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Truths, Lies, and Prospects for the New Cross-Strait Security Complex in the Taiwan and Luzon Straits

By: Joshua Bernard B. Espeña

Joshua Bernard B. Espeña, MIS is a lecturer at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, a Ph.D. student in Political Science at the University of the Philippines, Vice President of the International Development and Security Cooperation (IDSC), and a Young Leader at the Pacific Forum.

Introduction

The current crisis in the Strait of Hormuz demonstrates how strategic geopolitical chokepoints can affect the global supply chain. The Luzon and Taiwan Straits are no different. Once imagined by academics and politicians to be isolated and separated, these Western Pacific chokepoints have the potential to harm the world's economic arteries should a major conflict erupt in the Pacific Region.

In a separate *Global Taiwan Brief* article from last year, this author coined the term, "New Cross-Strait Security Complex" (NCSSC) to denote the Philippines' consolidation of its archipelagic and maritime defense: interlocking the West Philippine Sea (WPS) and Luzon Strait as a common concern, and linking the Luzon Strait's future security with that of the Taiwan Strait. Put simply, NCSSC refers to the material, institutional, and cognitive patterns occurring and intersecting between the polities of the two straits.

This author argues that the NCSSC is not an empty term. It represents an organic framework of action observed by multiple actors: including the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, the Philippines, the United States, and Japan. One notable dimension of this framework comes with how the cognitive aspect affects the material and institutional patterns of interactions. Simply put, while some actors are recently recovering truths of the past—namely, the past connection between the Philippines' Ivatan people, and Taiwan's Tao people—to shape the future relations, still others are also using the past to spread lies. This includes the PRC's downplay of that connection, and claims over the Batanes Islands. Ultimately, the NCSSC impels states and other actors to produce clearer policies with flexible mechanisms for the future secu-

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Editor-in-Chief
John Dotson

Editor's Note: With this November 2026 issue of the Global Taiwan Brief, we are shifting to a new monthly publication format. Each monthly issue will contain 6-7 short articles about Taiwan-related security, trade, diplomatic, political, and social issues. Between issues, we will also be releasing more articles independently in our "GTI Dispatch" format, providing coverage and commentary on significant current news stories. Keep on the look-out! — John D. Dotson, editor-in-chief

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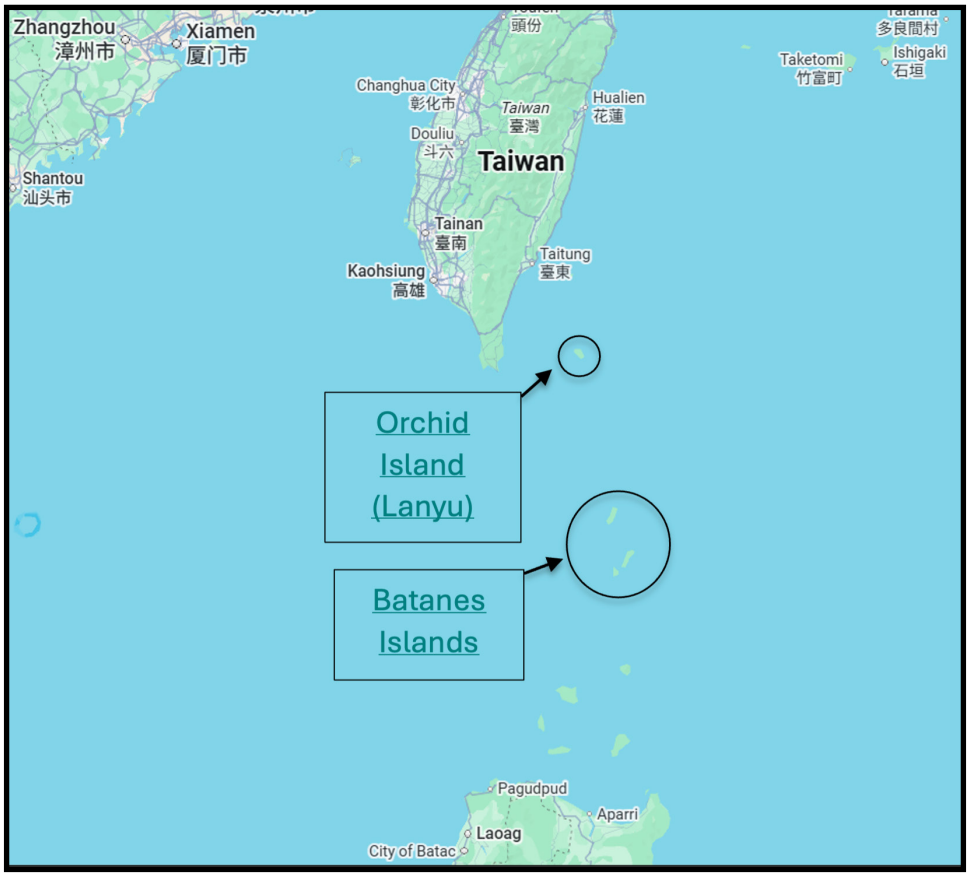


Image: The Batanes Strait, between Taiwan and the northern Philippines. In 2026, PRC government institutions began to advance the claim that the Batanes Islands (part of the Philippines) were Chinese territory, based on the extension of the continental shelf from Taiwan. (Image source: Google Maps)

rity agenda in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

A Framework of Interaction?

The Philippines is known to muddle through in pursuing its foreign and security policies. The literature debates whether or not it has a deliberate grand strategy, yet one thing is certain: the future of Taiwan is now in Manila's sights as it sees the PRC's regional ambitions unrestrained. "To be dragged into a potential conflict"—as noted by Philippine leaders' rhetoric and official documents—is one thing. However, to appreciate its geopolitical importance in the broader Indo-Pacific is another. The NCSSC serves as a sensible framework to see how regional actors might interact in the immediate and distant future.

Recent events show the regularity of such interaction. On a positive note, we can see how Taiwanese and Filipinos are historically and culturally linked by the seas. In June 2026, 20 Tao people from Orchid Island (Lanyu, 蘭嶼), Taiwan's southernmost island, sailed into a port in Mahatao, Batanes, the Philippines' northernmost island. This was a journey of about 111 miles using a traditional wooden boat known as Tatala (as known by the Tao people) or Tataya (as known by the Ivatans of Batanes). Such deep connections between the Taos and Ivatans—although dormant for 300 years due to colonialism—demonstrates how contemporary peoples of this region are making these unheard stories heard by replicating this 4000-year practice of migration and seafaring. Indeed, such rekindling serves as a reminder of their Austronesian linkage. Though lacking an explicit supportive statement of the Tao-Ivatan exchange by higher government officials, the Philippines' Office for Transportation Security strategically framed its press release about Manila's resolve to "ensure that the country's northern maritime gateways remain protected and efficient" in the case of "welcoming communities."

Interestingly, two Chinese officials—Ambassador to the

Philippines Jing Quan, and Consul and Head of Post Li Xiaoyan of the Chinese Consulate in Laoag, Ilocos Norte—arrived in Batanes on the same day as the Tao people's arrival for an "official visit" to the province's officials. On the one hand, this visit serves to remind Philippine officials of Manila's "One-China Policy." On the other hand, it also means that Beijing is now playing into the logic of the NCSSC, which serves as a prognosis for broader regional tensions.

Some academics from the PRC contest the "Out of Taiwan" theory of Austronesian linkage between the Tao and Ivatan peoples. Rather, they prefer to propagate Beijing's narrative of historic rights over Taiwan, contending that these indigenous peoples came instead from mainland southern China. In July 2026, a *Global Times* article reported that several PRC-based academics at an academic symposium in Jinan University (暨南大學) asserted that the Batanes Islands "are legally China's sovereign territory and form a natural geographic extension of China's Taiwan island," on the basis of the 1898 Treaty of Paris and the so-called "Japan-Philippines maritime delimitation talks." In other words, by virtue of PRC's historic claims on Taiwan and the Tao's linkage to the Ivatans, Batanes is allegedly an integral part of the PRC.

Philippine government officials have rebuked such PRC academic's claims on Batanes. For instance, Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. noted at the sidelines of the West Philippine Sea summit that such talking points by PRC academics validated his agency's assessment that Beijing wants to control the Western Pacific. Moreover, given that there is no serious legal basis for such claims, Teodoro noted that "it's a joke." Separately, Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro noted that the government would not listen to unofficial channels, while her agency's spokesperson Analyn Ratonel said that "flights of fancy should not be dignified with a response" since "the Philippines' sovereignty over Batanes is settled and not up for debate." Batanes' lone District House Representative, Ciriaco Gato Jr., similarly rebuked such claims, noting that "any challenge to our status is not merely a geopolitical provocation; it is an affront to our identity that we will not tolerate." The Philippine's National Historical Commission (NHC) debunked the Chinese scholarly claims, noting that there is a continuous shelf extending from Northern Luzon through the Babuyan and Batanes Islands and into parts of the Taiwan archipelago based on "current satellite and oceanographic data."

There were also reported circulations among Chinese social media apps last year suggesting that the Philippine province of Palawan—which puts the Municipality of Kalayaan in the WPS under its jurisdiction—is allegedly part of China, by virtue of Ming-era Admiral Zheng He's explorations. At the macro-level, the Philippine government recognizes that such Chinese talking points are reinforced by foreign influence and malign interference (FIMI) operations—various kinetic activities that aim to alter Filipino solidarity in favor of PRC's narratives.

All Set for the Future?

These latest events demonstrate that the framework of interaction demonstrated by the NCSSC does not only involve material and institutional aspects, but also the most basic of human cognitive elements—identity, historical memory, and people-to-people linkage—which are all essential to make the case for brokering the regional commons. They also point to a common denominator: the PRC's irredentist and unrestrained expansion. However, the NCSSC also opens novel methods for various stakeholders to explore opportunities to assert their agency.

The first opportunity refers to cognitive patterns. Whether by constraints or deliberate choice, the Taiwanese government has yet to make any comments on the claim by PRC-based academics regarding Batanes. While ignoring Chinese talking points against the Philippines may sound risk-averse, there is an equal harm inherent in isolating these comments outside the PRC's broader FIMI operations. Taiwan's political and security apparatuses would be well advised to invest their attention in curating counter-responses. Moreover, both Manila and Taipei must also leverage linkages between Filipino and Taiwanese cultural communities, academics, think tanks, and civil society organizations, to counter the PRC's FIMI operational logic.

The second opportunity refers to institutional patterns. Since Taiwan is de facto limited in its diplomatic options, the Philippines—with its rapidly expanding strategic partnerships—could serve as a node of a broader security network by framing the Luzon and Taiwan Straits as strategic nerves that cannot be unilaterally occupied by one regional hegemon. Rather, the Straits represent a politically plural area in which to enforce a rules-based international order. This would mean enhancing logistical points of entry and exchange through increased port security, diversifying areas of cooperation between their respective coast guards, fisheries agreements, and anti-piracy and anti-smuggling

frameworks, among others. Moreover, while Filipino and American officials argue that Balikatan exercises are solely for Philippine defense, and not intended as a stage for a Taiwan contingency, Filipino and other regional scholars and analysts otherwise note that they are not mutually exclusive. Here, wargaming centers by academics and think tanks can intensify stress-testing assumptions into wider grand strategic considerations, which ripple into Track 1.5/2 dialogues and influence public opinion.

The third opportunity refers to material patterns. So far, it is microchip discourse which catches the main attention of the PRC, the US, and other global players on this NCSSC. Minilateral forums serve as cost-efficient avenues in addressing shortcomings of multilateral forums that have been hijacked by PRC's "Global South Champion" narrative. Moreover, informal talks—like the "Smart Harbor" forum in December 2025 between Taipei and Philippine officials—demonstrate the balance between strategic autonomy and risk-aversion. The Luzon Economic Corridor, which feeds into the US's Pax Silica initiative to counter the PRC's World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO), are both welcome developments. Taiwan has stated on separate occasions that it is willing to expand economic corridors with the Philippines, either through its proposed "Silicon Prosperity Initiative" or as an external node with Pax Silica.

So far, Pax Silica has not been well received by most Filipinos, largely due to the lack of an accurate and transparent blueprint, which in turn caused fear among local communities. So far, the Philippines rejection of a diplomatic immunity bargain by the United States in the proposed Pax Silica compound in North Luzon are very well noted points to rebuke PRC narratives of the Philippines "as an American Puppet." However, the broader goal must be the ability of the Philippines to become a formidable node of the global supply chain through state-led development—not "independent" for its own sake—while addressing local woes. In sum, there is a need for more assertive Philippine counterproposals to serve the country's industrial interests if it is to become Taiwan's capable partner.

Strategic uncertainty will continue to pervade the 21st century, and the new geopolitical reality of the NCSSC has now emerged around which all stakeholders must carefully design their approach. They must set clear policy interests while maintaining flexible mechanisms. As for the Philippines and Taiwan, they have an opportunity to set their shared path by modeling such interactions.

The main point: The Philippines is becoming more relevant to the future of Taiwan's security, as the two island states find their security concerns ever-more connected. It is time for all stakeholders to integrate the New Cross-Strait Security Complex as part of the broader regional security architecture. They should and can achieve this through clearer policies, with flexible and responsive mechanisms for future interaction.

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Double Dragon: How Taiwan and South Korea Can Collaborate through Chips

By: Alan Jeong and Seamus O'Neill

Alan Jeong is a South Korean writer specializing in East Asian affairs.

Seamus O'Neill is a graduate student at Johns Hopkins SAIS and a policy analyst with the Centre for International Security and Economic Strategy (CISES) focusing on US-China economic relations and tech competition.

Taiwan and South Korea, the two largest of the Four Asian Dragons by population and economic output, are fierce rivals, especially in the semiconductor manufacturing industry. But their common reliance on China's market has become a vulnerability that neither can address alone. Each controls crucial nodes of global semiconductor manufacturing, and together they could constitute a chokepoint in the global hardware ecosystem.

Taipei and Seoul should collaborate to open new markets and negotiate with major powers. Together, they have leverage that neither one can wield so effectively alone.

Rivals, but Also Partners

Taiwan and South Korea have long been bitter rivals. The relatively recent memory of Seoul switching recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1992 has left a lingering sense of betrayal among many Taiwanese, as South Korea was the last country in Asia to end diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

In the 2000s and 2010s, South Korea's Samsung Electronics allegedly pursued a "kill Taiwan" plan aimed at undermining Taiwan's chipmaking capabilities.

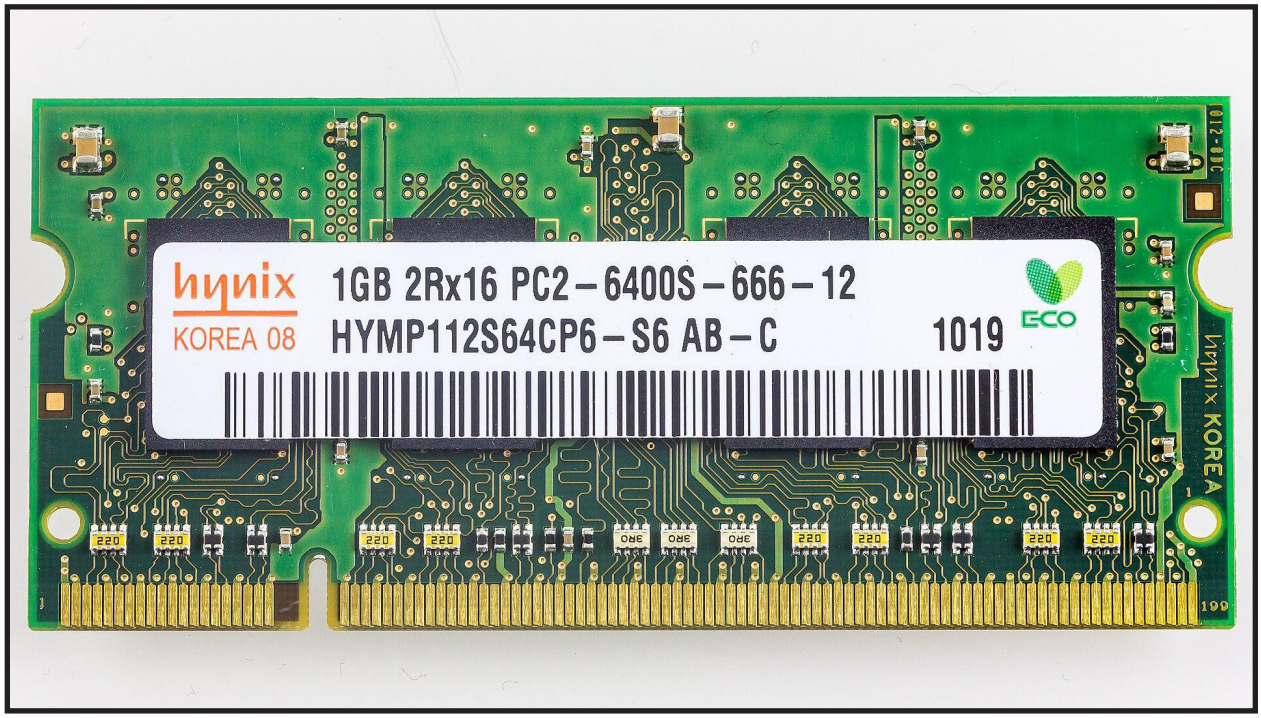


Image: A semiconductor chip manufactured by SK Hynix, one of South Korea's major chip manufacturers. Taiwan and South Korea manufacturers have faced intense competition qin the market for advanced chips. (Image source: Wikimedia Commons)

Furthermore, the contested judgment in the taekwondo competition at the 2010 Asian Games, also called "Sockgate," sharply eroded bilateral public goodwill.

In 2012, Foxconn founder Terry Gou (郭台銘), while discussing competition with Samsung, used the derogatory racist slur, *gaoli bangzi* (高麗棒子), to refer to Koreans, prompting strong criticism and further fueling anti-Taiwanese sentiment in South Korea. Given this bitter history and the very real financial stakes involved, the South Korean and Taiwanese chip firm rivalry is often shaded by feelings of mutual antagonism.

In the past, outside attempts to align Taipei and Seoul's chip policies—such as President Joe Biden's "Chip 4 Alliance" concept—fell short because they did not adequately reckon with the logic of heated competition between leading Taiwanese and South Korean chipmakers.

However, unhealthy rivalry and nationalism should not blind either side. The two neighboring East Asian democracies, together with their manufacturing champions, have a far more synergistic relationship today than many assume.

Taiwanese American Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang's (黃仁勳) recent consecutive visits to Taiwan and South Korea in late May and early June, respectively, garnered warm welcomes in both places. Such a reaction speaks to how deeply interconnected and complementary the two economies have become in today's semiconductor industry. Huang was also awarded this year's James A. Van Fleet Award for his contributions to the promotion of US-South Korea relations.

Economically, the Asian neighbors have built enduring ties. In 2025, South Korea was Taiwan's third-largest trading partner, while Taiwan was South Korea's fourth-largest. Furthermore, a partial division of labor already exists between the two economies. Taiwanese firms, notably Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造股份有限公司), manufacture advanced logic chips, while South Korea's Samsung and SK Hynix dominate memory. These companies (and both countries) are integral to today's AI revolution, both for training AI models and supplying data centers.

The two economies conducted over USD 60 billion in bilateral chip trade in 2025, with Taiwan's advanced logic chips supporting rapid AI compute infrastructure development in South Korea, while Taiwan packages many South Korean-made high bandwidth memory (HBM) chips. In 2025, Taiwan imported around USD 49.3 billion worth of integrated circuits from South Ko-

rea, representing 37.7 percent of Taiwan's chip imports, far more than from any other country. South Korea accounted for a smaller but still significant share of Taiwan's integrated circuit exports, around USD 18.4 billion, or 8.8 percent.

Shared Challenges

Yet despite this growing industrial interdependence, Taiwan and South Korea remain exposed to the same strategic vulnerability: both of them depend heavily on China as a major downstream market for their chips.

China's booming electronics industry consumes vast quantities of semiconductor chips for everything from iPhones to appliances to AI data centers. In 2025, 51.2 percent of Taiwan's chip exports went to mainland China or Hong Kong, while 41.7 percent of South Korean chip exports headed to the PRC.

Such overwhelming reliance on one market—especially one that is actively subsidizing its own domestic chip manufacturers to gradually reduce foreign dependence—carries substantial economic security risk. SK Hynix, Samsung, and TSMC may eventually lose much of China's demand to state-backed Chinese firms. Moreover, Beijing's increasingly aggressive security posture and willingness to coerce smaller economies make China a fundamentally unreliable customer.

Taiwan and South Korea have long recognized this problem, and each has pursued its own trade reorientation over the past decade. Taipei launched the "New Southbound Policy" under former president Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) in 2016. Seoul followed in 2017 by initiating its "New Southern Policy" under then-president Moon Jae-in. These policies succeeded in deepening economic relations with other markets—especially those in Southeast Asia—but have failed to fundamentally reorient chip exports away from China. At the time, the political impetus and market opportunities were simply insufficient.

How to Team Up Through Chips

Today, Seoul and Taipei cannot afford to go it alone. Reducing the relative weight of the Chinese market for their chip exports is not only a security imperative; it is an economic necessity as China's indigenous chip ecosystem gains ground.

Building on the complementary strengths of their semiconductor industries, South Korea and Taiwan could establish an industry-led bilateral working group led by their chip giants—TSMC, Samsung, and SK Hynix—to coordinate semiconductor trade and investment policy.

Given the absence of formal diplomatic relations, a direct government-to-government framework with ministerial leadership would not be realistic. However, the sheer economic and monetary weight of these private firms and their close ties to their respective governments would give a cooperative framework substantial influence and credibility. For instance, Taiwan's National Development Fund is a major shareholder in TSMC, while TSMC founder and former CEO Morris Chang led Taiwan's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) delegation seven times between 2006 and 2023.

Similarly, given its strong relationships with Korean chip firms, the Lee Jae Myung administration has a record of leveraging its commercial involvement to pursue decisive political objectives. For instance, ahead of the August 2026 election in South Korea for Democratic Party leadership, Lee promoted a major semiconductor cluster in Jeolla Province backed by planned investment from Samsung and SK Hynix. The initiative benefited one of Lee's cabinet officials, Kim Min-seok, helping him win the election for party leader to replace Lee's prominent rival within the party, Jung Chung-rae. Critics accused the administration of using corporate investment to tilt politics in Lee's favor. Yet, this example demonstrates that Seoul maintains substantial influence over its domestic semiconductor industry—and could work effectively with those firms to facilitate de facto economic collaboration with their Taiwanese counterparts that prioritizes national rather than private interests.

Similarly, TSMC—which was established with Taipei's financial and political backing in 1987—retains close ties to Taiwan's political leadership. Taiwanese and South Korean industry associations and companies would provide the institutional backbone of the working group and serve as the primary channel for bilateral engagement, with which the governments could easily and regularly engage. Trade and economic government officials could participate discreetly at the working level or through the two sides' representative offices. More senior officials would have the opportunity to speak directly in private meetings alongside multilateral institutions in which both are represented, such as the APEC, to coordinate the working group. Some level of unofficial government contact is prudent to ensure that the nominally private sector working group advances the interests of South Korea and Taiwan as a whole, as well as those of their chip firms.

This working group would have two primary aims: (1)



Image: Then-President Joseph Biden and then-President Yoon Suk-yeol visiting a Samsung semiconductor plant in South Korea (May 2022), (Image source: Wikimedia Commons)

to develop a common strategy to cultivate new markets; and (2) to coordinate negotiations on new trade and investment agreements with major economies from a position of greater strength.

One Strategy, One Face

Taiwanese and South Korean chips flow primarily to three sectors: cloud computing infrastructure; consumer goods such as electronics, appliances and automobiles; and telecommunications equipment. Yet China's massive output in all three categories has created a gravitational pull that has been hard for Taiwanese and Korean chip firms to escape. As a result, any joint Taiwan-South Korea strategy for cultivating overseas markets and negotiating trade agreements must go beyond setting up chip packaging facilities or even fabs. They must push for a broader set of economic reforms in those markets that will facilitate the rapid development of consumer electronics manufacturing and cloud computing infrastructure.

India holds the most potential. Unlike in Southeast Asia, Chinese investment and 5G telecommunications penetration are fairly low, and the country has massive room for growth. Individual Taiwanese and South Korean firms such as Foxconn, Samsung, and Hyundai have had success with particular projects that received special Indian government attention and support. Indeed, the Indian government has repeatedly identified electronics, automobiles, and semiconductors as key sectors to bolster India's manufacturing output. But India's complex regulatory environment, bureaucratic proceduralism, infrastructure development bottlenecks, and sometimes counterproductive labor laws mean that India's operating environment remains very difficult for foreign investors. [1] As a result, India has failed to generate an electronics manufacturing ecosystem—and chip demand—that can rival China's.

By speaking with one voice to New Delhi as the only two economies capable of helping fulfill India's ambitions in electronics and semiconductor manufacturing, Seoul and Taipei might make greater progress in pressing for reforms in India than either could alone. They might also open greater access for Taiwanese and South Korean firms to a more populated market than China—one which has yet to expend its demographic dividend.

The same logic applies to Taiwan's and South Korea's policies *vis-à-vis* the United States. In recent years, successive US administrations have pressed Taiwanese and South Korean chipmakers to expand manufacturing on American soil, from the Biden Administration's *CHIPS and Science Act* to the Trump Administration's greater

demands for investments in the United States. Washington's desire to reshore enough chip production to sustain its defense capabilities and economic system in a supply shock is a rational pursuit. However, as long as key inputs, downstream packaging, and testing still occur outside of the United States, domestic chip fabrication alone is inadequate to ensure US economic resilience. Moreover, a substantial share of the world's chips still end up in electronics made in Asia. Even if the United States can ensure a bare minimum supply at home for military use and cloud services providers, it will have to look beyond its borders for sufficient demand to make US chip production economical in the long run.

More recent US administrations have focused on boosting foreign investment in the United States. A Washington willing to subordinate political and geostrategic partnerships in favor of a maximum reshoring effort might seek to play Taipei and Seoul against each other by inducing them to pledge ever greater semiconductor investments. This tactic could gradually hollow out the manufacturing capacity underpinning their respective "silicon shields," leaving both more vulnerable to security threats from China in the long run—even if the most advanced logic chips are still produced in Taiwan.

Instead of competing to offer ever-larger investments and concessions, Taipei and Seoul should coordinate the scale, terms, and technological scope of their US investments. Rather than sending an ultimatum to Washington, Taipei and Seoul could provide a roadmap for a sustained Taiwan-South Korea-US trilateral partnership on semiconductor innovation and fabrication to support US-led AI stack dominance (which covers the whole production chain from critical minerals and energy to semiconductors and telecommunications equipment, upon which the development and rollout of AI software relies). This triangle would be based on mutual trust and common economic and security interests. This would be far more beneficial to all involved—including the United States—than haphazard investment pledges.

Targeted investments would complement ongoing economic security projects (such as the Hanwha Philly Shipyard in Philadelphia) and help anchor chip fab suppliers in the United States. They would also allow Taiwanese and South Korean chip firms to better serve their US customers; indeed, this was part of the rationale that made the initial TSMC plant in Arizona feasible. More direct cooperation between Taipei, Seoul, and Washington may also allow all three parties to identify and capitalize on new production synergies of which US policymakers may not be aware.

The main point: Ongoing commercial rivalry and nationalist sentiments show that the Taiwan-South Korea partnership will not be easy. But in continuing to work alone—and sometimes at odds—Taipei and Seoul are leaving leverage on the table that could secure their symbiotic prosperity for years to come.

[1] Devesh Kapur and Arvind Subramanian, *A Sixth of Humanity: Independent India's Development Odyssey* (Gurugram: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2025).

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Battle for the Capital: Inside the 2026 Taipei Mayoral Race, Part 1

By: Abby Fu and Karyn Kao

Abby Fu is a Senior Programs Manager at Global Taiwan Institute. Before joining, GTI, she has previous experience as a Research Fellow at Hudson Institute, as a consultant and senior economic data analyst at Econ One Research, and as a Senior Analyst at DAI's US Government market intelligence team. Her research areas include international economics and trade, democratic governance, and Taiwanese diaspora and society.

Karyn Kao is a Research Assistant at the Global Taiwan Institute. Her research interests include China's short-of-war strategies against Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific region, intersection of Taiwan's domestic politics and great power competition, and democratic governance.

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Taiwan is fast approaching its "Nine-in-One" local elections, which will be held on Saturday, November 28, 2026. While President Lai Ching-te (賴清德) is not on the ballot, the election will serve as the first significant electoral test of Taiwanese voters' assessments of the Kuomintang Party (KMT, 中國國民黨) and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) since the "Great Recall Movement" (大罷免) in 2025. With elections taking place across different municipalities, the race for the Taipei mayor's office is arguably the most prominent and critical battleground between the two major political parties. This analysis aims to provide background context regarding the two major campaigns competing in the 2026 Taipei mayoral race, prior to the official policy debate between the two candidates on October 31.

Table: Selected Taipei Mayoral Candidates and Subsequent Political Roles.

Politician	Party	Year of Running for Taipei Mayor	Year of Running for President	Other Notible Positions
Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁)	DPP	1994 (Elected) 1998 (Lost)	2000 (Elected) 2004 (Elected)	DPP Chairperson (2002-2004; 2007-2008)
Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九)	KMT	1998 (Elected) 2002 (Elected)	2008 (Elected) 2012 (Elected)	KMT Chairperson (2005-2007; 2009-2014)
Hau Lung-pin (郝龍斌)	KMT	2006 (Elected) 2010 (Elected)	N/A	KMT Deputy Chairperson (2014-2020)
Hsieh Chang-ting (謝長廷)	DPP	2006 (Lost)	2008 (Lost)	DPP Chairperson (2000-2002) Ambassador to Japan (2016-2024)
Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌)	DPP	2010 (Lost)	2008 (Lost)	DPP Chairperson (2005-2008; 2012-2014) Premier of Executive Yuan (2006-2007; 2019-2023)
Ko Wen-je (柯文哲)	Taiwan People's Party (TPP, 台灣民眾黨)	2014 (Elected) 2018 (Elected)	2024 (Lost)	TPP Chairperson (2019-2025)
Sean Lien (連勝文)	KMT	2014 (Lost)	N/A	KMT Deputy Chairperson (2021-2025)

(Source: Compiled by authors.)



Image left: Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) of the DPP campaigning for Taipei mayor in 1994 (Source: BBC Zhongwen). / Image right: Then-Taipei mayor Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) of the KMT speaking at the Taipei Marathon in 2006 (Source: Wikimedia Commons). Both men were subsequently able to leverage their tenure as Taipei mayors in successful bids for the presidency.

Historical Significance of the Taipei Mayoral Election

The Taipei mayoral election has always drawn a great amount of attention—not only by virtue of Taipei's status as the capital city of Taiwan, but also because of the political implications of the race at the national level.

Historically, candidates from Taipei mayoral races have often proceeded to become candidates in Taiwan's presidential elections. Therefore, the race for Taipei mayor this year has been expected to be the "opening skirmish of the 2028 presidential election" (2028總統大選的前哨戰).

"Blue North and Green South"

Taipei has been widely considered a KMT stronghold for many decades, with few exceptions. Since Taiwan's first direct local election took place in 1994, Taipei has only elected two non-KMT mayors: Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) of the DPP in 1994; and then-independent Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) in 2014 and 2018. In Chen's case, the momentum of pro-democracy movements likely contributed to his victory. (The other two candidates in the 1994 race also split the Pan-Blue vote.) Yet, despite a 70 percent satisfaction rate for Chen's mayorship, he lost to Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) in his 1998 bid for re-election.

This demonstrates that the KMT still enjoys a solid support base in Taipei—due in part to the legacy of KMT military veterans and supporters settling in the capital city after the KMT retreat from mainland China in 1949. Entering the 2000s, both economic developments and turbulent cross-Strait relations led to the phenomenon of the "blue north and green south" (藍北綠南) in Taiwan politics. The KMT, because of its endorsement of closer cross-Strait ties, received greater support from the northern part of Taiwan, where technological and export-oriented industry thrived. The DPP, on the other hand, attracted a larger share of voters from southern Taiwan, partially as a result of its policies of benefiting farmers and closing up developmental gaps.

In the past 10 years, Taiwan's local elections have been significantly shaped by a range of factors, to include party influence, the charisma of individual candidates, and the prevailing political landscape. In addition, Taipei has witnessed a surge in independent voters who are indifferent to either major party. Ko successfully appealed to these independent voters, and won the Taipei mayoral elections twice as a political outsider in the 2010s. Undoubtedly, independent voters will still continue to play a critical role in deciding whether or not Taipei will elect another non-KMT mayor.

The KMT and DPP Candidates in the 2026 Taipei Mayoral Election

Five candidates are currently in the running in the Taipei mayoral race this year, with Chiang Wan-an (蔣萬安) of the KMT and Puma Shen (沈伯洋) of the DPP at the center of the spotlight. The parallels and contrasts between the two candidates have dominated most elec-



Images: Chiang Wan-an (蔣萬安) of the KMT (left) and Puma Shen (沈伯洋) of the DPP (right). (Source: CNA)

tion-related headlines and social media discussions. Both Chiang and Shen grew up in Taipei and went on to pursue higher education in the United States. (Chiang received his JD from the University of Pennsylvania in 2006; Shen earned his PhD in criminology and sociology from the University of California, Irvine in 2017.) They also share similar public images of being both family men and rising stars within their respective parties' younger generation.

Still, differences between Chiang and Shen are salient. Chiang enjoys the advantages of being the incumbent seeking re-election, as well as the "Chiang-family" prestige from being a rumored descendant of Chiang Kai-shek (although this claim has its own set of controversies). Shen, with his professional experience primarily focused on national defense and information warfare in academia, is often criticized for lacking formal political experience and lineage. While he joined the DPP only three years ago, he has gained significant status and visibility within the party during that time. Regardless of the election outcome, Shen's status could further rise due to his willingness to take on a risk that no one else in the DPP was willing to bear: potentially losing another election in the capital city to the opposing party.

Where the Candidates Stand in Current Polls

When Shen made the decision to run as the DPP candidate for Taipei mayor in May, the public widely viewed it as a "battle without any chance of winning." In an opinion poll conducted by TVBS Poll Center in May 2026, 58 percent of respondents supported Chiang for re-election, while only 30 percent of respondents preferred Shen to be their mayor. However, five months of campaigning have significantly altered the popularity of the two candidates. The newest poll in October 2026 also carried out by TVBS shows that the support rate for Chiang has dropped to 49 percent, as that of Shen has risen to 41 percent. An opinion poll by another survey center has demonstrated a more dramatic shift: 50 percent of respondents believed that Shen is more suitable for the mayorship, leaving only 33 percent supporting Chiang.

Nevertheless, whether or not opinion polls accurately reflect public opinion is still up for debate. Considering the unexpected failure of the Great Recall Movement, DPP supporters remain cautiously optimistic about



Image: Famous television host Kevin Tsai (蔡康永) was seen participating in Shen's campaigning event on October 4. (Source: CNA)

Shen's chance of victory. During the recall movement, the narrative of "countering China to protect Taiwan" (抗中保台) promoted by pro-DPP voters failed to attract independent voters, who were more concerned about economic and social issues. The results of the Great Recall Movement severely damaged morale within the DPP, and subsequently boosted the KMT's status. Despite a promising support rate in recent polls, it still remains a challenge for the DPP to "break" the "spiral of silence" effect (沉默螺旋) among Taipei constituents – which in this context means the assumption that most KMT voters restrain from expressing their support for the KMT publicly due to fear of judgement from peers or society, although they would still ultimately cast ballots in favor of the KMT. It is also worth observing whether or not Taipei voters will approve of the DPP's attempts to strike a balance between its core values of national security, and local issues that may appear less abstract to independent voters.

National Security Concerns and Foreign Interference in Local Elections

Taiwan's presidential elections have been targeted by foreign influence campaigns, and this fact has been widely discussed. However, local elections in recent years have also been subject to foreign interference, and China has explicitly attempted to interfere in the 2026 Taipei mayoral race. The *Global Times* (环球时报), a Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-affiliated media outlet, published an article on October 27 criticizing the DPP for allegedly "shaping the election with underground gambling." Furthermore, Taiwan's National Security Bureau (NSB, 國家安全局) recently revealed that the Government Service Network (GSN, 政府網路服務網)—which is a dedicated and secure high-speed backbone network for Taiwanese government agencies to use for internet usage and cybersecurity defense – had been attacked on average 2.58 million times per day, and that the number of attacks have risen as this year's election approaches. The NSB statedthat the increase of interference could reflect preparation for intelligence collection and influence campaigns directed against the upcoming local elections.

Social media has become a double-edged sword in Taiwan's elections, and the upcoming Taipei mayoral election is not an exception. Both candidates and their supporters have been actively engaging with each other on social media outlets such as Threads and Facebook. The interactive nature of social media has increased the public discussion on policy and politics. However, it has also been exploited to advance foreign influence campaigns against Taiwan's elections, including races for local mayors and legislators. Around the 2022 local elections, Taiwan's Doublethink Lab observed a surge of

suspicious posts with misinformation and extreme narratives attacking DPP-affiliated politicians.

With the growing popularity of Threads among the Taiwanese audience, especially among the younger generation, inauthentic social media posts have only become more rampant this year. For example, a series of opinion polls on the special municipalities conducted by the "Chiaohu Island Poll" (巧虎島民調) have circulated on Facebook and Threads; however, it appears that no such company actually exists, as there is no entity by that name registered with the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA, 經濟部). The "Chiaohu Island" graphics also show no information on the methodology of how these "polls" were conducted (such as the sampling size, actual questionnaires used, etc.). In addition, a series of posts have circulated on the internet attacking Shen for allegedly making up false stories of his grandfather and other issues. These posts have aimed to frame Shen as dishonest, thereby impacting voters' opinions to be unfavorable towards Shen. As Shen has been listed as a "die-hard Taiwan independent separatist" (台獨頑固分子) by China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO, 國務院台灣事務辦公室), it may be expected that foreign interference will only further intensify as the elections approach.

The "Kevin Tsai Incident" and Financial Coercion

A recent case of foreign coercion targeting Taiwan's local elections that has recently emerged in news headlines is China's reaction to Kevin Tsai (　　)'s participation in Shen's campaign. Tsai, the popular and well-known host of the popular Taiwanese variety show *Kangsi Coming* (康熙來了), was photographed in October while attending a Shen campaign event. Unsurprisingly, Tsai's presence stirred up considerable negative reactions from China. Tsai's social media accounts were flooded with raging Chinese netizens. Companies that previously cooperated with Tsai, such as Leapmotor and Harper's Bazaar China, announced that they would take down any related advertisement contents. Moreover, Chinese officials and CCP-affiliated organizations have also weighed in on the incident. The TAO criticized Tsai of being a "two-faced" person who "earns Chinese money while entangling with Taiwan independence forces." A social media account affiliated with the PLA News Media Center threatened that public figures will pay the price for siding with pro-"Taiwan independence" figures.

The immense pressure from China forced Tsai to put out a formal statement that he does not support independence. The TAO then responded to Tsai's social media post by calling on Taiwanese celebrities to nurture Chinese "compatriotship" and promote friendly cross-Strait interactions. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Office (大陸委員會) warned that this has become a strategy of the CCP: coercing public figures to take a stand, then demanding pledges that they behave in accordance with CCP positions. This type of behavior reminded many voters of a similar incident involving the K-pop star, Chou Tzu-Yu (周子瑜), close to the 2016 presidential elections—an event that many believed shifted some voters' behaviors to vote for Tsai Ing-Wen. Whether the Kevin Tsai incident and similar actions from the CCP will convert Taiwanese peoples' actual voting behavior still remains to be seen, but it is clear from all the online discussions and media frenzy around such incidents that many people are watching this election closely.

The main point: Both the KMT and the DPP have a large stake in the upcoming Taipei mayoral election, as it could impact the future political trajectory for both parties on a national level. The KMT incumbent, Chiang Wan-an, was initially viewed as a strong favorite to win re-election; however, the DPP challenger, Puma Shen, has proven to be an effective campaigner and has outperformed initial expectations. Intensive campaigning from both sides may be expected in the lead-up to the election on November 28.

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Battle for the Capital: Inside the 2026 Taipei Mayoral Race, Part 2

By: Abby Fu and Karyn Kao

Editor's Note: This is the second article in a two-part series. The first article, "Battle for the Capital: Inside the 2026 Taipei Mayoral Race, Part 1," was published by GTI on October 30.

As the incumbent Taipei mayor, Chiang Wan-an (蔣萬安) of the Kuomintang (KMT, 中國國民黨) faces immense pressure to succeed in his re-election bid against Puma Shen (沈伯洋), the candidate nominated by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨). Despite the similarities in their backgrounds and public image, their political reputations, stances on policy issues, and campaign styles set them apart. As the election (part of Taiwan's larger "Nine-in-One" local elections) approaches on November 28, the whole island is watching whether the "Ocean Current," or "Yang Liu" (洋流) *(see further below)*, will lead to a different politi-



Image: Taipei mayoral candidates Chiang Wan-an of the KMT (left) and Puma Shen of the DPP (right) shake hands before their televised debate on October 31. (Image source: Central News Agency)

cal landscape over the next four years.

The Background of the Competing Candidates

As the two leading candidates in the Taipei mayoral race—a race now at the center of national and international attention—Chiang and Shen share a few striking similarities in terms of their experience and public image. Both Chiang and Shen have deep ties to Taipei, as they both grew up in the city and attended the famous Chien Kuo High School (建國中學) that is revered as the premier high school for boys in Taiwan. Their prominent higher educational backgrounds also reinforce their elite images: Chiang obtained a Master of Laws (LL.M.) degree and a Juris Doctor (J.D.) from the University of Pennsylvania, while Shen earned a LL.M. degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a Ph.D. degree in Criminology, Law, and Society from the University of California, Irvine.

In Taiwan politics, academic qualifications and educational credentials play a role of "outsized significance." It is often the case that Taiwanese campaign billboards, flyers, and other promotional materials focus on highlighting the candidates' educational credentials over other characteristics, since many Taiwanese voters view candidates' level of education and the prestige of their alma maters as an indicator of their ability to govern. The majority of well-known Taiwan politicians hold a master's degree at a minimum, and it is quite common to see those with doctorate degrees running for public office at the legislative or mayoral level. Therefore, it is no surprise that, out of the six candidates running for Taipei mayor in 2026, five of them hold either a Ph.D. degree or J.D. (the sixth candidate has a master's degree).

In addition, both Chiang and Shen represent the middle-age generation of their respective political parties, sharing similar ages and relatively new political resumes. The more prominent figures of both the KMT and DPP tend to be older, and it has been observed that the average age of local politicians is increasing. In contrast, the two Taipei mayoral candidates are considered the "new blood" of their respective parties. Chiang was elected as a legislator in 2015 and won the Taipei mayor election in 2020; Shen first entered the Legislative Yuan (LY) in 2023. Regardless of the 2026 election results, both of them are set to be rising stars within their respective political camps for the next decade.

In spite of the commonalities mentioned above, the two men have quite different political reputations and paths.

For example, Chiang's familial connection has been in the center of public debate for years before the current election cycle. His father, Chiang Hsiao-yen (蔣孝嚴)—who claimed to be the descendant of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣中正) and Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國)—was a former minister of foreign affairs and former KMT secretary general. On one hand, the Chiang family name makes the KMT candidate an insider in Taiwanese politics, and the prestige of being the fourth generation of the Chiang family has allowed Chiang Wan-an to enjoy a public reputation following his return from the United States to Taiwan. On the other hand, Chiang's bloodline credibility has been challenged, as some doubt Chiang's actual familial connection with Chiang Ching-kuo. Additionally, the incumbent has only apologized to victims of the White Terror (白色恐怖) in his role as Taipei mayor, while some have argued that he should bear the burden as a descendant of the former authoritarian president.

Compared to Chiang's insider status as part of a prominent political dynasty, Shen has been seen as more of a political outsider, with a previous academic career and extensive experience in the nonprofit sector. He is an associate professor in criminology at National Taipei University, with research interests in the field of white-collar crimes. In 2019, he foundedthe Doublethink Lab (台灣民主實驗室), an NGO analyzing informational and cognitive warfare; and Kuma Academy (黑熊學院) in 2023, a civic group advocating for civil defense. Some are concerned about Shen's late entry to Taiwan's politics and his relative lack of administrative experience. Others are worried that Shen's expertise in foreign interference and brash political style could make him overly provocative for local governance.

Salient Policy Discussions

Throughout the Taipei mayoral campaign, both sides have had heated debates on various policy issues, including drug treatment, school lunch quality, tree trimming, and traffic safety. In terms of the race between Chiang and Shen, the debates surrounding child welfare and the potential relocation of Songshan Airport (松山機場) have drawn the most public attention.

Songshan Airport Relocation

One of Chiang's main policy proposals is a plan to relocate Songshan Airport and replace it with a Taipei AI park. In the relocation plan, Chiang pledged to build an AI industry zone, public green space, and a sustainable community with residential areas, historical preservation sites, and transportation networks. Chiang envisioned that the new AI park would create a comprehensive industrial network by connecting with multiple neighboring technological parks: Beitou-Shilin Technology Park (北投士林科技園區), Neihu Technology Park (內湖科技園區), National Biotechnology Research Park (國家生技研究園區) and Nangang Software Park (南港軟體園區). The proposal estimates that, over time, the AI park would create an estimated 65 thousand job opportunities, and generate NTD 12 trillion in output value.

However, there is pushback against the plan from both the central government and local governments. The Ministry of Transportation and Communication (MOTC, 交通部) has expressed concern about the feasibility of the plan, as well as air transportation capacity. If the relocation project is carried out, Taoyuan International Airport will have to take on significant additional air traffic; yet, as its original design was intended for international rather than domestic flights, it will take around 10 years to increase Taoyuan Airport's capacity to a level necessary for the loss of Songshan. The Ministry of Interior (MOI, 內政部) has also pointed out that Songshan Airport is critical for search-and-rescue in northern Taiwan, since it also serves as the Songshan Base for the National Air Service Corps (空中勤務總隊). In addition, Penghu County and Taitung County have opposed the policy proposal, on grounds that Songshan Airport has played an important role in medical transportation for the outlying islands and eastern Taiwan. While Shen also agreed that the Songshan relocation plan is worth discussing, he emphasized the necessity to prioritize issues of national defense, medical transportation from rural areas, and disaster relief.

Child Welfare

Major child abuse cases during Chiang's current mayorship have sparked public attention on both candidates' child welfare policy. Since 2022, Taipei has seen eight serious child abuse cases and 115 minor victims. The severity of minor abuse incidents has put the Taipei City government under the spotlight. The Audit Office (審計部) of the Control Yuan (監察院) revealed that Taipei City has not incorporated the assessment system introduced by the central government into its own case screening mechanism, and up to 303 minor welfare reports have been delayed since last August. The Control Yuan has also censured the Taipei City government for negligence on many child abuse cases—including multiple sexual abuse cases at the Piramide pre-school (培諾米達幼兒園) first reported in 2022, the Kaikai Case (剴剴案) in 2023, and a sexual abuse case against a mi-



Image: A large flag reading "Ocean Current" (洋流, "Yang Liu") waves above supporters at the opening of Puma Shen's Taipei campaign headquarters. The term has been adopted as a slogan by Puma Shen supporters. (Image source: qhfan)

nor employee of McDonald's restaurant in 2024.

Shen has criticized the minor protection mechanisms of Chiang's government and pledged to make child welfare a policy priority. He and other DPP legislators held a press conference in July accusing the Taipei City government of failing to contact relevant agencies and carrying out procedures only out of formality, revealing the necessity for systemic adjustment. Along with other social welfare policies, Shen proposed to establish a Children and Teenager Safety Governing Center (兒少安全治理中心) under the Taipei Research Institute (台北研究院) to integrate data from multiple agencies in analyzing major incidents and reviewing policy responses. He has also stated that he will strive to improve the system and well-being of social workers.

In response to Shen and other critics, Chiang affirmed that the Taipei City government has strengthened cross-agency networks regarding childcare management. He also proposed a "7+1 Improvement Plan," which covers measures such as increasing visitation frequency, strengthening childcare professionals' training, and providing mental health services.

Shen's Surprising Performance and the "Ocean Current" ("Yang Liu")

Given Shen's image as a political outsider, many have been surprised by the level of support he has received. The "Ocean Current," or "Yang Liu" (洋流), which is derived from Shen's name, illustrates the island-wide popularity of his campaign. One major attribute to the phenomenon could be the shift of policy focus. This refers not only to particular policy proposals, but also Shen's entire re-branding in the campaign. During multiple campaigning events and media appearances, he has focused extensively on local issues—such as urban planning, social welfare, and education—while downplaying his usual emphasis on defense and foreign interference.

Another tactic that has successfully built up Shen's active support base is his interactions with voters of different generations. His campaign has attracted the younger generation with non-traditional measures. The interactive features of his campaign website illustrate policy proposals to the younger population, who are comfortable with and reliant on digital interface. His campaign team also extended the normal scope of



Image: Chiang Wan-an of the KMT (left) and Puma Shen of the DPP (right). (Source: jamesonwu1972 and qhfan)

public policy discussions by collaborating with writers, poets, and artists to create magazines. Shen also endeavors to reach independent voters who are concerned about economic issues and skeptical of the two major parties. He invites voters to in-person "soapbox" (肥皂箱) events to directly express their concerns and needs in daily life. He has also attended multiple interviews, including those held by "Pan-Blue" hosts, to expand target audiences and break out of partisan echo chambers.

The impressive civic engagement of Shen's supporters is also a critical factor in the widespread "Ocean Current" phenomenon. It is worth noting that the "Ocean Current" theme started as a grassroot movement initiated by Shen's supporters. They turned political enthusiasm into community building through designing and distributing campaign merch, coordinating neighborhood gatherings, and participating in policy discussions. The bottom-up mobilization has effectively complemented Shen's strategy to re-brand and interact outside of the echo chamber, creating an unprecedented political phenomenon.

Can DPP Break the "Blue North and Green South"?

The emergence of the "Ocean Current" movement has surprised the capital city, which has historically been a KMT stronghold. Yet, it remains unknown whether Shen can break the pattern of "Blue North and Green South." In addition to local governance, the upcoming elections could also alter the national political dynamic in Taiwan. While the DPP holds executive power, it has been facing constant political deadlock in the Legislative Yuan (LY), in which a coalition of the KMT and the Taiwan People's Party (台灣民眾黨) holds the majority. Tension between the Executive Yuan (EY), the LY, and local government has also reached its height after the LY's budget cuts earlier this year, as some counties and municipalities receive proportionally less funding than others. The upcoming elections will be an opportunity for the DPP to challenge the KMT's strong hold on local politics—and a fight for the KMT to defend its base by preventing the spillover effect of Shen's "Ocean Wave" into other mayoral races.

The main point: In Taiwan's current round of "Nine-in-One" local elections scheduled for November 28, the highest profile race is the Taipei mayoral election. The current campaign pits incumbent mayor Chiang Wan-an of the KMT (a reputed descendant of Chiang Kai-shek) against challenger Puma Shen (Shen Bo-yang) of the DPP. Although Taipei is traditionally a "blue" KMT stronghold, Shen has mounted a stronger-than-expected campaign for the capital city's top job. As the Taipei mayorship is arguably the most prominent elected position in Taiwan aside from the presidency, the outcome of the election could have implications for future island-wide politics.

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Taiwan as a Partner and Leader in Disaster Prevention and Management

By: Nicholas Romero

Nicholas Romero is a 2026 Fall Intern at the Global Taiwan Institute. He is currently a second-year graduate student in the Master of Arts in Asian Studies (MASIA) program at Georgetown University, double concentrating in Politics & Security and Southeast Asia. He has previously worked as a China Policy intern with the US Department of State, translating and analyzing open-source PRC Ministry publications. Besides US-Taiwan foreign policy, he also enjoys learning about Taiwanese subnational diplomacy and sports diplomacy.

In 2026, Taiwan has demonstrated how it prioritized disaster prevention, management, and preparedness at home and abroad. The " 2026 Disaster Response and Flood-Season Preparedness (115年救災及汛期整備)" plan, announced by the Ministry of the Interior (內政部, MOI), encouraged cross-agency collaboration, set up projects for emergency supplies and remote communication for isolated areas, and further developed search and rescue capabilities. Additionally, the 2026 Han Kuang exercises in August showcased Taiwan's increased attention toward a two-level response to disasters: it demonstrated the military's ability to respond to crises— as well as the capacity of local governments and civilians to adapt—by establishing emergency operations centers, while dealing with a massive slowdown in internet speed.

Most notably, the government hosted its annual "Disaster Prevention Day" (國家防災日) on the anniversary of the 7.7-scale Jiji Earthquake (集集大地震 or 921大地震), a 1999 tragedy that left 2400 deceased, 10,000 injured, and 100,000 homeless. This year, the event featured testing of emergency broadcast systems (including cell phones, television, and radio) and technology, as well as the mobilization of almost 200,000 civilian disaster responders, plus 5000 volunteer first responders, for local training. On that same day, President Lai Ching-Te (賴清德) met with Taiwan's diplomatic partners, inaugurating the "World Alliance for Disaster Management" (世界災害管理聯盟, WADM). He stated that the WADM is the "first intergovernmental organization spearheaded and established by Taiwan in 55 years."

These milestones allow Taiwan to strengthen its relations with the US and European Union (EU), and partner with its diplomatic allies, especially those in the Pacific. Thus, Taiwan can strengthen a network of democratic friendly nations, share information and strategies for disaster management, and ensure civilians' protection in disaster scenarios.

Taiwan's International Cooperation in Disaster Prevention

The United States

The Trump Administration has avoided acting as a world leader in disaster management. In doing so, it has left a vacuum of authority that has been filled by countries such as the People's Republic of China (PRC). The 2025 Myanmar earthquake is an example, where the PRC was first in providing monetary aid, and on-the-ground personnel assistance–compared to the late, ad-hoc response of remaining US organizations. This was largely attributed to the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) virtual extinction, which otherwise would have taken the reins in providing relief from the West.

This trend, however, is contrary to the US' long history of leadership in the Indo-Pacific. Take, for example, the US' assistance in the wake of the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004: the US military provided humanitarian aid, utilizing more than USD 841 million in government funding from USAID, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Defense. At the tail end of the Biden Administration, US actors were on call to provide assistance following the 2024 Hualien earthquake. At the grassroots level, donations were directed through fundraising efforts by Taiwanese American civil society organizations.

Public Taiwanese collaboration with the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has been limited to superficial signaling, with the sole instance of in-person activity being the invitation of the National Science and Technology Center for Disaster Reduction (國家災害防救科技中心, NCDR) to the 2018 National Level ExerciseInternational Observer Program. While some of Taiwan's disaster-focused institutions, such as the Taiwan Community Emergency Response Team (臺灣民間自主緊急應變隊, T-CERT), are based on FEMA initiatives, these counterparts are facing opposite fortunes when it comes to government relevancy in their home countries. The American organization is facing top-down pressure as executive calls continue for states to take up the mantle of local emergency re-



Image: President Lai Ching-Te (center) with representatives from member states of the World Alliance for Disaster Management (WADM) and other governmental observers. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

sponse.

Recently, though, the US and Taiwan's disaster management partnerships have found a new level, operating with the help of various US state entities. The Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Miami met in March with the Florida Division of Emergency Management to discuss "collaboration on disaster management and resilience initiatives." Even in the first year of the Trump Administration, Taiwan itself highlighted its outward viewpoint as the US was turning inward: TECO in Houston donated 350,000 USD to relief efforts in the aftermath of the debilitating 2025 Texas floods.

Civil society on both sides are also facilitating funding or garnering support for local and global disaster management initiatives. American NGOs such Spirit of America are helping fund a "mesh network of communications" across the island, and a drone training program to boot. Across the Pacific, The Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (台灣亞洲交流基金會, TAEF) is helping facilitate inter-civil society organization (CSO) dialogue and stronger cross-sector partnerships. The *non-governmental* aspect should especially be emphasized, noting that the actions of some other countries' NGOs remain firmly influenced by state desires.

It goes without saying that Washington understands Taipei's importance to the US from an economic and geopolitical point of view. Nevertheless, a natural disaster might create the same consequences as a foreign attack, thereby putting critical industries and supply chain nodes at risk.

The European Union

Taiwan's relations with the Europe and the EU in particular rest on the the ideals of common democratic values, and is marked in economic terms by the ties between Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC, 台灣積體電路製造公司) and the European Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (ESMC).

In terms of disaster prevention and civil defense, the European Parliament has recognized Taiwan's "whole-of-society resilience" initiative in the face of PRC coercion. Additionally, a group of organizations concerned with resilience initiatives—the European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan (EETO), Forward Alliance (a Taiwanese think tank for civil defense), and Samaritan International (a European-based NGO network)—met in September this year to workshop civilian solutions to disasters in both areas. Lutz Gullner, head of the EETO, called Taiwan "one of the reference

points for anything related to natural disasters", citing their expertise.

Diplomatic Allies in the Pacific

Taiwan's allies in the Pacific are already suffering from some of the worst effects of climate change. In response, Taiwan has organized international action pathways: along with the US, Taiwan hosted a Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) workshop "Disaster Management in the Pacific" in New Zealand, bringing about public-private partnerships from a host of Pacific-facing countries. It also highlighted Taiwan's technical and logistical capabilities in combatting earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods, and its practices and resources that can be shared across the Indo-Pacific.

In Tuvalu, Taiwan worked with the US under the Biden Administration to fund climate response projects. While these initiatives have faded in Trump's second term, Taiwan can still assume a leading role in organizing similar plurilateral funding projects for its island partners across the Pacific, using its own history and experience of natural disaster recovery as a diplomatic strategy.

Challenges to Taiwan's Growing Role in Disaster Management

The PRC pressures Taiwan, limiting its international partnerships in all sectors. In the field of disaster management, this manifests in Beijing having long blocked Taiwan's full membership in the World Health Organization (WHO). It has also used its network of state-funded, controlled, and affiliated media to advocate for its global leadership role, showing off Chinese progress in "global disaster governance" during International Day for Disaster Reduction on October 13. Furthermore, the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, 一帶一路) features the "Belt and Road International Cooperation Mechanism for Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management" (一帶一路自然災害防治與緊急管理國際合作機制,), which aims to increase investment and good governance measures with regards to combating the risk of disasters in affiliated nations.

However, the PRC's history of humanitarian work has not been consistent, as shown by examples across Asia, and is often tied to its own resource security. China's disaster help in Southeast Asia has been tinged by conditional questions of South China Sea sovereignty in the case of the Philippines, and for Indonesia, claims of restrained help. China has also failed to fully address domestic disaster relief, such as the cases of flash floods on the Tibet-Nepal border earlier this year. While China did provide emergency supplies and cash assistance to the Nepali government, much more could have been done proactively to mitigate the effects of the disaster, or at least work with authorities to evacuate locals beforehand. Moreover, Beijing concealed the extent of the damage on the Tibetan side.

In this regard, inviting the PRC's assistance in disaster relief is akin to inviting Beijing to pursue initiatives that prioritize the flow of at-risk goods into Chinese hands. Thus, Taiwan can promote its less conditional and more equitable framework for disaster assistance.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned, Taiwan should:

1. Expand the World Alliance for Disaster Management

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交部, MOFA) should seek to expand the number of observers and partners of the WADM beyond the likes of the United States, Japan, Poland, and the Philippines. This momentum should be harnessed to gather support from the free world, and counter the pressure of China's similar organizations, incentivizing non-interventionist support for countries' disaster preparation.

2. Strengthen Initiatives of Disaster Prevention and Management with the United States

Taiwan should invite US federal and local representatives to future iterations of Disaster Prevention Day, to exchange insights and lessons learned in this field. Furthermore, while the 2026 Han Kuang exercises officially featured American observers, these were featured mainly in military components. Taiwanese disaster management personnel should play a role in directly inviting American guests and other willing participants to take part in civilian components, too. Having friendly observers thinking about, and even participating in a whole-of-society Taiwanese response—to include managing severed communication lines, rescuing those in isolated areas, or even an evacuation of the president—by experiencing it firsthand is critical experience that can help the US and others respond most effectively in a time of need.

The MOI should seek to work further with FEMA to drum up support, exchange techniques and capabilities, and partner on research initiatives for disaster prevention and management. Organizing collaboration with the National Disaster and Emergency Management University (NDEMU) would help both sides strengthen communication and the ability to move

populations before disasters strike. Encouraging a reversal of the Trump Administration's push to minimize national response funding is key for getting their assistance in case of any Taiwan contingency. In this same vein, funding can be delegated to cooperation through civil society organizations, and to joint training of T-CERT with American equivalents and other interested parties.

This does not mean, though, that Taiwan should ignore US states' willingness to cooperate. On a subnational level, Taiwan should locate more places to host private and public events—not just in cities with a TECO Office like San Francisco or Seattle, but also in smaller municipalities across the Pacific, Atlantic, and the Gulf of Mexico. A focus should be placed on liaison activities such as those conducted by the TECO Miami office with the Florida government. Workshops with American locales and further local governments across Asia and the Pacific should highlight Taiwan's disaster response strengths, and encourage these places to exchange best strategies for preparation and real time response.

3. Seek Further Collaboration with the European Union

Given the experience of the EU, Taiwan should seek opportunities for collaboration regarding the use of nuclear powerand other energy sources that allow self sufficiency under threatening conditions. It should take advantage of a changing culture around nuclear energy, even if the reasons for this are not expressly from a disaster response point of view. It can also look to co-fund projects within its borders with interested EU partners–expanding the reach of, for example, the National Fire Agency (消防署, NFA), which has sought to expand its assistance into the larger Indo-Pacific region.

Additionally, in light of the European Parliament's language supporting "contingency planning" for Taiwan, MOFA should seek more detailed agreements with the EU (or even willing individual nations such as the Baltic states). Such agreements could cover a number of functional areas, to include infrastructure reconstruction and food security.

4. Sign MOUs with Pacific Allies

Taiwan should sign memoranda of understanding with Pacific research and development-based partners, collaborating with experts who know of specific islands' vulnerabilities—thereby strengthening Taiwan's position in the region amid PRC pressure, and further building connections with its diplomatic allies in the region. It can target both academic groups such as the University of Auckland's Pacific Climate Research Team, as well independent organizations like the Pacific Resilience Partnership. In the same vein, it should look to monitor and get involved in up-to-now bilateral frameworks for tsunami relief, such as in the case of Hawaii and Samoa's National Disaster Preparedness Baseline Assessment (NDPBA).

Conclusion

Natural and geopolitical factors compel Taiwan to be ready for disasters. However, Taiwanese people are not isolated from the goodwill of the rest of the world. Given its geography and aforementioned history, Taiwan has the capabilities to become a reliable partner in disaster management around the world. Taiwan should leverage its capabilities and share its expertise, thereby strengthening both its own resilience and its relationships across the democratic world.

The main point: Taiwan should further collaborate with the US and the EU with regards to disaster prevention and management, especially utilizing its mastery of subnational and civil society-based diplomacy, while taking a leadership role in disaster preparation and as a research collaborator amongst its diplomatic partners in the Pacific. This outreach will help skirt the challenges it faces in terms of pressure on the global stage.

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Observations from Taiwan's Education Frontline amid Cognitive Warfare

By: Mia Yang

Mia Yang is a high school student at Chulin Private High School in New Taipei City, Taiwan.

As part of the Global Taiwan Institute's commitment to promoting a diversity of voices, the Global Taiwan Brief *occasionally publishes articles written by Taiwanese youth. We are pleased to present this perspective from a high school student about the challenges young people face in navigating a complex internet information environment, and continuing debates over civic education in Taiwan's schools.*

Taiwan faces several serious threats, not only from direct military forces, but also from a self-defeating atti-

tude that I see frequently in people of my age. While foreign observers warn of the possibility of a cross-Strait conflict, social media platforms popular among young people are filled with claims that "War won't break out," "Taiwan could never win anyway," or "It doesn't matter who governs us." Nonetheless, these statements do not represent the voice of the majority of youth groups in Taiwan, and they should not be seen as proof that the entire generation has given up. However, as indifference toward democracy becomes a part of everyday conversation, it creates a sort of vulnerability that deserves attention.

The problem arises not simply because some students know too little about politics. In fact, many of us encounter politics in an information environment very different from the one for which our schools were designed. Civic education still largely proceeds through textbooks, exams, and classroom lectures. Political narratives, however, now reach us through short videos, influencers, memes, and recommendation algorithms. If schools avoid discussing controversial issues in the name of neutrality, students will not become politically neutral: instead, they will go somewhere else to learn about politics.

When Politics Spreads Through the Feed

Chinese social media platforms have become a major part of Taiwan's information environment. Platforms such as TikTok, Douyin, and Rednote blur the line between entertainment and political influence. Indeed, content that may impact Taiwanese does not always have to employ obvious propaganda. Videos of modern skylines, high-speed rail, traditional culture, food, rural life, or ordinary families can render China a familiar and attractive country. Political messages can then spread through entertainment videos, and Taiwanese youth may not perceive these as political messages at all.

This is not a marginal issue. In fact, a 2025 Doublethink Lab study—using data from the Taiwan Communication Survey—found that 50.73 percent of high-school students used TikTok. Researchers also interviewed sixteen Taiwanese users aged fifteen to eighteen and discovered that political videos had sometimes appeared unexpectedly in social media groups, especially around the 2024 presidential election. Nonetheless, the researchers found that most of these teenagers still had negative views of the PRC government and opposed unification. It is thus an oversimplification to claim that using Chinese platforms makes Taiwanese teenagers "pro-China." The more important question may be what kind of political information Taiwanese youth encounter on those platforms, and how they understand it.

That concern becomes clearer when we look beyond what appears on the screen. A 2025 peer-reviewed study of 700 members of Taiwan's Generation Z found that more frequent use of Chinese social media platforms—including TikTok, Rednote, and Weibo—was associated with lower political knowledge about cross-Strait affairs, and a weaker ability to tell the different usages of language between China and Taiwan. Greater use of Chinese social media was also linked to a decreased ability to identify People's Republic of China (PRC) disinformation. This does not necessarily mean that young people are being "brainwashed." The problem may be more subtle. If people have less knowledge about an issue, it becomes harder for them to judge whether the information they see is reliable in the first place.

The numbers from another Doublethink Lab nationwide survey make this picture even more complicated. Among 2,612 Taiwanese respondents aged fifteen and above, the majority of both frequent and non-frequent TikTok users rejected the idea of giving up democracy for cross-Strait peace. Yet there was still a difference between the frequent and non-frequent users. The study found that 30.3 percent of frequent users were willing to accept giving up democracy for peace, compared with 23.4 percent of non-frequent users. Frequent users were also more likely to believe that unification with China might not significantly change everyday life in Taiwan. These numbers do not prove that TikTok caused these attitudes. But they do suggest that cognitive influence does not have to make young Taiwanese actively admire Beijing. Sometimes, it may simply make the differences between democratic and authoritarian systems feel less important, or make resistance seem less worthwhile.

What "Politics Out of Schools" Originally Meant

If political influence increasingly reaches students through their phones, then Taiwan must also ask what role schools should play. Here, our democratic history creates an ironic situation. During the authoritarian period of Taiwan, politics was not absent from Taiwanese campuses. Rather, politics was deeply intertwined with education. Historical records show that Kuomintang (國民黨) organizations, the China Youth Corps (中國青年救國團), military instructors, and state security agencies were involved in monitoring and managing university campuses. In 1986 and 1987, as Taiwan moved toward democratization, students involved in the "Freedom of Love" movement (自由之愛運動) at National Taiwan University demanded freedom of speech, university autonomy, and reform of the *University Act* (大



Image: A teacher and students at Baozhong Junior High School in Yunlin County, Taiwan (December 2019). Image source: Wikimedia Commons)

學法), as well as the removal of party organizations, the Youth Corps, and military instructors from campuses.

This history matters because the original democratic demand was not that students should stop discussing politics. Instead, it was that the party-state should stop controlling political life in schools. Indeed, demands for political institutions to leave campuses appeared alongside demands for greater freedom of expression. Removing political control is not the same as removing political discussion.

Taiwan's legal framework still reflects this distinction. Article 6 of the *Educational Fundamental Act* (教育基本法) requires education to follow a principle of neutrality and prohibits schools from either campaigning for particular political organizations, or forcing teachers and students to participate in political activities. The restriction is directed at the institution, not at the student. Taiwan democratized its schools by making institutions politically neutral, not by requiring students to be politically silent.

From Political Neutrality to Political Silence

Yet in practice, the memory of authoritarian political indoctrination may have encouraged a broader habit of avoiding controversial politics in school. The idea that "politics should not enter schools" (政治不入校園) can be interpreted not only as a warning against party control, but also as a reason for teachers to avoid politically sensitive issues. This is different from the original purpose of educational neutrality, which was to protect students from forced ideology, rather than to stop them from discussing political life.

The same tension can also be seen inside schools. A National Academy for Educational Research (國家教育研究院) survey of high-school history teachers found broad support for teaching transitional justice, but more than 60 percent of teachers worried that such teaching could be influenced by partisan viewpoints. Among teachers who did not design additional lessons on transitional justice, fear of being accused of partisan indoctrination was the second most common reason— after lack of class time. This does not mean that teachers do not want to discuss politics. Rather, it shows how easily civic education can be confused with political indoctrination, even in a democratic society.

The tension is especially clear because Taiwan's curriculum has moved in the opposite direction. The 108 Curriculum (108課綱) included transitional justice in

high-school history, and education researchers have also recommended using multiple historical perspectives to encourage discussion and reflection. Formally, schools are therefore expected to help students think critically about history, understand different perspectives, and reflect on democratic values. At the same time, teachers may still worry about being accused of taking sides.

As many of my classmates have noticed, political issues can therefore become exam facts that we memorize for answer sheets, but quickly escape our memory. Civics exists as an academic subject, but politics does not always become part of students' real lives. History can feel distant from our own identities, while democratic rights become background conditions that we assume will always exist. When students then hear "If there's war, just surrender" or "It doesn't matter who is in charge," they may understand the danger of war without having seriously thought about what political change could mean for freedom of speech, elections, personal rights, or the rule of law.

This is where the role of the classroom becomes important. Schools should not tell students which party to support or what position to take on cross-Strait relations. Instead, they should give students a place to ask questions, test claims, compare evidence, and discuss difficult issues. Research using data from 3,953 Taiwanese students in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study found that an open classroom climate for discussion was associated with stronger civic knowledge and expected electoral participation. In other words, students do not become better citizens simply because disagreement is kept out of the classroom. They need opportunities to learn how to disagree while still respecting evidence, rights, and one another.

Rebuilding Civic Resilience

Taiwan can learn from the experiences of other democracies. Austria has included political education in its formal education system and emphasizes that controversial issues should also be presented as controversial in the classroom, while avoiding political indoctrination. Finland, meanwhile, treats media literacy as an important part of education and integrates it across subjects, helping students understand information, media, and misleading content. These two examples show that political education and media literacy do not have to mean telling students what to believe. Instead, they can help students understand political issues, recognize different viewpoints, and evaluate the information they receive.

Taiwan has also begun to recognize this need. In 2025, the Ministry of Education (教育部) announced plans to develop teaching materials on understanding China, including cross-Strait relations, national identity, and possible risks. By July 2025, thirteen teaching materials had undergone initial review, and were still being revised and supplemented. However, as a student on the front line of Taiwan's education system, I was barely aware of this plan. Most of the teachers and classmates I asked had not heard about it either.

Even if the material is still under review, students should be able to understand what is being prepared, why it is needed, and when they may actually have the chance to use it. A policy cannot have much effect on students if the students themselves barely possess awareness of it.

For this reason, the Taiwanese government should expedite the development of these materials and simultaneously seek to raise awareness among students and teachers regarding what changes are underway. However, teaching materials alone may not be enough. Taiwan should also consider adding more opportunities for civic education and discussion in schools, especially on topics such as cross-Strait relations, democracy, media literacy, and how political information affects our daily lives.

Taiwan does not need to copy either Austria or Finland's models exactly. Its own history provides the more important lesson. Taiwan's democratization movement fought to remove one-party control from schools so that thought could become freer. The purpose of that effort was never to create classrooms in which politics could not be discussed.

Modern cognitive warfare makes this distinction urgent. Algorithms do not respect the principle of "politics out of schools." They enter teenagers' lives every day, deciding what we see. If schools in democracies respond by remaining silent, they leave the most politically consequential part of students' education to systems designed not to educate citizens, but to maximize attention.

The challenge, then, is not to bring partisan politics back into schools. It is to bring democratic politics back into civic education. Students should understand how Taiwan's freedoms were won, how authoritarian systems differ from democratic ones, how algorithms can shape political perception, and how to examine claims without automatically accepting or rejecting them because of party labels. Taiwan's psychological defense will not be built by teaching young people what to think. It will be built by giving them the knowledge and habits neces-

mean political silence. Instead, Taiwan's civic education should encourage open discussion, critical thinking, and media literacy, allowing students to develop their own informed judgments about democracy and the challenges it faces.

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