



**12th Annual Conference on
“The Taiwan Issue in China-Europe Relations”**

Shanghai, China

September 21-22, 2015

A workshop jointly organised by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs / Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin and the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), Shanghai. With friendly support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Shanghai Office).

Discussion Paper

Do not cite or quote without author's permission

Retrospect and Prospects of Cross-Strait Political Relations

NI Yongjie

Deputy Director of Shanghai Taiwan Research Institute

Editor-in-chief of *Taiwan Strait Research*

Retrospect and Prospects of Cross-Strait Political Relations

Ni Yongjie

Since 2008, cross-strait relations have come to a new era of peaceful development, and considerable progress has been made in the political relations across the strait, involving many areas and many levels, with the pioneering and leading significance. However, the development of political relations across the strait have lagged behind that of the economic and cultural relations across the strait. The bounded political relations have restricted the consolidation and deepening of the peaceful development of the cross-strait relations.

I. Achievements

Since 2008, bumper practical results have been obtained in pushing ahead the development of political relations across the strait, as the main marks and important motive force in the peaceful development of cross-strait relations, and they are embodied mainly in six aspects.

The political mutual trust across the strait has kept on enhancing, and the common political foundation of adhering to the “1992 Consensus” and opposing “Taiwan independence” has been established. The high levels of both Mainland and Taiwan have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the “1992 Consensus”, with the core of adhering to the one-China principle and the key point as recognizing that both the Mainland and Taiwan belong to one China. In June 2013, Wu Po-hsiung, Honorable Chairman of the Kuomintang, stated on behalf of Ma Ying-jeou that adhering to “1992 Consensus” and opposing “Taiwan independence” were the unanimous proposition of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, the respective laws and institutional systems on both sides across the strait are based on the one-China principle and define cross-strait relations in the framework of one China, instead of relations between countries. In July the same year, Ma Ying-jeou, as Chairman of Kuomintang, sent a reply letter to Xi Jinping, which clearly stated that in 1992, both sides across the strait reached the consensus that “each side expresses adhering to the one-China principle in the form of oral statement”. Ma stressed a number of times that the Mainland and Taiwan are in special relations, “not relations between countries”, and “not international relations”. Ma Ying-jeou promised that he would “not promote ‘two-China’, ‘one China one Taiwan’ or ‘Taiwan independence’ either domestically or overseas”. Ma also indicated that the “Respective Expression of the One-China Principle” would never be expressed as “two-China” or “one China one Taiwan”. These have shown that both sides across the strait have advanced in parallel in

safeguarding the one-China framework and seeking for common cognition, and this has deepened the political mutual trust between both sides across the strait.

Both sides across the strait have established cooperation platforms for political interaction, to plan the development direction of political relations across the strait. The Mainland established cooperation and exchange mechanism and platforms with the Administration and main political parties and groups of Taiwan, including the mechanism of a periodical meeting of top leaders of the Kuomintang and Communist Party, APEC, and the mechanism for high officials of both sides across the strait to meet at the Boao Forum. Also, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping respectively met with Lien Chan, Wu Po-hsiung and Vincent Siew, to plan the strategic framework and development direction of the political relations across the strait. More and more Mainland leaders at all levels went to Taiwan for exchanges. According to statistics, leaders at provincial and ministry levels of Mainland have visited Taiwan for exchanges for over 2000 person-times, over 30 exchange visits have been made by delegations led by top provincial or ministry leaders, and over 20 provincial and municipal CPC Committee secretaries have visited Taiwan. Institutionalized exchange platforms have been built across the strait, and nine sessions of economic, trade and culture forums across the strait, one session of an “Elite Forum” across the strait, three sessions of county and city “Double-100 Forum” across the strait and six sessions of “Strait Forum” have been held.

The normalized communication mechanism between departments in charge of affairs across the strait has been established, further upgrading the political relations across the strait. As the Mainland Affairs Council is an institution handling Mainland affairs, the use of the official title of the chairman of the council did not go against the one-China principle, but can promote the further peaceful development of both sides across the strait. In Oct. 2013 during the APEC in Indonesia, the Mainland side smoothly solved the question about the official title of the chairman of the Mainland Affairs Council, this promoted the meeting and mutual visit by the chiefs of departments in charge of affairs across the strait, and established the normalized communication mechanism between the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and the Mainland Affairs Council. In 2014, Wang Yu-chi, Chairman of the Mainland Affairs Council, visited the Mainland and Zhang Zhijun, Director of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council visited Taiwan. Then they met three times in succession, and in May 2015, Zhang Zhijun met with Andrew Hsia in Jinmen, marking a historical breakthrough in the political relations across the strait. This became the most important and direct channel for both sides across the strait to conduct political dialogues and policy consultation, establishing an institutional and normalized mechanism for the continual development of the political relations across the strait and further upgrading the political relations across the strait.

Both sides across the strait have carried out diversified political cooperation, organized institutions for joint exercises, expanded and deepened the connotation of the political relations across the strait. The Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) and Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) restored consultations, signed agreement, and established the first joint institution across the strait within the framework of ARATS and SEF —— “Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Committee” (ECC), setting up a model for political dialogue and negotiations across the strait. The economic relations and trade institutions of both sides have set up permanent institutions on the opposite side, and both parties conducted consultations and achieved major progress on ARATS and SEF establishing offices to each other. The maritime departments of both sides carried out salvage drills on sea in the sea areas of Jinmen and Xiamen for three consecutive years, and a number of departments of both sides such as public security, judicial and civil aviation have respectively established service communication and cooperation and a crisis emergency handling mechanism. The political cooperation in multiple areas and at multiple levels as mentioned above enriched the connotation of political relations across the strait, and has provided precious experience and powerful motive force.

Both sides across the strait have made reasonable political arrangements for Taiwan’s international participation, avoiding internal frictions. Based on the concept “both sides across the strait are one family”, since 2008, the relevant departments of both sides across the strait, with the purpose to avoid internal friction, have set up a number of channels for political and policy-based communications, and made reasonable political arrangements for Taiwan’s international participation, regional economic integration and avoidance of dispute at international occasions. They arranged for Lien Chan and Vincent Siew to participate in the APEC Leaders’ Summit, the associated departments of Taiwan to attend the annual conference of World Health Assembly (WHA) and the annual conference of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), properly handled the economic and cooperation agreements signed by Taiwan with New Zealand and Singapore, and expanded the participation of Taiwan in international NGOs. These have provided experience and routes for the exchange and cooperation of both sides across the strait in international occasions.

A Peace Forum was held, as an important step in the political dialogue between both sides across the strait. In Oct. 2013, over 120 scholars from 14 think tanks of Mainland and Taiwan held the first Across the strait Peace Forum at Shanghai, on the theme of “Peace Across the strait and Joint Development”, they conducted symposiums on four political subjects of political relations across the strait, foreign-related affairs, security, mutual trust and peace framework, making a practical step in promoting the political dialogue across the strait as a beneficial

trial for the political dialogue across the strait in the future, with the milestone significance in the progress in this regard.

II. Experience

The practice in the political relations across the strait since 2008 has produced precious experience, which is of important enlightenment to the future.

Adhering to the one-China principle and enhancing mutual trust. This is the basic criterion to push forward the development of the political relations across the strait, and also the fundamental guarantee for the peaceful development of cross-strait relations.

Gathering common points, dissolving differences and controlling rhythm. This is a fundamental route verified in practice as effective to push ahead the political relations across the strait. The political differences of both sides across the strait have existed over a long time, and will remain over a long time, but they will not remain unchanged or exist forever. So long as both sides across the strait uphold the spirit of seeking common points while reserving and dissolving differences, adopt the strategy of solving easy and low level problems before difficult and high level ones, making progress step by step and controlling rhythm, to gradually build up atmosphere and create conditions, we can finally find ways and methods to solve problems and develop the political relations across the strait.

Establishing a mechanism to enhance motive force. This is the basic strategy to push forward the development of the political relations across the strait. The relevant departments of both sides across the strait have established multiple and well-through mechanisms for political communication and consultation, especially, the institutions in charge of affairs across the strait have established normalized communication mechanism, they play a critical role in the development of the political relations across the strait, achieving the prominent effect of enhancing mutual trust, dissolving doubts and puzzles, communication and cooperation and solving problems, lowering the risks in the cross-strait relations and enhancing the motive force to develop the political relations.

Pooling wisdoms of both sides and making innovation for development. This is the inevitable demand in pushing forward the development of the political relations across the strait. The political relations across the strait are related to the interests of all parties of both sides, therefore it is necessary to pool the wisdom of both sides, adhere to empathy and sense of responsibility, understand each other and move forward in parallel, to seek for solutions to political difficulties. In the meantime, theoretical innovation and practice innovation are carried out at all times, to seek for new things and changes in the areas of institutional mechanism and policy measures, innovate thinking, open up new routes and take opportunities, to bring the political relations across the strait into a new realm.

III. Problems and restrictions

As the period of peaceful development is not long and the political differences of the two sides across the strait are quite complicated, there have been quite a few regrets in the political relations across the strait since 2008, with many limits and restrictions, affecting the consolidation and deepening of the peaceful development of the cross-strait relations.

The four major regrets left are the following:

The political differences of both sides across the strait have not been fundamentally resolved, and some issues have become even more outstanding and pressing. No breakthrough progress has been achieved in the political positions of the two sides across the strait and the view of the “Republic of China”, and no good solution has been found to the military deployment of both sides across the strait and the international participation by Taiwan.

No political dialogue and negotiation has been started by the Mainland and Taiwan. There was even no dialogue or negotiation on track two, and only the peace forum of civil nature was held, without substantial influence on the Taiwan Administration.

The Mainland and Taiwan have not ended the hostility and signed any peace treaty, and no military security mutual trust mechanism has been established.

The two sides across the strait are lacking a common understanding and intersection on democracy, human rights, way of life and social systems, sometimes the two sides are indulged in empty shouting and exchange fires across the sea, and the two sides have not formed common values.

The political relations across the strait are subject to restrictions on five aspects:

The political mutual trust of the two sides across the strait is not sufficient, stable and deep. The political mutual trust of the two sides across the strait is fairly fragile, not stable, balanced, complete and solid. For example, the Taiwan side keeps on stressing the “sovereignty of the Republic of China”, highlights “priority for Taiwan”, discriminates and even adopts a hostile attitude towards the Mainland, treads on the political redline of the Mainland, exerts pressure on Mainland to let some people to become “democratic” first, and echoed the “Occupy Central” protests in Hong Kong.

The political differences across the strait have restricted the development of the political relations across the strait. Differences such as political positioning of the two sides across the strait, the international participation of Taiwan, the overall military deployment of the Mainland and difference of political and social systems of Mainland and Taiwan, have not been effectively solved, and some have become even more outstanding.

The interference, obstruction and sabotage by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Up to date, the DPP has refused to give up the secession position of

“Taiwan independence”, insisting on opposing the Mainland and Japanolatrly over a long time, affecting the inter-Party exchange between the Mainland and the DPP. The exchanges between the DPP and the Mainland are only limited to individuals, local areas and primary level, therefore no overall and normal exchange between political parties has been realized across the strait.

The public opinions in Taiwan have more doubts on the political relations across the strait. “Taiwan Identity” has increased and “subject consciousness” enhanced, although the people of Taiwan have a higher favor degree on the Mainland, they still have more negative feelings, especially, they have the worry that the political dialogue and negotiations between Mainland and Taiwan would “sell Taiwan”, harm the “sovereignty of Taiwan” and lose the selection right in the future.

The United States and Japan and other international forces have more doubts on the development of political relations across the strait, especially, they are highly alert on political dialogue, negotiations and conclusion of a peace treaty by the two sides across the strait.

IV. Prospects

The key in the development of cross-strait relations lies in the development and progress of the Mainland itself, and the strategic deployment of “four comprehensives” has produced a huge motive force for cross-strait relations. At present, the Mainland is firmly grasping the dominant right in the development of cross-strait relations, the one-China pattern can hardly be changed, the “1992 Consensus” has enjoyed popular support and peaceful development has been affirmed further. The trend of economic merging, cultural and exchanges, and social interaction of both sides across the strait will not change as it will only be strengthened instead of weakened.

At present, Ma Ying-jeou is obstructed in his administration, unable to do what he hopes to do. The political relations across the strait before “May 20” 2016 will be closely related to the 2016 Taiwan elections, and will wait for the final result of the election. It can be predicted that for a period of time to come, the political relations across the strait will be in an idle period, and the prospects are not quite optimistic. The political mutual trust across the strait has shown the trace of weakening, and it is urgent to transit and upgrade the platforms for political communication and dialogue between both sides across the strait. The mechanism of high level meeting of both sides across the strait at the APEC this year and Boao Forum in 2016 will need to give play to their active and positive roles, and the high level meeting mechanism between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party needs to be strengthened. The normalized mechanism of institutions in charge of affairs across the strait can be expected to continue, in the second half

this year and before “May 20” next year, Zhang Zhijun and Andrew Hsia should meet again, to give play to the role of positioning and navigation, to ensure the direction and maintain the motive force.

If the DPP took office in 2016, as it refuses to accept the “1992 Consensus” but is unable to propose a political consensus acceptable to the Mainland and embodying “both sides across the strait belong to one China”, cross-strait relations will come to a very difficult time of earth shaking and rainstorm. The two sides across the strait may come to the period of “Cool War” with cold peace and cold exchanges, and local friction, stagnation and even suspension cannot be excluded. By that time, the DPP will face unprecedented pressure from the inside of Taiwan, the Mainland and the international society. Consultations and negotiations across the strait will be interrupted, the implementation of agreements between Mainland and Taiwan will be affected, the normalized communication mechanism between Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and Mainland Affairs Council can hardly be continued, and the communication and coordination mechanisms between relevant departments across the strait will come to a stop. Flights across the strait will be affected, Mainland visitors, students and investors to Taiwan will decrease substantially with reduced enthusiasm, the economy in Taiwan will come to a cold winter, the stock and exchange markets will slump and all businesses will fall into depression. However, the “new economy model” and “local economy” keeping far away from Mainland as advocated by Tsai Ing-wen will become a castle in the air and cannot save the economy in Taiwan. It will be unavoidable for Taiwan to encounter a “diplomatic” impact, which will produce a “domino” effect. New turmoil may occur in Taiwan society, people on the island will start a new surge of departure, with one climax after another of “Mainland fever” and “Shanghai fever”. The DPP can certainly serve as a chess piece of the United States and Japan, however, the military deterrence of the Mainland will make it face the danger of suffocation.

Under high pressure, the DPP people will be subject to torment, and their political will can be destroyed. Tsai Ing-wen has no capital and strength to confront with the Mainland, and she has no other choice except for deigning and seeking for dialogue. It will be more probable for Tsai Ing-wen to materialize the subjectivity of Taiwan on “cultural Taiwan independence” and “flexible Taiwan independence”, and it is comparatively not possible for her to irritate the Mainland and the United States with “jurisprudential independence of Taiwan”.

V. Recommendations

For the possible sharp change of situation in 2016 and afterwards, the author proposes three recommendations for the development of cross-strait relations.

1. Promoting the legalization of cross-strait relations. According to the strategy layout of “comprehensive rule by law”, the work of Mainland on Taiwan should also be based on the thinking, method and means of rule by law, and the legalization process of the cross-strait relations should be speeded up, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the Anti-Secession Law, National Security Law and Law on the Protection of Taiwan Compatriots' Investment shall be used as the basis to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and protect the rights and interests of compatriots on both sides across the strait. We should create conditions and choose appropriate time to formulate the “Law on Cross-strait Relations”.

2. Upgrading the institutionalization of cross-strait relations. We should complete and improve the political interaction mechanism across the strait, establish an in-depth economic cooperation mechanism across the strait, a culture creation and sharing mechanism across the strait, and a social mutual trust mechanism across the strait, and also establish an interests adjustment mechanism across the strait and a risk prevention, management and control mechanism across the strait.

3. Promoting the optimization of cross-strait relations. The cross-strait relations should take root downward, rise upward and step forward, with civilization and friendliness, fairness and justice as the value; we should attach importance to both expansion of quantity and improvement of quality in the cross-strait relations, and achieve good development while emphasizing distribution, so that the results in developing the cross-strait relations can benefit the primary level, vulnerable groups and youngsters on both sides across the strait.