Xi Jinping’s Policies toward Taiwan after the Nine-in-One Elections

Chien-min Chao

_Distinguished Chair Professor and Director,
Graduate Institute for Sun Yat-sen Thoughts and Mainland China Studies,
Chinese Culture University_

Abstract

Having experienced smooth sailing, culminating in the signing of 21 agreements, since President Ma Ying-jeou’s election as Taiwan’s president in 2008, cross-Strait relations have recently encountered headwinds. The failure of the _Cross-Strait Agreement on Service in Trade_ to sail through the Legislative Yuan and the appearance of the “Sunflower Movement,” when hundreds of students stormed the Legislative Yuan to protest to the government for rushing into agreements with mainland China, have sapped the momentum. As more bad news followed in 2014, the once robust bilateral relationship is hitting a snag. Facing these uneven developments, Xi Jinping has been rather crafty. His policies are flexible yet assertive. What is to be expected in the run-up to the next presidential elections slated in January 2016?

_**Keywords:** Xi Jinping, Taiwan Policy, One China Framework, Cross-Strait Talks, Sunflower Movement_
I. Introduction

Xi Jinping calculatingly has been navigating the tranquil waters across the Taiwan Strait made possible by President Ma Ying-jeou since 2008, when Ma was elected. Added to the accomplishments of 10 summit meetings between the Straits Exchange Foundation and the Association of Relations between the Taiwan Strait, the two semi-official organizations tasked with negotiating, and the signing of 21 agreements, the two meetings between Wang You-chi, Chairman of the Mainland Affairs Council, and Zhang Zhijun, Director of the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO), in 2014 heralded a new era in the theretofore quarrelsome bilateral relationship. Nevertheless, the failure of the Cross-Strait Agreement on Service in Trade to sail through the Legislative Yuan and the “Sunflower Movement” in March 2014, when hundreds of students stormed the Legislative Yuan to protest the government rushing into agreements with mainland China, have sapped the momentum. More bad news followed in the next few months: A deputy minister at the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) was accused of divulging national secrets when conducting talks with the other side; many Taiwanese were hurt when Xi Jinping raised the sensitive “one country, two systems” mantra in September; the Chinese ignored the calls by Taiwan side to hold a historic summit between Ma and Xi at the APEC meeting in November; the pro-engagement Kuomintang (KMT) suffered a crushing defeat at the year-end elections; and finally, mainland China announced over Taiwan’s protests the launch of a new flight route (M503) near the median line of the Taiwan Strait.

Facing these uneven developments, Xi Jinping has been rather crafty. His policies are flexible yet assertive. What are the considerations behind the high walls of the Zhongnanhai? What is to be expected in the run-up to the next presidential election slated for January
While inheriting the “peaceful development road” designed by his predecessor, Hu Jintao, Xi is more assertive and relies less on the policy of “rangli” (making concessions to profit the people of Taiwan). Before the “Sunflower Movement,” Beijing obviously was elevating the decibel of politics: Increasing the frequency of mentioning the “one China framework” and encouraging the Taiwanese not to be afraid of political talks. As the prospect of transitioning power to the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) looms, preemptive measures are gradually being put in place.

II. The State of Affairs before Xi Jinping

Over the years, mainland China has gradually formed a three-dimensional strategy towards its neighbor to the southeast: On the strategic level, the “1992 consensus” has been reaffirmed as the basis for political trust on which the “peaceful development” policy is founded; at the medium level, negotiations between the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) have resumed based on the principles of “economics precedes to politics and easy ones to difficult ones.” At the bottom, exchanges have broadened and institutionalized as governments have started to get involved. Taking the direct flights as an example, countless meetings have been held through tourist organizations empowered by the authorities, making the Taiwan Strait one of the busiest air spaces in the region. The new mode of relationship has ushered in peace in the region for the first time with millions of people reaping the fruits.

As President Ma geared up for reelection in 2012, Beijing seemed to expedite the benign process by demanding “deepening political
trust.” First, as relations began to stabilize, mainland China seemed eager to substitute the ambiguous “1992 consensus,” the necessary compromise to bring the wayward cross-Strait relations back to the course, with a more clear “one China framework” and “both sides belong to China” (tongshuyizhong) discourse.¹ Second, harking back to the spirit of gradualism, Beijing seemed to slowly forge the ambience for political talks as the more pragmatic terms like “economics before politics” were giving way to a more ambivalent “economics and politics are intermingled.”² Talks on cultural and educational agreements were urged as intermediaries between economics and politics. Politically charged terms, such as “the relations are entering into deep waters,”³ “one China framework,” and “peace and stability framework,” were often preached. Third, acknowledging the complaints that the fruits of cross-Strait exchanges had been unevenly distributed, focus was shifted to the grass-roots, with people living in southern Taiwan and lower income earners being targeted.

III. The Chinese Dreams

The core of Xi Jinping’s ideology is the “Chinese dream.” Six

elements can be extracted from this ideology in cross-Strait affairs: Racial restoration, whole interests of the nation and the Chinese race, patriotism, unity and unification, shared growth, and peaceful development. Among the six, the first three are the most frequently cited. In a nutshell, nationalism lies at the center of Xi’s thinking toward Taiwan. Examining the speeches he made in meetings with Taiwanese leaders, including Vincent Siew, Wu Po-hsiung, Lien Chan, and James Soong, collected in Xi Jinping Talks about Governing the Country, the “whole interests of the Chinese race,” the “great restoration of the Chinese race,” and the “beautiful future” are the most cited. Xi is a highly nationalistic leader, and his policies will no doubt reflect upon this temperament.

IV. The “One China Framework”

Before the KMT returned to power in 2008, mainland China focused its policies on making the “1992 consensus” the cornerstone of political trust between the two sides. Former CCP leader Hu Jintao made this clear in his “four points” statement in March 2005. The trouble in cross-Strait relations, according to Hu, was found in “Taiwan authority’s refusing the one China principle and not recognizing ‘the 1992 consensus’ as the embodiment of the one China principle.”4 To Beijing, the “1992 consensus” was synonymous with the “one China principle” back then. A breakthrough was made when KMT honorary chairman Lien Chan made a historic “ice-breaking” visit to Beijing in April 2005, paving the way for the reconciliation opened up by Ma and Hu later on.5 Nevertheless, expectations were raised on

5. 趙建民, 〈中共談判行為〉, pp. 123-144.
Beijing’s side after Ma succeeded in winning a second term in 2012. The emphasis shifted to “deepening and consolidating the one China principle,” and “consolidating, enhancing, and deepening” mutual political trust. Beijing wanted to add more clarity to the murky “1992 consensus,” the “foundation of mutual political trust,” by demanding that “the two sides belong to the same China” and “one China framework.” Wang Yi, former Director of the Taiwan Affairs Office, spelled out the policy in unambiguous terms in Houston, the United States, in April 2012. Wang stressed that, by consolidating the political foundation, Beijing meant to “maintain the 1992 consensus” and “refuse Taiwan independence by any means.” Nevertheless, to increase mutual political trust means that the two sides should “acknowledge that they both belong to one China” (rendongliangdongshuyizhong) and to “maintain one China framework” (weihuyizhongkuangjia) so that “a more clear common acknowledgement (gongdongrendong) and consistent stand (yizhilichang) can be forged.” Speaking on the sidelines of the Boao Forum before heading to Houston, Wang hinted that the two sides needed to “further maintain, consolidate and ceaselessly deepen mutual political trust” to warrant more economic cooperation. Actually, Wang divulged his view at the 10th Conference on Cross-Strait Relations on March 15, 2012, by saying that, on the matter of maintaining the “one China framework,” the two sides should “forge a more clear common acknowledgement and consistent stand” and “erect an understanding of one family from across the

---

6. For further discussion, see 趙建民, 〈從九二共識談兩岸談兩岸政治互信〉, pp. 65-78.
Xi Jinping’s Policies toward Taiwan after the Nine-in-One Elections

149

Taiwan Strait.”

Hu Jintao himself preached the same mantra in March 2012, while meeting with the KMT’s honorary chairman Wu Po-hsiung.9

To enhance mutual political trust [the two sides should] insist on “1992 consensus” and oppose Taiwan independence resolutely. For this, [the two sides] should take concrete measures and work harder. Although the two sides are yet to be unified, Chinese territories and sovereignty are not divided and the fact that both mainland and Taiwan belong to one China remains unchanged. Reaffirming this fact is in line with our current regulations and should be within reach by either side. To maintain the one China framework would help enhance mutual political trust and stabilizing the development.

In the meeting, Hu reiterated the stand of “belonging to the same China” he made in his “eight points” proposal in 2008. In a speech to “the KMT/CCP Economic and Culture Forum” held in Harbin in July 2012, Jia Qinglin, former chairman of China People’s Political Consultative Conference, further clarified the policy:10

To enhance political trust is to maintain and consolidate the one China framework and the core of the one China framework is that Taiwan and the mainland belong to the same country (Taiwan yudalongshuyigeguojia). Cross-Strait relations are not state-to-state re-

---


lations. The two sides should reaffirm that fact and form a common acknowledgement based on current regulations so that one China framework can be reassured, maintained and consolidated. On this basis the two sides should proactively explore a new type of special political relations before unification and gradually opening up ways for the resolution of deep-rooted issues that are confronting us.

“One China across the Strait” (lianganyizhong) seemed to have emerged as the main focus in China’s quest for “deepening political trust.” This policy was written into the CCP’s political report at the 18th Party Congress held in November 2012. “The two sides should adhere resolutely to the common grounds of opposing ‘Taiwan independence’ and insisting on the ‘1992 consensus,’ enhance common acknowledgement of one China framework and seek to maximize their commonalities and save differences on that basis.”

Built on the success of previous policies, the new Chinese leadership under Xi Jinping seems to have crafted a path of his own. The new policy is to stretch politics a bit more as nationalism creeps in as the core of Xi’s ideology. While meeting with Wu Po-hsiung in June 2013, Xi parroted the same tone orchestrated by his predecessor with more vigor, saying that “although not unified the two sides belong to the same China… the two parties should insist on the stand of one China, and maintain the one China framework together … the core of enhancing mutual trust is to consolidate and maintain one China principle so that a clear common acknowledgement can be formed.”

Sensing the change of tempo, Taiwan tried to accommodate. In

his trip to Beijing in February 2012, Lien Chan stated that “both legal systems practice one China principle. Taiwan is part of China just as mainland is also part of China and on that basis the cross-Strait relations under one China framework are given birth.” A spokesman from the TAO expressed consent with “Lien Chan’s insistence, based on the 1992 consensus, on seeking the common grounds while setting aside the differences of the one China framework.” Wu Pohsiung expressed a similar stand while meeting with Xi Jinping in June 2013, by saying “laws (falu) and regimes (tizhi) of both sides advocate one China principle and cross-Strait relations are defined by one China framework, not state-to-state relations.” In the meeting Wu reiterated the KMT’s stance of opposing Taiwan independence and, for the first time, on behalf of the KMT, echoed the proposition of “one China framework.”

V. Gearing up the Tone for Political Talks

In addition to urging the acceptance of “one China framework” Beijing also has increased the heat on political talks. The more soothing mantras that Taiwan had grown accustomed to, such as “economics precedes politics” and “easier issues ahead of difficult issues” were replaced by new slogans, such as “political issues could not be delayed forever” and “politics and economics were inseparable.” The mainland Chinese started to prepare the Taiwanese for more difficult issues by stressing that the bilateral relationship was “stepping into deep waters” and current arrangements were insufficient to meet the challenges.

The Political Report of the 18th CCP Party Congress, held in
November 2011, stated that “it is hoped that the two sides work together to explore the political relationship in a unique situation before unification and make reasonable arrangements accordingly; to discuss and establish military security confidence-building measures so that Taiwan Strait can be stabilized; to negotiate cross-Strait peace accord so that the prospect of peaceful development can be opened up.” When meeting with Taiwan’s former vice president Vincent Siew in October 2013, in Bali, Indonesia, Xi said that “the political differences between the two sides have to be settled step by step, and there is no allowing to drag on generation after generation.” A few days later, TAO director Zhang Zhijun stressed that political disputes could not be circumvented and that the policy of “economics without politics” could not be continued. While meeting visitors from Taiwan in September 2014, Xi reiterated that “peaceful unification and one country, two systems are the basic guidelines to resolve the problem of Taiwan and the best way to realize unification.” Signs were abundant that Beijing was looking for relations beyond economics.

VI. Cross-Strait Representative Offices

The proposal to establish cross-Strait representative offices is by far the most politically charged issue in the bilateral relationship. It has been reported that, by August 2014, seven rounds of talks have been held.14

In his address to celebrate Double Ten Day in 2012, Ma revealed for the first time the intention to push for the establishment of cross-Strait offices (lianganbanshijigou) as soon as possible so that “businessmen, students, and people in general can be benefited.”15 In an

14 《中國時報》(China Times), August 8, 2014.
15 《馬英九總統國慶講話全文「不畏艱險 攜手向前」》,《今日新聞網》
address at the same occasion a year later, Ma made a small change by suggesting that his government would “proactively push for the establishment of representative offices of the two semi-official organizations (the SEF and the ARATS) so that millions of people travelling across the Strait would be taken care of.” The statement unfolds a change in strategy: The future institutions that are to be created are downgraded from “cross-Strait offices” to “SEF/ARATS offices.” Nevertheless, when established, the new institutions will insert additional momentum into the strong bilateral relationship.

First, capitalizing on the stand of not denying the actual existence of the respective regimes, the establishment of the representative offices would be a giant step towards elevating the relations to official level. The SEF’s Beijing office will not be a mere branch of a civilian organization empowered by the government to enter negotiations with the mainland side on its behalf, but an institution representing Taiwan’s interests. The representative and employees at the office most likely would be officials receiving work permits sanctioned by the government on the other side and privileged to diplomatic immunities not dissimilar to other diplomats. Cross-Strait affairs would hence be conducted via official channels.

Second, cross-Strait relations are likely to be more stabilized and institutionalized. In the past, exchanges between the SEF and the ARATS were often suspended because of political reasons. With the creation of the representative offices, it would be difficult to call it off at will.

Third, misunderstandings and miscalculations might be avoided.

Due to a lack of direct channels, authorities are forced to rely on academic exchanges to fathom the real intentions behind a policy statement. In the future, staffers at the representative offices may assess the situation on a daily basis and report back. This will no doubt help reduce misunderstandings in the making of their respective policies.

Talks on the representative offices have been focusing on three issues: document issuance, visitation rights to the detained by the other side, and safety of properties and personnel of those who are staffing the offices. The fundamental issue here is the political status of the two entitles vis-à-vis the other side.

Because of the large number of travelers crossing the Taiwan Strait, over nine million a year, there is indeed an urgent need for a more efficient way of issuing travel documents. It is understood that the two sides have agreed on the inviolability of the institutions, freedom of correspondence, immunities while on duties, exemption of taxes, and entrance with preferential status.\textsuperscript{16} It is also reported that the visitation rights to detainees has also been ironed out.

Establishment of offices by the SEF and ARATS is by far the most politically sensitive issue in the volatile relations and fundamentally will alter the way each side deals with the other. There are a few issues deserving scrutiny at this point. First, since the ARATS and the TAO are known as the “same people with two hats” (yitao-renmaliangkuaizhaopai) the relations between the two mainland agencies will change little after their Taipei office is established. The same, however, is not true on Taiwan’s side. The creation of a branch

\textsuperscript{16}《聯合報》(United Daily News), August 30, 2013.
office in Beijing by the SEF fundamentally will transform the structure of Taiwan’s mainland China policy-making. How the semi-official SEF, tasked to negotiate with the ARATS, would interact with the MAC, the agency that supervises the work of the SEF, would be an interesting thing to watch. The long history between the two organizations fighting for jurisdiction over China is a cause for concern.

Second, in the future, the offices created under the SEF/ARATS framework would be semi-official at best. Staffing officials are bound to make contacts with their counterparts on the other side. What are the protocols? How should they be addressed? Are they allowed to interact with diplomats from other countries? What if Chinese officials stationed in Taiwan talk, in high profile, about sensitive issues, such as unification and Taiwan’s being part of China, or seek investments? Things of these sorts are either disallowed at present or are extremely sensitive.

VII. Taiwan’s International Space

In September 2009, Taiwan was invited by the Secretary-General of the WHO, under the title of “Chinese Taipei,” to the World Health Assembly as an observer. On September 11, 2013, Taiwan’s Civil Aeronautics Administration Director-General Jean Shen was invited by Roberto Kobeh Gonzalez, President of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), to attend the 38th Congress as a “special guest” under the title “Chinese Taipei CAA,” making it the second UN-affiliated organization that Taiwan has managed to set foot in since 2008. Reasons contributing to this breakthrough are multiple, but first and foremost, is the elevation of trust between the two sides, which effectively reduces mainland China’s resistance to Taiwan’s international cause. While meeting with Wu Po-hsiung in June 2013, Xi Jinping expressed “extremely affirmative with Ma Ying-Jeou’s
stances of not promoting ‘two Chinas,’ ‘one China, one Taiwan’ or Taiwan independence.” More relaxed cross-Strait relations also have made it easier for Taiwan’s friends to come to its aid. United States President Barack Obama signed a law on July 12, 2013, to show support for Taiwan’s bid for the ICAO. Interestingly, while the TAO staged a protest to the U.S. it was not aimed at derailing the initiative.

Basically, Taiwan has resorted to three means to reach the goal. First, according to Jean Shen’s account, the two semi-official travel associations, Taiwan’s Taiwan Strait Tourism Association and the mainland’s Association for Tourism Exchange across the Taiwan Straits, created and authorized by their respective transportation agencies to conduct negotiations on direct flights, have discussed the issue a number of times. As the number of travelers crossing the Taiwan Strait increases, the Chinese gradually are changing their attitude, recognizing that inclusion of Taiwan in the ICAO is helpful in reducing flight risks. Second, the APEC meeting in Vladivostok’s Russkiy Island in Russia in September 2012, was pivotal. Hu Jintao promised Lien Chan to “study seriously the issue of Taiwan participating in the ICAO in a proper manner.” Third, Wu Po-hsiung

18. Yang Yi, a spokesman for the TAO, responded on July 13 that “our stance has been clear all along and is widely recognizable and that is on the preconditions of no ‘two Chinas’ or ‘one China one Taiwan’ and through negotiations a reasonable and rational arrangement can be made……involvement of foreign powers is not helpful and it’d only further complicate the matter.” See 李漢揚, 〈ICAO/美挺台入國際民航組織 陸：務實協商〉, 《中央日報網路報》(CD News.com), July 13, 2013, <http://www.cdnews.com.tw/cdnews_site/docDetail.jsp?coluid=141&docid=102383734>.
also raised the issue of Taiwan’s international space while meeting with Xi. Although Wu was referring to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) specifically, it nevertheless helped with the case. Wu was meticulous enough to bring up the signing of an education agreement and currency swap agreement, both favored by the Chinese side, at the same time. A spokesman from mainland China’s TAO commented on Taiwan’s entrance as “a move to show mainland’s care for Taiwanese compatriots in a new situation of peaceful development in which cross-Strait relations are more consolidated and deepened, and is made possible through negotiations on the premise of no ‘two Chinas’ or ‘one China one Taiwan’.”21 Taiwan’s original plan of gaining observer status was thwarted because ICAO regulations required observers to be either “non-member states” or “international organizations.” The achievement is certainly welcomed by Taiwan as its air transportation will be better served but it is only a temporary arrangement. In the future, the two sides should explore ways so that a more lasting peaceful co-existence in the international arena can be found.

VIII. Conclusion: Reactions of the Civil Society

In what has been dubbed the “Sunflower Movement,” students stormed the Legislative Yuan in March 2014, to protest what they considered the government hastily entering into an Agreement on Trade in Service with mainland China. The opposition DPP quickly seized the momentum by attacking the government’s reconciliatory policies with mainland China. Public opinion swung into a mood not too favorable for proactive exchanges. Beijing was stunned again when the ruling KMT suffered a crushing defeat at the year-end nine-in-one elections, forcing it to reevaluate its theretofore “rangli”

policy, which was designed to provide the Taiwanese with economic incentives. Politics again has become the focus.

First, having suffered an excruciating setback from the previous DDP’s Chen Shui-bian administration, Beijing was glad to turn its attention away from curbing the Taiwanese independence sentiment to the promotion of unification, a long-term policy based on winning the hearts and minds of the Taiwanese people. In light of the latest developments on Taiwan’s side, Beijing seemed to renew the urgency of fighting against Taiwan independence. In what has been widely regarded as a message intended for the independence-prone DPP, which according to many might displace the KMT as the ruling party at the next presidential election scheduled in January 2016, Xi Jinping stressed the importance of the “1992 consensus” as a political foundation between the two sides while attending a meeting held by the mainland China’s Political Consultative Conference in March 2015, and warned of “earth-shaking and mountain swinging” consequences should the foundation cease to exist.

Second, sensing the timing might not be ripe, Beijing relented on the quest for a quickened pace of political talks. While meeting James Soong, Chairman of Taiwan’s the People’s First Party, shortly after the “Sunflower Movement,” Xi Jinping expressed Beijing’s policies as “four noes” – no change over the guiding principle of peaceful development; would not give up on the measures to facilitate cross-Strait cooperation that is mutually beneficial; would not dampen the enthusiasm to unite the Taiwanese to fight together for the same cause; will not falter over the fight against Taiwanese independence. Xi further preached the importance of reaching to the bottom rump of the Taiwanese society in what has been known as a policy of putting emphasis on the “three middles” – the middle and small businesses, the middle and lower income earners, and people living in
Third, Beijing is also preparing for the worst – a possible return to power by the DPP – by shifting to a wait-and-see mode in many of the on-going cross-Strait dealings. It is obvious that the momentum for quick negotiations to bring the two economies closer together has slowed down. The talks over the establishment of representative office and an agreement for free trade have been stalled. On the other hand, warnings have been sounded so that the DPP would not be mistaken into thinking that business is as usual without the cushion of a political foundation.
References

Book Articles
趙建民，2012.〈從九二共識談兩岸政治互信〉，林中森、丁樹範主編，《九二共識二十周年學術研討會會議實錄》. 臺北：海峽交流基金會. pp. 65-78.

Newspapers

Online Resources


2012/10/10.〈馬英九總統國慶講話全文「不畏艱險 攜手向前」〉，《今日新聞網》(NOW News), <http://www.nownews.com/n/2012/10/10/383419>.


