

PROGRAM

2025 TAIWAN UPDATE

Wellington, 4–5 September 2025

Canberra, 9–10 September 2025



Australian
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University



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2025 Taiwan Update

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Welcome Message

2025 has seen Taiwan enter a period of increased uncertainty and instability. Along with the rest of the world, Taiwanese leaders have attempted to navigate the capricious whims of Donald Trump as he attempts to remake trade and international relations. The activities of China — both overt and covert — continue to threaten Taiwan's sovereignty. And internally, the conflict between the Presidency and executive branch held by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and the Legislature held by the Nationalist Party (KMT) and their allies in the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), has led to legislative gridlock, an attempt at what some analysts have called a 'constitutional coup', challenges in the Constitutional court, and a mass recall of KMT member of the legislature.

In this year's Taiwan Update, four international experts will address these, and other, issues facing Taiwan. The keynote address will be given by Christina Lai of the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica on Taiwan's economic statecraft. Chyungly Lee of National Chengchi University will discuss Taiwan's energy security challenges. Alex Tan of Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha — University of Canterbury in Aotearoa New Zealand, will speak on Taiwan's current political polarisation while Wu Chia-rong, also from Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha — University of Canterbury will introduce how Taiwanese Indigenous knowledge systems are being revitalized through video games.

Continuing the theme of contemporary Indigenous Taiwan, this year we will be screening the 2022 feature film *Gaga* directed by the Atayal director Laha Mebow. This comedy-drama, with much of the dialogue spoken in Atayal, concerns a local election for township chief and reveals the tensions inherent between the ideologies and institutions of contemporary Taiwan and the Atayal practice of tribal law and practice — the *gaga* of the title. Laha Mebow will be present and will take part in a Q&A after the screening.

In a development to celebrate, this year the Taiwan Update will be held in Wellington as well as in Canberra. Wellington is a most appropriate city to hold the Update as it is the seat of Aotearoa New Zealand's national government and national institutions, as Canberra is in Australia. The ANU Taiwan Studies program is partnering with the Political Science and International Relations programme at Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington to bring this important and timely Update to our two cities. We hope that in doing so, Taiwan and its place in the world will be better understood on its own terms rather than simply being regarded as a pawn on the geopolitical chessboard.



Professor Benjamin Penny
Convenor
ANU Taiwan Studies Program



Associate Professor Jason Young
Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of
Wellington

The Taiwan Update is an initiative under the ANU Taiwan Studies Program 2025-28, which is a partnership between the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University and the Ministry of Education, Republic of China (Taiwan). We especially thank the Political Science and International Relations programme at Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington for co-hosting the 2025 Taiwan Update in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Wellington

Thursday 4 September

Lecture Theatre 104, Hugh McKenzie Building, 28 Kelburn Parade, Wellington

Light Refreshments

Lecture Theatre 104, Hugh McKenzie Building, 28 Kelburn Parade, Wellington

4:30pm

Welcome & Introduction

Delivered by

Associate Professor Jason Young, Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington

5:30pm

Professor Benjamin Penny, The Australian National University

Professor Averil Coxhead, Dean/Amo Aronui, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington

Representative Joanne Ou, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New Zealand

Keynote Address

Taiwan's Economic Statecraft and the Future of the Liberal International Order

5:55pm–7:15pm

Dr Christina Lai
Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica

Friday 5 September

AM103, Alan MacDiarmid Building, Kelburn Parade, Wellington

Session 1

1:00pm–2:00pm

Taiwan's Multidimensional Energy Security Challenges

Professor Chyungly Lee
International Relations, National Chengchi University

Break

2:00pm

Session 2

2:15pm–3:15pm

What does Taiwan's two-level politics tell us?

Professor Alexander C. Tan
Political Science and International Relations
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha — University of Canterbury

Afternoon Tea

3:15pm

Session 3

3:45pm–4:45pm

Gaming Taiwan: Indigenous Epistemologies in Play

Associate Professor Chia-rong Wu
Department of Global, Cultural and Language Studies
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha — University of Canterbury

Film Screening

6:00pm–8:15pm

Gaga 《哈勇家》

Lecture Theatre 104, Hugh McKenzie Building, 28 Kelburn Parade,
Wellington

In-person Q&A with Film Director Laha Mebow

Canberra

Tuesday 9 September

Auditorium, Research School of Social Science, 146 Ellery Crescent, ANU

Drinks Reception

RSSS Auditorium, 146 Ellery Crescent, ANU

5:00pm

Welcome & Introduction

Delivered by

Professor Benjamin Penny, School of Culture, History and
Language, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

5:30pm

Paul Girrawah House, Ngambri-Ngunnawal custodian of the
Canberra region / Senior Community Engagement Officer, First
Nations Portfolio, The Australian National University

Professor Matthew Tomlinson, Acting Dean, ANU College of Asia
and the Pacific

Deputy Representative Regine Huey-jen Chen, Taipei Economic and
Cultural Office in Australia

Keynote Address

Taiwan's Economic Statecraft and the Future of the Liberal International Order

5:55pm–7:15pm

Associate Professor Christina Lai
Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

Wednesday 10 September

Seminar Room, China in the World Building, Fellows Lane, ANU

Lunch

Tea House, China in the World Building

Session 1

1:00pm–2:00pm

What does Taiwan's two-level politics tell us?

Professor Alexander C. Tan
Political Science and International Relations
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha — University of Canterbury

Break

2:00pm

Session 2

2:15pm–3:15pm

Taiwan's Multidimensional Energy Security Challenges

Professor Chyungly Lee
International Relations, National Chengchi University

Afternoon Tea

3:15pm

Session 3

3:45pm–4:45pm

Gaming Taiwan: Indigenous Epistemologies in Play

Associate Professor Chia-rong Wu
Department of Global, Cultural and Language Studies
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha — University of Canterbury

Film Screening

6:30pm–8:45pm

Gaga 《哈勇家》

RSSS Auditorium, 146 Ellery Crescent, ANU

In-person Q&A with Film Director Laha Mebow will be facilitated by Dr Ying Xin Show with Mandarin-English translation.

Keynote Address

Taiwan's Economic Statecraft and the Future of the Liberal International Order

Over the last decade, China has punished countries that undermine its territorial claims and foreign policy goals with measures such as restricting trade, encouraging popular boycotts, and cutting off tourism. These coercive measures have caused significant economic damage to U.S. partners such as Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Australia. This talk focuses on Taiwan's response to China's economic sanctions, highlighting the agency of medium-sized countries in the shadow of a great power.

The second part of this presentation will propose a common understanding of the liberal international order in which state and non-state actors follow rules, norms, and legal procedures in conducting international affairs. This rule-based practice is an essential part of the Asian regional order. If Taiwan were integrated into the multilateral institutions in Asia, the chance of conflict would be greatly reduced. The future of Taiwan also depends on the resilience of the liberal international order and other middle-power states in the Asia Pacific.



Christina Lai

Associate Research Fellow, Academia Sinica

Christina Lai is an Associate Research Fellow in the Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Dr. Lai received her Ph.D. in Government from Georgetown University. In 2015–16, she was a post-doctoral fellow in the China and the World Program at Princeton University. Her research interests include U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations, Chinese Foreign Policy, East Asian politics, and Qualitative Research Methods. Her works have appeared in the *Politics*, *International Politics*, *Political Science*, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Pacific Review*, and *Asian Security*.

Plenary Sessions

What does Taiwan's two-level politics tell us?

This presentation examines Taiwan as a critical case study for understanding the evolving challenges to democracy in the 21st century. Arguing that Taiwan serves as a “canary in the coalmine,” the analysis highlights how the island’s early and persistent political polarization — rooted in identity politics and the legacies of authoritarian rule — prefigures trends now visible in established democracies worldwide. The research explores how deep divisions between the Kuomintang (KMT) and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), reinforced by institutional and social factors, have led to legislative gridlock, declining trust in political institutions, and a “democratic ceiling” that constrains further democratic development. Taiwan’s precarious geopolitical position, facing constant pressure from the People’s Republic of China, intensifies the dilemma of balancing national security with the protection of civil liberties. The presentation analyzes Taiwan’s innovative responses to disinformation, foreign interference, and public health crises, illustrating both the resilience and fragility of democratic systems under external and internal stress.



Alexander C. Tan

Professor, Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha — University of Canterbury

Alexander C. Tan is Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Canterbury, University Chair Professor at National Chengchi University (Taiwan), Honorary Professor of the NZDF Command and Staff College, Fellow of the John G. Tower Center for Political Studies (USA), and Founder and Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Indo-Pacific Affairs (NZ). Alex received his PhD in political science from Texas A&M University, MA Economics from the University of California at Santa Barbara, and AB Economics from the Ateneo de Manila University. He was recently visiting professor at Oxford University’s School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA). Alex writes extensively in the areas of parties & elections, political economy, Taiwan and Asian politics, and Asia-Pacific international relations.

Taiwan's Multidimensional Energy Security Challenges

A stable and reliable energy supply is essential for a nation's economic growth and development. In selecting fuel sources, nowadays almost all countries have taken climate change into account, adopted sensible clean energy transition plans, and designed a schedule to meet the goal of Net Zero. While pursuing a 3-E (energy-economic-environmental) balanced energy supply strategy, Taiwan, lacking indigenous resources, faces unique challenges of supply disruptions from over dependence on energy imports and possible blockade, quarantine, or invasion from Beijing. Any disruption of power supply or surge of energy costs could not only threaten Taiwan's competitive edge in the global high-tech market but also undermine Taiwan's internal stability and the nation's survival. In this talk, Professor Chyungly Lee will first present fact sheets on Taiwan's energy status, summarise Taiwan's current energy strategy, and then discuss dilemmas and vulnerabilities that Taiwan might face in the next few years.



Chyungly Lee

Professor, National Chengchi University

Chyungly Lee is Professor of International Relations at National Chengchi University in Taiwan. Her research covers topics on Asia-Pacific comprehensive security, Indo-Pacific multilateralism, and conflict prevention in East Asia. She received her Ph.D. from University of Maryland at College Park and has been an invited visiting professor at Krach Institute for Tech Diplomacy at Purdue, ASEAN Studies Initiative at American University, Stimson Center in Washington D.C., Liu Institute for Global Studies at UBC, and the U.S. Sandia National Lab.

Gaming Taiwan: Indigenous Epistemologies in Play

This research explores how Indigenous knowledge systems in Taiwan are being revitalized through video games. Far from mere entertainment, these games draw on tribal traditions, ancestral stories, and deep connections to the land to create meaningful digital experiences. By blending oral storytelling with interactive gameplay, Taiwanese Indigenous game developers are preserving cultural memory while challenging colonial legacies. Titles like *Princess Baleng*, *Tayal*, *VuVu*, and *Gadvia* show how games can empower communities and pass down wisdom to younger generations in innovative and engaging ways. Gamers not only play a game but also immerse themselves in digital environments shaped by Indigenous perspectives and values. This study encourages all engaged audiences, including educators and students, to consider video games as powerful tools for cultural resurgence and learning. Focusing on Indigenous Taiwan, it highlights how digital games integrate historical consciousness and interactivity to reimagine the past and future of the island.



Chia-rong Wu

Associate Professor, Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha — University of Canterbury

Chia-rong Wu is an Associate Professor in the Department of Global, Cultural and Language Studies at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. He is the author of two monographs: *Supernatural Sinophone Taiwan and Beyond* (Cambria Press, 2016) and *Remapping the Contested Sinosphere: The Cross-cultural Landscape and Ethnoscape of Taiwan* (Cambria Press, 2020). Additionally, he co-edited *Taiwan Literature in the 21st Century: A Critical Reader* (Springer, 2023) and *The Southern Discourse in Sinophone Literature: Moving Borders* (Routledge, forthcoming in September 2025).

Film Screening

Gaga 《哈勇家》



Directed by Laha Mebow

112 mins, Mandarin/Atayal/Taiwanese, English subtitles

Among the Atayal indigenous people of Taiwan, *gaga* is the traditional law and custom, the way of living with the land and organising society, the source of values. When Hayung, the patriarch of an Atayal family, and the senior knowledge-keeper, dies, his oldest son Payang decides to run for election as head of the local district. The film *Gaga* follows this election, in its raw democratic, and occasionally corrupt, form and the ways – sometimes serious, sometimes hilarious – that it affects the extended family. A groundbreaking film, *Gaga* is mostly in Atayal language and presents the life and social interactions of these contemporary Indigenous Taiwanese people unsentimentally, with humour, with compassion, and with the sharp eye of a brilliant film-maker.

Gaga won Best Director and Best Supporting Actress at the 59th Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival in 2022. Beyond Taiwan, it won the Best Director at the 2022 Singapore International Film Festival - Asian Feature Competition.



Laha Mebow

Film Director, *Gaga*

Laha Mebow is the first female director from Taiwan to win Best Director at the Golden Horse Awards. An Indigenous filmmaker of the Tayal people, she is also the first Indigenous woman in Taiwan to direct a narrative feature. Her films explore spiritual inheritance, family trauma, and Indigenous identity through a deeply personal yet cinematic lens. Her recent films include *Finding Sayun* (2011), which reimagines a colonial-era legend from an Indigenous perspective, and *Lokah Laqi!* (2016), a coming-of-age tale of three Indigenous boys.



Ying Xin Show

Deputy Director, ANU Malaysia Institute

Ying Xin Show is Senior Lecturer at the School of Culture, History and Language. Her work explores the history and culture of migration, decolonisation, and the impact of the Cold War on Asian societies through literature and the arts.



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Australian Centre on China in the World

<http://ciw.anu.edu.au/>

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Event websites

Wellington
<https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/2025-taiwan-update-4473433>

Canberra
<https://ciw.anu.edu.au/event/2025-anu-taiwan-update>



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