The new perspective of Taiwanese expatriates, arisen from the change from “overseas Chinese” to “overseas community,” requires more thorough deliberation as the government continues to expand and develop the strategy of its “new southbound policy.”

At the Fifth Global Conference on Overseas Compatriot Affairs in Kaohsiung on Tuesday, President Tsai Ing-wen (□□□) called on the nation’s expatriates to “be a bridge between domestic enterprises and the international market.”

Tsai’s words were echoed by Keng Kim-yung (□□□), an Indonesian-Taiwanese and a member of the Democratic Progressive Party’s (DPP) New Immigrant Committee.

During an event launching a legislative subgroup for addressing issues concerning new immigrants, Keng said that the skills immigrants and their children possess should help the nation develop “closer business and cultural ties with Southeast Asian countries.”

Since the announcement of the “new southbound policy,” Keng has urged both the government and the public to focus on the “human-centered” aspects of the policy, rather than view it as solely an economic initiative.

He has also warned the government of the risks of relying solely on Chinese-speaking communities in Southeast Asia for expanding Taiwan’s ties, and urged a deepening of relationships throughout the region.

Traditional Taiwanese businesses have almost exclusively worked with ethnic Chinese communities overseas because of the relatively low level of language and cultural barriers. However, easy entrance can generate unwanted inertia and immobilize businesses, which would take a toll on Taiwanese businesses in China.

Focusing only on those easy-to-access communities in Southeast Asia would result in a limited market in the region, which is not likely to help build strong relations within those countries.

Taking on ethnic Chinese-centered views also goes against the "human-centered" focus — which is supposedly about respecting national, cultural and religious differences — adopted by the "new southbound policy."

However, it is an entrenched habit followed by the Republic of China (ROC) and former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administrations, which have touted the nation's purported 40 million expatriates (greater than Taiwan's total population), who are potential ROC citizens, as ROC citizenship is granted according to "bloodline" rather than place of birth.

The Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC) has undergone a few name changes, from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, which later changed by the then-DPP administration in 2006 to the Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission, but the moniker was then briefly reinstated in 2012 for one year by then-president Ma Ying-jeou's (□□□) administration, before again being revised to what it is now called.

The battle has not been confined to the name. In many nations where overseas Chinese have had strong and stable communities since the 19th century, a political fault line between those sympathetic with the Chinese Communist Party and later affiliated with the People's Republic of China, and those siding with the KMT and the ROC is still apparent.

The battlefront in recent years has been further widened with the rise of Taiwanese national identity that characterizes itself as distinct from Chinese identity.

Relying on what one is familiar with is natural, but in this case, appealing to common ancestry would not only work against the policy's aim — it would also fail to distinguish Taiwan from China, the "authentic origin" of the said ancestry, which would be both politically and economically disastrous.

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