

Taiwan's “International Space” Issue

—Policy Review and Suggestions^{1*}

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Taiwan's “international space” issue has become a significant problem for two reasons. Firstly, after the cross-Straits diplomatic turn-around in the 1970s, Taiwan's “international personality” was cast into grave doubt, and both the regime's legitimacy and public mentality experienced a major shock. A sense of sorrow embodied in such terms as “Orphan of Asia” and “International Abandoned Infant” started to take shape. Secondly, after the 1990s, the issue of “international space” grew beyond the politics of the island, and has become increasingly important to the development of cross-Straits relations. The tug-of-war on this issue not only serves a major barometer for the state of cross-Straits relations, but is also utilized by the “Taiwan independence forces” as an effective instrument to create a sense of sorrow to influence public opinion to their advantage. These two points serve merely as a short historical background. What this paper will focus on is solving this issue in light of the new situation, due to the key that it holds to improving cross-Straits relations and its importance in the upcoming ARATS-SEF dialogue.² In order to solve the issue, it is imperative to have a safe and proactive approach, and what is important is to find a solution that is acceptable to both sides.

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I. POLICY REVIEW: THE ISSUE'S SIGNIFICANCE

(i) Policy Declarations by Both Sides from the 1990s

For the Taiwan side, the “National Unification Guidelines,” “Prospectus on Relations across the Taiwan Straits,” Lee Teng-hui’s “Six Points,” and “Note on the ‘One China’ Question,” all touched on the question of “goodwill” on the part of the mainland side towards Taiwan’s “international space” issue, claiming that finding a solution to this problem was one of the three preconditions for improving and developing cross-Straits relations. Together these four documents and speeches constituted the bulk of the Taiwan authority’s mainland policy (and even its unification policy) throughout the 1990s. For example, the “National Unification Guidelines” proposed that the expansion of cross-Straits interaction would be in three phases. In the first phase of “exchanges and reciprocity,” three fundamental principles should be observed: no deniability of the other side as a political entity, a promise to solve all disputes through peaceful means, and mutual respect in the international sphere. Only when the mainland made concessions on these three issues could cross-Straits relations enter the second phase and could the issue of “three links” be solved.³ “Prospectus on Relations across the Taiwan Straits” and “Note on the ‘One China’ Question” both had special sections to state out Taiwan’s position on the issue of Taiwan’s “international space,”⁴ further highlighting its significance.⁵

The mainland of China, on its part, maintained a bilateral perspective and did not talk much about the “international space” issue in the early years of cross-Straits interaction. However, the “One Country, Two Systems” proposal did touch on it by focusing on how much autonomy Taiwan was supposed to enjoy after unification of the country. It proposed that Taiwan would enjoy some rights in the realm of external affairs, such as maintaining external economic and cultural relations, and the ability to sign agreements pertaining to these matters. Only in August 1993 did the mainland come to be aware of the importance of the issue in the white paper released, which is *The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China*, in which Section 5 dealt specifically with the “international space” issue and the policy positions of the Chinese mainland.⁶ Later on, Jiang Zemin’s “Eight Points” clarified

the mainland's positions on the "international space" issue and demonstrated a willingness to communicate with Taiwan authorities on the matter. Jiang's "Eight Points" differentiated between political "international space," which came with a number of sovereignty implications, and the unofficial economic and cultural space. Jiang pointed out that the Chinese mainland did not oppose Taiwan's quest for independence in the latter. One should note that the "Eight Points" also discussed two principles for solving the "international space" issue — the "One China" principle and relevant rules for participation in international organizations.⁷

(ii) Examination of Recent Policies of the Two Sides

During his inaugural address in 2008, Ma Ying-jeou emphasized the importance of a solution to the issue of Taiwan's "international space." Two paragraphs of his speech were particularly relevant:

We will make Taiwan a respectable member of the international community. We will uphold the principles of "dignity, autonomy, pragmatic, and flexible" to deal with issues of external relations and international space. The Republic of China will meet her obligations as an international citizen... [and we] will shoulder our due responsibilities....

In the future we will conduct consultations with the mainland on matters such as Taiwan's international space and cross-Straits peace agreement. Taiwan wants security, prosperity, and even more so, dignity! Only when Taiwan is no longer isolated internationally can cross-Straits relations move forward... the two sides shall reach reconciliation and truce across the Taiwan Strait and in the international community and help and respect each other at international organizations and during their activities. The people of the two sides belong to the same Chinese nation and shall try their own best to make progress and to together make contributions to the international community instead of conducting vicious competition and wasting resources.⁸

On Ma Ying-jeou's priority list of mainland policy, the "international space" issue was not at the top first. The sequence was as follows: normalization of cross-Straits economic and trade relations, resumption of SEF-ARATS meetings, signing of a peace

agreement, and finally, solution of the “international space” issue. However, due to the recent rapid development of cross-Straits relations, the issue could well be further prioritized and become an important one in the next phase. Indeed, Ma Ying-jeou’s proposal of “viable diplomacy” gave expression to the importance he attached to “international space.” More recently, Ma further stressed that the importance of the “international space” issue lay in the development of multilateral relations when bilateral relations were being improved. Therefore, to properly handle the issue is one important way for Ma to respond to voters’ calls, and it will also become a salient matter during future ARATS-SEF meetings.

In recent years, economic matters have occupied the most important place during ARATS-SEF meetings, and such issues as service trade and mainland-outbound investments continued to receive primary attention. Yet, when negotiations on those issues were drawing to a close, the “international space” issue automatically came to the fore. In such forums as the annual United Nations General Assembly meetings in September and the World Health Assembly (WHA) in May, the “international space” issue can hardly be avoided. The director of Taiwan’s “Mainland Affairs Council” once pointed out that during future SEF-ARATS meetings no issues would be excluded, including the “international space” one.

PRC leaders have expressed goodwill on several occasions with regards to Taiwan’s “international space” issue, and have deemed it an important component of the peaceful development of cross-Straits relations.

Meanwhile, when considerable improvement was witnessed in cross-Straits relations in recent years, mainland Chinese leaders have expressed goodwill on more than one occasions over the “international space” issue, deeming it an important component of the peaceful development of cross-Straits relations. Hu Jintao, former general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, emphasized that the mainland appreciated Taiwanese compatriots’ feelings about participation in

international activities. He also stated that the "Common Vision for Cross-Straits Peaceful Development" already clearly states that "after the resumption of ARATS-SEF meetings, Taiwan's participation in international activities will be discussed, and the World Health Organization (WHO) issue will come first." He believed that solutions to these issues could be found, so long as the two sides make sufficient efforts to create an amicable environment through consultation.⁹ On December 31, 2008, Hu's "Six Points" further clarified the mainland's basic positions on Taiwan's "international space" under the sub-title, "to safeguard national sovereignty and hold consultations on external affairs." Hu pointed out that:

"we are consistently committed to safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of our Taiwan compatriots abroad...[and] we pay particular attention to solving relevant issues. For the two sides of the Straits, to avoid unnecessary internal strife on external affairs is conducive to furthering the overall interests of the Chinese nation. Further consultations can be conducted, as needed, on the prospect of Taiwan's people-to-people economic and cultural interactions with other countries. Regarding the issue of Taiwan's participation in the activities of international organizations, fair and reasonable arrangements can be effected through pragmatic consultation between the two sides, provided that this does not create a situation of 'two Chinas' or 'one China, one Taiwan'."¹⁰

After the power transfer of the Chinese Communist Party, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed that the Party's Taiwan policy was consistent and stable, and he stated that "the compatriots of both sides belong to the same Chinese nation." Xi's talk indicated that the new leadership of the mainland would adopt a more conciliatory policy and solve cross-Straits issues not only from a "country (China)" perspective, but also a "nation (Chinese nation)" one. All this indicates that there should be more leeway and possibilities to solve the issue regarding Taiwan's "international space" in a reasonable way.¹¹

In sum, the mainland appears to have come to be aware that the "international space" issue is a key to the peaceful development of relations across the Taiwan Straits. This understanding has led to

a more thoughtful strategy for dealing with the popular sentiment within Taiwan, through policy declarations and providing aid on practical matters. One can only hope that these conciliatory policies would be carried on.

(iii) Importance and Sensitivity of the “International Space” Issue in More Recent Time

Since May 2008, the cross-Straits relationship has entered a long-sought-after period of peaceful and stable development. Quite a few achievements have been made in areas of economic, cultural, and educational exchange between the two sides. The ARATS-SEF meetings were resumed, and the “Chen-Jiang summit” has been held in nine rounds. Together, these meetings have produced 19 agreements and reached two consensuses. In particular, the full realization of “three links” and the signing of ECFA have normalized and institutionalized cross-Straits economic and trade relations. The agreements reached have created a solid foundation for overall development of cross-Straits relations in the future.

Nevertheless, the “international space” issue still casts a shadow and, if left unsolved, would produce a negative impact on cross-Straits interaction. Several recent incidents — from the Japanese Kyodo News Service’s false reporting of the TAO director’s comment on the WHO issue, the controversy over the name of “Chinese Taipei” before the Beijing Olympics, to the incident at the Tokyo international movie festival in 2010 — have highlighted the hypersensitivity of the “international space” issue. If similar incidents are not handled properly, they would have a negative effect on Taiwan’s public sentiment towards the mainland and enhance mistrust between the two sides. Such incidents might also be used as a pretext and manipulated by the DPP to its own advantage.¹²

The afore-mentioned controversies demonstrate that, despite the temporary damage that they caused, the “international space” issue remains an important and sensitive one. If it would not be properly resolved, it would cause further trouble to cross-Straits political relations.

The “international space” issue is important and sensitive because it is closely related to several relationships.

The relationship between “international space” and “Taiwan independence”

During Lee Teng-hui's 12-year rule and Chen Shui-bian's eight-year rule, the “international space” issue was employed as an instrument to promote “Taiwan independence.” For instance, Lee Teng-hui's visit to the USA and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Nauru by the PRC in 2002 served as stimuli for both Lee and Chen to put forward separatist statements. These statements, which were based on the “theory of two countries” and “theory of one country on each side,” were blatant challenges to the “one-China” principle. Lee and Chen also manipulated the issue to foster a sense of sorrow among the people of Taiwan in order to fan up the so-called “Taiwan independence consciousness” and expand the ranks of “Taiwan independence” supporters.

In 1997, John Chiang (Zhang Xiaoyan), then “foreign minister” of Taiwan, openly expressed his concern that the shrinking of Taiwan's “international space” might strengthen the “Taiwan independence consciousness” among some Taiwanese. Zhang was worried that, if the number of Taiwan's “diplomatic allies” dropped below 20, there might be a distinct increase in the number of Taiwanese supporting “independence,” due to the mainland's “strangulation” of Taiwan's “international space.” Zhang was also concerned about “pragmatic diplomacy,” but he seemed not to have a satisfactory answer to the balance between “pragmatic diplomacy” and mainland policy. At the time, he proposed a different view from his predecessor, Qian Fu,¹³ that is, ranking external policy higher over mainland policy.¹⁴ Zhang's view regarding the relationship between “international space” and “Taiwan independence” indeed deserves attention: if Taiwan loses all of its “diplomatic allies,” the “international personality” of the “Republic of China” (ROC) would become nil, completely cutting off its political connections with China.

The logic here is somewhat similar to that during the Jinmen crisis in 1958. Had the mainland taken over Jinmen and Mazu at that time, the “ROC” would have been geographically confined only to the island of Taiwan, being cutting off with China proper in geographical terms. Such a takeover would have also provided additional justification for future “Taiwan independence” forces.

When the U.S. asked Chiang Kai-shek to give up those offshore islands, the demand would be tantamount to a geographical isolation of Taiwan, implying politically “two China’s,” or “one China, one Taiwan.” Both Chiang and Mao simultaneously realized at the same time the crux of this issue. Mao said, “It is better to have Jinmen and Mazu at the hands of Chiang.” This allowed for a high degree of tacit understanding to be reached between the two leaders.

In sum, leaving Jinmen and Mazu to Chiang in 1958 allowed for the preservation of a geographical framework for the “ROC.” Similarly today, the 20 or so “diplomatic allies” of the Taiwan authority are necessary to preserve its “constitutional framework,” in addition to providing a theoretical life of defense against *de jure* “Taiwan independence.”¹⁵

2) The relationship between “international space” and public opinion

The public in Taiwan is sensitive to the “international space” issue. When the mainland keeps suppressing Taiwan at the international arena, it may produce certain negative influence on popular sentiment in the island. If such a trend continues, an increasing number of people in Taiwan may reach the conclusion that Beijing does not have their best interests in mind, and may lose all their desire to be reunited with the mainland. The aforementioned visit to the U.S. by Lee Teng-hui and the Nauru incident are two cases in point, as the handling of the two incidents by Beijing did have a negative impact upon the feelings of some Taiwanese. Polls conducted on the “theory of two countries” and “theory of one country each side” indicated that about 70%

percent of Taiwanese supported those statements. Although we may doubt the reliability of the polls, at least they show that the “international space” issue played a considerable role in the rise of the number of independence supporters. One mainland scholar pointed out, “The establishment of diplomatic relations with Nauru and the international struggle between the two sides during the SARS epidemic significantly

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intensified Taiwan's hostility toward us (the mainland of China), which eventually turned out to be a social base for Chen Shui-bian to win reelection by implementing confrontational tactics." He further emphasized that, in light of the particular political ecology on the island, there is direct causality between the suppression on Taiwan's "international space" and the rise of the "Taiwan independence" cry. The scholar also noted that the WHO issue has fuelled a particularly strong backlash against the mainland.¹⁶

Moreover, some of Ma Ying-jeou's statements also helped illustrate this point. Ma said that the ceding of Taiwan with the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, the "February 28 incident," and Taiwan's withdrawal from the UN in 1971 were the three biggest scars for the ordinary Taiwanese. the latter two events also turned out to be a stimuli for the emergence of the so-called "Taiwanese identity" and the separatist sentiment in the island. After the adoption of democracy in Taiwan, they have become insignificant, leaving only the "international space" issue to be tackled. "Taiwan's subjectivity has to be respected in order to appease the sulks of Taiwanese." Taiwan needs more recognition "diplomatically," and if the Communist Party of China does not even compromise on this issue, "all people in Taiwan will be forced to revolt (against the mainland) and instabilities will become the order of the day."¹⁷ While one may not necessarily agree with Ma's statements, some of the discussions about the "international space" issue and public opinion deserve attention, however.

4) The relationship between the "international space" issue and policy to be implemented

It can be seen from the slogan "the Han and the bandits cannot coexist," Chiang Ching-kuo's "substantive diplomacy," Lee Teng-hui's "pragmatic diplomacy" and Chen Shui-bian's "beacon fire diplomacy" that, when cross-Straits relationship turns sour, the Taiwanese authorities would rank external policy higher over its mainland policy. Whereas when cross-Straits relationship improves, the mainland policy would be ranked higher. The examples include the 1995 Taiwan Straits crisis and the post-2000 period of Chen Shui-bian's reign. Two further ones are the early and mid-

1990s when the cross-Straits interaction remained in better shape and the current period when Ma Ying-jeou is in office and has openly declared the priority given to of the mainland policy over external policy. The trajectory of policy change demonstrates that the “international space” issue can be a trigger as well as a direct consequence of cross-Straits tension and crises. If the “Taiwan independence” policy is coupled with the competition of the two sides over the “international space,” serious cross-Straits crises will almost inevitably erupt. On the other hand, once the mainland takes goodwill initiatives, or if Taiwan expresses a willingness to solve the issue through consultation and negotiation, the tension will alleviate and cross-Straits relations will improve.

2. SEVERAL INFERENCES AND SUGGESTIONS

(1) The “international space” issue was a root cause of displeasure between the two sides in the 1990s. Lee Teng-hui’s visit to the U.S. in summer 1995 and Taiwan’s other escalatory measures of “pragmatic diplomacy” ultimately led to a political crisis across the Straits. Similar cases also took place during Chen Shui-bian’s rule. The establishment of diplomatic relations between the mainland and Nauru was at least an immediate cause of the “theory of one country each side.” The Taiwan side took the perspective of “survival” and “dignity.” They believed that the mainland should make some concessions, while the mainland stuck to the “one-China” principle and deemed “pragmatic diplomacy” a challenge to it. After the mid-1990s, the two sides agreed to solve the issue through consultation and negotiation.

(2) In recent years, Taiwan’s policy has witnessed the following changes:

- (i) No “*de jure* Taiwan independence” and emphasis on the “ROC constitutional framework”;
- (ii) Ranking mainland policy over external policy, no “beacon fire diplomacy,” and a cross-Straits truce on the international stage;

Despite these policy preferences, it cannot be ruled out that the Taiwan authorities would not come back to the “two China’s”

stance when it sees that the "international space" issue is not to be solved.

(3) On the part of the mainland, the policy is consistent so long as the one-China principle is upheld.

(i) Peaceful development is the aim of cross-Straits relations and other policies are complementary, and they should not interfere with this policy.

(ii) A strong policy signal has been sent from the mainland that the "international space" issue will be covered in the cross-Straits talks instead of being only a unilateral aspiration or demand from Taiwan.

(4) Thus, according to the basic policies of both sides on this and other relevant issues, here the author gives some policy suggestions.

(i) A strategic perspective should be adopted regarding the necessity of solving the "international space" issue. By the so-called strategic perspective, it means that the development of cross-Straits relations should revolve closely around the fundamental aim of peaceful development, make constructive moves to establish the framework of cross-Straits peaceful development and usher in a new phase of cross-Straits relations. This could include making efforts to win the confidence of the Taiwan people. Therefore, the issue is related to a larger objective and should not be dealt with technically or impetuously. To do otherwise constitutes a tactical, instead of a strategic perspective.

A strategic perspective should be taken regarding the necessity of solving the "international space" issue.

(ii) The "international space" issue will likely enter the agenda of next-phase ARATS-SEF meetings, so the mainland should prepare plans for the consultations in advance. From now on, the mainland should also convey to the Taiwan side the impression that the issue is resolvable and that a mutually acceptable solution can be found in the near future.

- (iii) The “international space” issue is mostly expressed in Taiwan’s “diplomatic allies” and its participation in international organizations. As for the issue of “diplomatic allies,” it is first and foremost an issue of perception. With this in mind, a strategy of winning hearts and minds should be adopted. Since the mainland of China is already a major power, how many diplomatic allies it has now become insignificant to its overall status. However, the Taiwan issue could indeed hurt China’s status because unification is a main criterion in judging whether a country a major power. The number of “diplomatic allies” is somewhat similar to the Chinese war movie *Nan zheng Bei zhan* (南征北战), which shows that it is not always a bad thing to give up two or three counties temporarily because it may create materialistic, spiritual and public opinion conditions for ultimate victory, including winning back the lost territories. As for the resolution of the Taiwan issue and realization of peaceful reunification of the Chinese nation, spiritual and public opinion conditions are far more important than the materialistic ones. Second, it is also a matter of tactics. Given that the number of “diplomatic allies” is sensitive to Taiwan, the increase or decrease of that number entails two things: first, both sides have some sort of an agreement beforehand and include the issue in the consultations, and second, the mainland refrain from forcing the other side into a corner. To be sure, in the future two phenomena deserve particular attention as regards the issue of “diplomatic allies”: one is that the two sides should no longer engage in a competition for some “diplomatic allies” and reach a genuine “reconciliation and truce”; and the other is that, when some countries, i.e., “diplomatic allies” of Taiwan, approach the mainland for the establishment of diplomatic relations, it is not always the best solution for the mainland to just say no. The mainland can sometimes do a little bit “fair play,” sometimes let Taiwan itself to take charge of the situation, and some other times be selective.
- (iv) The matter regarding the international organizations is a

more complicated one than the one regarding the "diplomatic allies." In this, the mainland should not only hold onto the bottom line; it should also be the one to offer a way out. According to previous practices, Taiwan has joined some international activities under the names of "Chinese Taipei," "Taipei, China" or "Taiwan, China." And on the "international space" issue, the "Olympics mode" and the "ADB (Asian Development Bank) mode" have been established. In the future, although the two modes do not have to be applied in every case, they can be studied from the perspectives of law, political science and international relations so as to find a new formula that is acceptable for both sides. Moreover, how the issue is thought of and perceived needs improvement. The controversy over "Chinese Taipei" and "Taipei, China" should not arise again and the names should be consistent. The so-called "Chinese Taipei" is after all better than either "two China's" or "one China, one Taiwan."

1 The article is part of the project "'One Country, Two Systems' and Taiwan," which is financed as a major project by the National Social Science Fund (Grant No. 07AZZ003).

2 ARATS refers to Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits, and SEF refers to the Straits Exchange Foundation.

3 *The National Unification Guidelines*, Section 4.

4 *Prospectus on Relations across the Taiwan Straits*, Section 4 "Internal and External Factors on Cross-Straits Relations"; Lee Teng-hui's "Six Points," Point No. 4; Note on the "One China" Question, Section 2.

5 The significance of the "international space" issue for Taiwan can be seen from some representative Pan-blue scholars. For example, Shao Zonghai noted that "the National Unification Guidelines declares that in order for cross-Straits relations to march toward the second phase of official

contact, Beijing has to meet the three conditions in the first phase as a goodwill gesture: no deniability of Taipei as a political entity, no boycott of diplomatic space and no use of force.” Shao Zonghai, *Liang'an Guanxi: Liang'an Gongshi yu Liang'an Qijian* (Taipei: Wunan, 1998), p. 19. Likewise, Chen Desheng maintained that political downgrading, economic cooptation, constant military threat and diplomatic isolation are the four obstacles for developing cross-Straits relations. Only by sweeping them away can cross-Straits relations step into a phase of benign interaction. In particular, “diplomatic isolation” is one of the major manifestations of the mainland’s malign intentions. Chen Desheng, *Liang'an Zhengjing Hudong* (Taipei: Yongye, 1994), p. 6. In addition, Zhang Yazhong and Yang Kaihuang share those views. See the relevant sections on “international space” in their work. Zhang Yazhong, *Liang'an Tonghe Lun* (Taipei, Shengzhi, 2000), *Liang'an Zhuquan Lun* (Shengzhi, 1998); Yang Kaihuang, *Zonglun Liang'an Xun Shuangying* (Taipei: Lishi Zhi ku, 1996). Those scholarly views are quite representative on the island. It is also worth noting that those scholars belong to the blue camp and their views are more pro-unification.

6 The Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) and Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China*, Section 5, “Several Question Involving Taiwan in International Relations,” August 31, 1993.

7 Jiang Zemin, “Fighting Continuously to Promote the Accomplishment of the Great Cause of the Reunification of the Motherland,” *People’s Daily*, January 31, 1995. See Point No. 2.

8 Central News Agency, May 20, 2008.

9 Xinhua News Agency, May 28, 2008.

10 Hu Jintao, *Let Us Join Hands to Promote the Peaceful Development of Cross-Straits Relations and Strive with a United Resolve for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation*, Beijing, People’s Publishing House, 2009, p. 9.

11 See Xinhua News Agency coverage of the “Xi-Xiao meeting” and the “Xi-Wu meeting,” April 8, 2013 and June 13, 2013.

12 Before the 2008 Olympics, on the use of “Chinese Taipei” or “Taipei, China,” the TAO spokesperson explained in detail the origins and background of those names and dispelled misunderstandings from Taiwan. It is worth noting that, during the Olympics, the Xinhua News Agency once again used “Taipei, China” due to carelessness, stirring another controversy on the island.

13 Qian Fu believed that mainland policy ranked higher than external policy, a view familiar to many.

14 *Lien Ho Pao*, May 17, 1997.

15 According to the “ROC constitution,” its “constitutional framework” is “constitutional one China.”

16 Li Yizhou, *Dagong Chucheng, Gonggu Qianjin* (manuscript, July 2008), p. 49.

17 Li Yizhou, *Dagong Chucheng, Gonggu Qianjin* (manuscript, July 2008), p. 76.