

## **Crafting Taiwan-Southeast Asian Relations with Halal Tourism**

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### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to discuss halal tourism (Muslim-friendly tourism) as a strategic bridge to bring Taiwan into a closer and more constructive engagement with Southeast Asian nations. Halal tourism's strategic element lies not only in material benefits but also in many politico-strategic and socio-cultural factors. Developing halal tourism means strengthening Taiwan's economic performance and public diplomacy, as well as increasing its visibility among the people of Southeast Asia, which in turn stabilizes Taiwan's global position in general. President Tsai Ing-wen has put Southeast Asia as Taiwan's priority in the New Southbound Policy she adopted when she came to power in 2016, a policy which was further intensified in the second term of her administration. We argue that in the case of Taiwan, halal tourism is not

only attracting tourism but also operates as a soft power to increase further the visibility of Taiwan in Southeast Asia and the broader Muslim world. First, this is an essential way for Taiwan to face an increasingly influential China in Southeast Asia. Second, halal tourism is a powerful tool to increase Taiwan's visibility and denote its identity to Southeast Asians. Third, the New Southbound Policy allows for halal tourism to become a well-developed market opportunity for Taiwan, in which China is still lagging. However, future attempts to realize halal tourism in Taiwan face some challenges.

**Keywords:** *halal tourism, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, New Southbound Policy, soft power*

## **1. Introduction**

One of the main problems facing Taiwan in its foreign relations is its increasingly limited recognition because of the One China policy. Although the policy allows the Republic of China (hereafter Taiwan) to engage in relationships beyond political and military issues, in practice, the People's Republic of China's (hereafter China) growing strength and influence is gradually drowning out Taiwan's existence in the world. Due to its unique political status, only 14 out of 193 UN member countries still recognize Taiwan's sovereignty.

Taiwan has made various efforts to continue maintaining its survival and existence as a country. The guarantee of military power from the United States (U.S.) is undoubtedly important. However, the problem so far is that China has shown that it will not realize integration with Taiwan through military force. Rather, China uses its political, economic, and cultural influences to marginalize Taiwan's existence, relations and influence indirectly. In other words, China uses soft power to put aside Taiwan in global politics. Based on this circumstance,

Taiwan has no choice but to strengthen its soft power to demonstrate its visibility, image, and presence in foreign relations.

For some time, especially during Ma Ying-jeou's administration (2008-2016), Taiwan assumed that its soft power, such as the democracy and economic progress models, could appease China, and both countries could flourish within the same system. To a certain degree, as mentioned by Chu, Taiwan's dynamic civil society and vibrant democracy have pushed China to learn to cooperate with its democratic system (Chu, 2011). Taiwan's social and democratic values can shape the future of China's politics; however, the Chinese Communist Party's increasingly firm grip on China's politics complicates this. On the contrary, it is China, with its large population, which controls the direction of Taiwan's social and economic change and dependency on the country in the long run.

Recognizing this situation, under current President Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan moderates its dependence on China and reverts to the 2016 Go South Policy under a new name, the New Southbound Policy (NSP). This policy is closely related to Taiwan's use of potential soft power in agricultural technology, health systems, industry innovation, education, and culture (Office of Trade Negotiations, Executive Yuan, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2017). These areas have operated for some time, especially in relation to some Southeast Asian countries, where Taiwan has maintained trade, cultural and educational links. For example, trade relations with Indonesia until the late 1990s surpassed the country's trade volume with China (Ku, 2000: 33). Cultural approaches through contemporary art performance are also common. The most significant form of soft power is education. Taiwanese universities hold several Memorandums of Understanding with Southeast Asian universities, and the Taiwanese government also offers a substantial number of scholarships and training programs for Southeast Asian students.

Nevertheless, not all of these approaches work to the fullest. Taiwan is experiencing some obstacles because of the global community's general view or image that does not distinguish between China and Taiwan as Chinese communities. The soft power approach has succeeded primarily in attracting Malaysian and Indonesian Chinese people to make Taiwan a learning and trading destination, including taking up residence there (Supamijoto and Herlijanto, 2016: 1181). The Taiwanese government has also managed to attract the attention of various groups, such as students, academics, tourists, and people in business, to come and interact with the people of Taiwan. However, the use of soft power has not reached a broader audience in the majority of Southeast Asian populations, primarily Muslim communities.

The New Southbound Policy underlies tourism as a prospective area for creating a new market in Taiwan (Office of Trade Negotiations, Executive Yuan, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2017). The policy highlights the attractiveness of halal tourism and emphasizes the importance of partnering with Southeast Asian countries to develop opportunities in the business sector. Halal refers to Islamic rules that deem what is permissible and what is not. The term *halal* traditionally refers to foods and beverages permitted by Islamic law, but now include also cosmetics, pharmaceutical products, as well as business practices. To convince consumers of a halal product, halal certification is required on products in accordance with the standards specified in the Qur'an. They need to be produced with practices that follow Islamic law and should be free of prohibited components. This term has just recently become associated with tourism. Halal requirement includes hotels serving halal-only food and no alcohol, private beaches and swimming pools for women, and room to perform their daily prayers. Meanwhile, halal tourism is a new concept in tourism. The term *halal* is defined as 'permissible' according to Islamic teaching (Sharia law). In terms of

products, food, and drinks, the concept of *halal* is now gaining popularity worldwide because halal is an assurance of hygiene and safety, which is acceptable both by Muslim and consumers from other religions.

Halal tourism's popularity is now gaining worldwide, as can be seen from the readiness of many countries to promote it through policy. Battour and Ismail (2016: 2) define halal tourism as "any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to be used or engaged by Muslims in the tourism industry". The foundation for halal tourism is Islamic law (*sharia*), targeting mainly, but not limited to, Muslim customers, involving products such as such as halal hotels (*sharia*-compliant hotels), halal resorts, halal restaurants, and halal trips. Similarly, the location of halal tourism is not limited to the Muslim world; thus, it can be performed by anyone in any place, including Taiwan. The increasing number of Muslim travelers worldwide has given rise to halal tourism development with no exceptions for non-traditional destinations such as Taiwan.

In the above context, this paper proposes that Taiwan may gain increased attention, advantage, and visibility when it has more knowledge of Southeast Asian Muslim cultures. Developing halal industries and Muslim friendly facilities in Taiwan may support Taiwan's New Southbound Policy. Despite being a lucrative business opportunity, halal tourism is a form of Taiwan's soft power.

Recently, there are around 50,000-60,000 permanent Muslim residents around Taiwan (less than 0,3% of the total populations). According to Chinese Muslim Association (CMA), the first wave of Muslim migration was about 20,000 people, came from Yunnan, Sinkiang, Ninghsia and Kansu (in the western and northern regions of China). They distributed mainly in Yunlin, Changhua, Keelung, and Tainan. Unlike the post-first migrants, the first wave mostly descended

from Chinese Muslims in Mainland China. They are mostly Sunni Muslims and belong to the Hanafi school (Zafar, 2016). The third Muslim immigration in Taiwan migrated from Thailand and Myanmar. The majority of Taiwanese Muslims today are recent converts who have married mainlander Muslims. During the Revolution of 1911, Dr. Sun Yat-sen liberated the Muslims from Manchu oppression and went on to recognize them, along with the Han, Manchurians, Mongols and Tibetans. The Han ethnic groups have settled in Taiwan since the 17th century long before the arrival of the Kuomintang Army and its supporters in Taiwan in 1945. Indigenous people had been in Taiwan for 15,000 years before the Chinese such as Han people, came to the island (Gowing, 1970).

The Taiwan government welcomes Muslims and supports the development of Muslim community in Taiwan largely. It can be seen from a number of *masjids* (mosques) and Muslim associations around Taiwan. As of 2018 there are 9 *masjids*: Taipei Grand Mosque in Da'an, Taipei; Taipei Cultural Mosque in Zhongzheng, Taipei; Longgang Mosque in Zhongli, Taoyuan City; Taichung Mosque in Nantun, Taichung; Kaohsiung Mosque in Lingya, Kaohsiung; Tainan Mosque in East District, Tainan; At-Taqwa Mosque in Dayuan, Taoyuan City'; An-Nur Tongkang Mosque in Donggang, Pingtung County; Hualien Al-Falah Mosque in Hualien City, Hualien County (Aditya and Agmasari, 2020).

This research uses qualitative methods, and was conducted between 2018 and 2019. The authors employed surveys, observations, and interviews with relevant informants, including staff at the China Muslim Association (CMA), some Indonesian respondents at the Taipei Grand Mosques, Taiwanese and Indonesian scholars and students, and the staff of Halal International Taiwan (HIT).

## **2. Taiwan and Southeast Asia: Reshaping “profit-centered” business with Halal Industry**

Taiwan-Southeast Asian history dates back to 3000 B.C. when the aboriginal people of Taiwan interacted with people throughout Southeast Asia. Shared linguistic, religious, and cultural practices in many parts of Southeast Asia are evidenced in migration patterns and familial linkages that occurred in the past and continue today. Common histories between Taiwan and Southeast Asia are rich, ranging from colonization to other economic, political, and socio-cultural factors, forming a solid foundation for establishing person-to-person relations today. Some historical narratives showcased that the relationship between the people of Taiwan and Southeast Asians was not new (Lipson *et al.*, 2014: 2). Thus, initially, they were not strangers, yet their proximity was interrupted by political hurdles. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the New Southbound Policy, as Chong claims, “is a natural extension of these long-standing relationships” (Chong, 2018).

In the past few decades after the first republican government was established in Taipei, Taiwan, Southeast Asian relations were somewhat hampered by political factors. The anti-communist movement in Taiwan positioned the country as a strong ally to the U.S. By that time, the natural bond between Southeast Asia and Taiwan was neglected, making the relationship limited, formalized, and elitist despite the fact that many Southeast Asian countries were also anti-communist and therefore strongly backed by the U.S. However, the most influential factor that distanced the Taiwan-Southeast Asian relationship was the Southeast Asian governments’ acknowledgment of the One China Policy. For instance, Indonesia's relationship with Taiwan was “maintained with a low profile, mainly because of the sensitive ethnic Chinese issues in Indonesia.” However, Indonesia posed no problems in its relationship with Taiwan (Ku, 2002: 228). The relationship between Taiwan and

other Southeast Asian countries has encountered similar issues. Relations with Malaysia have also been problematic due to anti-communist and anti-Chinese sentiment (Ku, 2000) and the ethnic Chinese sentiment. Singapore and Taiwan are small anti-communist states on the world stage and now potential allies, even though Singapore-Taiwan links are a source of suspicion for the PRC government (Shih, 2016: 2).

Before the initiation of the New Southbound policy, the relationship between Southeast Asia and Taiwan was characterized by a state-centered approach. The previous regimes led by Presidents Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou approached Southeast Asian countries with a different agenda, emphasizing formal relations, especially with ASEAN as a regional organization, which put little emphasis on people-to-people relations. Even though Taiwan established relationships with individual ASEAN member countries, these relationships were more institutionally based. As Buszynski puts it, the ASEAN countries have a special place in Taiwanese international relations due to Taiwan's position vis a vis China, in which Taiwan tries to attract ASEAN within a campaign for greater international recognition (Buszynski, 2001). Buszynski further explain that the visit of Premier Lien Chan to Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia in the mid-1990s was in an effort to establish economic diplomacy among ASEAN member states. The visit also "intended to avoid excessive dependence upon China and to diversify economic and commercial ties" (Buszynski, 2001). In other words, Taiwan has used economic diplomacy with ASEAN as a politico-strategic measure against Chinese hegemony pressuring Taiwan to implement the One China policy.

The rediscovery of Taiwan-Southeast Asia relations gained momentum when ASEAN entered a new phase as a matured, integrated regional institution by establishing the ASEAN Community in 2015,



which centers on people-to-people connectivity and lessens the state-centered, top-down approach. ASEAN's agenda is in line with Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, which "places greater attention on the development needs of the people and civil society in Southeast Asia and represents Taiwan's response to the core value of a people-centered ASEAN Community" (Hsiao and Yang, 2018). Compatible agendas between Taiwan and Southeast Asia could bring mutual benefit and lead the two parties to constructive relations and shift Taiwan from being "profit-centered" to becoming "people-oriented" by implementing the "4Rs:" relocation, reinvention, reinvigoration, and reform (Yang, 2017: 141). By pivoting Taiwan's foreign policy strategy, Taiwan and ASEAN are ready to move together into deeper and more meaningful cooperation.

To reach its full potential, the ASEAN community needs a partner in consolidating its three pillars (political security, economic community, and socio-cultural). In that sense, Taiwan's New Southbound Policy is ready to "take mutual interests in politics and security, economics and investment, and social prosperity into consideration" (Yang, 2016). The ASEAN Community is in accordance with Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, as both strategies prioritize people-to-people connectivity. Since ASEAN member countries do not have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan, people-to-people contacts form the foundation of relations among them. Historical facts show that Taiwan-ASEAN relations are durable and capable of fostering future relations. In the absence of formal diplomatic relations, people-to-people connectivity is the backbone of the two parties' relations. In other words, this relation can be situated in a more meaningful awareness and mutual understanding among everyday people in the form of public diplomacy.

As an integral part of the people-centered foreign policy prioritized by both the New Southbound Policy and ASEAN Community, wider public involvement is vital, especially in the absence of formal diplomatic recognition. After decades of being distanced due to political circumstances, Taiwan's New Southbound Policy aims to reorient its relationship with Southeast Asia through different flagship programs. Tourism has been explicitly mentioned as "one of the best channels for bringing people closer together," which will "give partner countries a better understanding of Taiwan's history, natural environment, and hospitality" (Office of Trade Negotiations, Executive Yuan, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2017). Taiwan and Southeast Asia aim to bring their peoples closer than before, and halal tourism is one strategic means, considering Taiwan's intention to create a new tourism market and for the Southeast Asian public too.

The dynamics of the Muslim world are also changing. Globalization continues to shape the tastes, habits, and spending patterns of people around the world. The profile of Muslim travelers has often been oversimplified in the past, but their behavior has changed in the last two decades. The increasing numbers of Muslim travelers worldwide have given rise to halal tourism's development. Muslim travel was typically limited to holy sites in Mecca and Medina, as well as other traditional destinations in Muslim countries in the Middle East. In recent years, due to ease of travel expenses and more open borders, Muslim travelers have expanded their destinations. Consequently, halal tourism has become a promising business, offering many facilities that can be easily accessed by Muslim travelers.

Halal tourism requires, among other things, halal certificates. Halal certified products are guaranteed to comply with Islamic Law ('Sharia'). The halal standard regulates all relevant aspects of the product, including

materials, feed and slaughter (if animal-based), manufacturing processes, hygiene and safety requirements, packaging, labeling, and transportation. Halal standards are in line with current consumer market trends, prioritizing healthy, hygienic, and safe products.

Corresponding with these trends, halal products have emerged as a promising new business opportunity. Fast-growing numbers of Muslim tourists, who spend money, are a positive indicator for the halal tourism sector. It was estimated that “spending by Muslim consumers worldwide would increase from \$1.9 trillion in 2015 to \$2.6 trillion by 2020” (Abdi, 2017). This number is obviously promising. Furthermore, Salaam Gateway (2019) estimates that Muslims spent around US\$2.2 trillion in 2018 on sectors including food, pharmaceuticals, and lifestyle products due to Islamic faith-inspired ethical consumption needs (Salaam Gateway, 2019). In previous years, Thomson Reuters’ *State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2016/17* concluded that “sentiment on the Islamic Economy was overwhelmingly positive.” Thomson Reuters surveyed 172 industries, and the aggregate Islamic Economy was characterized by high growth. Moreover, the report estimated global Muslim spending across sectors at over \$1.9 trillion in 2015. The largest spending sector for Muslims was food and beverages, followed by clothing and apparel, media and recreation, travel, and pharmaceuticals and cosmetics (Thomson Reuters, 2016).

Furthermore, the Thomson Reuters report also explains that there are four key factors of an Islamic-based market that support the majority of halal business: demographics (the fast-growing, young, and large Muslim population worldwide); economies (57 Muslim-majority Organization of Islamic Cooperation member-countries had a total GDP of \$17 trillion in 2015, which represented 15 percent of the total global world); ethos/values (Islam as a ‘way of life’ for many Muslims continues to guide all aspects of their lives, including their consumption

behavior); and halal markets (many Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) governments have launched initiatives that expand into other halal market sectors). The global market also helps Islamic markets' fast growth through the participation of multinational corporations, which seek market growth opportunities. Converging global business ethics such as sentiment around healthy/organic food, ethical finance, humane treatment of animals, fair trade, eco-tourism, and other socially-conscious businesses are compatible with the growing demand for halal industries.

The halal market is a new economic force that should not be ignored. The market's potential is estimated to be worth trillions of U.S. dollars; therefore, companies with halal products and services must quickly reap potential profits. The demand for halal products around the globe is not limited to Muslims. Still, it comes from people of different races and ethnicities, thus giving a significant boost to the halal industry. According to the United Nations World Trade Organization (UNWTO, 2018), the year of 2009 to 2016 witnessed a sustained growth of global tourism despite the global financial and security crises. In 2020, the UNWTO projected international tourist arrivals worldwide to grow at a rate of 3-4 percent (UNWTO, 2020). The prospects of Muslim visitors look gloomy during 2020 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet the number has not confirmed yet.

Based on the data provided by the MasterCard-Crescent Rating Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), the halal-friendly travel market is one of the fastest-growing segments in the global travel industry. For example, there were approximately 117 million Muslim international travelers in 2015, and their numbers were projected to increase to 168 million by 2020. Also before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the travel expenditure of Muslim travelers was expected to exceed USD 200 billion (CrescentRating, 2015). The numbers are expected to increase to

more than 230 million by 2026, and worth USD 300 billion into the global economy (CrescentRating, 2019). In 2030, the Muslim population is expected to increase from 1.6 billion to 2.2 billion. This number is too large to overlook and suggests that halal travel will outpace the growth of any other tourism sector (*The National*, 13th August 2015).

Taiwan's main halal tourism targets include Asia and the Middle East, as well as the U.S., Europe, and the U.K., which have significant market sizes. Positive trends are also valid for Taiwan to reap substantial benefits from Southeast Asian tourists, even though they remain small and need to develop further. Taiwan's Deputy Director of Tourism Wayne Liu said that Taiwan took ten years to increase the number of visitors from Japan; therefore it is impossible to see the result of only two years' worth of investments towards attracting Muslim tourists who have a very different culture from Taiwan (*Taipei Times*, 30th May 2016). The number of Muslim travelers to Taiwan is relatively small, even though it has recently been named the seventh most popular destination (ranked tenth in 2015) and the safest of the 130 non-OIC destinations worldwide in the Global Master Index (*ibid.*). In 2019, Taiwan ranked third among non-OIC destinations for Muslim tourism, together with Japan and the United Kingdom (*BusinessToday*, 2019).

Following this record, the Taiwan halal industry is traveling in the right direction. In 2019, the number of Muslims who came to Taiwan was still small, at only about 200,000 of its 10.44 million population, but Taiwan hopes to gain more Muslim visitors. The number of Muslim travelers, the majority coming from neighboring countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, was projected to grow to 168 million in 2020. However, the Covid-19 pandemic put a halt to the Taiwanese government's effort to bring these international tourists in (*The Halal Times*, 2020).

**Table 1** Comparisons of 2018 and 2019 Top 10 Non-OIC Destinations on Taiwan Position

Non-OIC Destinations Rank	GMTI 2019 Rank	Destination	Score	Non-OIC Destinations Rank	GMTI 2018 Rank	Destination	Score
1	10	Singapore	65	1	6	Singapore	66.2
2	18	Thailand	57	2	18	Thailand	59.5
3	25	United Kingdom	53	3	19	Japan	56.1
3	25	Japan	53	4	24	United Kingdom	53.8
3	25	Taiwan	53	5	27	Taiwan	51.4
6	29	South Africa	52	5	27	Hong Kong	49.6
7	31	Hong Kong	51	7	32	South Africa	47.7
8	34	South Korea	48	8	35	Germany	45.7
9	36	France	46	9	36	France	52.2
9	36	Spain	46	10	37	Australia	44.7
9	36	Philippines	46				

Source: Compiled by authors from *Mastercard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index 2018* and *Mastercard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index 2019*.

The expansion of tourism from Southeast Asia has coincided with the decline in the number of Chinese tourists to Taiwan sparked by President Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to reconcile with Mainland China as "One China". Instead, President Tsai prefers a status quo. The first three months of 2017 showed that travelers from Southeast Asia exceeded 478,000, up 36 percent from the same period in 2016. By contrast, the number of Chinese visitors continued to fall by 42 percent. By learning from the experience of South Korea and Hong Kong, which are too dependent on the Chinese tourist market, Taiwan is seeking to diversify its relations by attracting more visitors from other Asian countries (*The New York Times*, 17th May 2017).

Tourism is an economic activity that can contribute significantly to the GDP of any country. The economic impact of this sector is well-known: generating foreign exchange, creating employment

opportunities; stimulating income, trade, and entrepreneurship; and increasing regional development. In Taiwan, tourism has been dubbed “the best prospective industry sector” (*The Straits Times*, 25th July 2016). For this reason, unsurprisingly, the Taiwanese government, has developed a halal tourism platform to increase state revenue. Taiwan has a strong economic performance and is one of the “Asian Tigers”, yet Taiwan has remained low-ranked in terms of tourist destinations among non-OIC countries. Other countries have also developed halal tourism and use the platform for business purposes, including non-Muslim countries such as Singapore, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Thailand.

Halal goods and service providers are prepared to equip a halal tourist industry. To cater to Muslim travelers’ needs, the Taiwanese government opened Taiwan’s Halal Center on April 21, 2017, in Taipei as part of government efforts to assist local businesses in optimizing potential Muslim markets. Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-jie promised to make Taipei a friendly city for Muslim travelers by increasing the number of halal restaurants from 30 to 70 by 2019 (*ibid.*). Taiwan has a great opportunity to expand trade and business relationships with Muslim countries through rapid economic development. More than half of the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims live in Asia, with Indonesia comprising the largest Muslim market in the world. To help local companies grow their presence within Muslim markets, Taiwan’s Halal Center is working on expanding the availability of halal-certified products domestically (Zaini, 2018). In short, the global market potential for halal tourism is very promising for Taiwan. The Taiwanese government is quite open to halal tourism, as shown by its steps to accommodate Muslim travelers.

### 3. Manifesting Taiwan's Soft Power with Halal Hospitality

Soft power has increasingly become an important concept in the way one country influences another. This concept was born in the context of declining U.S. military power and the need to restore U.S. world supremacy. First popularized by Nye (Nye Jr, 2005), it has already been implemented in U.S. public diplomacy in the fields of education, culture, movies, food, and democratic and economic values. However, soft power was not yet articulated as a theoretical concept. Nye reformulated the idea and considered it to be an important part of American power in the world. For him, soft power is “the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing [an] agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction to obtain preferred outcomes” (Nye Jr, 2011). Power often relates to the use of force, coercion, and payment. Through soft power, advantage or benefit is obtained because people of other countries are attracted to the capabilities or specialty of one country, which allows for better relationships and cooperation.

Taiwan has begun to develop halal tourism to meet the needs of a dynamic market. It enters the halal tourism market by ensuring that Muslim travelers are given maximum comfort during their travels and are able to fulfill their religious obligations while on vacation (Yonhap News Agency, 2016). There are many reasons why Taiwan needs to employ halal tourism to harness its soft power. **First**, Taipei seeks to maximize it to maintain its survival. As discussed in various theories of international relations, survival is one of the primary motivations of a sovereign state in conducting its foreign relations. Taiwan uses soft power to cope with its isolation in international society due to the strong One China policy campaigns. Since President Tsai assumed office in 2016, it is important to note that Taiwan has lost its diplomatic allies as they switched to preference for the mainland. With this unfavorable



development, Taiwan would utilize soft power to attract foreign tourists as ambassadors by employing its good position in halal tourism.

Taiwan's future depends on the ability of the elite and the Taiwan community to get out of this international environmental trap. Launching the NSP is one government effort to reduce dependence by diversifying relationships. The NSP targets countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia, as well as Australia and New Zealand. Relations with these countries already existed, with the exception of several South Asian countries where Taiwan is just beginning to explore formal relations. Through the NSP, Taiwan seeks to maximize its soft power, which is relatively superior in some areas compared to many Southeast Asian countries. The NSP enhances the cooperation of existing programs and designs cooperation in areas with good prospects. Existing cooperation programs with NSP's target countries include agricultural development, health, educational development, industrial innovation, and a regional dialogue forum known as the Yushan Forum. Areas with particularly good cooperation prospects include e-commerce, tourism, and infrastructure (Office of Trade Negotiations, Executive Yuan, Republic of China (Taiwan), 2017).

One of the interesting points mentioned in the NSP is halal tourism (*ibid.*). This falls into the wider religious tourism category aimed at Muslim families who adhere to Sharia rules. Halal tourism is a newly developed concept in the industry and has the potential to become one of the most resilient forms of tourism. However, it has not been explored by the discipline of International Relations as a means to harness soft power since tourism does not look attractive to many I.R. scholars. Despite this, (international) tourism is an effective means of practicing cultural diplomacy (Carbone, 2017: 61). Developing halal food is one goal of the agricultural development flagship program. The NSP likewise includes the goal of becoming a convenient tourist destination

for Muslim populations. Indeed the increased number of foreign tourists, particularly Muslim travelers, is a vehicle to intensify Taipei's soft power.

**Second**, Taiwan needs to increase its visibility and denote its identity to the wider Southeast Asian communities as a democratic, tolerant country with a high level of cultural openness. A closer relationship with Southeast Asian people is one of President Tsai Ing-Wen's priorities. She suggests, "Taiwan must play an even more active and prominent role in order to participate in the future of the region,"[...] "Redefining Taiwan's role in the region is one of my highest priorities as president" (Reuters, 13th October 2017). The NSP is a tool of President Tsai to promote soft power to the region. Although the economy remains significant in the DPP's foreign policy agenda, President Tsai underscores the use of soft power to strengthen cultural and non-economic bonds with Southeast Asian countries (Thornton, 2017). DPP's political stance against the PRC is a reflection of the generational change, where the Taiwanese treasure their heritage to be different from the Mainland (Lin, 2018). The significant change of ethnic Taiwanese identity appeared between 1994 and 2002, which brought fundamental impacts on Taipei's future domestic and foreign policies (Chang and Wang, 2005: 30). Gradually, many people, especially younger generations, came to feel that they distinguished themselves as different from China, and they were struggling to show Taiwan's uniqueness to the world. As a consequence of identity change, in the long run, Taiwan would become economically and culturally less dependent on China than before.

As a democratic country, Taiwan recognizes all religions, including Islam (known as *hui jiao*, which means the religion of Hui, a predominantly Muslim population in Taiwan). This is an important foundation for creating a separate identity from the Mainland and could

cultivate confidence for the country to engage with the rest of the world. Taiwan even ranks second in a Religious Diversity Index (RDI score 8.2), after Singapore (score 9), as the most diverse nation in terms of religious and public life. China's score is 7.3, below Vietnam (7.7), Togo (7.5), and South Korea (7.4) (Pew Research Center, 2014). Even though this score does not necessarily reflect the relationship between state and religion, especially in the case of China, in general Taiwan is a tolerant country to any faith (Tacet, 2014). As Pelletier observes, the rise of Taiwanese nationalism and "Taiwanization" provides a more robust basis for the second and third generation of Taiwan to settle their own identity from the Mainland (Pelletier, 2014). For Taiwanese Muslims, a separate identity is firmer, as they come from the same ancestor before migrating to Taiwan.

Making Taiwan a Muslim-friendly tourist destination is in line with the development of a separate Taiwanese identity, characterized by the desire to build a multicultural country. Taiwan has become a modern state with a high level of tolerance and respect for others regardless of their origins, race, ethnicity, religion, and belief systems. As Wang claims, multiculturalism has emerged as a new value in Taiwan (Wang, 2004: 301). Taiwan now creates opportunities for every element of the society, from indigenous people, and the islanders to be able to express their own cultural identity. As Prowse suggests, Taiwan is slowly emerging as a multicultural society, but still faces the challenges of becoming a cosmopolitan society (Prowse, 2015). However, despite it now being a liberal and open country, Taiwan's immigration policy is still based on a mono-cultural society of the past. Combined with its isolated political situation, this does not help Taiwan to develop beyond its prevalent mono-cultural nature. Moreover, Taiwanese themselves have little international travel experience outside East Asia, as they prefer to visit China (32 percent) and Japan (26 percent). If Taiwan

needs to enhance people-to-people contact, it is the time for it to engage closer to the larger international community. A more assertive role in shaping regional dynamism can help increase its visibility.

Visibility poses a significant challenge to successful halal tourism development. A quick survey about Taiwan's halal services conducted by the authors among Indonesian citizens reveals that Indonesian Muslims are not aware of their availability. They generally believe that Taiwan's population has dietary habits, which are different and not compatible to their own. They are worried about the Taiwanese government's readiness to engage in halal business. They, therefore, do not believe that the government is able to provide facilities for Muslims, including necessary public spaces such as prayer rooms, toilets with washers, or other information about Muslim life in Taiwan. Consequently, many Indonesian and Malaysian Muslims are hesitant to visit Taiwan, despite its reputation as a safe tourist destination. Taiwan's visibility as a Muslim-friendly nation is not as high as other non-OIC countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Japan. Quite a few Indonesian people have visited those countries and are impressed by their service for Muslim travelers. Likewise, the authors have observed that the concept of "Halal Taiwan" is even less visible among Taiwanese citizens. When they are asked about the word "halal," Taiwanese citizens showed confusion, as the word is not generally used in the majority population's daily life. Islam is also a minority religion, with only 60,000 adherents comprising approximately 0.2% of the overall population (Bao, 2010). As a new concept, halal tourism is limited to certain people and is generally not yet fully understood by most Taiwanese. Lack of visibility may hamper government efforts to promote halal tourism in Taiwan globally.

**Third,** The NSP allows for halal tourism to become a well-developed business opportunity for Taiwan, which China is still lagging.

The majority of NSP target country populations identify as Muslim. Economically, they comprise a potential market. Traditionally, Taiwan is not yet the leading travel destination for inbound Southeast Asian tourists. Its tourism industry has not developed strong source markets and has yet to reach the non-traditional market of Southeast Asia, despite geographic proximity. Taiwan's top ten sources of foreign tourists were including mainland China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), USA, Canada, Macao SAR, South Korea, Japan, Mexico, Singapore (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2021). Indeed, the majority of tourists come from neighboring countries with cultural proximity.

Given halal tourism's growing popularity, Taiwan has taken the opportunity to become involved in this new market. Known as a country with a beautiful landscape, it is a dream of many to visit Taiwan, including Muslim travelers. Exploring Taiwan can be less comfortable for Muslims, not only because Taiwan is not a traditional destination for Muslims, but also because of a lack of information about Muslim-friendly tourist facilities and product availability. To prepare itself for the arrival of Muslim travelers, Taiwan would need to adjust to accommodate them.

For many people, Taiwan is lesser known as a tourist destination than China. People may think these two countries are indifferent. In the context of the hospitality industry, as Taiwan's rank improves as a non-OIC destination for halal tourism, China just does not tap into this market. China has not yet devoted attention to halal tourism and does not seem interested in developing this type of tourism to attract Muslim travelers. Despite home to more than 20 million Muslims, the halal industry in China is still underdeveloped. Crescent Rating's top 20 Muslim-friendly destinations do not recognize China as a halal tourism destination because the Chinese government does not invest in that industry (Joles, 2019).

Many literatures suggest that historically, China has close relations with the Islamic world through trade and business deals (Li, 2018: 35; Selmier, 2018: 257), evidence that China has a potency to become a significant player in the halal business. Currently, China turns to look at the Islamic world as part of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiatives (through Silk Road trading routes). Yet, it is not interested in expanding its capacity to develop the potency. Beijing's investment in this business is still in infancy. Beijing mainly a small player, its main export to this industry is dominated by food export, which contributed only 0.1 percent of the global halal market. As Latif suggests, China's low participation is due to several factors, including fragmentation of its halal food industry, besides the lack of "household names" (Latif, 2016). Beijing needs to address many uneasy challenges, such as limited credibility in international markets due to lack of national-level halal certification, its involvement in halal food scandals, which risking itself to losing trust among OIC markets. Besides, China has long been isolated from the Islamic world due to ideological differences between them. This may hamper the opportunity for Beijing to grab the larger Muslim community. This is confirmed by Zhang Hongyi, the Jingyitai Halal Food Company's general manager, who stated that China's halal food market has its limitations. He further reiterated that "even though we have 23 million Muslims, they live all over the country. It is difficult to reach many consumers in any one region due to traditional distribution models, which means it is hard for us to expand" (Chen, 2014). More importantly, Beijing's halal business opportunity underlines the contradictions between Beijing's contradictory policies domestically and abroad, resulting in mixed impacts of its foreign policy. China has a poor human rights record due to its gross violation in Xinjiang. The government imposes restrictions on Xinjiang Muslims to travel overseas

as outbound tourists (Meesak, 2017); at the same time, Beijing opens the door to reconnect with the Islamic world (Erie, 2016).

However, China's halal industry is not to underestimate. Even though the proposal to draft a nationwide halal food law was recently vetoed by Beijing, China is on its way to tap on this industry. China seeks to cultivate soft power to attract foreign tourists and utilizes inbound tourists to enhance its international image. Similarly, Beijing likes to be seen as a benign rising power by using an outbound tourism program, for example, to African countries (Chen and Duggan, 2016: 45). The difference between Taipei and Beijing to approach halal hospitality is that, while Taipei seeks to harness people-to-people relations, Beijing's agenda is highly politicized.

#### **4. Challenges**

As Taiwan's position in the global halal industry continues to improve, it is becoming an increasingly popular new destination for Muslim travelers. To cater to their needs, the availability of halal facilities in the country is still limited. There have been several halal or Muslim-friendly restaurants and hotels/accommodation developed. As Taiwan's position in the global halal industry continues to improve, it is becoming a new and cost-effective destination for Muslim travelers. According to a Halal mobile application used by the authors to observe halal facilities in Taiwan, there are 89 and 90 available services, respectively, and 39 Muslim prayer rooms in public spaces (such as airports, train and bus stations), across the country. Other user-friendly applications are also available to get information about Muslim-friendly facilities in Taiwan, such as "Halal" Taiwan, an application created by the Chinese Muslim Association (CMA), and the International Muslim Student Association of National Taiwan University of Science and Technology (NTUST)

in Taipei. This software provides information on hotels, mosques, restaurants, and other facilities that can make a trip to Taiwan more convenient and enjoyable for Muslim visitors.

To ensure its seriousness in promoting halal tourism, the government established agencies, like the Taiwan Halal Integrity Development (THIDA) and the Taiwan Halal Centre as certification bodies that produce Halal certificates. The CMA also worked in cooperation with Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI or the Indonesian Ulema Council), Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM or the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia), and Majelis Ulama Singapura (MUIS or the Singapore Ulema Agency) for certification duties. These bodies have been reputable for many certifications in restaurants, hotels, and for food products (Fulco, 2018). Taiwan is moving in the right direction to embrace the halal industry; however, there are several challenges that must be overcome to make it a halal tourism hub.

As a country with troubled cross-strait relations, Taiwan must extend links to other states to gain more sympathy and promote itself to develop a good international citizenship status. Its relatively weak position in global politics does not hamper Taiwan in associating itself with other countries through people-to-people relations. In the National Day address on October 10, 2017, President Tsai reaffirmed that the Southbound Policy is ‘to hold a more advantageous position in international society.’ From the speech, it is clear that Taiwan wishes to diversify relations with neighboring Southeast Asia, South Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. A clear message from the President is that Taiwan needs to engage with those countries, to reduce overdependence on and marginalization by China. As China is now becoming more powerful than ever, Taiwan must be more tactical to deal with its



southern neighbors because China is tightening its grip on Southeast Asia. Building people-to-people contact through the tourism sector is a way for Taiwan to “find its place in the international order” (Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), 10th October 2017).

Running halal tourism, especially in a Muslim-minority country, is not an easy task because the host needs to be culturally sensitive. As a new concept, halal tourism is limited to certain people but is generally not fully understood by most Taiwanese. For this reason, Halal International Taiwan (HIT), a platform for halal tourism in Taiwan is committed to assisting the government in better promoting it in various ways. The vision of Halal International Taiwan Co. Ltd is “...dedicated to promote Muslim Friendly Halal Excellence Platform in Taiwan and assist vendors providing better Halal goods. Its mission is to “Promote and implement international Halal projects, and act as a resource integration and coordination unit between multinational governments, domestic associations and companies” (*halaltaiwan.com*, n.d). Due to many factors between Taiwanese and Southeast Asian people, the halal concept is not gaining popularity among Taiwanese (interview with a HIT staff). Based on the authors’ observation, when told about halal and Islamic law (*sharia*), the Taiwanese generally get an impression that *sharia* is a legal system stressing harsh punishments such as cutting off hands and whipping for those committing unlawful acts. This law is only practiced by a small number of Islamic states such as Saudi Arabia. It is little known in Taiwan that, an element of *sharia* involves many positive-acts, including ethical lifestyles (such as humane treatment for the slaughtering of animals) and healthy lifestyles (such as cleanliness and avoiding alcoholism). The lack of people’s knowledge about Islam, in general, can also be seen from their innocence when talking about terrorism conducted by a very small minority with radical and extremist views (interview with an anonymous Chinese Muslim Association staff

in 2018). The main problem lies in the lack of understanding among the Taiwan population about what halal means. Lack of visibility may hamper the government's effort to promote Taiwan's halal tourism product globally. The Taiwanese government is fine in its intention but has shortfalls in execution.

Furthermore, the informant adds, Taiwan has so far benefited from many Southeast Asian Muslims; thus, it is the time to assist its Muslim friends to have better facilities in the country. Taiwan must be friendlier to Muslims as it is now heading to become a champion in the halal industry by providing more Muslim-friendly facilities across the country. She advises both the government and the people of Taiwan need to thoroughly learn the concept of halal first, before further embarking on luring enough numbers of Muslim visitors into the country (interview with an anonymous CMA Staff). However, some Southeast Asian informants suggest that one of the biggest impediments hampering more Muslims from visiting Taiwan is a lack of halal food availability around tourist spots. In comparison with the success of other countries' experience to develop its halal industry, Taiwan is facing a big challenge. However, with the increasing number of Muslims, including workers/expatriates, students, scholars, and tourists coming to Taiwan, learning about halal will improve understanding about Islam. In addition, knowing that Taiwan is a democratic country, open, vibrant, and toward a cosmopolitan society, a halal industry, including halal tourism, is expected to be a bridge for Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

The tourism sector has been badly hit by the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and it has triggered an unprecedented crisis in the tourism industry. Due to close economic ties with China, Taiwan's economy has suffered significantly. The impact of Covid-19 has reduced foreign tourist numbers to 60 percent compared to normal levels in 2020 and this

could possibly worsen to 80 percent if recovery is delayed until the end of 2020 (OECD, 2020). Among other tourist destinations, Asia is experiencing its worst since the pandemic, drop in travel and tourism revenues in 2020 (Maniga, 2020). During this crisis, with the absence of foreign tourists, the Taiwan tourism industry has redesigned itineraries, focusing on serving domestic tourists (Yu and Lee, 2020). Covid-19 is having a more profound impact on the tourism sector. The Taiwanese government has constantly promoted a Muslim-friendly environment to attract more Muslim travelers. However, the novel Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted government efforts. The uncertainty of when the pandemic ends makes it difficult to project when normalcy will return as travelers are very sensitive to safety and security aspects. Even though Covid-19 is expected to slow down by the end of this year, regaining people's trust will take a longer time as nobody can predict when the pandemic will have totally come to an end.

## **5. Conclusion**

Taiwan has been creatively successful in maintaining survival as a state amid an increasingly limited space due to the One China policy. One of the things that Taiwan does to achieve this is to use its soft power, such as democratic values, technology, education, economic development, and cultural exchanges. Cooperation with other countries undertaken in these areas not only strengthens the visibility of this country but also contributes to the advancement of economic development and democratic discourse in Asia. Efforts to strengthen the survival and visibility of this country in the world continue with the introduction of the New Southbound policy directed to South Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand.

In this paper, we discussed one of Taiwan's efforts to strengthen its visibility in the context of the NSP, specifically the development of halal tourism. Through this policy, Taiwan will serve as a center for Muslim-friendly tourism. This effort is new and has a good chance as it can make Taiwan become an attraction for the booming Muslim tourist and halal industry. Halal tourism can also highlight Taiwan's compatibility with its robust multicultural identity, democracy, and tolerance. This, in turn, will confirm Taiwan's presence distinguishing it from authoritative leaning mainland China. Nevertheless, there are some challenges for Taiwan in developing halal tourism. The people of Taiwan do not have enough knowledge and understanding of the Muslim population, especially in Asia. This is because, for a long time, Taiwan has mostly focused on China, Japan, and the U.S. Similarly, the interactions between Taiwan and the Muslim community have not been large enough to avoid potential cultural clashes. The Taiwan government needs to increase the visibility of the Taiwan Halal scheme to a broader segment of society, both domestically and globally.

The New Southbound Policy, which aims to bring the people of Taiwan and Southeast Asia closer, is in accordance with the ASEAN Community platform for people-to-people connectivity. Halal tourism is one measure to make the policies materialize. As Taiwan maintains its current status quo on the global political stage, halal tourism can be a strategic means to create public diplomacy for Taiwan to a broader Southeast Asian population. Halal tourism is a means of public diplomacy with a scope of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy. Southeast Asian tourists coming to Taiwan can be ambassadors showing the best side of Taiwan. Halal tourism can also be a part of Taiwan's smart power, given the fact that Taiwan can offer a wide range of attractions to the populations of other countries. For this and other reasons, Taiwan needs to make a better effort to promote halal

tourism to stand out from rival destinations. Most of all, expanding tourism markets to Southeast Asia means Taiwan can reduce its overdependence on the PRC, giving it more choices in conducting its international relations.

Strong and lasting perceptions of destination countries, like Taiwan, are shaped by the travel experiences of Muslim travelers. By recognizing the role of Muslim tourists in shaping Taiwan's public image, people-to-people connectivity can be achieved. However, more efforts are needed for the Government of Taiwan to increase the visibility of the Taiwan Halal scheme to a broader segment of society, both domestically and globally, so that halal tourism is contributing to a positive perception of Taiwan. By promoting halal tourism Taiwan is increasing its visibility to a broader Southeast Asian population that will help it become more knowledgeable in the region. The essence of the New Southbound Policy meets with the aims of the ASEAN Community when the people of Taiwan and Southeast Asia know and understand each other, and the opportunity to work together positively is there.

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## Notes

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