

The History and Future of the Taiwan Issue

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On January 8th, responding positively to Hu Jintao's New Year's Eve speech on "promoting the peaceful development of cross straight relations", Ma Ying-jeou said that despite the existence of different voices within Taiwan, from an overall perspective, the majority of people support the current situation of development between the two straights, the further warming of their relations, and that there is no comparison between the situation of today and that of 30 years ago.

On January 1st, 1979, the day that Sino – American relations became normalized, the National People's Congress issued the "Message to Taiwan Compatriots", marking the end of the mainland's coastal bombardment of the Kinmen and Matsu Islands, as well as ensuring the "inevitability of considering the reality... of solving the question of reunification and at the same time respecting the status quo of Taiwan... in adopting fair and reasonable measures and policies". Today, a more practical Taiwan policy has replaced original ideological sentiments. Since the beginning of the 1960's, the overhead whistling of shells heard on Fujian's coastline and Taiwan's Kinmen and Matsu's outposts, was one way for each sides military to greet each other. But today, mainland China's media agents no longer continue to use conventional revolutionary era practices of calling Taiwanese leaders "Chiang's Clique", but instead refer to them now as "the Taiwanese Authorities". Changing the way in which it addresses the Taiwan leadership is a reflection of the important policy shift the Central government has made towards Taiwan. In September 1981, the National People's Congress Standing Committee Chairman Ye Jianying put forth a comprehensive nine point recommendation regarding the reunification of Taiwan, called "Ye's Nine-Point Proposal for Peaceful Unification". This proposed that both sides send delegations to meet and engage in a comprehensive exchange of ideas to come to a common agreement on the issues of post, trade, transportation, the visiting of relatives, and travel, as well as carry out academic, cultural and sports exchanges in order to facilitate the reaching an agreement; that Taiwan would be considered a Special Administrative Region with its own armed forces, and enjoy "a high degree of autonomy". This interaction, called "the third Kuomintang – Communist cooperation" among other names, was rich in constructive as well as creative proposals, and in the end laid the solid foundation for the proposal of "one country two system".

However, Ye Jianying's expression of goodwill from the mainland to Taiwan did not receive positive feedback. Chiang Ching-kuo's response to this was the "Policy of Three No's", producing a completely non symmetrical reaction of "no meeting, no discussion, and no compromise". Yet Taiwan's "obstinacy" can be explained by certain underlying political and historical reasons.

In one respect, on December 15th, 1978, Chiang Ching-kuo was only informed a few hours before about President Jimmy Carter's decision to announce the normalization of relations with China. This shocked and angered the Taiwanese Administration, who felt they had been betrayed by America's friendship, and who, believing themselves all along be the legitimate government of Taiwan and desired to mount a counterattack against the mainland, could absolutely not at that time lower its standing and hold substantive talks with the mainland. In another respect, the Taiwanese politicians and people held a deep sense of fear towards the recently liberated mainland China. Because of the extreme brutality of the civil war and the horrific memories of the Cultural Revolution, the Taiwanese people were truly afraid of all at once finding themselves under the control of the mainland and forced to accepted communism. The civil servants who held

responsibilities during the civil war and their relatives were considered as “counter-revolutionaries” and subjected to trial. This fear was obviously created by a misunderstanding of the mainland’s policies towards Taiwan.

The underdeveloped economy of mainland China was one of the main reasons why the Taiwanese Administration at that time refused to engage in peace negotiations with them. Before 1978, trade between the sides could be described as insignificant. After the mainland experienced 10 years of turbulence, its National economy had just begun to recover, but compared with a Taiwan, who had taken advantage of economic opportunities and was considered one of “Asia’s Four Little Dragons”, the mainland could not even be mentioned in the same sentence. At that time, Taiwan never believed that China’s economy could contribute any positive influence to their own. On the contrary, they believed that the economic backwardness of the mainland would cause their own to fall into deadlock. In 1980, Taiwan was engaging in trade with over 100 countries, with its total amount exceeding 39 billion USD, moreover in 1982, trade between the mainland and Taiwan, conducted through Hong Kong, did not exceed 520 million USD. Yet today, the economic differences between the two straights is ever decreasing, with economic and trade exchanges exceedingly becoming closer, to a point where neither side can do without the other. There would be the sure prospect that island’s economy, directly driven by the establishment of the three full links¹, will grow. However, before the 1980’s, Taiwan continually criticized the mainland’s use of western ideology to destroy Chinese tradition, and said that Taiwan was the protector of Chinese tradition. After a zeal for tradition appeared in China (although it still lacks reasonable reflection and analysis), today, changes are occurring now that are welcomed by many people, and lay a more stable foundation for cultural exchange between the two straights.

In retrospect, we don’t need to turn the old pages of history, but need to look towards the future. Since 1979, beginning with the “Message to Taiwan Compatriots”, to “Ye’s Nine-Point Proposal for Peaceful Unification”, “Deng’s Six Conditions”, “Jiang’s Eight Points”, and all the way up to Hu’s speech, 30 years have gone by, and demonization of each other’s words and actions between the straights are now disappearing. They have done away with discriminatory ideologies, ended the cold war era military opposition, are rationally confronting historical issues (including dealing realistically with Taiwanese separatists), and constructing mutual political and military confidence. This will benefit the well being of the people on both sides of the straight, most certainly opening a new phase in the future of cross straight relations.

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¹ Translator’s note: The Full Three links refer to: the three links between mainland China and Taiwan: including, Post, Air Travel, and Business.