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Bridging Theory & Practice: How the George Washington University's Taiwan Studies Research Fellows Program is Cultivating Taiwan Affairs Expertise

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An Administrator's Perspective on the Taiwan Studies Research Fellows Program

Good policies do not craft themselves—people do. We rely on experts to conduct rigorous research, design thoughtful frameworks, and implement solutions that are responsive to communities' histories, positions, and evolving needs. As a result, we need people who are equipped to navigate the intricate sociopolitical, economic, and security dimensions of policymaking, and to assess outcomes with critical insight. At every stage—research, implementation, and evaluation—academia plays a foundational role in training future policymakers and leaders, preparing them not only to make policy, but also to shape a world that can be sensitive, open and strong.

Institutions of higher education play a critical role in shaping the next generation of policymakers by equipping students with the analytical tools, historical knowledge, and cross-cultural competencies necessary to navigate complex global challenges. Central to this preparation are experiential learning opportunities—such as internships, scholarships, and fellowships—which offer students direct exposure to policymaking environments and bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world application. To be truly effective, policy learning must draw from a wide range of disciplines—including the arts, humanities, STEM fields, languages, and area studies—to ensure that future leaders are equipped with both the breadth and depth of understanding needed to address our most pressing issues today and tomorrow.

These programs foster not only technical proficiency, but also the ethical and strategic sensibilities essential for good governance. One of the most formative experiences in my professional develop-

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ment was my internship with the Public Diplomacy Section at the Taipei office of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). This opportunity allowed me to directly apply my academic training in Taiwan Studies toward advancing US policy goals and strengthening bilateral people-to-people ties. Through this experience, I came to understand the often-complex relationship between policy design and implementation—and how critical on-the-ground experience and area studies expertise are to effective policymaking. I also realized that many of the soft skills essential to organizational success—such as project management, team morale, intercultural communication, and navigating different work styles—are best learned not in classrooms, but in practice. This internship represented the most direct and meaningful convergence of my academic interests and career aspirations, and it remains the learning experience I reflect on most in my growth as a Taiwan affairs specialist. Yet, none of it would have been possible without the financial and institutional support of my undergraduate alma mater, the University of Central Florida. Fortunately, my story is not unique: around the world, colleges and universities continue to provide students with critical resources and opportunities that serve as stepping stones into meaningful careers in policy.

The imperative to establish and resource practical learning experiences is especially salient in the context of US-Taiwan relations—a multidimensional and historically dynamic relationship. US-Taiwan relations are increasingly central to regional and global stability, economic prosperity, technologic growth, and democratic deepening. There is a growing need for academic programs that promote rigorous study and critical engagement with Taiwan's political system, society, and international position. In recent years, the field of Taiwan studies has gained meaningful traction across US higher education, with programs and centers emerging or expanding at US institutions—such as the University of Washington, University of California, Los Angeles, the University of Texas at Austin, and Stanford University. Furthermore, government efforts—such as the United States' US-Taiwan Education Initiative and the Taiwanese Ministry of Education's Taiwan Studies Project grants—have encouraged more institutional investment and educational exchange between both sides. These developments reflect the increasing scholarly momentum and greater recognition of Taiwan's importance in global affairs and across academic disciplines. By investing in Taiwan-focused curricula, research initiatives, and student opportunities, academic institutions provide an invaluable service in fostering deeper understanding and policy fluency among future leaders. Such efforts not only contribute to more sophisticated and informed policymaking, but also support the broader socialization of Taiwan within US public discourse—an outcome essential for sustaining a resilient and constructive bilateral relationship.

In this context, the George Washington University (GW) has developed a rigorous and interdisciplinary Taiwan studies hub through its Taiwan Education and Research Program (TERP) at the Sigur Center for Asian Studies. Established in 2004, TERP supports comprehensive study and research on Taiwan's history, arts and humanities, identities, democratization, international relations, and socio-economic development. The program's backbone includes an ever-expanding suite of Taiwan-specific courses, a vibrant calendar of public events, a special collection of Taiwan materials (including *dangwai* [黨外] periodicals), and professional development opportunities for students interested in building careers in Taiwan affairs. With an approach that centers around the development of student resources, TERP has sought to generate a virtuous cycle: scholarships empower students to take Taiwan-focused coursework to build up their knowledge and competencies, which is then paired with experiential learning activities that provide students with opportunities to apply these skills in professional and research settings. This process is based on my own experience as an undergraduate research fellow on Taiwan affairs at the University of Central Florida's Office of Global Perspectives and International Initiatives, following my experience studying abroad in Taiwan.

Policies need people, and our goal at GW is to be a leadership incubator for the next generation of Taiwan affairs policymakers. Central to this effort—and indeed to this special issue of the *Global Taiwan Brief*—is the Taiwan Studies Research Fellows Program. Now in its fourth year, the Fellows Program awards roughly three to four fellowships annually for undergraduate and graduate students to pursue Taiwan-focused research projects over the course of an academic year. Working with a faculty advisor throughout the year, each fellow crafts a project that could be presented at academic conferences, published in policy-oriented outlets, or used in other professional applications. The program has supported a wide breadth of research topics and disciplines: including US defense policy toward Taiwan, women's rights and the history of comfort women in Taiwan, Taiwan's democratization and digital governance, economic development, cross-Strait relations, cultural identity, and refugee protection policy. The program cultivates well-rounded researchers who can analyze Taiwan's political, social, and strategic complexities—signaling GW's commitment to nurturing policy fluency in students that is grounded in hands-on scholarship. Through this program, each cohort of fellows become indispensable contributors not just to the GW Taiwan Studies community, but also to the greater research and policymaking circles.

In that spirit, for this special issue of the *Global Taiwan Brief*, the Global Taiwan Institute (GTI) has partnered with TERP to invite current and past fellows to present their own research. These contributions reflect the diverse perspectives and analytical depth of a rising generation of scholars and practitioners, and highlight the expanding opportunities for new voices within the study of Taiwan's domestic and international affairs.

A Former TERP Fellow's Perspective

As a graduate student who had previously only written academic papers, the Taiwan Studies Research Fellows Program gave me invaluable experience researching and writing from a policy angle. With academic papers, it is expected that the reader of the paper already has some background knowledge, and the main purpose of the piece is to present evidence that backs up a scholarly, theoretical argument. However, with policy writing, background knowledge is not assumed, and the purpose of the piece is to provide practical and actionable solutions. This change in style, while subtle, is a major shift that dictates how to both research and write.

Instead of only searching for related evidence in a narrow way to prove that your argument has merit, the research focus in policy writing broadens to encompass the *reasons behind* the focus on a specific issue. In terms of writing, less emphasis is placed on proving that your central arguments are correct—and more emphasis is placed on why the subject matter is important, and what solutions would be of most relevance.

My TERP fellowship culminated in a policy memo describing how Taiwan could augment its defense policy to become more resilient, and how the United States could change its defense posture in the region to increase readiness. My experience as a fellow not only consisted of preparing a policy-oriented deliverable, but also included a presentation. After submitting the final policy memo, I was also given the opportunity to present my findings at a seminar hosted by TERP. Through the experience of presenting and defending my policy memo before an audience, I received critical feedback and also had to justify the decisions behind my research and writing method. Overall, the experience not only challenged me to think more critically and analytically about the choices that I had made, but also sharpened my argumentation and communication skills.

In addition to learning more about Taiwan's defense policy and how the United States is preparing to combat any potential invasion scenario, immersing myself into these issues allowed me to gain deeper insight into the unique challenges that Taiwan faces on a daily basis. Motivated to learn more about Taiwan, I was introduced by one of my professors to the Huayu Enrichment Scholarship. This scholarship would allow me to gain first-hand experience living and studying in Taiwan at a Mandarin language center. I eagerly applied and after a few months, I was excited to learn that I had obtained the scholarship to study at National Chengchi University in Taipei for nine months.

Beyond looking at a computer screen and talking with subject matter experts in DC to learn about Taiwan, my time in Taiwan allowed me to gain deeper insights into Taiwanese society. Living there gave me the opportunity to observe everyday life, speak directly with locals, and experience how policy plays out on the ground. I traveled all around the country and these experiences deepened my understanding of Taiwan beyond the academic and policy frameworks I had previously encountered.

Upon returning to the United States and continuing my studies at GW, I wanted to continue my passion for Taiwan studies. GTI was a natural place for me to do this. I was given the opportunity to intern at the organization in Fall 2023. During my internship, I gained hands-on experience on Taiwan related policy issues. During my internship, I was able to publish two articles in the *Global Taiwan Brief:* one about the struggles of Taiwanese youth finding employment after graduation, and another about the outcomes and implications of the 2024 Taiwanese legislative elections. After graduation, I was fortunate enough to continue as a full-time staff member at GTI, where my research has focused primarily on Taiwan's defense policy and various social, political, and economic issues in Taiwan. My TERP fellowship enabled this path and gave me the foundational skills to navigate complex research questions, collaborate with subject matter experts, and to think critically and uniquely about problems—all skills that I continue to use in my work today.

The main point: Robust policymaking begins with people—those trained to research, design, and implement policies grounded in historical, cultural, and strategic awareness. Academia plays a vital role in this process, particularly through experiential opportunities that bridge theory and practice. Nowhere is this more evident than in the growing field of Taiwan studies, where programs like GW's Taiwan Education and Research Program are cultivating the next generation of leaders with the skills, insight, and fluency to shape the future of US–Taiwan relations.

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Lost in Translation: How Language Barriers Shape the Integration of Southeast Asian Marriage Migrant Women in Taiwan

By: Simran Dali

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, Taiwan has quietly evolved into a multicultural society—home to more than half a million foreign spouses, the overwhelming majority of whom are women from Southeast Asia. By 2022, nearly 91 percent of all foreign spouses were female, with significant numbers

arriving from Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. [1] Such women, often labeled as "foreign brides," play a central role in sustaining Taiwan's care economy and demographic future—raising children, supporting aging in-laws, and bridging cultural worlds. Yet, while they are indispensable to Taiwanese households and society at large, these women are often rendered invisible, and their perspectives are frequently misunderstood, unheard, and overlooked.

At the heart of their marginalization lies a crucial challenge: limited fluency in Mandarin. For many of these women, this is not just a communication gap, it is also a deep-rooted barrier that shapes their access to healthcare, employment, education, and community life. Their lack of fluency reinforces social isolation, invites discrimination, and leaves them vulnerable within both public and private spheres.

These linguistic challenges do not exist in a vacuum. For over three decades, Southeast Asian marriage migrants have been stigmatized as "undesirable others" from "undeveloped countries" and reduced to tropes of passive victims, gold-diggers, or runaways. [2] Taiwanese public discourse often expects these migrants to embody the ideal of the "traditional, chaste, virtuous woman," tasked with prioritizing their husband's family and assimilating quietly. [3] Those who fall short—due to language, education, or cultural unfamiliarity—are further marginalized as "unfit mothers" who are incapable of raising the so-called "new second generation" (新二代) of Taiwan. [4] These damaging narratives compound migrants' feelings of inferiority and disenfranchisement, silencing their agency and reinforcing their outsider status.

Despite recent government initiatives and grassroots support, language remains one of the most deeply entrenched—and yet most addressable—barriers to social inclusion. It continues to cast many Southeast Asian marriage migrants as perpetual outsiders, estranged even within their own homes and communities.

Employment Barriers

While approximately 74 percent of new immigrant spouses in Taiwan are employed—according to data from the Ministry of Labor—language proficiency remains a critical determinant of job quality, stability, and mobility. For many Southeast Asian marriage migrants, limited fluency in Mandarin or Taiwanese acts as a barrier to better employment opportunities. In a recent national survey, "foreign country" spouses (mostly Southeast Asians and others) were much more likely than mainland Chinese spouses to report problems in Chinese literacy and communication while on the job. About one in four new immigrant workers said they faced job-related difficulties; among women the top concerns were low pay, juggling family and work, and especially weak Chinese reading/writing skills.

This language gap often relegates migrant women to informal or low-skilled sectors such as domestic caregiving, factory work, or hospitality—fields where linguistic competence is essential for safety and communication yet seldom supported through structured language training. Even with Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP, 新南向政策) aiming to boost economic and people-to-people exchanges between Taiwan and countries in Southeast Asia, the NSP has failed to address labor issues, and many Taiwanese employers do not hire non-Chinese speakers beyond menial tasks. Mandarin proficiency is frequently treated as a baseline requirement for employment, and hiring decisions often depend on social referrals rather than formal channels. As one Indonesian resident explained bluntly, "Almost all jobs in Taiwan require at least understanding Chinese." One study found that many employers explicitly associate Southeast Asian migrants with low-skill labor and express concerns over their communication abilities—even when candidates have prior experience or relevant education. This dynamic reinforces a pattern of "double exclusion," where migrants are disadvantaged both structurally—through the lack of accessible language training, adequate formal job matching services, and inclusive labor policies—and through employer bias. [5]

Without adequate language proficiency, many migrant women remain trapped in a cycle of constrained opportunity—ultimately reinforcing stereotypes about their educational backgrounds and capabilities and perpetuating a broader pattern of economic precarity and social marginalization.

Healthcare Access and Utilization

In addition to limiting employment opportunities, language barriers are also a critical obstacle preventing Southeast Asian marriage migrants in Taiwan from accessing timely and effective healthcare. Most of these women, lacking basic language and literacy skills, struggle with low health literacy, making it difficult to understand medical information or navigate the healthcare system. In practice, this often results in missed preventive care, misunderstanding of diagnoses or treatment plans, and harmful outcomes. According to one 2019 survey, 17.1 percent of marital migrants cited language barriers when visiting doctors, frequently leading to miscommunication, incorrect treatments, or delayed care. One woman mistakenly fed her child the wrong formula due to instructions written only in Chinese; another was unable to convey a serious medication allergy, placing her in immediate danger. [6] In the absence of professional interpretation, many women rely on spouses, children, or informal helpers to communicate—raising significant risks to patient safety and autonomy.

These real-world consequences underscore the urgent need for a more systematic and equitable approach to language access in healthcare. A 2019 study found that 60 percent of migrant respondents wanted an in-person interpreter, while 51 percent requested medical documents in their

native language. One Vietnamese interviewee reflected, "I couldn't understand anything… medical information was beyond reach until a health center translator helped."

Taiwan has taken steps to improve healthcare access for migrants under the Ministry of Health and Welfare's 2016 "Multi-language Translation for Healthcare Service Initiative." Measures include an online platform to match volunteer interpreters, pilot instant interpretation services, and the translation of 225 medical forms into 20 languages. Migrant-friendly clinics have also been piloted at Taipei Veterans General Hospital (north), Changhua Christian Hospital (central/west), Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital (east), and Kaohsiung Medical University Hospital (south). However, a 2020 study found that these initiatives remain fragmented, highlighting significant gaps in the availability of professional medical interpreters, the lack of a legal framework to protect medical interpreting, and insufficient dissemination of information about national healthcare resources to support migrants in Taiwan. [7]

Without treating language access as essential healthcare infrastructure—rather than an optional support—Taiwan will continue to underserve one of its most vulnerable populations.

Social Acceptance and Discrimination

Beyond services, language differences influence how society treats foreign spouses. As a result, public attitudes in Taiwan remain ambivalent. Surveys of expatriates praise Taiwanese friendliness, but many local citizens are still unaccustomed to non-Chinese speakers. Even the common term "foreign bride" betrays bias: it implies pervasive xenophobia and discrimination against married immigrant women, casting them as outsiders and subordinates. Language aptitude—or lack thereof—often reinforces stereotypes. For instance, Indonesian brides who can speak the Hakka dialect are seen more favorably and have fewer issues communicating, while those who only speak their native tongue are often marginalized. [8]

These linguistic deficits also create dependency and power imbalances within families. Many new immigrant women rely heavily on their husbands or in-laws to navigate daily life. This dynamic can reinforce the stereotype of the "submissive foreign wife," limiting their autonomy and increasing their vulnerability—especially in abusive households. Linguistic isolation is a known factor in preventing women from reporting domestic violence or accessing help, leaving many trapped in silence.

Outside the home, social and familial exclusion is common. A 2025 feature by the Taiwanese National Immigration Agency (NIA, 內政部移民署) lists "lack of social support networks" and strained family relationships—particularly difficulties with spouses and in-laws, including frequent conflicts with mothers-in-law—as key integration challenges faced by new immigrant women from Southeast Asia in Taiwan. Migrant women who speak "broken" Mandarin often find themselves ignored by colleagues or neighbors. Some face outright discrimination at work: long-time workers reported that such women often earned lower pay for the same work compared to their counterparts—i.e. local Taiwanese women—or were passed over for promotions by colleagues due to perceived language deficiencies.

Within the household, language barriers are also closely linked to stigma and interpersonal strain. Research shows that miscommunication with in-laws, especially mothers-in-law, frequently provokes conflict and emotional distress for such women in Taiwan. [9] One illustrative case involved a Vietnamese woman who could not understand her mother-in-law's mixture of Mandarin and Hoklo, prompting the mother-in-law to call a government-supported hotline for translation assistance in order to communicate how to feed the baby properly. This reliance on third-party intervention underscores how limited language proficiency can disrupt even basic caregiving routines and familial trust. They also often feel disrespected or misunderstood, reinforcing their perception as outsiders in both familial and societal contexts. [10] Such linguistic exclusion compounds social stigma and isolates migrant women from broader community life and women often remain at home, unable to join local groups or events without language support.

Still, many foreign brides are eager to integrate. One survey notes that "many new immigrant women are eager to learn the language and understand local culture" in hopes of gaining respect and social acceptance. Yet, even these efforts are often met with limited institutional support—such as insufficient access to affordable and flexible language classes, lack of culturally sensitive social services, inadequate outreach programs, and minimal governmental or community resources to assist with their social integration—and public ambivalence. In this context, language barriers do more than isolate, they contribute to a wider system of structural and symbolic exclusion that keeps women on the margins of both family and society.

Grassroots Efforts and Policy Recommendations

In Taiwan, grassroots movements have proven essential in addressing the language-related marginalization of Southeast Asian marriage migrants—especially where state efforts fall short. The TransAsia Sisters Association, Taiwan (TASAT), founded in 2003, is a standout example. Originally launched to provide literacy classes to immigrant brides, TASAT has evolved into a dynamic advocacy force led by and for migrant women. It operates multilingual hotlines, peer-staffed workshops, and creative platforms like the *TASAT Troupe*, which uses theater to expose the lived consequences of linguistic and social exclusion.

Similarly, the Alliance for Human Rights Legislation for Immigrants and Migrants (AHRLIM)—founded by Taiwanese researcher and activist Hsia Hsiao-chuan (夏曉鵑)—has played a pivotal role in shaping national policy. Through

large-scale grassroots mobilization, AHRLIM successfully pushed for major amendments to *Taiwan's Immigration Act* (2007) and the *Statute Governing Relations with Mainland China* (2009), amplifying the voices of immigrant communities and strengthening legal protections for foreign spouses. [11]

Migrant women have been central to these movements, demonstrating that language barriers are not simply personal challenges—they are deeply political issues tied to legal status, access to citizenship, and public recognition. Yet, while grassroots efforts like TASAT and AHRLIM have made significant gains, they cannot shoulder this burden alone. These community-based responses must be reinforced by state-led, structural interventions that address the root causes of exclusion and remove linguistic barriers across all sectors—employment, healthcare, and other social services.

Based on my research, I propose the following targeted policy recommendations:

- **Expand language education:** The government should subsidize Mandarin and Taiwanese language courses for immigrant spouses, both pre-arrival and post-arrival, through municipal service centers and trusted community organizations such as TASAT. These programs should offer flexible scheduling and provide on-site childcare to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, employ bilingual instructors and peer mentors to enhance accessibility, and be formally linked to residency and naturalization pathways, providing supportive—not punitive—language proficiency benchmarks.
- **Ensure Interpretation in Public Services:** Public hospitals and clinics should mandate the use of professional interpreters to ensure effective communication. Services should be offered in major migrant languages such as Vietnamese, Indonesian, Tagalog, and Thai. Additionally, key forms, prescriptions, and educational materials must be translated into these languages. To further support diverse communities, multilingual assistance should also be expanded in schools and social welfare offices.
- **Enhance community outreach.** Municipal integration centers should be established by local governments in partnership with the NIA under the Ministry of the Interior, and supported by trusted community organizations like TASAT. They should be financially supported by the NIA and staffed by local governments to offer valuable services such as peer-led language cafés and civic education programs. These centers can also provide parenting support and raise awareness of rights among immigrant families. To reach isolated or rural women, home visits should be conducted, ensuring that support is accessible to all members of the community.
- **Strengthen Parental Engagement:** Schools should be equipped to engage immigrant mothers in meaningful ways by hiring bilingual parent liaisons who can bridge language and cultural gaps. Interpreted school events and translated materials should be provided to ensure accessibility for all families. Additionally, involving immigrant mothers as classroom assistants and cultural ambassadors can foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

By treating language support as foundational, Taiwan can turn diversity into strength. In the words of one official, foreign spouses and their children "are a new generation of Taiwanese" who are worth the government's attention. Reducing linguistic barriers will help these families fully participate in society—from the marketplace to the hospitals—and will not only improve the lives of these women but also build a more inclusive, cohesive Taiwanese society.

The main point: Limited proficiency in Mandarin lies at the core of the challenges faced by Southeast Asian marriage migrants in Taiwan. It underpins their struggles with employment discrimination, healthcare access, and social exclusion, reinforcing their marginalization within families and society. To break this cycle, Taiwan must invest in accessible language education, mandate professional interpretation in public services, and expand community outreach programs. Only by doing so can Taiwan ensure the full participation of these women, and build a truly inclusive society.

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Analyzing Taiwan's New Southbound Policy and Its Path Towards Economic Sovereignty

By: Kyle Nguyen

Kyle Nguyen is from the San Francisco Bay Area and is a sophomore undergraduate student at the Elliott School of International Affairs. He is majoring in international affairs with a concentration in security policy and minoring in data science. His research interests include the modern security relations between East Asian countries. As a 2024-2025 Taiwan Education Research Program Fellow, Kyle's research analyzes the economic and security aspects of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP) and its impact on Taiwan's relationship with China and Indo-Pacific nations.

Throughout Taiwan's history, the nation has continuously faced encroachment from China. Moreover, China's rise as a hegemonic power over the past quarter century has allowed the country to leverage forms of power and statecraft to force global adherence to its "One-China Principle," which claims that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is the government that represents all of China, including Taiwan. To combat China's overreach in the region, Taiwan has implemented various policy strategies to increase its international visibility, with the most notable being the New Southbound Policy (NSP, 新南向政策). Since the creation of the NSP, Taiwan has forged multiple partnerships with 18 countries in the Asia/Oceania region. By outlining the NSP model and the modern challenges China imposes on Taiwan, this article argues that Taiwan's NSP is critical for achieving its economic sovereignty by decreasing dependence on trade with China and diversifying its regional trade partnerships.

Overview of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy Model

Lai Ching-te (賴清德) emphasized his commitment to enhance relations with specific countries in South and Southeast Asia under Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) New Southbound Policy. As part of this foreign policy strategy, Lai has focused on the promotion of six core industry areas: 1) information and digital industries; 2) cybersecurity; 3) precision health; 4) renewable energy; 5) national defense and strategic industries; and 6) strategic stockpile industries. Lai's foreign policy goals are not unique—throughout Taiwan's history, almost every president has tried to advance strategic relations and partnerships with the southern part of the Indo-Pacific region. The Lai Administration's current NSP framework is an evolution of his predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen's, creation of the NSP program. However, the question remains: Why must Taiwan pursue a New Southbound Policy?

China's International Pressure Over Taiwan

As a regional hegemon, China has used its economic superiority over Taiwan and pushed other countries within the region to abide by the "One-China Principle." Much of China's coercion has been leveraged through "dollar diplomacy" (also known as "checkbook diplomacy"), which refers to when China offers investment incentives and development assistance to regional neighbors as long as the receiving nations adopt Chinese positions, including the "One-China Principle." From a global standpoint, China has successfully stripped Taiwan's international status through this mechanism. For instance, in 2002—and again in 2024—Taiwan accused China of "buying" Nauru's allegiance, luring the country away twice from a diplomatic partnership with Taiwan.

On a global scale, China has used its importance to the global economy and the countries it supports to continue to isolate Taiwan from the international community, particularly by distorting United Nations Resolution 2758. Simultaneously, China has developed various foreign initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, formerly known as "One Belt, One Road," 一帶一路), to increase its economic power worldwide and undermine Taiwan's New Southbound Policy goals by using its larger market to forge partnerships and establish development projects with other Southeast Asian countries. Overall, China's aggressive

Countries Originally Allied with Taiwan	Year these Countries Severed Ties with Taiwan	Years these Countries Declared Relations/Partnerships with China
Republic of Kiribati	2019	2019
Nicaragua	2021	2023
Nauru	2002, 2024	2002, 2024
Honduras	2023	2023
Republic of El Salvador	2018	2018
Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe	2016	2017
Dominican Republic	2018	2018
Republic of Panama	2017	2017
Solomon Islands	2019	2019

Table: Countries Originally Allied With Taiwan and the Years They Severed Ties with Taiwan and Declared Relations with China. (Table Sources: See [1])

dollar diplomacy has severely undercut Taiwan's efforts to forge international partnerships by poaching Taiwan's formal diplomatic partners, and limiting Taiwan's official recognition in international and multilateral organizations.

Image: Then-President Tsai Ing-wen holds a meeting with journalists from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand to discuss Taiwan's New Southbound Policy. (May 5, 2017). (Image source: Wikimedia Commons / ROC Presidential Office)

Spearheading The New Southbound Policy

Given the above-mentioned challenges, Taiwan's goal should be to reduce its dependence on China's trade by establishing itself as a vital partner in the global economy. The New Southbound Policy is critical for Taiwan because it is Taiwan's first step towards achieving this objective, creating an opportunity for Taiwan to spread its economic influence across nearby countries. In 2024, the Taiwanese government reported the lowest decrease of exports to China and Hong Kong in five-years, with a 1.1 percent reduction from 2023, while Taiwanese exports to NSP partner countries within the ASEAN bubble rose to new highs, increasing by 15.1 percent that year. These trends signify the success of the NSP towards Taiwan's diversification of export partners while—albeit slowly—decreasing dependence on Chinese exports. However, there are still further steps that Taiwan must take to develop pragmatic partnerships with individual countries in the NSP. China's hegemonic presence in the region continues to be a formidable obstacle to Taiwan's goal of economic sovereignty. As a result, these policy proposals will outline how the Taiwanese government can improve its NSP program while keeping the current status quo in cross-Strait relations.

Developing Pragmatic Partnerships with Individual Countries

Taiwan should pragmatically examine each country's current situation within the range of the NSP's guidelines. With China currently dominating the Indo-Pacific region, Taiwan must usurp this influence by establishing partnerships near the home front. Although approximately 18

partner countries claim to be part of the NSP, each country's level of engagement with Taiwan varies, with some countries maintaining limited or less active partnerships with Taiwan. Additionally, only seven of Taiwan's top 20 trading partners are part of the NSP. Taiwan should prioritize strengthening economic and strategic alliances with the Philippines and India. Both countries are not only partners of the NSP program, but are also two nations that are in Taiwan's top 20 trading partners and likewise face geopolitical tensions with China.

The Philippines

The South China Sea is a region that constantly experiences maritime disputes. Although Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia all have maritime disputes with China, of these countries, only a few have actively spoken out against China–with the most vocal being the Philippines. In 2016, the Philippines brought a case before the arbitral tribunal at The Hague against China for violating the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS). Since then, the tensions between the Philippines and China have significantly risen, with current President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. publicly warning China against continuing to violate the Philippines' claimed borders in the South China Sea.

Another reason that Taiwan must commit to furthering its partnership with the Philippines is because of the Philippines' openness to cooperating with Taiwan. On April 15, the Philippine government passed Memorandum Circular 82, which eased travel restrictions between Taiwanese and Filipino officials. This policy reversed the Philippines' 1987 Executive Order No. 313, which had previously heavily restricted Filipino travel to Taiwan. Moreover, the Philippines has sought out Taiwanese corporations within the semiconductor industry—such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造公司) and United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC, 聯華電子)—as partners to expand the Philippines' domestic semiconductor industry.

With current disputes in the South China Sea at an all-time high, Taiwan should leverage the rising tensions between the Philippines and China to further relations between both countries. Potential partnerships include expanding job outsourcing between the two countries and growing the renewable energy industry. In 2024, Taiwanese employers submitted 15,000 job orders to the Philippine government to be filled by Filipino workers, with about 3,000 job vacancies in the semiconductor industry alone. Another promising development is Taiwan's plan to import green energy from the Philippines. By constructing undersea cables between both countries, Taiwan can fulfill its transition from nuclear energy to sustainable energy sources and eventually reach its 2050 net-zero goal. The Philippines is not only vocal about its shared territorial disputes with China, but it is one of the few countries that has both vocalized its discontent against China and expressed a willingness to cooperate with Taiwan.

India

India has the highest GDP out of all of Taiwan's NSP partners and has steadily increased its trade with Taiwan, growing from USD 4.7 billion in 2016 to USD 10.9 billion in 2023. India is a rising economic power in the region, with a market potentially on par with China, which makes it an attractive economic partner for Taiwan.

The current turmoil between China and India could also create opportunities for Taiwan to create stronger partnerships with India. Two factors that account for the recent decline in India-China relations are: 1) China's military support of Pakistan; and 2) Sino-Indian border disputes. India and Pakistan have a long-standing territorial dispute over Kashmir, with China funding 81 percent of Pakistan's imported weapons supply. Despite April's escalation in tensions ending in a ceasefire, China's military support of Pakistan has caused distrust of China among Indian officials. Additionally, like in the South China Sea, both India and China have engaged in minor conflicts throughout the past decade over their shared border in the Himalayan Mountain Range, with the most recent reported conflict on the border occurring in 2020.

The current Modi Administration has preferred to lean towards the United States when it comes to cooperation efforts and forging bilateral initiatives. As of February, India and the United States launched the "US-India COMPACT (Catalyzing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce and Technology) for the 21st Century." India's current tilt towards the West could create opportunities for India to cooperate with Taiwan. Current cooperation between India and Taiwan has increased the growth rate in total trade by 29 percent between 2023 and 2024. As of May 1, the current 2025 total trade has already surpassed the total annual trade amount in 2020.

Due to India's vast market, India can be another way for Taiwan to decrease its dependence on trade with China. Considering that India's current surplus in rare earth elements (REE) is crucial in developing clean energy and defense technologies, India's defense and renewable energy industries are prime opportunities for Taiwan-India trade. Not only are there industries critical to Taiwan's goals of achieving net-zero energy totals, but they are also critical for strengthening

Taiwan's domestic resilience. By advancing these industries, Taiwan can both improve relations with a high-GDP-producing NSP partner and decrease Taiwan's dependence on China.

China's hegemonic rise and influential dominance over the Indo-Pacific region have limited Taiwan's ability to forge partnerships with nearby countries. The New Southbound Policy is vital to combating these issues and allows Taiwan to diversify its domestic markets to regional countries. Taiwan should advance its partnerships with countries that share geopolitical tensions with China, such as the Philippines and India.

The main point: Taiwan must prioritize enhancing regional partnerships through its New Southbound Policy to mitigate its economic dependence on China. Furthermore, Taiwan should continue to leverage shared geopolitical concerns—such as the Philippines' and India's tensions with China—to find new areas of cooperation with NSP partner countries. Both countries offer expansion opportunities in Taiwan's critical markets, such as the renewable energy and defense industries.

[1] Data compiled from: Bock, Jonah, and Haley Parilla; Lai, Michelle. "Honduras Ditches Taiwan for China." Foreign Policy Research Institute, October 6, 2023. https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/10/honduras-ditches-taiwan-for-china/#:~:text=Honduras'%20decision%20to%20cut%20ties,of%20China's%20diplomatic%20grand%20strategy; Lyons, Kate. "Taiwan Loses Second Ally in a Week as Kiribati Switches to China." The Guardian, September 20, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/20/taiwan-loses-second-ally-in-a-week-as-kiribati-switches-to-china; "Honduras Cuts Ties with Taiwan, Opens Relations with China." Al Jazeera, March 26, 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/26/honduras-cuts-diplomatic-ties-with-taiwan; Ellis, Evan. "China and El Salvador: An Update." CSIS, March 22, 2021. https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-and-el-salvador-update; An, David. "The Geopolitics of Losing Diplomatic Allies: The Case of Sao Tome and Principe." Global Taiwan Institute, March 22, 2017. https://globaltaiwan.org/2017/03/the-geopolitics-of-losing-diplomatic-allies-the-case-of-sao-tome-and-principe/; "Panama Cuts Ties with Taiwan in Favour of China." BBC News, June 13, 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40256499; "Taiwan Loses Diplomatic Ally as Dominican Republic Switches Ties to China." BBC News, May 1, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43958849.

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Comfort Women, Democratization and Women's Rights in Korea and Taiwan

By: Haruka Chunhyang Satake

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Between 1932 to 1945, women and girls throughout the world were forced to provide sexual services to members of the Japanese military as so-called "wartime comfort women" (*jugun ianfu* in Japanese). This system of institutionalized sexual slavery, carried out through so-called "comfort stations" across Asia, was state-organized and has since become one of the most controversial historical and human rights issues in Asia. Over the decades, women and advocates in different countries have sought justice and recognition, though their experiences have not always been remembered or represented equally. These differences in recognition and historical memory vary across national and social contexts.

In South Korea, the comfort women issue is one of the most prominent historical concerns in relation to Japan. According to a 2023 poll conducted by Genron NPO, 60 percent of South Korean respondents cited comfort women issues as the most important historical issue that needs to be resolved between the two countries. In contrast, despite Taiwan's high level of democratization, Taiwanese comfort women have garnered considerably less public attention. National surveys conducted by the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association in 2024 did not even include questions asking about comfort women—and, on the contrary, Japan ranked as Taiwan's favorite country. This represents a stark difference from the situation in South Korea.

This disparity raises a critical question: why has the comfort women issue gained such differing levels of public attention in these two societies? And how did democratization in South Korea and Taiwan influence the recognition of comfort women's rights? By comparing the issue of comfort women in South Korea and Taiwan, this article explores how the historical narratives of the comfort women, and broader discourses on women's rights, have taken shape differently in each society through the democratization process. In the end, although South Korea and Taiwan share similar colonial legacies, their respective political transitions and civil society engagements have shaped divergent national approaches to historical memory and justice.

The Scale of Victims

The first key factor contributing to disparity in the social recognition of Korean and Taiwanese comfort women is the number of victims. From 1932, when the first comfort station was established in China, until the end of World War II, numerous women from Korea and Taiwan were mobilized, coerced, or deceived into serving as comfort women. While the numbers of Korean comfort women are estimated to be around 170,000 to 200,000, the numbers of those affected from Taiwan are estimated to be far lower, at approximately 1,000 to 2,000. As we can see from this, one of the major factors behind South Korea's greater public recognition of the issue could be that there are significantly more Korean comfort women than Taiwanese comfort women.

Democratization and Recognition

However, the number of the victims is not the sole reason for South Korea's widespread recognition of the comfort women issue—the timing and nature of democratization in each country has also contributed to the level of recognition given to the issue.

The process of democratization has been a pivotal catalyst for the promotion of women's rights in both South Korea and Taiwan. In South Korea, the restoration of democracy in 1987—following the nationwide June Democratic Struggle and the earlier struggles symbolized by the 1980 Gwangju Uprising—enabled the emergence of grassroots movements, academic research, and the testimonies of comfort women, which brought the issue into national and international discourses.

By 1990, the Korean Council was established as the first organization in South Korea dedicated to supporting comfort women. In 1991, Kim Hak-sun became the first comfort woman to publicly testify, initiating a wave of activism, legal actions, and international attention. A significant expression of this activism began with the "Wednesday Demonstration," which has taken place weekly in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul since 1992. The demonstration demands that the Japanese government redress the issue of comfort women by making a formal apology and providing reparations for those who were affected. However, the Wednesday Demonstration functions not only as a protest, but also as a powerful ritual of collective memory and national identity. Such protests ultimately led to Japan's official acknowledgment of the issue in 1993.

In contrast, Taiwan's democratization began in 1987, after the lifting of nearly four decades of martial law imposed by the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) government. Although democratization eventually allowed for greater freedom of expression, discussions on historical injustices—including the issue of comfort women—gained traction more slowly than in South Korea. [1] While support organizations and interviews with comfort women did emerge in the early 1990s, these efforts lacked the early momentum and visibility seen in South Korea.

Image: Comfort women rally in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul (August 2011). (Image source: Wikimedia Commons)

The Taipei Women's Rescue Foundation (TWRF), the only organization in Taiwan dedicated to supporting former comfort women, was established in 1987. TWRF has played a pivotal role in locating comfort women survivors, providing legal aid, and raising public awareness of the issue. When TWRF published research identifying the experiences of Taiwanese women during the war in 1992, the Taiwanese public finally became more broadly aware of the comfort women issue. However, Taiwanese society widely shared the contemptuous view that comfort women were "dirty beings." At the first press conference organized by the TWRF to demand an apology and compensation from the Japanese government in August 1992, the Taiwanese comfort women testified by hiding their faces behind black curtains.

The fact that South Korea transitioned into being a democracy earlier contributed significantly to the earlier emergence of public testimonies, the establishment of support organizations, and legal actions addressing the comfort women issue. While South Korea began discussion of the issue in the 1980s, general awareness of the comfort women issue has only been known in Taiwan since the 1990s, meaning that Taiwan civil society is roughly 10 years behind South Korea when it comes to mobilization around the issue.

Post-Colonial Political Authority

The third key factor shaping the divergent trajectories of the comfort women issue in these two societies lies in the differences in the nature of their post-colonial central authorities. After World War II, Taiwan came under the rule of the KMT, a regime originating from mainland China. According to Shu-Hua Kang (康淑華), an assistant professor in the Department of Social Work at National Taipei University, the KMT sought to distance itself from the legacy of Japanese colonial rule, and largely ignored and marginalized the experiences of Taiwanese comfort women. [2] Mamie Misawa also states in her essay, "The Representations of 'Comfort

Women' in Contemporary Taiwan" (*Gendai Taiwan "ianfu" gensetsu no seiri* in Japanese), that Taiwanese women's testimonies were silenced or stigmatized, viewed as "shameful remnants" that had been controlled by Japan. Therefore, many Taiwanese comfort women remained anonymous for a long time, and their stories were excluded from the dominant historical narrative, which prioritized Chinese nationalism over colonial memory.

On the other hand, postwar South Korea was governed by a Korean people-led postwar administration that constructed Korean national identity in direct opposition to Japanese imperialism. This domestic governance structure fostered a political and cultural environment that was more receptive to addressing colonial injustices. Comfort women were widely recognized as victims of imperial oppression, and their voices were amplified through grassroots activism, media coverage, and state-led initiatives. The government also supported the construction of museums and memorials, incorporated the issue into public education, and contributed to the creation of symbolic spaces of protest such as the "Statue of Peace,"which was erected in Seoul in 2011. Thus, post-war political authority shaped divergent conditions for the comfort women: While South Korea fostered an environment that enabled the women to speak out, led by a government based on their shared national identity, Taiwan continued to marginalize these women in the post-colonial era under a regime that came from the outside after the end of Japanese rule.

Taiwanese Comfort Women: Challenges of Divided Nationalism and Gendered Memory

As a result of these political differences, Taiwanese comfort women faced a further deeper identity-based disjuncture than did South Korean comfort women. The regime that governed them after the war neither reflected their lived experience under Japanese rule, nor recognized them as part of its foundational nationalist narrative. According to Misawa, in postwar Taiwan the issue of comfort women was shaped by two competing strands of nationalist ideology. The first ideology was the Republic of China (ROC) nationalism promoted by the KMT, which emphasized its anti-Japanese credentials; and the second was Taiwanese nationalism as articulated by conservative elites, who had experienced Japanese rule with traditional patriarchal norms. This ideological divergence produced conflicting interpretations of the comfort women issue. While the KMT initially marginalized womens' voices, it gradually shifted its stance in the 1990s toward acknowledging the suffering of comfort women and supporting womens' rights. Taiwanese nationalism, on the other hand, continued to deny elements of coercion, thereby reinforcing social stigma and silencing survivors. [3]

Moreover, wartime memory in Taiwan has been predominantly male-centered. While men were commemorated for their wartime contributions, womens' experiences, particularly those of comfort women, were stigmatized. Comfort women were not viewed as victims of structural violence but were often dismissed as "pitiful" or "shameful." According to Kang, even women who had served in other wartime roles, such as nurses, avoided association with comfort women due to fear of social stigma. It was not until the 1990s that some survivors began to speak out publicly, emphasizing that they had not passively accepted their fate under Japanese rule but had fought for autonomy. These testimonies, supported by organizations such as the TWRF, gradually shifted public discourse and increased recognition of their experiences, particularly within Taiwan's growing women rights movement. [4]

Shared Traumas and Political Controversies

Up to this point, this article has focused on the differences between South Korea and Taiwan in relation to the comfort women issue; however, there are several significant similarities between the two. First, comfort women in both countries are victims of Japanese imperialism during wartime. The *1998 United Nations McDougall Report* officially recognized the comfort women system as not merely an accumulation of individual crimes, but rather as a system of state-organized, systematic wartime sexual slavery orchestrated by the Japanese government and military.

Second, both groups' experiences were politically exploited by their respective governments after the war. Misawa states in her 2021 essay, "A Study on the Representation of 'Comfort Women' in Contemporary Taiwan" (*Gendai Taiwan "ianfu" hyōshō ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu* in Japanese), that the comfort women issue has been politicized beyond its humanitarian and historical dimensions, as seen in 2015 Japan-South Korea Agreement—which did not reflect the victims' voices and was simply a surface-level, politicized agreement—and the KMT's usage of the comfort women issues for political gain.

Third, both groups of women shared the similar experiences of trauma and suffering. According to psychiatrist Judith L. Herman's concept of "traumatic bonding," he states that "the enforced dependency of the victim, the isolation from potential sources of help, and the intermittent reward and punishment reinforce traumatic bonding, making the victim feel emotionally tied to the perpetrator." Likewise, many comfort women also developed complex psychological attachments to their perpetrators under strict surveillance, illustrating the deep trauma endured. As a result, many comfort women around the world share a common legacy of imperialist violence, political alienation, and unresolved trauma.

Conclusion

While the social and political contexts differ across different Asian countries, comfort women have continued to raise their voices, seeking recognition and justice. The shared trauma they endured has fostered a sense of transnational solidarity, reflected in joint legal actions and public testimonies in South Korea and Taiwan. However, as this article has shown, social awareness and public opinion regarding the

comfort women varies widely, depending on the country and region. In particular, research done on Taiwanese comfort women remains limited when compared to South Korea, due to language barriers and a lack of archival sources. For example, searching for the keywords "Korean comfort women" on the JSTOR database yields over 20,000 results, whereas the phrase "Taiwanese comfort women" generates around 2,000 results. This roughly tenfold difference highlights the disproportionate focus on Korea in the existing academic discourse on comfort women.

This poses challenges for researchers who aim to conduct comparative analyses and gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Moreover, with the passing of the last known former Taiwanese comfort woman in 2023, it is no longer possible to hear directly from survivors. This development underscores the urgency of preserving memory and reexamining historical responsibility.

The main point: Due to differences in South Korea and Taiwan relating to the scale of victims, the time of democratization, and the agendas held by the post-colonial central authorities, the issue of comfort women is viewed differently in South Korea and Taiwan. Still, both groups of comfort women share common experiences when it comes to their trauma, suffering, and marginalization. With former comfort women getting older by the year, it is vital to urgently preserve memory and reexamine historical responsibility.

[1] WAM Museum, 日本人にされたアマたち (2014).

[2] Interview with Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work at National Taipei University, Shu-Hua Kang, March 25, 2025.

[3] Interview with Shu-Hua Kang, March 25, 2025.

[4] Interview with Shu-Hua Kang, March 25, 2025.

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Dinner at Air Force Village No. 2: Nostalgia for Taiwanese Military Dependents' Villages

By: Fiona Stokes

Fiona Stokes was a Taiwan Education and Research Program fellow researching Taiwanese military villages (juan cun) at the George Washington University. She is majoring in International Affairs with a concentration in Contemporary Cultures and Societies. Outside of school, she works at JF Books, the only Chinese-language bookstore in DC.

When a new socialist republic was declared by Chairman Mao in 1949, many Chinese people fled to Taiwan. Dominic Yang wrote in *The Great Exodus from China* that this was "one of the largest and least understood instances of out-migration in twentieth-century China." [1] The wealthiest of this population fled to the United States, but the majority ended up in Hong Kong or Taiwan. [2] In Taiwan, many of these newcomers settled in *juan cun* (眷村), or military dependents' villages. Depending on their military rank, some were assigned the big houses of former Japanese military officers. Others were given simpler, one-story houses that were divided among up to eight families. [3] Regardless of how nice their assigned dwelling may have been, they all shared one thing in common: these homes were meant to be temporary settlements until the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) retook China. The military villages—and Taiwan, by extension—were not meant to be a permanent home.

Over 65 years since the "great exodus," residents of military villages and the greater Taiwanese population both need to work together to create an inclusive vision of Taiwan's future and its national identity. As Taiwan reflects on its past as a nation, the government should ensure that the individual stories of military village residents are not lost to time. Instead, they should be included in Taiwan's cultural memory along with the experiences of other Taiwanese people and groups.

Background

By the end of the Chinese Civil War, the mainland immigrants in Taiwan were uncertain of where to call home. Taiwan was supposed to be the temporary base for the KMT government until they retook the mainland—or at least, that was the plan. But the war was over, and the military villages that many had moved into as temporary homes had become more permanent over time. The 1.2 million Chinese newcomers were now, for better or worse, the first generation of Taiwanese mainlanders. [4] These people were called *waishengren* (外省人)—the "outside province people," or simply "outsiders"—by the *bendiren* (本地人), or native population. Reasonably, the sense of attachment to China from these two groups differ drastically. Today, supporters of the KMT—especially those in Taiwan who identify themselves as primarily Chinese—are more likely to self-report an emotional attachment to China. The varying sense of attachment to China factors into the larger issue of Taiwanese politics and a national identity.

Air Force Village No. 2 (空軍二村)

On August 8, 2024, I met Mr. Wu Xian Hui (吳憲輝) at the Image Museum of Hsinchu City for the first time. On duty as a volunteer, he proceeded to share some photos of his childhood in Air Force Village No. 2, the military village he grew up in. Although a native Taiwanese myself, I was unfamiliar with this side of Taiwanese history, even though both Mr. Wu and I grew up in the same city of Hsinchu. Mr. Wu agreed to let me do an ethnographic report on what he had to share. Beyond my own interest, I saw value in his story as a unique and humanizing angle to approach the complicated issue of politics and identity in the early and formative stages of Taiwan's history. In a contemporary context, I also saw value in how this story shed light on the roots of varying Taiwanese attitudes towards China today.

On April 18, 1950, Mr. Wu was born in Air Force Village No. 2 in Hsinchu, Taiwan. Mr. Wu's father was a wartime photog-

rapher. Although the primary task of the senior Wu was to capture aerial shots of Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) bases with his Yashica-D camera, he also used this camera to capture the ordinary experiences and joys of life in the military village. *(Some photos are embedded in the article, but you can also see more images on my website.)*

According to Yang, military villages were "residential enclaves established by the exiled KMT to house its displaced military officers and their families." [5] Even though the tight spaces, communal living, food stamps, and war-time tension strained living conditions, Mr. Wu recalled his childhood memories fondly and he reminisced about the close-knit community that emerged as a result of these circumstances.

Image: Mr. Wu Xianhui, his mother, and younger brother on November 18, 1960. (Image source: Photo provided by Mr. Wu.)

Within Air Force Village No. 2, there were eight households in total. Thin bamboo walls divided each household to a share of 36 sq ft (6 ping). The walls were so thin that it was easy to hear noises from the other families, and Mr. Wu recalls hearing the neighbors' mothers crying at night when news arrived from the airport of flight accidents.

The village was located next to the Air Force Academy, which Mr. Wu later attended. Alongside Air Force Village No. 1 and 3, the three villages were called *xiao qian* (校前), meaning "in front of the school." Starting in 5th grade, students were expected to attend night school, a mandatory program to help students prepare for the government-issued exam before middle school. Mr. Wu recalls going home for dinner and returning to school for his night classes.

A common dinner item was homemade dumplings. Mr. Wu recalls his mom making dumplings from scratch in the back-

Image: Mr. Wu's mother made dumplings in the backyard on July 17, 1957. (Image source: Photo provided by Mr. Wu)

yard. Dumplings were easy to make, requiring low-grade fatty pork, chives, flour, and water. Once again, you can see the bamboo walls that served as separation.

The food was cooked in a shared kitchen amongst eight households. The Da-Tong steamer was a staple that appeared in the military village kitchens and in Taiwanese kitchens to this day. Many Chinese dishes are made through the steaming process–especially rice, the most important staple in Chinese cuisine. The military residents commonly ate dishes such as fried rice with spicy Chinese sausage (香腸炒飯), fried leek dumplings (韭菜盒子), dumplings (水餃), and beef noodle soup (牛肉麵). While the food that the military residents made was Chinese in origin, the dishes also adapted through their experiences living in Taiwan. For instance, the Taiwanese rendition of the Lanzhou-style beef noodle soup evolved into a less spicy, deeper flavored dish with beef cubes instead of slices. Taiwanese beef noodle soup is now an iconic part of Taiwanese culture and is celebrated in the annual Taipei International Beef Noodle Festival, with former President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) recognizing Taipei as the "world capital" of this "traditional dish."

Arguably the most important dinner of the entire year falls on Chinese (Lunar) New Year's Eve. This is a time of family reunion, and the dishes are heavily symbolic to the values of Chinese culture. Pictured above is Mr. Wu's Chinese New Year Eve dinner in 1956. You can see the large dishes in the middle of the table, laid out family style. The chicken leg is cooked whole, leaving its bones intact. This night is called tuan-yuan yei, as written in the blue text on the top left of the photo. Tuan-yuan means to come together, referencing a circle for unity. Yei means night. This picture captures a togetherness that was celebrated all over Taiwan that night.

Mr. Wu found joy in the simplicity of life, and was nostalgic

Image: Mr. Wu's family sharing a meal together on Chinese New Year's Eve in 1956. (Image source: Photo provided by Mr. Wu)

for the closeness of the community he grew up in. Dinner at Air Force Village No. 2 was about community, flavors of a previous home in a new place, and settlement.

Reconstructing the Past

"All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory," wrote the author Viet Thanh Nguyen. [6] Although the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949, its consequences have been long lasting. Today, the question of a Taiwanese identity is one of the most heated political discussions in Taiwan. It is also highlighted in international news media and US-Taiwan policy discussions. Considering that 67 percent of Taiwan's population now identify primarily as Taiwanese when given the choice between Taiwanese or Chinese, it is evident that there is a growing sense of Taiwanese identity among the people of Taiwan. With each new generation born in Taiwan, Taiwanese youth become further removed from the older generations' emotional attachment to China. In addition, growing concerns over Taiwan's national security and cross-Strait tensions would arguably make it even harder for younger Taiwanese to understand older generations' nostalgia.

As these stories are remembered, the war is fought for the second time—as Nguyen puts it. The effect of the past is reorganized, reassigned meaning, and we seek the answers to these questions of identity through these passed down stories. Mr. Yen, a military village inhabitant, explained that the first generation of Chinese immigrants missed their families back in China. Their children—second-generation immigrants such as himself—were nostalgic for the roots of the transplanted culture with which they grew up.

According to Yang, it is the "Taiwan-born children and grandchildren… [who] serv[e] as the curators and proponents of their parents' and grandparents' memories." [7] Mr. Wu is living memory of his parents' migration to Taiwan as he curates and proposes his father's photographs to tell a personal, familial, and national story. Some of the military villages remain homes, while others have been transformed into memorials or weekend bazaar venues for others to be exposed to this period of history and culture. For example, the General Village (將軍村) in Hsinchu invites people to traverse the renovated village space through cafes, restaurants, and basketball courts. The village continues to create a sense of community in a modern setting.

Today, high-rise apartment complexes stand in place of the one-story houses. They are the result of government-reconstructed military villages. The apartments are redistributed based on a lottery system to former military village inhabitants. Mr. Wu laments that his previous childhood neighbors have mostly either moved away or been distributed to apartments farther away. The *ren qing wei*, a sense of human closeness from a tight-knit community, is lost in the renovation and revisiting of Taiwanese military villages.

How to Remember the Past

To avoid losing the history and cultural community of military villages through their reconstruction, the government should consider initiatives to preserve their memory. Rather than being torn down and transformed into generic high-rises, military villages could be designated as cultural heritage sites or adaptive reuse models (such as transforming the villages into farmer's markets). The adaptive reuse models may follow the renovation of Songshan Cultural and Creative Park (松山文創園區) in Taipei, a former tobacco factory in the Japanese colonial period. The park celebrates the spirit of its previous factory employees while inviting people to engage in art exhibitions, performances, and markets.

Additionally, the government could transcribe the stories of the military village residents through digital archiving and oral history recordings. For example, the Hsinchu City Military Dependents' Villages Museum (新竹市眷村博物館) displays the formation, living environment, and the atmosphere of military villages. Mr. Wu volunteers there to this day, pointing to photos he contributed to in the museum as he tells his childhood stories. Another example is the Beitou Heart Village (中心新村) in Taipei, a "museum without walls" that allows visitors to step into the preserved military village with a lived-in atmosphere. With each revisiting of military villages either through memory or in person, Taiwan's history and identity is further explored through understanding.

The main point: Following the reconstruction of Taiwanese military villages, former village inhabitants lament a lost sense of community and cultural identity in their new apartments. As Taiwan reflects on its past as a nation and works to create an inclusive Taiwanese identity, the government should ensure that the individual stories of military village residents are not lost to time, and that they are included in

Taiwan's cultural memory—along with the experiences of other Taiwanese people and groups.

[1] Dominic Meng-Hsuan. Yang, *The Great Exodus from China: Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Modern Taiwan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Max Ko-wu Huang, "The Dilemmas of Becoming Chinese in Taiwan," *China Review* 23, no. 2 (2023): 149–64, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48726995.

[5] Yang, *The Great Exodus from China.*

[6] Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, Harvard University Press, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjk2xtq.

[7] Yang, *The Great Exodus from China.*

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