

Taiwan's "New Southbound Policy" and Its Implications for Thailand

Sanyarat Meesuwan¹

¹ College of Politics and Governance, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

This work is supported by the Taiwan Fellowship under the R.O.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the year of 2017. The draft of the paper was presented at the Presentations of MOFA Taiwan Fellowship Scholars at the National Central Library, Taipei, Taiwan on 14 March 2017. The author would also like to thank Associate Professor Liao Min-shu of the Department of History, National Chengchi University for all her support and valuable comments on the research.

Corresponding Author:

Sanyarat Meesuwan, College of Politics and Governance,
Mahasarakham University, Maha Sarakham 44150, Thailand
E-mail: sanyarat@msu.ac.th

Abstract

Aimed at understanding the New Southbound Policy's motives and its chances of success, this research employed James Rosenau's *Linkage Politics* and *Theory of Change and Continuity*, and Robert Putnam's *Two-level Game Theory* as the principal analytical tool. Exploring the interconnections between Taiwanese government and domestic interest groups, it finds President Tsai Ing-wen's New Southbound Policy has been designed primarily to help boost Taiwan's economy, while substantially reducing economic reliance on China; and that ASEAN members toward the south are among the target countries. However, whether or not her New Southbound Policy will achieve its objectives depends in large measure on the direction of current development of relations between the US and China, particularly the on-going tensions and uncertainties between these two countries and their principal allies in and around the South and East China seas, and on the Korean Peninsula. As a target country of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, Thailand—herself in dire need of boosting the national economy, while laying a sustainable internal security and political structure for the foreseeable future—simply cannot ignore Taiwan's initiative. Meanwhile, she cannot overlook China's intense concerns in regard to strategic, political and military maneuverings of the US and allies in the South and East China seas. It seems logical that Thailand would choose to respond positively to the economic aspect of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, while maintaining a “non-intervention position” on the politics of Peking-Taipei ties.

Keywords: New Southbound Policy, Taiwanese Dream, Taiwan-China-US relations, Thai foreign policy

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ใช้ทฤษฎีเกี่ยวพันและทฤษฎีการเปลี่ยนแปลงและความต่อเนื่องของเจมส์ รอสสโนว และทฤษฎีเกมสองระดับของโรเบิร์ต พัตนัม เป็นเครื่องมือวิเคราะห์หลัก เพื่อทำความเข้าใจความมุ่งหมายและโอกาสความสำเร็จของนโยบายมุ่งใต้ใหม่ของไต้หวัน การสำรวจความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างรัฐบาลไต้หวันและกลุ่มผลประโยชน์ภายในประเทศพบว่า นโยบายมุ่งใต้ใหม่ของประธานาธิบดีไช่อิงเหวินออกแบบมาเพื่อส่งเสริมเศรษฐกิจของไต้หวันเป็นสำคัญ ในเวลาเดียวกันก็ต้องการลดการพึ่งพาจีนทางเศรษฐกิจ และสมาชิกอาเซียนเป็นหนึ่งในเป้าหมายของนโยบายนี้ อย่างไรก็ตาม นโยบายมุ่งใต้ใหม่จะบรรลุวัตถุประสงค์ที่ตั้งไว้หรือไม่ ขึ้นอยู่กับทิศทางความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างสหรัฐอเมริกาและจีนเป็นอย่างมาก เฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในสถานการณ์ความตึงเครียดระหว่างสองประเทศและประเทศพันธมิตรหลัก ๆ ในบริเวณทะเลจีนใต้และทะเลจีนตะวันออก รวมถึงคาบสมุทรเกาหลี ในฐานะหนึ่งในประเทศเป้าหมายตามนโยบายมุ่งใต้ใหม่ ประเทศไทยซึ่งอยู่ในสถานการณ์ที่ต้องการฟื้นฟูเศรษฐกิจของตนเป็นอย่างยิ่ง และอยู่ระหว่างดำเนินการวางรากฐานอย่างยั่งยืนด้านความมั่นคงและโครงสร้างทางการเมืองภายในประเทศเพื่ออนาคตอันใกล้ จึงไม่อาจเพิกเฉยต่อ ความริเริ่มของไต้หวัน ในขณะเดียวกัน ประเทศไทยก็ไม่สามารถมองข้ามความกังวลของประเทศจีนในประเด็น การเคลื่อนไหวด้านยุทธศาสตร์ การเมือง และการทหารของสหรัฐอเมริกาและประเทศพันธมิตรในทะเลจีนใต้และทะเลจีนตะวันออก จึงเป็นเรื่องสมเหตุสมผลที่ประเทศไทยเลือกตอบสนองทางบวกต่อประเด็นทางเศรษฐกิจของนโยบาย มุ่งใต้ใหม่ แต่พยายามรักษา “สถานะไม่แทรกแซง” ในประเด็นการเมืองระหว่างจีนกับไต้หวัน

คำสำคัญ: นโยบายมุ่งใต้ใหม่, ความผืนไต้หวัน, ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างไต้หวัน-จีน-สหรัฐอเมริกา, นโยบายต่างประเทศไทย

Introduction

On 16 January 2016, a nation-wide presidential election took place in Taiwan. Emerged victorious over two other candidates—from the Kuomintang (KMT) and the People First Party (PFP)—was Tsai Ing-wen from the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), collecting 56 percent of the vote. In addition, the Taiwanese electorate also gave her party its first-ever majority in the country's legislature, 68 out of 113 seats (Hsiao, 2016). Tsai's victory was most likely an upshot of the voters' shifting preferences, reflecting perhaps their strong desire for change displayed earlier in the so-called "Nine-in-One Local Elections" in November 2014 – about eight months after the 24-day student-led protest Sunflower Movement against one of President Ma Ying-jeou's cross-strait legislations (Glaser, 2014).

Key issues uppermost in the voters' mind on both occasions were primarily domestic ones, namely—"skyrocketing property prices, falling incomes, a growing gap between rich and poor, and food safety. Many young people are worried about job prospects." Peking-Taipei ties naturally factored in, but "were likely less important," although "concern has been growing about Taiwan's over-reliance on Mainland China economically and Beijing's increasing influence on the island" (Glaser, 2014).

Entrusted with such a solid mandate, President Tsai declared in her inaugural address that her administration would concentrate on five areas of activities—three internal and two external: (a) transform Taiwan's current economic structures; (b) strengthen the country's "social safety net"; (c) enhance social fairness and justice, "so as to further deepen and evolve Taiwan's democratic institutions"; (d) "pro-actively" help promoting regional peace and stability and cross-strait (China-Taiwan) relations; and (e) effectively handle diplomatic and global issues (Republic of China [R.O.C.] Office of the President, 2016)

To help achieve her goals, openly stated or otherwise, Tsai has formulated the "New Southbound Policy" (NSBP). Significantly, Tsai mentioned the NSBP in the context of "transforming Taiwan's existing economic structures," and noted that her NSBP aims principally "to elevate the scope and diversity of our external economy, and to bid farewell to our past overreliance on a single market," meaning undoubtedly Mainland China (Republic of China [R.O.C.] Office of the President, 2016).

Clearly, activities 4 and 5 above reflect President Tsai and her cabinet's full awareness of the impact of on-going developments in the international sphere upon the success or failure of her NSBP, particularly those within and around the South China Sea (SCS) and East China Sea (ECS), starting from her closest neighbor to the west—China.

In other words, President Tsai is shifting Taiwan's economic strategy from "past overreliance on a single market" to an enhanced cooperation with countries toward the south of Taiwan, with the ten ASEAN member countries standing prominently among them. Most significantly, she stressed that if the "NSBP" strategy failed, Taiwan would "lose the ability to determine its own future"—meaning, in academic terminology, "self-determination" capability or "independence."

The success or failure of Tsai's NSBP essentially depends on two sets of factors, one internal and the other external. In this article we addressed both, but with emphasis on the latter, namely: the foreseeable outcome of (a) conflicting territorial claims in the SCS and ECS; (b) intensifying rivalry between China and the United States, along with the latter's principal allies in the region such as Japan and South Korea; (c) wildcard incidents on the Korean Peninsula, particularly North Korea's 17 missile and two nuclear tests, viewed as provocative by South Korea, and prompted the latter to declare it would reduce Pyongyang to ashes in retaliation; (d) China's flexibility on the issue of Taiwan "independence" and the magnitude and tempo of Tsai's independence drive; and (e) President Tsai's own "proactive" diplomatic positioning of Taiwan amid the on-going maneuverings by all parties concerned, especially China. Also pertinent is the fact that, ultimately, Taiwan appears to have only the US as her most effective guarantor of national security. In a worst-case scenario that Peking decided to annex Taiwan by force, will President Trump risk coming to recuse the latter?

Research's Objectives

1. To identify President Tsai Ing-wen's New Southbound Policy, and analyze its rationale and motives.
2. To analyze the New Southbound Policy's chances of success.
3. To examine the effects of Taiwan's New Southbound Policy on Thailand and her responses.

Research Methodology and Analytical Framework

The research employed qualitative research method as a main technique. It started with a review of literature on Taiwan's New Southbound Policy. Information on Taiwan's movements, policy decision, and law from media, newspaper, the Internet, and books were gathered in this process. Interviews with Taiwanese scholars were conducted for a comprehensive view on the Taiwan's intentions. This research was written in a policy-oriented analytical narrative style.

The analytical framework, used in this research, is a combination of James Rosenau's *Linkage Politics* (1969) and *Theory of Change and Continuity* (1990), and Robert Putnam's *Two-level Game Theory* (1988).

In *Linkage Politics*, Rosenau described foreign policy as a result of the entanglements of domestic and international politics (1969, p. 2). He separated the foreign policy making process into two stages: the initial and terminal stages. Initially, policy-makers accumulate demands from the public and analyze the internal environment before shaping them into foreign policy. The policy then enters the external environment or international system. Triggered by this policy, the external environment, e.g. state and non-state actors, reacts. These international responses, then loop back to influence the domestic environment. Evidently, the interaction between internal and external environments, is a never-ending process.

In a nutshell, *internal environment* refers to an environment in a society wherefrom the foreign policy originates. They include: (a) political structures and institutions—government systems, legislatures, bureaucracies, competitions among interest groups, public opinion and media; (b) economic realities, including the state's economic structures, level and nature of economic development, natural resources, and economic predicaments a country is facing; (c) social, cultural, and historical characteristics—the nature of social structure, social solidity, shared cultural and historical identities, and values; and (d) military capabilities. Policy makers always take these factors into account during the process of interpreting and formulating foreign policy.

The external environment comprises of situations and environment taking place outside a society or on the international stage. They include activities and interactions between states, polar power structure/balance of power in the region and the world, and cooperation, alliance and conflicts between major powers.

The international system underwent tremendous changes following the end of the Cold War; therefore, Rosenau revised his *Linkage Politics* ideology and proposed additional variables to the analytical framework (1990, p. xiii). In *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*, he explained two significant factors which created change in an international system as (a) the rise of non-state actors, and (b) increased economic and technological interdependence among states (p. 78). According to Rosenau, under this new international environment, non-state actors, i.e. civil society, domestic interest groups, internal political factions, and multinational corporations play larger and broader roles in shaping foreign policy. To sum up, Rosenau's *Linkage Politics* centralized the argument on the role of states, while *Theory of Change and Continuity* expounded a "multi-centric" approach, incorporating the roles of state and non-state actors to analyze changes in international politics.

One dilemma when using Rosenau's *Theory of Change and Continuity* is that it downplayed the "realist perspectives" used in *Linkage Politics* to examine the international system. However, excluding studies on the balance of power and cooperation and conflicts between the major nations in East and Southeast Asia would result in an incomplete picture of Taiwan's foreign policy. Thus, by combining Rosenau's *Linkage Politics* and *Theory of Change and Continuity*, interconnections between the Taiwanese government (state actor) and internal political and social groups (non-state actors) were investigated with regard to the NSBP. As well as taking balance of power, alliance and rivalry between major powers into consideration, our framework also examined how Taiwan's economic relations with states in Southeast Asia, and Thailand in particular, influenced the making of the NSBP.

However, the above mentioned combination formula lacks one qualification as a "theory." In short, it does not have predictive power and cannot forecast whether or not the NSBP would succeed. Putnam's Two-level Game Theory was, therefore, utilized to achieve this objective.

According to Putnam, the success or failure of any diplomatic negotiation depends largely on capabilities of the negotiator to incorporate domestic and international factors. Table 1 shows the probabilities of a negotiation's outcomes, determining by agreements of internal and external environments on the negotiator's proposal.

External Environment	Internal Environment	
	Agree	Disagree
Agree	Success	Fail
Disagree	Fail	Fail (with probability that internal and external environments would join force to fail the negotiator)

Table 1. The Chances of Cooperation between Internal and External Environments on the Negotiator's Initiative

Source: Adapted from Putnam's Two-level Game Theory (1988)

The only chance the negotiator will succeed in a negotiation is when he could bring internal and external environments to agree with his position/initiative. The worst-case scenario occurs when both internal and external environments disagree with his position. In response to the policy they oppose, players from domestic and international environments may team up and work against the negotiator, resulting in him losing authority to represent them at the negotiation table.

Applying Putnam's theory to project the New Southbound Policy's chances of success, the research explored whether Taiwan's domestic and international politics are "friend" or "foe" to President Tsai's NSBP.

Literature Review

Past research on Taiwan's foreign policy could be divided into three categories, namely domestic factor oriented; international factor oriented; and mixed factor oriented research.

The first group, the domestic factor oriented research, focused on the impact of internal non-state actors and socio-economic factors on Taiwan's decision making process and foreign policy. Li Yit-an and Zhong En-yu (2017) stated the shift in Taiwanese identity caused President Tsai's administration to distance Taiwan from the mainland China. The gradual democratization process in Taiwan since 1987 created the new political identity among Taiwanese, especially the younger generation. As Taiwanese enjoyed more freedom and privilege under the democratic regime, they tended to feel they were more and more different from the Chinese

who live under communist government. The identity change, hence, made the government reassess their cross-strait policy. Li and Zhong research result went along the same line as other previous work which emphasizing on the need to win the voter's mind as the major contributor behind Taiwan's changing foreign policy (e.g. Lin, 2016; Shih & Cheng, 2010; Wakabayashi, 2006; Brown, 2004).

On the other hand, Lin The-chang (1999) viewed the economic reason as the main determination. Pressured by the economic demand to survive in the "new" international economy and the transformation of Taiwan's economic structure, the R.O.C. government had to interact and soften her stance toward China. At the same time, she needed to forge ties with Southeast Asia countries where she could benefit from cheap labor and natural resources. While these two camps might perceive different factor as the main cause in shaping Taiwan's foreign policy, they seem to agree on one thing, Taiwan's government acted as a passive actor. In short, they formed foreign policy to accommodate domestic demands. Ma Tsai-chuan (2010), on the contrary, argued in reality the government was more likely to have more power to determine what they wanted to act in international arena. Ma's study found that the government of Taiwan from time to time played with interest groups inside the country and chose policy that benefited them most by employing strategic selectivity and coordination technique.

The second group, international factor oriented research, cited the international environment and balance of power as the main driver for Taiwan's foreign policy. In *Foreign Policy Making in Taiwan: From Principle to Pragmatism*, Denis V. Hickey (2013) examined the transformation in the international system, especially the rise of Chinese and North Korean threats, as the most influential factors when formulating Taiwan's foreign policy. Hickey considered China to be a principle threat to Taiwan's survival, a view widely shared by many cross-straits scholars (e.g. Waldron, 2012; deLisle, 2010; Li, 2005). US foreign policy toward China also influenced Taiwan's foreign policy options (Wang, 2015; 2016). Wang Wei-cheng (2016) suggested that US policy toward Asia, combined with a new outlook toward China under the Trump administration, gave Taiwan the opportunity to employ more assertive foreign policy.

Unlike many scholars who emphasized the roles of the US and China in Taiwan's foreign policy, George C.W. Wei (2012) opined that to understand Taiwan's motives and diplomatic ambition necessitated study of Taiwanese relations with "insignificant" global players. Wei concluded that Taiwan revealed true traits and acted more deliberately in expanding her role as a sovereign state when dealing with small players. Jacques deLisle (2016) agreed with Wei's thesis. He noted that

Taiwan's main technique was to turn her economic power to support diplomatic missions, thereby gaining recognition and opening up "international space" with small Asian countries. In the case of Indonesia, Johanes Herlijanto (2016) mentioned Taiwan's "economic diplomacy" by offering scholarships and building networks of Indonesian students as a main tool to promote international recognition of the country.

Studying Taiwan's foreign policy during the Lee Teng-hui administration, Jie Chen (2002) discovered a relationship between Taiwan's economic growth and democratic progress; increasing political and economic power of ASEAN countries caused Taiwan to forge closer ties by providing economic and development assistance. The main objective of Taiwan's foreign policy at that time was to secure international recognition, implicitly to guarantee her sovereignty from China's threats and to expand overseas markets. His work falls into the third category of this literature review; the intertwining of internal and external environments in Taiwan's foreign policy making. Lin Chia-lung (2008) cited the relationship between democratic identity and sinophobia among Taiwanese, especially those born during or after Taiwan's democratic transition and economic boom period. This drove the Taiwanese Government to strengthen relations with the US, expand Taiwan's role in the international community, and gain independence from China.

Falling in the same mixed approach category, Li Cheng-hong's research (2005) utilized Robert Putnam's two-level game theory to analyze President Chen Shui-bian's policy toward Beijing. He found that interaction between domestic politics and international relations determined the success of Taiwan's foreign policy. To keep his election promises, President Chen adopted a hardline posture toward the People's Republic of China (PRC), trying to promote independence for Taiwan. Simultaneously, he was pressured by the Chinese Government and also by opposition parties in Taiwan to acknowledge "One-China Policy." As a result, President Chen's foreign policy was in a dilemma and doomed to fail.

This research falls within the third group, in the sense that it considers both domestic and international elements when analyzing Taiwan's NSBP. More importantly, the impact of the international system and balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region are assessed to shed new light on the understanding of Taiwan's foreign policy formulation process and its relationship with the international environment.

Tsai Ing-wen's New Southbound Policy: Rationale and Motives

According to James C. F. Huang, Director-General of the New Southbound Policy Office under the Office of the President, the NSBP is Taiwan's "new outward-oriented economic strategic plan that puts people at its core...a five-year plan," through which "the government would be pushing bilateral interaction and cooperation [in the fields] of human resources, industries, investments, education, culture, tourism and agriculture between Taiwan, ASEAN and South Asian nations to build a new partnership with these countries this century" (Hsiao, 2016). In a nutshell, Taiwan will concentrate on bilateral people-to-people diplomacy, particularly among those in the leading national developmental sectors

Huang pointed out that the NSBP has a three-dimensional content: "new range, new direction and new support." Under "new range," he explained that the NSBP targets ten ASEAN countries and "six South Asian countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka," as well as Australia and New Zealand; that "new direction encompasses inbound investment and tourism, as well as educational exchanges"; and that "new support involves viewing Southeast and South Asia as more than just a base for manufacturing, but an extension of Taiwan's domestic demand to support growth" (R.O.C Office of Trade Negotiations, 2016).

Two points deserve emphasis here: (a) there is a sense of urgency to accomplish the NSBP's objectives. As Huang noted, "Taiwan's new southbound policy is getting a late start compared with other countries [such as the] US, Japan, Australia, South Korea and China. If Taiwan does not catch up quickly, the nation's industry and economic advantages in ASEAN would gradually erode. This is the crux of the new southbound policy" (Hsiao, 2016); and (b) Taiwan intends to pursue the NSBP with the help of "countries that have similar values," particularly, Japan and the US (R.O.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). The latter point is a strategic decision unmistakably reflecting Taiwan's preference for allies who are on the opposite side of China—for instance, with a "free enterprise" economy, a "democratic" political system, and particularly a military force that China must be heedful of. As a result, one can only expect opposition, at least in principle, from Peking in the coming days against Tsai's NSBP and—more broadly—her government.

Additionally, the NSBP has long-, medium-, and short-term goals.

The "long-term goals of the policy are to strengthen Taiwan's economic, technological and cultural links with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Australia and New Zealand so as to promote the sharing of resources, talent and markets. They also indicate that the [NSBP] initiative aims to create a comprehensive mechanism for

negotiations and dialogue in order to effectively resolve differences and build trust and consensus" (Taiwan Today, 2016).

In regard to "short- and medium-term goals" of the NSBP, the Guidelines mention them in the same breath as (a) "to facilitate increased exchanges with the targeted nations on investment, tourism, culture and human resources"; (b) "[to] encourage Taiwan companies to explore opportunities in these countries in line with the government's new economic development model"; (c) "[to] develop the local talent pool to facilitate the growth in interactions with these regions"; and (d) "[to] expand bilateral and multilateral dialogue to enhance economic cooperation and tackle disputes" (Taiwan Today, 2016).

The above description of NSBP goals, item four to be precise, diplomatically left unsaid Tsai and her colleagues' ultimate strategic goal to lay a sustainable economic groundwork for Taiwan's political independence from China (Loa, 2015). One might perhaps label this aspiration the "Taiwanese Dream," as opposed to Peking's "One-China Dream."

Indeed, the "Taiwanese Dream" has been inscribed in the DPP's 1991 charter, saying it is the party's objective to establish a "sovereign and independent Republic of Taiwan" (Loa, 2016, p. 3). The DPP's stand on this issue has been essentially consistent over the years (Liu, 2014, pp. 48-49).

Meanwhile, it has also become increasingly clear that a sizeable portion of the Taiwanese population also share the "Taiwanese Dream" with Tsai's DPP. According to a poll conducted a week after Tsai took office as president, "an overwhelming majority of Taiwanese people reject eventual unification with China." This survey found 66.4 percent of Taiwanese oppose unification and only 18.5 percent were in favor, while 15.1 percent remained noncommittal. In addition, the younger generations in the country were more likely to favor Taiwan independence, as the figure showed that 72 percent of the respondents in the 20 to 29 year old age group supported independence (Xenakis, 2016).

Given such a trend, it is not surprising why Peking has adopted an unfriendly attitude toward Tsai and issued harsh words against her, following her electoral victory.

NSBP's Success Prospects: The Entanglements of Internal and External Factors

In January 2017, Tsai's government announced its NSBP has borne the following "initial fruits": (a) Taiwan's exports to countries covered under the government's New Southbound Policy "totaled US\$ 5.37 billion in December, up 20 percent from the same month last year. Among them, exports to the 10 [ASEAN] countries totaled US\$ 4.72 billion, up 22.9 percent from December last year"; and (b) on the low side, "talent exchanges between the two sides increased at a much slower pace. Students from the target countries studying in Taiwan totaled 29,145 in the 2016 academic year, up only 2.1 percent from the 28,550 in the 2015 academic year. Among them, the number of students from the ASEAN totaled 27,264, up 1.9 percent year-on-year. One noteworthy change was that the number of students from South Asia was up 12.4 percent year-on-year, totaling 1,443" (Tang & Wu, 2017).

President Tsai and her colleagues undoubtedly are trying their best to implement the NSBP. To be fair, at this writing they have just gone through a relatively short period of the NSBP's "operational phase," in contrast to the much longer interval before economic, political and people-to-people measures yield concrete and sustainable results. Accordingly, one should allow Tsai a little more time before issuing a full report card on the overall achievement of her NSBP.

However, there are in the meantime some visible trends of key internal and external factors that do not augur well for the overall final NSBP outcome. For the internal factors, there are three areas of concerns, as follows.

1. Like most political parties, Tsai's DPP is factious (Wilson, 2016). As of 2016, an observer points out there are "six to seven DPP factions mentioned in local media reports: The Hsieh faction, the Su faction, the Yu faction, the New Tide faction, the Chen Chu faction, and the Tsai Ing-wen 'special circle.'" Three of these are concentrated around powerful DPP elders, namely, Frank Hsieh, Su Tseng-chang, and Yu Shyi-kun, who had served as both DPP party chairman and premier during the Chen Shui-bian era. In addition, all three have acted as city mayor or county magistrate at the local level, and have developed extensive political networks during their terms.

Naturally, factions compete for perks and privileges such as seats within the party's top-decision making bodies—for instance, the 30-person Central Executive Committee, the 17-person Central Standing Committee; the placement of people under their banner on party tickets during election seasons; or government positions in case the DPP won an election. Factional groupings in the DPP are known since the party's founding nearly three

decades ago. Although there are reports of a *modus vivendi* among them under Tsai's leadership, infighting could break out once again, particularly if Tsai's principal policies such as improvement of the slowing national economy and the NSBP stumbled against uncharted submerged rocks.

2. Although the KMT and its leader are currently facing damaging lawsuits,¹ it seems determined to win back the presidency from Tsai. Reflecting this enthusiasm is the fact that not long after Hung Hsiu-chu became KMT chairperson, two persons—Steve Chan and Terry Gou—have announced their readiness to campaign for the KMT chairmanship/presidential candidacy in 2020 (see Chou, 2017, Hsu, 2017). Chan is currently Vice Chairman of the KMT, and former Health Minister. Terry Gou is Chairman of Hon Hai Precision Industry Co., Ltd. / Foxconn Technology Group. A number of Taiwanese big conglomerate owners have shown their support for him. In Taiwan, business tycoons by and large have close relations with the KMT—financially and/or personally, on account of the latter's "open" economic policy toward China. Such a development should give Tsai and the DPP an added pressure to concretize the "success" of their NSBP, before the next electoral season comes around.

3. There have been reports that the DPP's attempt to deal with the overall management of the economy is not up to expectation; and that the overall management of its NSBP is marred by managerial "ineptitude." A close observer has summed up Tsai's problems as follows: "failing to choose the right people for senior positions; exhibiting poor executive ability (making but not implementing good policies); failing to establish prioritization among her policies; and vacillating on next steps without strong determination." (Romberg, 2017) Furthermore, indecisiveness has led to Tsai "accomplishing nothing in the past half year; rushing around, confused, blind and without a main axis, she makes...big mistakes in governing" (Romberg, 2017).

In light of the above internal factors, it seems logical that President Tsai's popularity has been dipping fast in a number of recent polls. For instance, after just months in office, a poll by Taiwan Indicators Survey Research (TISR) reported Tsai's rating has plunged to 45.5 percent, while 49.2 percent of respondents said that they trusted her, a drop from 57 percent when she took office in May 2016. Sensitive to

¹ Ex-President Ma Ying-jeou has recently been indicted over the leaking of classified information involving suspected influence peddling by a powerful opposition lawmaker. As for the KMT party, its assets are currently being investigated by a newly-created government body. The latter has ordered a bank to freeze NT\$468 million that it maintains are part of the party's "ill-gotten" gains

popular mood, this alarming trend has prompted a DPP Legislator to call on the government to adjust its pace of reform to match public expectations (The China Post, 2016). Significantly, former president Lee Teng-hui pointedly criticized Tsai administration's performance over the past six months, saying her government did not handle the issues the public expected it to deal with (Su, 2016).

To be fair, one should also mention a poll conducted in February 2017 by the pan-green Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation. This survey found that President Tsai Ing-wen and Premier Lin Chuan's approval ratings rose slightly to 41.4 percent – up more than 7 percentage points from January; and that disapproval toward Tsai also fell from a high of 54.4 percent to 41.3 percent. Also noteworthy is that, for Premier Lin personally, his approval rose to 33.6 percent, although over half (52 percent) of respondents disapproved of his governance (The China Post, 2017).

Turning to the external factors, six variables loom most prominently: (a) Taipei-Peking relations; (b) Washington-Taipei relations; (c) Peking-Washington relations; (d) Conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea; and (e) Precarious developments on the Korean Peninsula, particularly President Kim Jong-un's declared intention to test-fire ICBM nuclear-capable missiles that can reach the US; and (f) China's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) policy.

1. Taipei-Peking relations: President Tsai's "Taiwanese Dreams" runs counter to President Xi's "Chinese Dreams". Her policies in various domains have been designed to eventually make Taiwan a separate country independent from China. The latter has countered such a design with a demand that Tsai acknowledge the so-called "one-China" principle (i.e., Taiwan is a part of Mainland China). Thus, after Tsai left out acknowledgement of this principle in her inaugural address, Peking showed displeasure with moves such as: (a) disabling its official communication channels with Taiwan (Reuters, 2016); (b) curtailing numbers of group tourists to Taiwan (Arlt, 2017); and (c) in July 2015, while Tsai was campaigning for the presidency, China made a forceful gesture against an independence move in the form of a PLA unit attacking mock-up Taiwanese Presidential Palace, and televised a footage on Chinese state TV (Rosen, 2015).

2. Washington-Taipei relations: Trump spoke by phone with President Tsai, the first ever by an American leader since President Jimmy Carter switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979, and thereby acknowledging Taiwan as part of "one China." Trump tried to downplay it by saying it was a congratulatory call from Tsai, and the US has in the past sold Taiwan military equipment. Peking chose to blame Tsai – overlooking

Trump's own decision to receive the call—and characterized her move as “petty” (Chong, 2016). Trump subsequently decided to freeze this issue, at least for now. But his diplomatic problem does not end here, as he still has to grapple with an Obama decision to station marines at the new American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) complex in Taipei's Neihu District, due to be completed later this year. The move has been characterized as a “symbolic expression of the U.S. commitment to its friends in Taiwan” (Yeh, 2017).

3. Peking-Washington relations: President-elect Trump tweeted that he would not be told by China who he should or should not talk to. “Did China ask us if it was OK to devalue their currency (making it hard for our companies to compete), heavily tax our products going into their country (the U.S. doesn't tax them) or to build a massive military complex in the middle of the South China Sea? I don't think so!” (Panda, 2016).

The state-run tabloid *Global Times*, echoing *China Daily*, responded sharply in its editorial that Peking would take “strong countermeasures” against Trump's attempt to “impair” the “One China” principle; and that the “Chinese mainland will be prompted to speed up Taiwan reunification and mercilessly combat those who advocate Taiwan's independence.” Over at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, a spokeswoman told a daily news briefing, as if addressing Trump personally: “Any person should understand that in this world there are certain things that cannot be traded or bought and sold. The One China principle is the precondition and political basis for any country having relations with China” (CNBC, 2017). It turned out that Trump “blinked” first, and told Xi in a phone call he would accept the “one-China” principle (Denyer & Rucker, 2017).

4. Conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea (SCS): China, citing history, has claimed the largest portion of the SCS, known as the “nine-dash line.” Apart from the conventionally understood islands, the disputed “land” consists of low tide elevations (LTEs) or submerged banks, rocky outcrops, atolls, sandbanks and reefs (such as the Scarborough Shoal). According to a US think-tank, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI), China has reclaimed land and built military facilities on many of them – for instance, the Gaven Reefs, Johnson Reef, Fiery Cross, Mischief, Subi and Hughes reef (2016). The conflicting claims culminated in the Philippines filing a case against China in the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague, which ruled in favor of Manila.

To further complicate the matter, Taiwan also claims this whole batch of territory, along with the legitimacy rationale of the “nine-dash line” from a historical perspective. Consequently, Tsai has to adopt a stance similar to China, that is, rejection of the PCA ruling. Taiwan currently appears to have full control of the Taiping, the largest in the Nansha (Spratly) Islands, which has also been claimed by China, Vietnam and the Philippines. Here, Taipei has built four concrete structures, billed as a facility to increase Taiwan’s military alertness (See: Williams, 2016, Brinkley, 2014). This historical legacy inherited from President Chiang Kai-shek will not fit well with Tsai’s NSBP, as some of its target countries are all located in or around the SCS, and have also declared territorial counter-claims in the area.

5. A wildcard development on the Korean Peninsula: President Kim Jong-un has declared his intention to become a nuclear power and to test-fire ICBM nuclear-capable missiles that can reach the US. His move predictably raised deep concern in the US and its Asian allies, especially South Korea and Japan. US Foreign Secretary Rex Tillerson said the tension here has reached “dangerous levels,” and suggested the US might launch a pre-emptive strike against Pyongyang. After Tillerson met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Peking, however, all sides concerned appear to have de-escalated to some extent (Torbaty & Blanchard, 2017). Taiwan, as a result, has for now a breathing space to pursue its NSBP free from complications upon which it has no control.

Given China’s current huge potential contributions to the US in terms of bilateral trade and leverage against North Korea, it seems a distinct possibility that Trump would at the end of the day do Peking’s bidding rather than Taiwan’s. His acceptance of the “One-China Principle” is just an example.

6. China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB): The most immediate and formidable competitor against Taiwan’s NSBP appears to be China’s “Belt and Road Initiative,” launched by President Xi in 2013. Indeed, it seems that Tsai’s NSBP is a logical reaction to BRI, being formally unveiled two years later, at the DPP’s 29th founding anniversary party in Taipei on 22 September 2015 (Djankov & Miner, 2016).

The BRI “is about building networks of connectivity. The geographical linkages envisioned by the belt and the [cover] multiple locations. And these links are not limited to physical infrastructure—President Xi has talk-

ed about connectivity in terms of trade, investment, finance and flows of tourists and students" (Gardiner, n.d.). Essentially, these are what the NSBP aims to achieve. To complete the loop, China offers loans through its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Gallo & Biava, 2017), which leaves Taiwan quite a few steps behind.

Given the above trends of internal and external factors, the prospect for success of President Tsai's NSBP does not look very bright. Granted a strong determination and willingness to work hard, she and her colleagues is up against a formidable substantial set of tasks, while her time in office is relentlessly ticking away.

The NSBP and Its Implication for Thailand

Thailand is currently at a critical historical juncture. King Bhumipol Rama IX has recently passed away after a 70-year reign, leaving the throne to his son King Maha Vajiralongkorn Rama X. General Paryuth Chan-Ocha, who led a coup d'état in May 2014 following eight months of violence-laced massive demonstrations against the Yingluck Shinnawat government, is currently trying to solve a long list of economic, political and "national security" problems. Each of these is already a complicated issue in itself, and requires a lengthy period of time to overcome. To further complicate the matter, they are also deeply intertwined with the socio-structural problem of widespread corruption among government bureaucrats – particularly the ranking ones. As their advancement up the hierarchy and financial wellbeing require an ability to help the reigning politicians realize personal whims and wishes – lawfully or otherwise. On top of it all, General Paryuth has added even more pressure on himself by promising a return to electoral "democracy" within November 2017.

Thailand's overall current problems by and large arose from, and exacerbated by, a power struggle between leaders of the armed forces who essentially wanted to protect the monarchy, and former premier Thaksin Shinnawat who was ousted by the former in 2006. Determined to restore his pre-2006-coup position, the latter has since built a well-financed network of followers who could forcefully disrupt important government activities (the Pattaya ASEAN Summit in 2009), produce mini-civil wars in the heart of Bangkok (2010, 2014), and engineer electoral majorities resulting in three proxy governments—Samak Sundaravej (December 2007-September 2008), his brother-in-law Somchai Wongsawat (September 2008-December 2008), and his sister Yingluck (August 2011-May 2014). Thaksin, apart from corruption charges, was later being investigated on lèse-majesté and stripped of his police

rank and royal decorations. Most recently, in March 2017, an arms cache and an alleged plot to assassinate the Premier and Deputy Premier/Defense Minister have been uncovered. The suspect, Wuthipong Kornthammakun, is widely known for his aggressive solutions to “bring back Thaksin.” He has been implicated by one of the arrested suspects for connections with Charupong Ruangsuwan, former Puea Thai Party chief and interior minister in the Yingluck government (Thepgumpanat & Niyomyat, 2017). Charupong has denied his involvement. He is currently executive-director of the Organization of Free Thais for Human Rights and Democracy (OFHD), based in San Francisco (Neawna, 2017 [in Thai]).

To expedite his tasks, General Prayuth wears two hats: (a) as prime minister, he follows the current legal-administrative norms and procedures; and (b) when the tasks appear unusually intractable, he, as Chief of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), can invoke Section 44 of the 22 July 2014 Interim Constitution. That is, if deemed “necessary for the purpose of reforms in various fields, for the enhancement of unity and harmony among people in the country, or for the prevention, restraint, or suppression of any act which undermines public order or national security, the Throne, the national economy, or State affairs, irrespective of whether such act occurred inside or outside the Kingdom, [he] shall have the powers to make any order to disrupt or suppress regardless of the legislative, executive or judicial force of that order” (Isranews, 2014).

On the international front, western countries, particularly the US, have relentlessly pressured Gen. Paryuth to quickly return the country to “democracy”. “There is no justification for this military coup,” John Kerry bluntly reacted; and on the following day, the State Department suspended about US \$3.5 million in military aid, including a portion for training (see Stewart, Alexander, & Brunnstrom, 2014; The Australian, 2014). The American ambassador in 2014 intentionally left out the NCPO/Government leaders from her July 4th celebration guest list, while members of the cabinet ousted by their coup were prominent invitees (Manager Online, 2014). Furthermore, it willfully violated diplomatic etiquettes in the form of, for instance: (a) sending embassy officials to a number of provincial polling stations posing as “observers,” without proper authorization through the Thai Foreign Ministry during the August 7, 2016 national constitution referendum, not to mention their refusal to identify themselves to the authorities present (Tnews, 2016 [in Thai]); and (b) sending embassy officials on goodwill visit to a number of pro-Thaksin (anti-Prayuth Government) “red villages” in the northeastern provinces (Manager Online, 2015 [in Thai]). On top of these, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel, with full knowledge of the “Red-Yellow color conflict” which finally led to the May 2014 coup, nevertheless insisted in early 2015 that

General Prayuth institute as soon as possible a "more inclusive political process" in Thailand—meaning an active role for the pro-Thaksin politicians and their "red shirt" supporters now and in the future (see BBC, 2015, Crispin, 2015).

However, General Prayuth firmly stood his ground, and reaffirmed his intention to reform the country before re-starting the democratic process. "Everybody wants to ask for a return to normal, to democracy with full freedom. I want to ask whether this is possible," he said in late December 2015. "If we want to create change from the past, it's not. We have tried for 83 years with many coups. Now I want the real reform to take place. This is for our children's future." He reportedly urged Thais "to stop trying to stir up trouble." While pointing out that democracy does not mean "unlimited freedom," he also warned people to stop trying to get foreigners involved in Thailand's internal affairs. Addressing the US insistence on a quick return to "democracy," General Prayuth reminded Washington that there is no "one shirt that fits all people in the world," as each people have their own unique problems to solve (Blake & Yuvejwattana, 2015).

China, keen to uproot US influence in Asia and Western Pacific areas, adopted a contrasting position. It readily lent a helping hand, sending Premier Li Keqiang to Bangkok in December 2014. During his visit, China agreed "to build a rail network in Thailand and buy two million tons of its rice," while offering "more than US\$3 billion in loans and aid to neighboring countries including Thailand to improve infrastructure and production, and to fight poverty." A few days later, China welcomed General Prayuth at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing for bilateral talks with Premier Li, and with President Xi on the following day. On this trip, the two sides signed three accords: (a) to renew a currency swap deal worth 70 billion yuan (US\$11.25 billion); (b) an enhanced technology cooperation in water resources and irrigation; and (c) cooperation between Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) and the People's Bank of China to help finance trade and investment deals (VOA News, 2014).

Russia—always eager to replace American influence anywhere on the globe—also sent Premier Dmitry Medvedev to Bangkok for a state visit and talks aimed at expanding bilateral trade and tourism. During talks, Russia had shown interest in buying rubber from Thailand. Medvedev's visit was the first by a Russian prime minister in 25 years. The two sides witnessed the signing of 10 MOUs at Government House. Five were signed between state agencies on energy, tourism, cultural exchange, anti-narcotics and investment; and another five by Thai-Russian private companies to strengthen cooperation in machinery engineering, navigation technology, rail infrastructure, fibreglass production and educational exchange be-

tween Moscow State Regional University and Siam Technology College (The Moscow Times, 2015).

Given General Prayuth's current predicaments, China clearly has more to offer Thailand than Taiwan—as trade partner, and particularly as countervailing force against American pressure. Apart from “gestural” assistance mentioned above, China-Thai trade has traditionally outpaced Taiwan-Thai transactions. As the Table 2 shows: (a) Thailand enjoyed trade surplus with China from 2010 to 2014, but slipped into the red in 2015; (b) Taiwan has always been in the blue in trade with Thailand from 2010 to 2016; and (c) a diminishing trend in Taiwan-Thailand import and export had emerged in 2015 and 2016.

Thailand	Unit : US\$ Thousand			
	China		Taiwan	
	Import	Export	Import	Export
2010	19,741,222.11	33,193,365.02	5,355,081	3,840,014
2011	25,694,603.60	39,039,795.89	6,229,961	4,404,640
2012	31,196,768.38	38,551,206.04	6,665,294	3,708,830
2013	32,717,903.84	38,522,680.53	6,431,935	3,793,413
2014	34,293,357.06	38,326,376.77	6,194,518	4,410,177
2015	38,310,626.47	37,221,137.65	5,770,400	4,043,308
2016	n/a	n/a	5,486,225	3,819,558

Table 2. Export and Import Values between Thailand and China and Thailand and Taiwan from 2010 to 2016

Sources: World Bank and Ministry of Finance, R.O.C. as of March 2017

Nevertheless, Thailand appears to welcome President Tsai's NSBP. For economic reasons at least, the kingdom will continue to trade and cordially interact with Taipei, in so long as the political issue of Taiwan's independence does not surface. If it does, Thailand most probably would adopt a non-interference position, saying it is the internal affairs of the two trade partners'.

Conclusion

The New Southbound Policy is a concrete gesture reflecting President Tsai's intention to move toward minimum economic reliance on Peking and, if unchallenged, toward Taiwan's status as an independent state in the longer run. But her available economic, socio-political and military resources are currently in need of shoring up. In any case, they are overall unmatched to Peking's—either now or at any time soon. This policy has to date produced minimal results; but it is only fair to allow President Tsai and her colleagues some more time to prove their mettle. In longer-term view, however, it would not be surprising if her NSBP meet the same fate as the "Go South" policy launched by presidents Lee Ting-hui (KMT) and Chen Shui-bian (DPP) in 1994 and 2002 respectively (Churchman, 2016).

Meanwhile, it appears unlikely that Tsai would venture to push Peking's tolerance limit on the "independent Taiwan" issue, since she cannot confidently rely on Trump readily coming to her rescue—particularly in view of the latter's emerging impulsive problem-solving style and his "America First" stand.

Thailand will continue to adopt the "non-interference" stance toward China-Taiwan cross-strait relations, while responding positively to Tsai's NSBP overture. A major reason for this position is to keep China as a counterweight against the US, who seems to be siding with the current government's principal political opponent. Nevertheless, the kingdom has shown readiness to welcome the US government's readiness for fence-mending/goodwill gestures, such as sending Adm. Harry Harris, Commander of its Pacific Command, to open the Cobra Gold joint exercise in Thailand on 14 February 2017. This is indeed a "simple reflex" deeply ingrained in Thai foreign policy thinking for centuries.

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