mindful of US demographic and sociocultural trends—and rooted in local communities—can help identify long-term strategic plans for Taiwan's people-to-people diplomacy in the United States. To avoid disruptive partisan politics, the term of this council should cross over Taiwan's presidential election period to ensure the continuity of its work.

Second, the OCAC should better mobilize existing resources among local communities. As mentioned, Taiwanese American local communities host annual events with government support (i.e. OCAC, TECRO) to introduce Taiwan to the general public. Incentives encouraging strategic collaboration with non-Taiwanese civic organizations, including religious groups, would deepen Taiwan's reach to broader demographics. For example, educational programming on the role that religious groups—such as [the United States' Black Church](#) and [the Taiwanese Presbyterian Church](#)—have played in democratization and liberation could foster dialogue between Taiwanese Americans and other minority communities in the United States. Such programs also bridge multigenerational collective memory and experiences among Taiwanese Americans who have witnessed societal injustices in both Taiwan and the United States.

Third, unlike many European nations, the United States does not have policies to incorporate newcomers into its highly diverse social fabric. Taiwan is well-positioned to fill this void. [OCAC education programs](#) have successfully cultivated US-born Taiwanese American generations as cultural ambassadors for Taiwan. For example, up to 2010, more than 4,500 overseas compatriot students had completed leadership and community service training, readying them to advocate for Taiwan in various US and Canadian cities. This policy can be expanded to include initiatives that prepare recent Taiwanese emigrants of diverse backgrounds (i.e. varying occupations and identities) to learn about and adjust to US society. The early stage of settlement is the most challenging for newcomers. This effort will support Taiwanese immigrants and equip them with the knowledge and skills to engage in and influence their new social and work circles.

Lastly, Taiwanese government and community leaders should increase efforts to incorporate Taiwanese Americans

in US historiography. The 2022 initiative to create a [National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture](#) and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center's [Keystone Initiative](#) are two examples of opportunities to include people of Taiwanese descent in US historiography, so as to reach a wider range of Americans. State and local Asian American museums should also be part of this undertaking.

Conclusion

Policies that aim to strengthen US-Taiwan relations must consider the historical and present racial and class dynamics within the United States. Although robust, many Taiwanese American communities face generational gaps in bridging Taiwanese and US experiences. Cultural sensitivity toward various segments of the United States, and knowledge regarding the similarities and differences in the struggle for justice and collective autonomy throughout US and Taiwanese histories, will enhance Taiwanese Americans' ability to build multiethnic, multiracial, and multiclass support for Taiwan's interests.

The main point: Taiwanese American immigrants and their offspring are influential agents in strengthening US-Taiwan relations. As US society becomes more diverse and fragmented, Taiwanese government and community leaders should develop policies and practices to empower Taiwanese Americans with the cultural sensitivity and knowledge of US racial and class dynamics to reach all segments of US society.

[1] Chen, Hsiang-shui. *Chinatown No More: Taiwan Immigrants in Contemporary New York*. Cornell University Press, 1992; Lin, Catherine Kai-Ping. 2006. 'Taiwan's Overseas Opposition Movement and Grassroots Diplomacy in the United States: The Case of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs'. *Journal of Contemporary China* 15 (46): 133–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560500331799>.

The Politics of Broadcast Media in Taiwan: The Problem of the National Communications Commission

By: Diarra Molock

Diarra Molock is a 2025 Spring Intern with the Global Taiwan Institute.

Introduction: A Stalemate in the Legislative Yuan

Recently, Taiwan's National Communications Commission (NCC, 國家通訊傳播委員) has been put into a peculiar situation as a partisan deadlock has halted the NCC from carrying out its duties. In November 2024, the Legislative Yuan (LY, 立法院) amended the *NCC National Organization Act* (國家通訊傳播委員會組織法), which as of December

1, 2024, capped NCC commissioners at two terms in office. The decision led to Acting Chairman Won Po-Tsung's (翁柏宗) dismissal (who served as a commissioner since 2014), throwing the commission's future into uncertainty as its operations have been grounded to a [halt](#). Currently only three of the NCC's seven total commission seats are filled, one seat short of the four required number of commissioners to resume NCC duties. Back in May of 2024, the Legislative Yuan's Procedure Committee proposed a bill to nominate four new commissioners including Wong Po-tsung as the official NCC chair, as well as Chen Ping-hung (陳炳宏), Lo Huei-wen (羅慧雯), and Chan Yi-lien (詹懿廉). However nine Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) members of a 15-member LY committee [voted against the bill](#), with one Taiwan's People Party (TPP, 民眾黨) lawmaker abstaining. Essentially, by obstructing new nominations, the KMT and TPP are exerting pressure on the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨) to negotiate appointees who are more favorable to their interests. From the opposition KMT-TPP coalition perspective, the amendment was a necessary corrective measure to restore balance and limit what they view as prolonged partisan control by the DPP party over the NCC. In contrast, from the DPP perspective, the term limits—which now leave the NCC without enough commissioners—are weakening the integrity of the commission, as the standstill threatens the continuity of regulatory governance.

In response to this deadlock, on August 2, 2024, two civil society media reform organizations, the Taiwan Media Watch Foundation (台灣媒體觀察教育基金會) and the Campaign for Media Reform (媒體改造學社) published a [joint statement](#) urging for personnel to be reviewed as soon as possible to ensure normal operations. According to the [Taipei Times](#), the Commission can currently advance consultations, but it cannot issue a ruling on any of the 104 items it regulates. As a result, the commission is unable to convene meetings and discuss critical issues such as the [renewal of broadcasting licenses](#). Meanwhile, 37 TV and radio stations, including International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT, 台北國際社區廣播電台) and Taiwan Plus, are due for license renewals before June 2025. Recently, the current acting NCC chair, Chen Chung-shu (陳崇樹), [described](#) the delay in license renewal as being by no means the fault of the operators, and has instructed terrestrial and cable channels to continue operations as usual. Both ICRT and Taiwan Plus are English-language media outlets that are essential for Taiwan's messaging to the international community. However, the NCC's inability to renew licenses leaves broadcasting companies in a legal gray area. The current paralysis of the NCC underscores deep systematic problems: while the commission is constitutionally independent, it is constantly subject to partisan struggle. At a time when Taiwan is a striving democracy that wishes to project its voice to a more international audience, the NCC must prioritize ensuring a more stable, transparent, media environment.

Historical Context

The tensions surrounding the regulation of Taiwan's media landscape is deeply entangled in the context of Taiwan's history. From 1949-1987, Taiwan underwent a period of authoritarian martial law under the Kuomintang government. [Media was strictly controlled](#) with only three terrestrial TV stations: Taiwan Television (TTV), China Television (CTV), and Public Television Service (PTS). Censorship was widespread and opposition voices had little access to broadcasting licenses. After martial law was lifted in 1987 and the 1993 *Broadcasting Act* (also known as the *Cable TV Act* [有線電視法]), was passed, the government's monopoly on media gave way to private TV networks and cable news channels. The NCC—the regulatory body responsible for overseeing telecommunications—was established as an independent agency in 2006 [“to regulate the communications sector from an objective, neutral, and professional standpoint.”](#) While these reforms and the establishment of a regulatory body has allowed for a diverse and vibrant media landscape, media outlets are perceived as heavily-biased and [entrenched along party lines](#). According to Reporters Without Borders, despite having a free and open press, Taiwan ranks 27 out of 180 nations for trust in its media landscape, citing strong political polarization, sensationalism, and pursuit of profit as reasons for [low levels of objective reporting](#). Additionally, according to Taiwan's [“2023 Government Heads Satisfaction Survey,”](#) the head of the NCC received the lowest satisfaction rate among Taiwanese citizens across all government agencies, at 22.36 percent. This begs the question, why is the NCC so unpopular? From what can be observed, the continuous tension surrounding Taiwan's media landscape seems to stem from ongoing struggles over political influence in the NCC, media ownership, and questions of the NCC's actual regulatory independence.

Corporate Interest and National Security

One can examine an incident related to broadcast licensing that took place within recent years. In November 2020, [the NCC made a decision](#) to deny a six-year license renewal for CTiNews. This was the first time a license renewal was rejected since the agency's founding. When addressing the reason behind the denial, the NCC cited concerns over editorial independence and national security related to the station's overtly pro-China stance. In particular, there were concerns over the background of the owner, Tsai Eng-Meng (蔡衍明). In addition to being the owner of Chung T'ien Television (CTV)—the operator of CTiNews—as well as the *China Times* newspaper in Taiwan, Tsai runs Want Want Holdings Limited, a subsidiary of a Taiwan- and China-based beverage company. As a recipient of generous subsidies from the Chinese government for Want Want Holdings Limited, Tsai was accused of a conflict of interest. CTiNews had continuously [received complaints](#) for exhibiting a pro-Beijing bias in its broadcasting and was [fined over twenty-one times during](#) the span of six years for failing to fact-check before reporting the news, and thus violating the [Satellite Broadcasting](#)

[Act \(衛星廣播電視法\)](#). The fines amounted to NTD 10.73 million (USD 374,000). The [DPP](#) supported this decision, accusing CTiNews of sabotage and spreading disinformation, while the [KMT](#) accused the government of suppressing freedom of speech. Currently, CTiTV's media presence has mostly moved online. Despite the Taipei High Administrative Court's 2023 decision to rule in favor of [CTiTV's lawsuit](#) against the NCC for failing to renew CTiNews' broadcasting license, the station has not resumed cable broadcasting. While the NCC acted on regulatory grounds, the absence of a separate national security review mechanism forced the commission into a politically-charged role. As a result, a regulatory decision that should have been interpreted as the protection of journalistic media standards was instead framed by the opposition party as political censorship. This highlights a problem that the NCC can never escape: the dire need for structural reforms to separate technical licensing oversight from national security-related media reviews.

The 2020 controversy was not the first time Want Want Holdings Limited found itself under scrutiny in Taiwan. When Want Want acquired the China Times Group and attempted to buy Taiwan's second largest cable provider, [China Network Systems](#) between 2012 and 2013, major protests broke out in response involving students, journalists, and activists opposing the consolidation of pro-China media outlets. This movement is known as the [Anti-Media Monopoly Movement \(反媒體壟斷運動\)](#).



Image: 2012 Anti-Media Monopoly Movement. Sign reads "The Judiciary Needs Democracy, Media Needs Independence." (Image Source: [Shih-Shiuan Kao Wikimedia Commons](#).)

Despite CTiNews losing its broadcasting license, Want Want still owns several major media platforms across TV, newspapers, and the internet, the latter of which is completely unregulated. Thus, the government needs to amend current legislation regulating the media landscape in Taiwan, including the *Radio and Television Act* (廣播電視法), *Cable Radio and Television Act* (有線廣播電視法), and the *Satellite and Broadcasting Act* (衛星廣播電視法). Former NCC Commissioner Wang Wei-Ching (王維菁) has stated, "The

NCC's legal tools are outdated and difficult to amend, yet they remain the basis for all decisions. As a result, the public often finds it hard to understand the outcomes, perceiving the NCC as a relic from the dinosaur era." [1] What currently exists is a patchwork of laws regarding media ownership that doesn't address cross-media ownership or monopolies. Recognizing this issue, the DPP has attempted to draft legislation to update current regulations, including the addition of [anti-monopoly provisions](#) to all three acts of broadcasting regulation, and the NCC submitted the first version of the bill (the [Prevention of Broadcasting and Television Monopoly and the Maintenance of Diversity Act](#)) in 2013. However, the KMT majority in the LY guaranteed that the bill never had a real chance at passing.

The Nomination Process

A major issue arises from the structural design of the NCC itself and the nomination process for commissioners. According to a former NCC commissioner, Lin Lihyun (林麗雲), when the National Communications Commission was founded, commissioners were nominated by separate political parties in the LY. [2] This ensured balanced representation and a diversity of perspectives. In a similar way, the [FCC](#) in the United States ensures a balance of representation across political parties by maintaining that no more than three commissioners (out of five total) can belong to the same political party—with the party of the current president entitled to one more seat and the right to appoint the chair.

However, in 2008, Taiwan's Constitutional Court ruled that government agencies should function in a coordinated manner, allowing the membership of the seven-person commission, including the positions of the chair and vice chairpersons, to be nominated by the [Premier](#), the head of the Executive Branch. The list of nominees are then designated for approval by the LY. By custom, commissioners are expected to be professionals with experience in law, technology, and media with a neutral or non-partisan background. In reality, nominees are not so apolitical and whichever political party has control of the Executive Branch, controls the policy direction of the NCC. Wang commented, "Commercial and corporate forces also realize that the NCC can be swayed politically, so they increasingly use political channels to influence its decisions. This erodes the NCC's independence and fairness." [3] An anonymous telecommunications expert has argued that "In practice, this allows the Executive Yuan to influence the NCC through its leadership. The chairperson, in particular, plays a central role in shaping the commission's agenda, including deciding which cases are brought forward for review." It is not inherently problematic for one political party to have more sway over the direction of policy within a given presidential term. However, in the case of Taiwan, the NCC's winner-takes-all nomination system means that the DPP has dominated the nomination process for NCC commissioners since it took control of the presidency in 2016.

How to Reform the NCC

Near-Term Reforms:

- In order to rebuild public trust in the independence of the NCC, the nomination process must reflect political diversity. The *National Organization Act* (國家通訊傳播委員會組織法) must be amended to create a proportional nomination process. A commission within the Executive Yuan should be formed with guaranteed representation from all political parties. The Executive Yuan should share publicly-available information regarding the political affiliations of the commissioners. In the future, this will prevent one single political party from controlling the entire process for the selection of commissioners. Lin added, “We can learn from the Korean model ([Korean Communications Commission](#)). The vice chairperson can be elected by the commissioners themselves to reduce external political influence.” [4]
- [The LY must pass the Media Pluralism Maintenance and Anti-Trust Act](#), an updated draft to the 2012 proposed antitrust act. The Act includes provisions to set clear boundaries to prevent excessive control by a single entity across various media platforms, including television, radio, newspapers, and online outlets. The most recent draft is ambitious in addressing cross-ownership, national security, editorial independence, and digital platforms. However, to prevent the much needed legislation from stalling in the LY, legislators should break up the Act into two or three bills to address specific areas of concern. Lawmakers must clearly frame such legislation just in economic terms, but as a method to protect Taiwan’s democracy from foreign influence and ensure a free, independent, and diverse media landscape.
- The LY must also pass the [Digital Intermediary Services Act \(DISA, 數位中介服務法\)](#). The Act, proposed by the NCC, aims to tighten regulations on digital media and curb disinformation linked to foreign influence campaigns. Current law only regulates traditional media (TV, radio, cable), but over-the-top (OTT) media such as social media and streaming platforms are barely regulated. DISA would bring online platforms under the same accountability frameworks that traditional broadcasters already face, closing the biggest outstanding regulatory gap.

Long-Term Policies:

- The *Satellite Broadcasting Act* should be amended to limit foreign ownership in non-traditional media. The Act does limit foreign ownership for broadcasting companies to less than 50 percent, but this does not address ownership in other forms of media. It may be worth developing an ownership security

review board, similar to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), providing a mechanism to screen companies for foreign investment in critical industries, including media. If an alternative institution conducts a national security pre-screening for foreign ownership, the NCC could avoid situations such as the Want Want controversies of 2012 and 2020. In these cases, the NCC’s main legal authority should have been to grant or renew licenses, not to review ownership structures or national security risks. Under this system, an ownership change in a media company should trigger a mandatory reassessment by the national security review board.

The main point: The current stalemate regarding confirmations of National Communications Commission appointees is revealing its underlying structural issues. To rebuild public trust in the NCC and update current regulations, the current nomination process needs to be reformed, the Legislative Yuan should pass the *Media Pluralism Maintenance and Anti-Trust Act* and the *Digital Intermediary Services Act*, and the *Satellite Broadcasting Act* should be amended.

[1] Interview with Former NCC Commissioner Wang Wei-Ching, April 12, 2025

[2] Interview with Former NCC Commissioner Lin Lihyun, April 9, 2025.

[3] Interview with Wang Wei-Ching, April 12, 2025.

[4] Interview with Lin Lihyun, April 9, 2025.

Signals from the South: An Opening for Stronger Philippines-Taiwan Ties

By: Thomas Shattuck

Thomas J. Shattuck, a non-resident fellow at the Global Taiwan Institute, is a senior program manager at the University of Pennsylvania’s Perry World House. He is also a 2025 non-resident fellow with Atomic Anxiety in the New Nuclear Age, a 2025-25 non-resident research fellow at the Modern War Institute at West Point, and a 2024-25 non-resident WSD-Handa Fellow at the Pacific Forum.

Given recent policy actions from the Marcos administration and statements from leaders in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), there appears to be growing momentum—or, at the very least, interest—in fostering a stronger unofficial relationship between Taipei and Manila.

Over the last month, three significant developments and signals from leaders in Manila occurred that should be interpreted by the Lai Administration as signals for a great-

er desire for direct exchange between the two neighbors. These developments should be taken seriously because they came from top Philippine leaders. Such leaders would not necessarily speak so directly about such a sensitive issue as Taiwan without being aware of and ready for the inevitable blowback from Beijing.

The AFP is Ready to Plan and Cooperate

In early April 2025, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Gen. Romeo Brawner initiated what became a series of Taiwan-related statements or policy actions in the Philippines. While commemorating the anniversary of the Northern Luzon Command, Brawner tasked his troops with preparing for a Taiwan contingency. Brawner's statements are noteworthy because they clarified two distinct issues related to the role of the Philippines in a Taiwan conflict.

[Brawner said](#), "If something happens to Taiwan, inevitably we will be involved. There are 250,000 OFWs working in Taiwan, and we will have to rescue them." He predicts the need for the AFP to get [Filipinos home](#) in a conflict scenario.

However, Brawner did not limit his comments to the AFP's need to prepare for a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO). Rather, he [expanded](#) the remit of the AFP in a Taiwan contingency: "But let me give you this further challenge. Do not be content with just securing the Northern Hemisphere up to Mavulis Island. Start planning for actions in case there is an invasion of Taiwan." For context, [Mavulis](#) is the northernmost island of the Philippine archipelago, closest to southern Taiwan—even closer to Taiwan than to the main Philippines archipelago itself. His call to action counters the notion that the AFP would be responsible for securing only Philippines territory. Indeed, the AFP could have some role in responding to a full-blown Taiwan invasion.

Brawner's statements in early April are, to date, the clearest and most direct public declarations from a high-level Philippine official regarding the country's role in a Taiwan contingency. Unlike previous statements made by President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr., Brawner's words were not vague. For instance, President Marcos made a less definitive statement [in February 2023](#): "When we look at the situation in the area, especially the tensions in the Taiwan Strait, we can see that just by our geographical location, should there in fact be conflict in that area ... it's very hard to imagine a scenario where the Philippines will not somehow get involved."

These recent statements point to the AFP moving into a planning and preparation stage for a Taiwan contingency.

However, Brawner was not the only high-level officer who spoke about Taiwan. In early May 2025, Philippine Navy Rear Admiral Roy Vincent Trinidad told [TaiwanPlus](#) that [direct military-to-military engagement](#) was taking place between the Taiwanese and Philippines navies. Trinidad also highlighted the general increase in international interest, and in some cases cooperation, with Taiwan. Trinidad is



Image: Lieutenant General Romeo Brawner (center left) and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (center right) shake hands to commemorate Brawner's appointment as next Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in 2023. (Image Source: [Presidential Communications Office](#).)

quoted as confirming that there is "unofficial and informal" engagement between the two navies.

Given the delicate nature of such engagements with the military of a country that it does not formally recognize diplomatically, very few Philippine military officials have publicly confirmed such cooperation with Taiwan. Only major powers, like the United States, have begun to publicly demonstrate such cooperation with Taiwan—and even then, [public acknowledgment is often delayed](#). Trinidad's point is obvious: foreign militaries are more directly engaging with Taiwan's armed forces, and that collaboration will only increase over the coming years, inevitably leading to regular joint military exercises. The more that the People's Republic of China (PRC) pressures its neighbors, including the Philippines, the more that the imperative grows to hasten this cooperation.

Room for Improved Civilian Exchange

While signals from the AFP point to not only a stronger desire for cooperation but also ongoing planning for Taiwan-related contingencies, Malacañang has created additional space for civilian interactions with Taiwanese government officials. On April 15 2025, Executive Secretary of the Philippines Lucas P. Bersamin signed [Memorandum Circular 82](#), which eases travel restrictions on Taiwanese officials seeking to travel to Manila and vice-versa. Prior to the signing of this memo, it was difficult for members of either government to travel to either country.

Previously, [Executive Order No. 313 from 1987](#) prohibited direct exchange or travel: "No official of the Philippine government may visit Taiwan. No official of the Philippine government may receive Taiwanese officials visiting the Philippines. No official activity relating to Taiwan shall be carried out without the clearance of the Department of Foreign Affairs." [This order](#) effectively gave the Department of

Foreign Affairs (DFA) a veto on all things related to Taiwan, which, according to people interviewed by the author in both countries, was frequently used to stifle exchange.

However, the new memorandum has created an opening for direct exchange and travel between the two capitals. [The memo states](#):

“Restrictions on travel to Taiwan and contact with representatives of Taiwan shall strictly apply to the President, Vice President, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and Secretary of National Defense. Philippine government officials intending to visit Taiwan for economic, trade and investment purposes, shall travel using their ordinary passports and without using their official titles. Further, they are required to: (a) inform MECO of the purpose of their visit prior to their departure; and (b) coordinate with MECO during their visit. ... Philippine government officials and/or agencies, through MECO, may receive delegations from Taiwan for economic, trade and investment purposes.”

This guidance makes it easier for the two countries to continue to develop economic and trade ties, which is the primary mission of the [Manila Economic and Cultural Office](#) (MECO), the Philippines’ *de facto* embassy in Taipei. Given the former Tsai Administration’s emphasis on the Philippines in its [New Southbound Policy](#), which is continuing under the Lai Administration, the memo is a clear sign that Manila is seeking to lower barriers to greater economic investment from Taiwan.

However, the memo does not mention exchange and travel unrelated to trade and investment, so there are still restrictions on defense- and security-related issues. Even though the statements from AFP leadership point to a desire for more dialogue with their Taiwanese counterparts, the Marcos Administration does not seem willing to remove said barrier just yet. Even though the [Marcos National Security Policy 2023-2028](#) (NSP) ranks cross-Strait issues as second only to the West Philippine Sea issue, there remain restrictions on deeper relationships between the two countries’ militaries and security officials. The NSP states: “Major concern is also seen in the Cross-Straits relations that has the potential to be the flashpoint in the region. The Philippines is concerned about its economic stability, a potential influx of refugees, and the welfare of overseas populations. Any military conflict in the Taiwan Strait would inevitably affect the Philippines given the geographic proximity of Taiwan to the Philippine archipelago and the presence of over 150,000 Filipinos in Taiwan.”

However, Malacañang does not seem willing to give agencies the independence to finalize agreements with their Taiwanese counterparts. As the [memo states](#), “No agreements, memoranda of understanding, exchange of notes or similar documents shall be concluded with any Taiwanese organization or agency without clearance from the DFA and, as may be necessary, an authority to sign from OP [Office of

the President].”

Overall, the memo is a step in the right direction for easing restrictions on the ability of the two governments to conduct exchange and travel, which was rather difficult before. However, despite the continuous signaling from the Marcos Administration that Taiwan is now a worry for Manila—including from President Marcos himself—Malacañang is not willing to eliminate all restrictions and is taking an iterative approach.

A Walk Back or a Calibration?

Nonetheless, the Philippines’ progress on Taiwan policy could not come without some sort of correction. Otherwise, the developments of the last month would make it seem like the Marcos Administration was moving at full tilt toward engaging with Taiwan and preparing for a Taiwan contingency. At the opening ceremony of the 2025 *Balikatan* US-Philippines joint exercises, Major General Francisco Lorenzo Jr. (who is in charge of the Philippines’ involvement in the drills), seemed to throw water on the role of the Philippines in a Taiwan contingency. [Lorenzo said](#), “The Philippines has renounced war as a means of its national policy. So if ever there will be conflict in Taiwan, the Philippines will not participate. And we will still continue to defend our territory and the Philippines.”

On the face of it, Lorenzo’s remarks end all discussion of the Philippines’ involvement in a Taiwan contingency. However, the wording of his remarks is nuanced, which leaves many options possible. For one, Lorenzo excluded in his statement what would happen in the event of a PRC attack on Philippine vessels or territory during a Taiwan contingency. The word “participate” is of particular note, as the word choice could imply that the Philippines will never get involved or that it will only get involved if provoked. Renouncing war as a means of national policy is instilled into the [country’s constitution](#). Yet, the constitution then outlines the procedures for the Philippines to declare war. Lorenzo’s final remark on defending territory is the clarifying point in a Taiwan contingency.

Considering Lorenzo’s remarks alongside those of Brawner and Trinidad, it seems that the Philippines is prepared to defend its territory in the context of a Taiwan contingency and is preparing to evacuate Filipinos from Taiwan back to the Philippines. Therefore, Lorenzo’s clarifying remarks are not as black-and-white as they may seem.

On the Road to a Stronger Relationship

The last month of signals and statements from civilian and military leaders in the Philippines signal a realization that the country needs better exchange and cooperation with Taiwan. The regular military coercion by the PRC around Taiwan, most recently the [Strait Thunder 2025A exercise in early April 2025](#), has created an imperative for such dialogue, cooperation, and exchange across all levels of government.

The developments are noteworthy, but not significant in their own right. The statements from military leaders demonstrate action on something delayed—i.e., the Philippines needs its own plan, in consultation with the United States, for a Taiwan contingency. And the easing of economic-related exchange and travel restrictions was a long time coming.

It is now up to the Lai Administration to continue this momentum and build on the progress. President Lai should send a business delegation to Manila after the May 12 legislative midterm elections in the Philippines. He should welcome a similar delegation from the Philippines before the end of 2025. To expand the bilateral relationship further, members of the Taiwan-Philippines Parliamentary Friendship Association in the Legislative Yuan (立法院) should travel to Manila to meet their counterparts later this summer, as well. This parliamentary friendship association was only created in February 2024, so the group needs to take advantage of these developments and meet with Philippine Senate and House of Representatives members after the May 12 midterms.

The actions taken by leaders in the Philippines need to be followed up with concrete progress and plans from Taiwan. Otherwise, the signals from the last month will become little more than a wasted opportunity.

The main point: Recent statements and actions by civilian and military officials in Manila point to a growing acknowledgment of the need for greater unofficial exchange and dialogue with Taipei. These signals should be taken seriously in Taiwan, and the Lai Administration should work to build on this momentum.

The Ramifications of the US-China Trade Conflict on Taiwan and the World

By: Annie Tseng

Annie Tseng is a senior at Georgetown University and an intern at the US-Taiwan Business Council.

Introduction

Since 2018, beginning with the first Trump Administration's aggressive trade policies, US-China trade tensions have escalated to reshape global trade, supply chains, and economic alliances. To explore the broader impact of the US-China trade conflict on global trade, it is instructive to analyze the shifting economic dynamics. Understanding how Taiwan and other countries have adapted to these shifts provides valuable insights into the evolving global trade landscape, and offers strategic considerations for how Taiwan can leverage the situation to strengthen its economic position.

The Evolution of the US-China Trade Conflict

2018-2020: Tariffs and the Initial Fallout

The US-China trade conflict began in 2018 when the Trump Administration [cited unfair trade](#) practices, intellectual property (IP) theft, and a growing trade deficit as the reason behind imposing sweeping tariffs on Chinese imports. The first wave of tariffs targeted [USD 50 billion](#) worth of Chinese goods and escalated to over [USD 360 billion](#) by 2019. China retaliated by [introducing tariffs](#) against US products, negatively impacting American agriculture and manufacturing. In January 2020, China and the United States signed a [Phase One Trade Agreement](#), which required China to increase its purchases of US goods by USD 200 billion, strengthen IP protections, and open its financial markets to American firms. However, China only fulfilled about [58 percent](#) of its commitments. With global supply chains strained by tariffs, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these trade disruptions. Lockdowns and [factory shutdowns](#) in China and elsewhere contributed to shortages of essential goods, including medical supplies and semiconductors, further complicating trade recovery efforts.

2021-2023: Strategic Decoupling and a Tech War

The Biden Administration maintained Trump-era tariffs while shifting toward economic and technological decoupling, enforcing [export controls](#) on semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum computing alongside scrutiny of Chinese inbound investments. Export controls on chips were [intended](#) to curb China's access to advanced semiconductors essential for AI and military applications. In response, China ramped up domestic chip production and [restricted](#) exports of critical minerals crucial to US and European technology firms. Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions—China's crackdown on Hong Kong and ambiguous stance on the Russia-Ukraine war—[strained](#) China's global trade relationships. Companies began [reassessing supply chain](#) dependencies, shifting operations out of China to India, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

2024-2025: Geopolitical Shifts and Protectionism

By 2024, the US-China trade conflict had evolved into a broader geopolitical contest, reshaping global trade. The Biden Administration, coordinating with the European Union (EU), tightened [trade policies](#) and began raising tariffs on Chinese steel, aluminum, electric vehicle batteries, solar cells, and semiconductors. In retaliation, China [restricted exports](#) of gallium and germanium, key materials for semiconductor and defense technologies, while strengthening trade ties with the Global South. In December 2024, China introduced a [zero-tariff policy](#) for the 43 least-developed countries in Africa and Asia, likely in an attempt to expand its economic influence.

Following Trump's inauguration in 2025, his administration imposed a [new 10 percent tariff](#) on Chinese imports,

escalating economic tensions over trade imbalances, IP concerns, and supply chain security. The United States intensified scrutiny of Chinese firms, investigating the new AI model [DeepSeek](#) for potential export control violations and pushing to ban TikTok on national security grounds. Meanwhile, China remains focused on [economic self-sufficiency](#) and expanding partnerships with the Global South to counterbalance US and EU trade protection measures.

The New Trade Order: Changing Global Alliances

Europe's Position

The US-China economic conflict is forcing Europe to reassess its trade dependencies. [Rising far-right politics](#) and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have pushed the EU toward more [defensive trade policies](#) like anti-dumping measures on Chinese goods and tighter controls on high-tech investments, aligning with US efforts to curb China's economic influence. In 2023, despite China remaining the EU's second-largest trading partner with total trade volume reaching [EUR 739 billion](#), bilateral trade [declined by 14 percent](#) compared to 2022, reflecting efforts to diversify supply chains and reduce reliance on Chinese goods.

However, a recent policy shift where the [United States aligned with Russia in United Nations votes](#) on Ukraine has created divisions within NATO and raised concerns in Europe about the United States' long-term reliability. This uncertainty can push the EU to balance economic ties with China against pressure to align with US trade policies, reinforcing a shift toward economic realignment.

Indo-Pacific Realignment

India and Vietnam have benefited the most from the US-China trade conflict and ongoing decoupling, attracting foreign investment as companies seek alternatives to China. As shown in Figure 1, both countries [have experienced](#) the highest trade growth with the United States, demonstrating their rising importance in global supply chains. In East Asia, Taiwan and South Korea have also emerged as [critical trade partners](#) for the United States in the technology and electronics sectors. Japan—[primarily reliant](#) on the auto industry—has seen slower trade growth. However, Japan's efforts to revitalize its semiconductor industry signal potential shifts in its trade dynamics with the United States.

Regional agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) have also reshaped Asia's trade networks. CPTPP has enhanced trade liberalization among its member countries by [eliminating tariffs](#) on 95 percent of goods, while RCEP has [strengthened trade flows](#) across Asia by harmonizing rules of origin, simplifying customs procedures, and increasing investment flows between China, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN economies. The US-China trade conflict has exposed the World Trade Organization's (WTO) [limitations](#) in resolving disputes, leading both the United States and China to

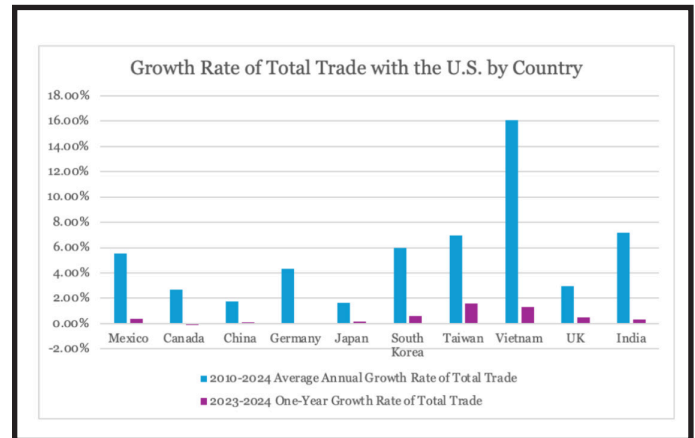


Figure 1: Growth Rate of Total Trade with the United States by Country (Figure source: [United States Census Bureau](#))

favor bilateral negotiations and unilateral measures.

North American Trade Tensions

The United States, Canada, and Mexico remain integrated under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). However, the US-China trade conflict has accelerated supply chain shifts, driving companies to [relocate production to Mexico](#)—although concerns persist over Chinese firms using Mexico to circumvent US tariffs. President Trump's 2025 tariffs—[25 percent](#) on most imports from Canada and Mexico, and 10 percent on Canadian energy products—aim to address illegal immigration and fentanyl trafficking and to serve as a border enforcement tool. While Trump agreed to a [30-day pause](#) after Canada and Mexico pledged to enhance border security, implementing these tariffs risks significant economic disruption.

Taiwan's Role in the Evolving Trade Conflict

By 2024, Taiwan had become the United States' seventh-largest trading partner, with a 7.1 percent annual trade growth rate. However, as Taiwan-US trade grows, so does the trade deficit. As shown in Figure 2, the United States' trade deficit with Taiwan grew from USD 9.8 billion in 2010 to USD 74 billion in 2024.

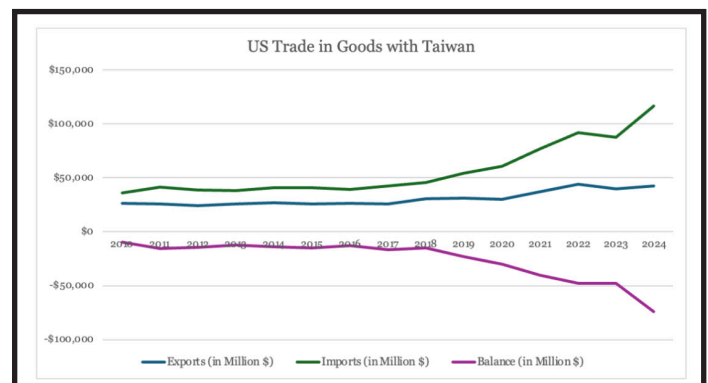


Figure 2: US Trade in Goods with Taiwan (2010-2024) (Figure source: [United States Census Bureau](#))

Taiwan and the United States conduct extensive cooperation in the semiconductor and tech sectors. As technology takes center stage in the US-China economic rivalry, Taiwan's strategic importance continues to rise. However, Taiwan's growing reliance on the US market poses risks, especially regarding changes in tax and tariff policies. In January 2025, President Trump proposed a [100 percent tariff](#) on imported semiconductors from the island. If implemented, this could significantly raise costs for US consumers and industries reliant on Taiwan chips, disrupting the global semiconductor supply chain while straining US-Taiwan economic relations.

Conversely, while Taiwan's semiconductor dominance provides the United States with a reliable supply chain, instability in the Taiwan Strait also poses a risk for US firms dependent on Taiwan's semiconductor production. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Ltd. (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造股份有限公司) recently announced a [USD 100 billion investment](#) in chip plants, advanced packaging plants, and an AI research and development (R&D) facility in Arizona, adding to its existing investment of USD 65 billion. President Trump [suggested](#) these investments could help TSMC avoid tariffs, aligning with broader efforts to diversify its manufacturing footprint and reduce reliance on Taiwan. However, this US-Taiwan cooperation also challenges China's technological ambitions. The relocation of semiconductor manufacturing capabilities could impede China's access to advanced chips, pressuring it to bolster domestic semiconductor development.

Implications for Taiwan

As Taiwan continues to navigate its economic relationship with the United States, it must proactively strengthen trade cooperation, enhance supply chain resilience, and solidify strategic partnerships. The [US-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade](#) serves as a framework for improving regulatory alignment, strengthening trade facilitation, and enhancing labor and environmental standards. Meanwhile, the [United States-Taiwan Expedited Double-Tax Relief Act](#), which remains under consideration in the US Congress, presents an opportunity for Taiwan to advocate for its full enactment and push for broader tax relief measures to encourage cross-border investment.

As the United States reinforces its Indo-Pacific alliances, Taiwan is well-positioned to leverage its economic and technological strengths to secure more favorable trade agreements and attract long-term investment. To maintain its competitive edge, Taiwan must expand its export markets, accelerate innovation, and reinforce its leadership in semiconductors and high-tech industries. With global supply chains shifting and geopolitical tensions rising, Taiwan must strategically leverage its economic significance to secure long-term trade stability and enhanced competitiveness.

The main point: The US-China economic conflict has reshaped global trade, driving shifting alliances, supply chain reconfigurations, and intensified competition, particularly in semiconductors. Taiwan, at the center of these changes,

has strengthened its economic ties with the United States but confronts trade imbalances, geopolitical risks, and evolving US policies, requiring strategic adaptation to ensure long-term stability.

Why Taiwan Topped Asia's Happiness Rankings

By: Y. Tony Yang

Y. Tony Yang is an endowed professor and an associate dean at the George Washington University.

The recent news that Taiwan has been ranked as [the happiest place in Asia](#) and 27th globally in the [2025 World Happiness Report](#) marks a significant achievement for a place that navigates complex geopolitical tensions and ongoing social transformation. Moving ahead of Singapore and securing the top position in Asia is certainly cause for celebration, but the true significance of this recognition goes far beyond mere numbers.

This achievement invites exploration of a deeper question: What underlying factors have contributed to Taiwan's happiness standing, and what can we learn from both Taiwan's cultural heritage and global research on the determinants of happiness?

Happiness Through Shared Meals and Social Connections

The [World Happiness Report](#) highlights an intriguing finding: Taiwanese people report an exceptional habit of sharing meals, enjoying 10.1 shared meals out of a possible 14 weekly opportunities. This places Taiwan 8th globally in meal-sharing frequency—a seemingly simple metric that carries profound implications.

As [noted](#) by the director of Oxford University Wellbeing Research Center and editor of the 2025 World Happiness Report, “sharing meals and trusting others are even stronger predictors of wellbeing than expected.” In an era characterized by growing social isolation and increasing political polarization, Taiwan's communal eating culture may be one of its greatest, yet least recognized, social assets.

This phenomenon is visible throughout daily Taiwanese life: families gathering for evening meals, colleagues leaving their desks to eat lunch together, and the vibrant night market culture where communities congregate amidst food stalls. What might appear as casual dining actually constitutes the invisible social infrastructure that enhances collective resilience and well-being.

The contrast between Taiwan and its neighboring regions is revealing. The report notes that dining alone is increasingly common in Japan and South Korea, often attributed to rising single-person households and demographic aging—challenges that Taiwan also faces. Yet, the Taiwanese

commitment to communal eating persists despite similar demographic pressures, suggesting deeper cultural factors at work.

Insights from Cross-Cultural Research

To fully appreciate Taiwan's happiness achievement, it's helpful to consider broader research on what constitutes happiness across cultures. A comprehensive [review](#) by researchers compared studies from over 100 countries and 44 cultures, identifying three fundamental categories of happiness determinants: "Health," "Hope," and "Harmony."

This "[Integrated Model of the Determinants of Happiness](#)" provides a useful framework for understanding Taiwan's specific strengths. Under this model, happiness encompasses mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Health); purposeful work-life balance and personal growth (Hope); and harmony with one's culture, traditions, community, and environment (Harmony).

Taiwan's success can be understood through this lens. The universal healthcare system addresses the "Health" component, while economic resilience and entrepreneurial culture support the "Hope" dimension. Most distinctively, Taiwan excels in the "Harmony" category through strong family bonds, community connections, and the preservation of cultural traditions alongside modernization.

A Historical Perspective

Scholars from leading Taiwanese universities have extensively researched happiness from a Chinese cultural perspective. Research exploring how traditional Chinese philosophical frameworks influence conceptions of happiness has yielded fascinating insights.

Contrary to Western happiness models that often emphasize individual achievement and personal freedom, [Chinese conceptions of happiness](#) have historically centered on social harmony, family obligations, and balancing material and spiritual needs. Research has found that Taiwan's happiness advantage may stem partly from its cultural ability to maintain traditional collectivist values while successfully adapting to modern economic demands—a delicate balance that many societies struggle to achieve.

Tradition and Innovation

Taiwan occupies a unique position globally: the island has preserved many traditional Chinese values while embracing democratic governance and economic innovation. This blend of heritage and progress creates a distinctive social environment that fosters well-being in multiple dimensions.

Unlike societies that have explicitly rejected tradition in pursuit of modernity, or those that rigidly adhere to tradition at modernity's expense, Taiwan has developed a more organic synthesis. Its embrace of gender equality is emblematic of this approach—Taiwan elected East Asia's [first female president](#) and [legalized same-sex marriage](#) before any oth-

er Asian society, yet these progressive achievements have occurred alongside the maintenance of strong family bonds and intergenerational connections.

Taiwan's healthcare system similarly blends approaches. The world-class national health insurance system operates alongside traditional Chinese medical practices, with many Taiwanese moving comfortably between both systems based on specific needs.

This integrative approach extends to religious and spiritual life as well. A typical Taiwanese person might participate in Buddhist meditation for mental clarity, honor ancestors with Confucian-influenced rituals, visit a Taoist temple for specific life challenges, and perhaps even attend a Christian service with friends. This philosophical flexibility reflects a practical approach to well-being that transcends doctrinal boundaries.

Environmental Factors

The relationship between environmental quality and happiness is increasingly recognized in global research. Studies have highlighted that neighborhoods with higher levels of aesthetic quality, more water, green space, and cleaner air were consistently associated with greater happiness across cultures.

Taiwan faces significant [environmental challenges](#) due to high population density and industrial development. However, recent policy shifts toward sustainability, including expanded public transportation, urban greening initiatives, and renewable energy development, align with research showing that environmental improvements can significantly enhance collective well-being.



Image: Tourists and residents gather in Taipei's Da'an Forest Park. (Image source: [Taipei City Government Tourism and Information Bureau](#).)

The network of national parks, extensive hiking trails, and urban green spaces like [Taipei's Da'an Forest Park](#) (大安森林公園) provide crucial natural environments that research shows are vital for psychological restoration. The widespread use of scooters and bicycles, alongside efficient

public transportation, reflects a transportation model that balances convenience with environmental impact.

Beyond GDP to Well-being

While Taiwan's [economic strength](#) certainly contributes to its happiness ranking, research suggests a more nuanced relationship between economic factors and well-being. Once basic needs are met, additional wealth yields diminishing returns in happiness, while factors like income inequality and economic insecurity can significantly undermine collective well-being regardless of overall prosperity.

Taiwan's relatively [equitable income distribution, low unemployment rates](#), and strong social safety nets likely contribute more to its happiness than absolute GDP figures. The entrepreneurial culture provides economic opportunities while the healthcare system protects against the catastrophic financial impacts of illness that undermine happiness in many developed economies.

However, challenges remain. Housing affordability in urban centers, work-life balance issues, and economic pressures on young families all emerged as potential threats to happiness in various studies. Addressing these issues will be crucial to maintaining and improving Taiwan's happiness standing in coming years.

Lessons from Vietnam

The World Happiness Report also highlights [Vietnam's](#) remarkable upward movement in happiness rankings, rising from 83rd place in 2020 to 46th in 2025. This dramatic improvement offers potential lessons for Taiwan as it seeks to further enhance its own well-being.

Vietnam's rapid happiness gains coincide with its significant economic growth, but the jump cannot be explained by economic factors alone. Cultural resilience, strong family structures, and community cohesion appear to play important roles in maintaining well-being despite rapid social change—factors that Taiwan should continue to nurture amid its own ongoing development.

A Path Forward

Taiwan's recognition as [Asia's happiest place](#) offers a moment to celebrate achievements while reflecting on how to preserve and strengthen the social, cultural, and environmental foundations of collective well-being. Drawing from both local experience and global happiness research, several key priorities emerge for Taiwan's continued happiness journey.

Preserving social connections is paramount, as Taiwan's unique meal-sharing culture and communal traditions serve as vital social infrastructure rather than mere cultural habits, deserving both protection and promotion in policy and social practice. Balancing tradition and modernity remains equally important, with Taiwan needing to continue finding harmonious ways to embrace progressive values while maintaining cultural continuity and strong family connec-

tions, which are essential for sustained well-being across generations. Environmental quality plays a critical role in this happiness equation, with studies showing that accelerating efforts to improve air quality, expand green spaces, and enhance sustainability directly contribute to happiness and quality of life for Taiwan's residents. Addressing workplace culture presents another vital opportunity, as reducing excessive stress and improving work-life balance could significantly enhance regional happiness and productivity simultaneously.

Finally, ensuring intergenerational equity by enabling young Taiwanese to access affordable housing, meaningful employment, and opportunities to start families will help maintain happiness across age groups, safeguarding the well-being of future communities and ensuring Taiwan's happiness achievement extends to coming generations.

Happiness as a Policy Goal

Perhaps the most important implication of Taiwan's happiness achievement is not how it compares to other places, but how happiness metrics might guide policy decisions. Rather than focusing exclusively on economic indicators, Taiwan has an opportunity to pioneer governance approaches that explicitly target the determinants of happiness identified in research.

Singapore has already moved in this direction by establishing a [Centre for Public Impact](#) focused on well-being outcomes. Similarly, New Zealand has implemented a "[Well-Being Budget](#)" that evaluates policy proposals based on their impact across multiple dimensions of citizen welfare. Taiwan could build on these examples while incorporating its unique cultural perspectives on happiness.

Conclusion

Taiwan's position as Asia's happiest place reflects the cumulative effect of its cultural heritage, social policies, economic development, and community connections. This achievement reminds us that the most meaningful measure of a society's success is not its economic output or international status, but the well-being of its people.

As Taiwan continues to navigate its unique challenges and change, preserving and enhancing the foundations of happiness—its social connections, cultural traditions, environmental quality, and economic security—should remain central priorities. In doing so, Taiwan can not only maintain its happiness standing but serve as a model for how societies can balance tradition and modernity, individual freedom and collective harmony, in the pursuit of genuine well-being.

Therefore, rather than viewing happiness as a competition, we should see Taiwan's achievement as an invitation to deeper understanding of what makes life meaningful and fulfilling in the unique Taiwanese context—an understanding that might ultimately contribute to greater well-being both in Taiwan and beyond.

The main point: Taiwan's ranking as Asia's happiest place in the 2025 World Happiness Report reflects deeper cultural strengths beyond economic success. The island's exceptional practice of communal dining—with Taiwanese sharing 10.1 meals weekly—represents a crucial social infrastructure that builds resilience. Taiwan's unique blend of traditional values with progressive policies creates a harmonious foundation for wellbeing—Taiwan's healthcare system, environmental initiatives, and cultural flexibility all contribute to this achievement. Rather than viewing happiness as a competition, Taiwan's experience offers insights into balancing tradition and modernity, demonstrating that genuine wellbeing emerges from strong community bonds alongside individual opportunity.
