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**Sunflower Movement and Cross-Strait Relations**

Xu Shiquan

Institute for Taiwan, Hong Kong

and

Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS)

## Sunflower Movement and Cross-Strait Relations

*Xu Shiquan*

Under incitement and manipulation by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and other political forces, the Sunflower Student Movement which erupted in Taiwan in March 2014 has triggered a political and social storm. The DPP, with the help of a group of students who occupied the Legislative Yuan for up to a month hindered the examination and adoption of CSSTA signed by Beijing and Taipei in June 2013, and Taiwan's secession force took the opportunity to cause a great clamor, seriously damaging relations between the two sides. Repercussions are still continuing. International and cross-strait public figures have all expressed their worries and doubts about the prospect of peaceful development of cross-strait relations. What impact has the Sunflower Movement made on cross-strait relations? Here are my humble opinions for your reference.

Looking back in history, it is obvious that the relations between the two sides have been following a zigzag pattern. Each time when a breakthrough is to be achieved, opposing voices in Taiwan are bound to emerge. Before Wang Daohan, President of ARATS, and Koo Chen-fu, Chairman of SEF, were about to hold the epical "Wang-Koo Talk" in Singapore in April 1993, the DPP had spared no effort to jeopardize the meeting. The DPP asserted that the "Wang-Koo Talk" should be overseen by Legislative Yuan and the public, and that semi-official CSOs such as the ruling party and SEF or any individual should not make any negotiation with Chinese mainland before all parties reach an agreement.

The above requirements are exactly the same as those demanded by the protesting students of the Sunflower Movement. Before Taiwan's general election in 2000, the KMT was plagued by internal division owing to Lee Teng-hui's manipulation. As a result, Chen Shui-bian was elected with less than 40% of the vote, and cross-strait relations then underwent a high-risk period for 8 years. It is gratifying that positive energy had been accumulated during this low ebb, getting prepared for the next wave of recovery. The KMT, the anti-secession party, succeeded in the 2008 election and cross-strait relations started a new era of peaceful development. Within the following 6 years, 21 agreements including Three Links and ECFA have been signed, and thus economic exchanges and trading with each other are finally institutionalized. The unprecedented development, though, aroused anxiety of the opposition force in Taiwan, which led to protests such as the Sunflower Movement. An event like this is the inevitable episode, so to speak, during the course of development of relations across the Strait.

Nevertheless, there is a deeper-rooted cause for the Sunflower Movement to break out and resonance among some social groups in Taiwan. An editorial in *China Times*, a leading Taiwan magazine, published on August 18<sup>th</sup> pointed out that the Sunflower Movement in March 2014 was driven by a diversified coalition of students, non-students, anti-capitalism, anti-unequal distribution of wealth, anti-consortium, anti-open up, anti-nuclear power, anti-KMT, anti-Ma Ying-jeou, and those who were worried about the imbalanced economical and political position between the two sides, or even those anti-China extremists who advocate secession, as well as some romantic street protestants. The reason for such a complex group with all kinds of rebellious sentiment to emerge in Taiwan is that, in a new international landscape, Taiwan is facing a hard choice of where to go. China mainland has risen as the second biggest economy over merely 30 years of opening up and reform, with a stronger will and power for peaceful reunification. Meanwhile, when globalization and regional economic integration prevails, Taiwan is still trapped in internal political struggle, only to sacrifice the opportunity of a whole generation.

Therefore, insightful and objective observers in Taiwan and the international world have recognized that the Movement is closely related to the future economic development of Taiwan, and that hindered cross-strait economic & trade negotiations are especially related to the free-trade negotiations to be finished between China and Korea, in that Taiwan and Korea's exports to China mainland usually fall in a similar category. If a free-trade agreement is signed between Beijing and Seoul, while Taipei continues to impose trade barriers against Beijing, 2% to 5% of Taiwan exports will probably be replaced by Korea. As estimated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs Taiwan, the loss in exports can lead up to 49 billion dollars. In early August 2014, the *Wall Street Journal* noted in its editorial on the Sino-Korea Free Trade Agreement and Sunflower Movement that, "Taiwan's leaders have warned for years that economic isolation will damage the nation's competitiveness." "Meanwhile, Taiwan's latest trade pact with China signed last year sits in limbo after the student-led 'sunflower movement' stymied its ratification by the legislature this spring." "As trade barriers among Taiwan's neighbors fall, failing to do so will further isolate the island." The title of the editorial "Taiwan Leaves Itself Behind" got to the point only more sharply.

Anti-CSSTA advocates insist on the same old cliché that Taiwan shall not depend too much on China mainland; otherwise it would fall under the sway of China: Exports to China have accounted for 40% of Taiwan's overall exports, which has reached a dangerous limit. If no change is made, Taiwan's fate will be controlled by China. They blame the situation on Ma's alleged "Fall for China, Selling out Taiwan" policy. International scholars, especially some American ones joined in to propagate the "China Economic Threat" theory, which is absurd and counter-factual. First of all, the current economic landscape between the two sides

is determined by economic law, or the invisible hand, but not by anyone's free will. Unstoppable growth of the exports from Taiwan to China indicates that the latter remains a lucrative market, and as a matter of fact, Taiwan will suffer from an astonishing trade deficit without this market. In 2013 alone, Taiwan enjoyed a 77 billion dollar surplus in its trade with China mainland, while its total global surplus was merely 37 billion, which is to say that Taiwan's total deficit would be 40 billion without the mainland market. Ironically, dependence upon the latter increased during the DPP regime from 2000 to 2008, when trade with the Mainland grew by 2.8 times, investment by 3.8 times and the export share from 24% to 40%. Instead, during the 6 years of KMT regime afterwards, exports to mainland decreased by 1%. It seems then, that economic & trade relations between the two sides will continue to develop abiding by economic law, and nothing, be it Sunflower Movement or any other event, can change its course.

What's the Mainland opinion about the Sunflower Movement then? Upon my own observation, the government surely expects for a smooth development of cross-strait relations, but Mainland leaders believe that all paths have their fair share of twists and turns, so difficulties or even temporary retrogressions are inevitable and normal. The very mindset prepares them to take the Movement calmly. On the other hand, the event enabled the Mainland to have a clearer and more insightful knowledge of Taiwan's social situation and thinking, so as to adjust its Taiwan policy accordingly, such as strengthening communication with Taiwan's youngsters to enhance their understanding of mainland China. As for the blocked CSSTA, we've come to the conclusion that Taiwan rather than China mainland will be the actual victim, but Beijing will continue to push forward economic & trade co-operation for mutual benefit. Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee and key figure responsible for Taiwan issues, said on Aug 18<sup>th</sup> 2014 when he was meeting Economic & Trade Delegation of Taiwan Industries Federation that, "cross-strait economic cooperation provides a link between the people of both sides, and serves as a strong engine for peaceful development of our relationship. We'll continue to encourage economic cooperation, in the hope that Taiwan compatriots will yield benefit from the opportunity of Mainland development."

The Sunflower Movement has obviously made a negative impression on Mainland people. George W. Bush praised Taiwan as the lighthouse of democracy in Asia, in an attempt to westernize China by setting Taiwan as a democracy model. Under the Taiwan Policy of "Peaceful Reunification and One Country Two Systems", Beijing has always respected Taipei's choice of political system and way of life, and at the same time, insists on its own, just as the Chinese saying goes "Well water never intrudes into river water." However, thanks to Taiwan's blind copy of the western democratic system, the so called lighthouse is getting dimmer in the eyes of China mainland. Scholars who've been to Taiwan said

emotionally that “I wouldn’t believe that the Cultural Revolution is still going on if I hadn’t been to Taiwan”, and the Sunflower Movement only reinforced this feeling. Legislative Yuan members are elected by the people to reflect public opinions, but protesting students actually occupied the LY building for as long as a month, which is an anachronism and against the law, far from being democratic at all. *The Economist* pointed out in its commentary on the Movement, that Taiwan’s future will probably be determined in the streets. Scholars in Taiwan might have a more profound understanding of democratic practice there. Cai Yi-ru, Professor of Taiwan Culture University, published an article in Singapore’s *Lianhe Zaobao* stating that, “It’s common knowledge that Taiwan has descended into democratic civil war.” “Politicians, media and orators are the biggest sources of chaos in Taiwan today. Politicians are sectarians and exclusionists who oppose for the sake of opposition; media and orators become manufacturers and slaughterers of information, who hoax, lie, exaggerate, and even forge news for the sake of exposure and ratings. Some Taiwanese, under constant exposure of distorted information and ideology, have become excessively irrational or even unreasonable, who mock everything, criticize whatever government practice, and blame everything on the government. Foreigners find it really hard to imagine that Taiwan’s government has been reduced to the public enemy. How can we expect Taiwan to have a bright future?” If so, fingers crossed for Taiwan’s democracy.