

A new era for studies on cross-Strait relations: Introduction

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Abstract

After more than half a century's separation, the interaction between China and Taiwan has progressively changed from a politico-economic interaction to a more civic interaction. Recently, scholars working on cross-Strait relations have begun to pay attention to the civic influence of Taiwanese businesses on the relationship. Some have emphasized the importance of sub-governmental interactions in the process of cross-Strait integration. Others assert that Taiwanese businesses can exert economic leverage to constrain the Chinese government in cross-Strait policymaking. These scholars stress a bottom-up approach in research, observing current phenomena, then deducing the emerging pattern of cross-Strait relations that may be influenced by business activities. Taking account of changing trends in scholarly discussions of the cross-Strait relationship, this special issue aims to present current research in this field. Theoretically, this issue also aims to balance the top-down approach, for instance, by considering political threats and economic interdependence across the Strait, with a bottom-up approach, for instance, by examining the identity of Taiwanese businesspeople and migrants, as well as a Taiwanese charitable organization operating in China. The main focus of this issue is on mutual social impact across the Strait. We are used to seeing China's impact on Taiwan, but seldom the other way round. In order to fill the vacuum, this issue focuses not only on the impact of China on Taiwan, but also the impact of Taiwanese investments, migrants, and exports on Chinese society.

Keywords

US-China-Taiwan relations, Taiwan's mainland policy, cross-Strait migration, Tzu Chi in China, Taishang, linkage community

The relationship across the Taiwan Strait has always been the focus of academic discussion in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Certainly some American scholarship has also paid attention to the cross-Strait debate because the United States plays an important role in the strategic triangular relationship with Taiwan and China. From a review of recent publications on cross-Strait relations, several topics can be identified.¹ The most popular topic is the analysis of the US–China–Taiwan relationship, which can be divided into four sub-topics. The first uses the theoretical perspective of international relations to analyse the triangular relationship.² The second concerns the potential conflicts across the Strait from the American government's perspective.³ Analysing the triangular relationship from an economic perspective⁴ forms the third sub-topic and discussion about security issues the fourth.⁵ Scholars have also focused on comparisons between the European model and the cross-Strait relationship⁶ and identified the influence of individual country on the cross-Strait relationship.⁷

Apart from examining cross-Strait relations on the international stage, other scholars focus on issues across the Strait. For instance, there is an abundance of scholarly discussion about cross-Strait security, and more so, on economic security across the Strait⁸ or non-traditional channels for cross-Strait confidence-building in relation to security issues.⁹ Trade and investment across the Strait and/or in greater China is another significant topic.¹⁰ Compared to security and economics, a rather 'soft' discussion topic in cross-Strait studies is the issue of identity,¹¹ which is a **rather nascent** topic in the discussion of cross-Strait studies. Interestingly enough, scholars also use sport or popular music to analyse the political situation across the Strait.¹²

More specifically from Taiwan's perspective, during the eight-year government of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), scholars have analysed in great detail the DPP's policy on China.¹³ During the period when the DPP was in power, the question of a referendum on independence or unification caused very heated debates.¹⁴ Apart from Taiwan's domestic politics, how Taiwan viewed the rise of China was also an important issue.¹⁵

As we can see from the above review, whether from an international perspective or issues across the Strait, most of the spotlight falls on strategic policy settings, approaches to establish confidence across the Strait in the realm of security or in macro-economic interactions between China and Taiwan. Few scholarly debates before 2008 have shed light on the impact of interaction between people from China and Taiwan on the cross-Strait relationship, apart from

some analysis of Taiwan's election results in relation to independence or reunification. It could be argued that the academic debates reflected real politics. After the Kuomintang took over the government in May 2008, many restrictions on cross-Strait economic and political exchanges disappeared rapidly. The Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF 海峽交流基金會) and Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS 海峽兩岸關係協會) resumed negotiations in June 2008. The three direct links, namely postal, transportation and trade, were officially opened on 15 December 2008. Furthermore, in terms of economic cooperation, in June 2009, Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs also relaxed restrictions on mainland investment in Taiwan. The newest developments are the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in January 2010 and the controversial cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement in June 2010. Along with the Taiwanese government's receptivity towards increased civic interaction, more scholarly research on Taiwanese workers¹⁶ or Taiwanese businessmen¹⁷ in China have been conducted, which inquired into the question of how Taiwanese integrate into Chinese society.

The changing nature of the cross-Strait relationship constituted the primary motivation for this issue which draws together different perspectives in cross-Strait relationship studies. It is time to re-evaluate our understanding of the cross-Strait relationship. Macro-structural analysis of the relationship continues to play an important role; however, more attention should be given to cross-Strait people-to-people interaction. Of the articles in this special issue, two of them are from a macro perspective or top-down approach. One discusses the strategic triangular relationship between the United States, China and Taiwan, while the other focuses more on Taiwanese domestic policy orientation towards China. The other three articles adopt a bottom-up approach to discuss the interaction of Taiwanese across the Strait in connection with business and daily life. Most interestingly, this issue also includes a contribution which discusses the impact of a Taiwanese charity organization on Chinese society. These articles not only present a balanced combination of macro and micro research in cross-Strait studies but more importantly, they constitute an up-to-date collection in the field.

Themes in this issue

We start with a macro-level analysis of the strategic relationship between the United States, China and Taiwan, as it has been a subject of ongoing discussion in cross-Strait studies. The first

article is from Richard Weixing Hu who analyses cross-Strait relations within the international order. Hu argues that China has always sought to 'de-internationalize' cross-Strait relations and that Washington is a significant player. The difference between Hu's approach and existing literature on the Sino-US relationship is his view of America's balancing act in relations between China and Taiwan. Hu adds a new variable of Taiwan Strait détente in the Sino-US relationship. In principle, the United States has tried to broker the development of a peaceful cross-Strait relationship. However, after Ma Yingjiu (Ma Ying-jeou) became president in 2008, the cross-Strait relationship turned out to be smooth, without much need for additional mediation from the United States. Hu raises an important issue in his article, which is about America's real national interest in US-Taiwan policy in view of a harmonious cross-Strait relationship after 2008, and more crucially, how America uses its connection with Taiwan to cope with China's rising power in the global context. Hu argues that America has to find a niche in the peaceful cross-Strait relationship. Furthermore, in spite of current peaceful cross-Strait relations, the dynamics of domestic power alternation in Taiwan may possibly affect cross-Strait détente and thus affect the balance of the triangular US-China-Taiwan relationship.

Hu contends that domestic politics in Taiwan has an important effect on international dynamics between the United States, China and Taiwan, and the second article by Jon Sullivan and Eliyahu Sapir further explores and elaborates the impact of Taiwan's domestic politics on its mainland policies. The authors compare three presidential terms, namely Chen Shuibian's (Chen Shui-bian) two terms from 2000 to 2004 and 2004 to 2008 and Ma Yingjiu's first term from 2008 to 2012. Observing that both presidents Chen and Ma raised different questions at different times during their office, Sullivan and Sapir provide a thorough and systematic analysis, measuring and explaining the differences in discourse context throughout the three presidential terms from 2000 to 2012. Their analytical data contain nearly 5,000 public speeches made by Chen and Ma. Sullivan and Ma conclude that the only issue which is addressed by both presidents is economic development in Taiwan. Democracy and Taiwanese identity – both major components of Chen's discourse – were downplayed in Ma's first term. By contrast, Ma has placed much greater emphasis on sovereignty issues, but unlike Chen, Ma's discourse relates to the Republic of China (ROC) rather than Taiwan's sovereignty. One interesting and important factor that Sullivan and Sapir mention at the end of their article is the strategic implications of the presidents' public speeches. The authors point out that the interpretation of sovereignty in

Chen's speeches to overseas audiences widely differs from that in his address to domestic audiences. It is significant that Taiwan's leaders target specific audiences for strategic purposes.

On both sides of the Strait, the emerging interest in business has long been a matter of great concern for Taiwan's political leaders, as reflected by Sullivan and Sapir's final note that an increasing number of Ma's campaign speeches concern Taiwanese businessmen in China (*taishang* 台商). The third contribution in our special issue is from Gunter Schubert who presents the importance of the *taishang* as a 'linkage community' that plays a significant role in the cross-Strait relationship. Schubert notes that while there is some research into the influence of the *taishang* on Chinese politics at the local level, to date there has been no systematic study of the *taishang*'s influence on Taiwan's high-level politics and on Taiwan's high-level politicians' efforts to gain the support of Taiwanese entrepreneurs during presidential campaigns, a point which Sullivan and Sapir also make. Despite the difficulties of obtaining data, as political issues are such a highly sensitive area which the majority of *taishang* are not willing to discuss, Schubert has carried out a study of the *taishang*'s political mindset during long-term fieldwork in and near Dongguan City in Guangzhou Province and in the Kunshan–Shanghai metropolitan area. The main focal points of Schubert's contribution are the expectations of the *taishang* with regard to future cross-Strait relations as well as their understanding of themselves as political agents across the Strait.

The fourth article in this special issue is by André Laliberté. The article analyses cross-Strait relations from a refreshing angle, from a religious and cultural perspective, focusing on the activities of Ciji (Tzu Chi), a Taiwanese Buddhist charity that has been active in China since 1991. In China, religion has always been a sensitive topic. However, Ciji registered with the Chinese authorities in March 2008, and became the first transnational organization headed by a Taiwanese national to do so. Zhengyan (Cheng Yen), the founder is a Buddhist nun. Laliberté examines Ciji's activities and influence on Chinese society, an apt illustration of Joseph Nye's concept of soft power. Laliberté also raises the possibility that the benevolence embodied by Taiwanese volunteers in China could change perceptions in cross-Strait relations. He argues that China may perhaps learn from Taiwan's experiences with religious charity foundations and how the Taiwanese government involves them in the provision of social services. After all, a stable and harmonious society is the common goal (accept) of all governments. Ciji in Taiwan has provided invaluable support and disaster relief to Taiwanese society in times of need. Laliberté's

article raises the strong possibility that Ciji might have a similar influence in China and that its presence stabilizes peaceful relations across the Strait without the intimidation of missiles or the attraction of investments.

Cross-Strait migration has increased steadily in recent years. A growing number of Taiwanese citizens have taken up permanent residence in mainland China. The final article in this special issue by Lin Ping focuses on Taiwanese women in China, among whom include wives of Taiwanese businessmen and female professionals. Tracing a group of Taiwanese female migrants' daily experiences in China from 2004 to 2005 and then 2008 to 2010, Lin discusses the gap between expectation (before migrating to China) and reality (after settling down in China), with the result that this group of Taiwanese women face difficulty in mingling with Chinese society. From interviews conducted, Lin posits that Taiwanese women in China are like 'birds in a golden cage': they are isolated and alienated from Chinese society. They anticipated upward mobility, to climb up another social ladder after moving to China. Lin's interviewees are all highly-educated Taiwanese women who shared the expectation of 'moving up through moving abroad'. When it failed to happen, they alienated among less-privileged Chinese people, which dcreated feelings of loneliness and seclusion from local society. They identified themselves as less Chinese after they moved to China.

By presenting this special issue of cross-Strait studies, we hope to attract more scholarly attention in the field. I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the contributors for their diligence in putting this issue together. I would also like to thank the referees who reviewed the manuscripts, without whose constructive suggestions we would not have been able to produce such a solid collection. Finally I would like to thank Tak-Wing Ngo and *China Information's* editorial team for bringing this special issue to fruition.

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Notes

¹ The articles selected are mainly from *Issues and Studies* and *The China Quarterly*. While the list is not exhaustive, the topics identified are derived from an overview of scholarly debates on cross-Strait relations. (accept)

² Dennis V. Hickey, Beijing's Evolving Policy toward Taipei: Engagement or Entrapment, *Issues and Studies*, 45(1), 2009: 31-70; James R. Holmes, A Clausewitzian Appraisal of cross-Strait Relations, *Issues and Studies*, 44(4), 2008: 29-70; Der-Yuan Wu, Maintaining Status Quo across the Taiwan Strait: A Constructivist/ Institutional perspective, *Issues and Studies*, 44(1), 2008: 33-69.

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