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President Tsai Ing-wen attended the opening ceremony of the Yushan Forum. She pledged that the Forum will facilitate regional dialogue on “creating a stable, prosperous, and sustainable future.” Picture source: Office of the President, Taiwan(ROC), *Office of the President, Taiwan(ROC)*, <<https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/23777>>.

Yushan Forum:

Highlighting Taiwan as a Driving Force for Asia Development

Dr. Alan H. Yang

Since Taiwan launched its New Southbound Policy (NSP) in 2016, it has devoted itself to deepening Taiwan’s ties with South and Southeast Asia, and New Zealand and Australia, through specific policy initiatives, engagement programs, and innovative partnerships, jointly facilitated with various ministries, business enterprises, and civilian sectors.

The NSP is a flagship foreign policy of President Ing-wen Tsai, with a people-centered focus on promoting economic cooperation, public health and medical service training, regional agriculture, education and talent training, as well as public policy platforms between Taiwan and its Asian neighbors. It is also a re-orientation of Taiwanese presence in Asia





through bilateral exchanges to increase the desirability of including Taiwan in the regional community.

The international society has long since anticipated Taiwan contributing more to human values, sustainable development goals (SDGs), and sharing its success with more people. Taiwan is nevertheless under-represented in international organizations and forums.

In Asia, the key regional platforms for security dialogue and political economic exchange include the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable in Malaysia and, of course, the Boao Forum in China. These platforms contour the competition and compromise among regional powers in military, security, political, and economic discussions.

Taiwan, however, has limited access to these international forums. The delegation number is limited and incumbent government officials or representatives may only participate in their personal capacity, if any. It is even more difficult for Taiwanese delegates to highlight Taiwan's national interests in and contribution to regional integration with regional stakeholders.

In addition, Asia needs an alternative dialogue mechanism or regional forum that focuses on sustainable development, economic innovation and social progress. It should be a new platform for key stakeholders, with specific action plans on collaboration, and of consensus among its people.

The Yushan Forum, as a regional dialogue on innovation and progress, emphasizes the importance of development and the practice of partnership in Asia. It is a Taiwan-initiated annual regional forum partnering with Asian neighbors, as well as like-minded countries, in line with the strategic rationale of the NSP.

In 2017, the inaugural forum was organized by the Prospect Foundation, a leading think tank on security and foreign policy in Taiwan. The two-day forum featured with six sessions, attracting more than 800 international and local participants. As the largest gathering of international leaders, social entrepreneurs, civil society organization leaders, and high-level officials, it successfully attracted international attention to Taiwan's southward engagement, as well as encouraging preliminary achievements.

In 2018, the Yushan Forum, held on October 11 and 12, was organized by the Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation (TAEF), a newly established pilot think tank promoting Taiwan's presence and connectivity in Asia. Expanded to eight sessions, this year's Yushan Forum, with the main theme of "Working Together for Regional Prosperity," welcomed 1,055 international and local participants to brainstorm the common future of Asia.

There were in-depth discussions that emphasized cultivating Asian young talents for regional development, innovative regional health care reforms, activating comprehensive cooperation on agriculture, and reinforcing capability for economic innovation and industrial connectivity. Taiwan's ministers and vice



ministers were invited to sharing their insights, policy practices and strategic rationale of how Taiwan works with their Asian counterparts to the international audience and local participants.

Stakeholders, such as policy practitioners, think tankers, NGO leaders, young entrepreneurs, and cultural leaders gathered, debated, brainstormed feasible practices of good governance and workable partnerships for regional prosperity.

The Forum itself is becoming an important vehicle for Taiwan to link up with a regional agenda for Asian development, as well as new actors and institutions. It is, for sure, not a political venue for hard power competition among major powers, but a social platform for sharing resources, experiences and insights, in line with soft power reinforced among stakeholders.

By highlighting Taiwan's contribution to the people and regional community in Asia, such experiences can be shared among neighboring countries and carried out by like-minded governments and civil societies. The Yushan Forum, as being institutionalized and regularly held, will become one of the significant driving forces in Asia.

For India and other South Asian countries, Taiwan is expected to establish solid ties in trade, investment, and economic cooperation. Taiwan's engagement and contribution to social entrepreneurship and local empowerment is in great demand. It is also true that in Southeast Asia, the blueprints of ASEAN-led integration

and the sustainable development goals of regional societies and governments are priority concerns of Taiwan's people-centered southward engagement over the past few years.

President Tsai Ing-wen attended the opening ceremony of the Yushan Forums in 2017 and 2018. Quoting from Teofisto Guingona, the former Vice President of the Philippines, at the 2017 Yushan Forum, she said that "We help each other. The Philippines to help Taiwan, and Taiwan to help the Philippines." President Tsai pledged that the Forum will facilitate regional dialogue on "creating a stable, prosperous, and sustainable future."

The next step of the Yushan Forum is not only to continue its annual gathering, but also to substantiate the action plans outlined from brainstorming and debates in line with its New Southbound Policy. As Taiwan utilizes the Yushan Forum as well as its regional networks and programs to reinforce new partnerships in Asia, a more coherent and integrated regional community in Asia will be facilitated and featured by an indispensable Taiwan.

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Editor's Note: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the Prospect Foundation.

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