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Discussion Paper

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The Situation on the Taiwan Island since 2008—Issues and Trends

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Since 2008, the radical agitations for “desinicization” on the island have been replaced by the “new three no’s” policy. Compared with the old three no’s proclaimed during the Jiang Jing-guo era (i.e. no contact, no exchange, and no unification negotiations) and Lee Deng-hui’s and Chen Shui-bian’s pledge to be “patient and tolerant”, the new three no’s, referring to no unification, no *de jure* independence, and no use of force, signify a fundamental change. Cross-strait relations have entered a new age of “extensive exchanges, big-league cooperation, and major development,” the desinicization movement has been curbed significantly, the quest for “Taiwan independence” has been quelled ostensibly, and the clamor for unification is not on the rise. At the same time, the mainland has grown into a much more important influence on the island and is no longer regarded as an expendable force. Ma’s promise to help Taiwan back on its feet as soon as possible is premised on the willing support from the mainland, which makes the mainland a positive presence neither the green nor the blue party in the island is able to shrug off. The mainland also seized this good momentum to show its friendliness, which resulted in the achievement of 12 agreements, 1 consensus, and a number of pro-Taiwan policies exceeding the total number of those passed in the past six years put together through a series of cross-strait talks within the space of the last two years. A symbiotic relation allowing for the interests of both sides to grow is forming across the strait, and if this trend is to continue and hold, the two sides may develop a new form of identification with each other, which will catalyze a strategic change in the cross-strait relations.

The two-camp structure on the island has not changed essentially, but generally speaking, the blue camp is still more powerful than the green camp. Even though the green party has gained the upper hand over the blue party in a couple of post-2008 elections in Taiwan, this is only reasonable given the impossibility for the blue party to keep the kind of absolute edge forever as it did in 2008 by sweeping in three quarters of the seats in both the “Legislative Yuan” and the township and municipal governments at the local level. A slight rebound is inevitable, which not only marks the beginning of Democratic Progressive Party’s (DPP) recovery from Chen Shui-bian’s disgraceful fall but should also be viewed as a signal of Ma Ying-jeou’s declining popularity with his blue party followers. The mediocre performance of Ma Ying-jeou’s administration and Ma’s stiff honesty that failed to court any fish to his waters (as a matter of speaking in Chinese culture) had a negative impact on his support rate. Also, Ma’s extreme idealism put a large question mark over his competency as a political leader, hence his waning popularity with both deep blue and moderate voters. However, Ma Ying-jeou will be the only voting choice of the majority electorate once Taiwan heads into critical elections, as the past 8 years of DPP in power constitutes such a terribly unforgettable nightmare to the blue voters that none of them will want to give the DDP another chance.



After the Kuomintang (KMT) resumed power and chose to embark on a path of reconciliation linking up the two sides across the strait by peace and development, the cross-strait relations have never been better in a historical sense. That the KMT is ready to sign into a closer economic and trade relationship with the mainland government through the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) shows that the KMT is making a closer tie with China its first step to be followed by the second step of developing Taiwan's international self *with* China. In contrast, the DPP champions developing Taiwan's international self first and closing its distance with China later, without offering a roadmap to the public. Currently, the DPP is hatching a "ten-year political platform" in an attempt to woo the electorate by producing a body of new arguments, especially to win more voters among the moderates. However, this strategy has not created any new changes so far.

The DPP plays the opposition party on the island, but it is oppositional for the purpose of being oppositional and it also takes an antagonist stand against almost everything. Therefore, ECFA becomes the focus of the offensive and defensive politics of respective parties and an issue no side can afford to lose. Whether ECFA's signing by the two sides will be able to bring more and various benefits to Taiwan will be an issue for debate for a long time to come because the prospects are not clear yet.

This year, there will be municipal level elections in Taiwan across five major cities and these elections will contribute to a redistribution of political power on the island. According to estimations based on the current power structure on the island, 3 wins for KMT and 2 wins for DPP will be an anticipated outcome. Ma Ying-jeou will be able to keep his edge unless the island is struck by a disaster out of the blue as was the case with the August 8 Typhoon in 2009.

Since 2008, the demand for a larger international space to Taiwan has remained strong from the island, albeit with a change of strategy. Now, they are no longer linking up the demand for more international space with the quest for "Taiwan independence" and will take up the more practical approach of getting their foot in more international organizations as a member to replace their previous approach of trying to establish diplomatic ties with more nations. However, to give recognition to only "one China" is the mainstream international trend with most countries and organizations in the world. At the World Expo hosted by China this year, most countries with diplomatic ties with Taiwan have participated nonetheless and will be moving eventually in the direction of establishing diplomatic ties with China. However, China will tiptoe around these nerves and keep its eye on the overall goals.

To sum up, the mainland will be very careful about how it deals with the forces on the island. It will stick to the two principles of "tackling easy things first and difficult things later" and "addressing economical matters first and political matters



later,” and take one step at a time to promote the cross-strait relations toward a better future.