

U.S. and Mainland China in Taiwan's International Participation^λ

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Generally speaking, the principles of “Flexible Diplomacy” upheld by the MA Ying-jeou administration of the Republic of China (hereafter, R.O.C. or Taiwan) have five major themes, that is, consolidating existing relations with 23 diplomatic allies, enhancing substantive relations with non-diplomatic allies, expanding and upgrading international participation, promoting cultural and humanitarian diplomacy, as well as benefiting people of Taiwan by strengthening function cooperation with countries and organizations in the world. For Taiwan, the first three themes depend particularly on a peaceful and friendly external environment. Such an external environment can maximize the contributions resulting from “Flexible Diplomacy” and prevent Taiwan from becoming a “chess” or “bargaining chip” in major powers competition.¹

More recently, nevertheless, as the Kuomintang (KMT) regained power after

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¹ In other words, Taiwan does not want to be dragged into potential conflict between major powers – not only the conflict between Washington and Beijing but also between Tokyo and Beijing – in the region of the Asia Pacific or to be taken advantage of by those powers having conflicting interests.

May 20, 2008 and wanted to realize its “close to the United States (U.S.), amicable with Japan, and peaceful with mainland China” strategy, Washington-Beijing and Tokyo-Beijing relations seem to begin to decline, in a relative term, with some obvious clashes. It complicates Taiwan’s effort to exercise more sensible foreign policies that need a stable and peaceful regional environment. Ironically, as the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the ruling party of Taiwan between 2000 and 2008, intended to carry out the so-called “Torched-the-earth Diplomacy” and make use of the U.S., Japan, and even the European Union to counter the People’s Republic of China (hereafter, P.R.C. or mainland China), most of the time the relationships between the U.S. and mainland China and between Japan and mainland China were being restored. Occasionally Taiwan was viewed as a “troublemaker” by these powers simply due to its provocative behavior toward mainland China or due to the high unpredictability of its foreign policy. These “historical coincidences” indicate the fact that the external environment of Taiwan has influenced Taiwan’s foreign policy implementations significantly.

Of the three major factors determining Taiwan’s success in participation in major international activities among nation-state governments – the endorsement of the international community, the tacit understanding of mainland China, and the backing of Taiwan’s civil society, the U.S. which is able and willing to facilitate the supporting voice for Taiwan and mainland China which is occasionally not opposed to Taiwan’s participation are two most crucial actors. In the current context of U.S.-mainland China strategic interactions, given the strategic distrust between the U.S. and mainland China nowadays, Taiwan’s international participation would be more possible if such participation is not seen by mainland China as a disguised approach whose real aim is to help the U.S. with its “rebalancing” policy. The U.S. has no worry about Taiwan’s pursuit of international space that relies partially on mainland China’s tacit understanding, because it knows the MA administration’s policy toward international participation does not lead to political intimacy that would change the status quo of the Taiwan Strait defined by the U.S.

Contemporary cross-Taiwan Strait relations have made salient progress

particularly in people-to-people, economic and trade, cultural and educational fields. Through the engagement of Taipei-based Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and Beijing-based Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), the both sides of the Taiwan Strait have struck 18 agreements and 2 memorandums of understanding since May 2008. Despite their cross-Strait nature, it is not impossible in the future that these documents of functional cooperation might be able serve as a basis for the interactions between Taiwan and mainland China in the related international arenas.

A Further Look at Taiwan's International Participation

Whether or not such an atmosphere of cooperation has spread to Taiwan's effort to participate in major functional institutions? The answer seems to be "Not really."² If the improvement in cross-Taiwan Strait relations is not a key policy goal of mainland China, Mainland China would have pushed Taiwan to the corner diplomatically. If the pursuit of stabilization in the Taiwan Strait and the wish to participate in and contribute to the international community meaningfully are not primary concerns of Taiwan, Taiwan would have continued to compete strongly with mainland China for formal recognition. What is also worth mentioning is that the "diplomatic truce"³ status quo does not guarantee a "surprise free" condition in international affairs both Taipei and Beijing are involved, partially because the scope of international affairs and activities have become too extensive and diverse. Now and then, there are some international occasions where cross-Taiwan Strait politics become the point of argument between Taiwan and mainland China. It is particularly true when some civil society

² The current status of the R.O.C.'s participation in functional inter-governmental institutions can be found in Appendix. It needs to be noted that the titles used by the R.O.C. to participate in these institutions vary.

³ The idea of "diplomatic truce" was put forward by President Ma during his presidential campaign in the first half of 2008. It asks the both sides to stop "checkbook diplomacy" – i.e., competing to buy each other's diplomatic allies – in order to reduce some tensions resulting from both sides' diplomatic struggle for recognition and bring a momentary stability to the Taiwan Strait. It can be argued that at least both Taipei and Beijing have ceased to struggle for each other's diplomatic allies since President Ma's inauguration on May 20, 2008.

organizations (CSOs) from both sides of the Taiwan Strait meet internationally.⁴

At this time, both Taiwan and mainland China are not satisfied with the diplomatic status quo that has been gradually shaped under the tacit agreement on “diplomatic truce” between the two sides, but actually the two parties accept this status quo unwillingly. On the one hand, Taiwan under the leadership of President Ma always wants to participate in the mainstream international community as one of the responsible shareholders, while mainland China hopes to diminish Taiwan’s international presence to highlight its own “legitimacy” and probably force Taiwan to engage political negotiations with it. On the other hand, mainland China’s desire for winning the heart and mind of people in Taiwan, Taiwan’s own capability that can somehow resist mainland China’s scheme of isolating and downgrading Taiwan internationally and diplomatically, as well as the international moral support, especially that from Taiwan’s diplomatic allies, the U.S. and the European Union, are of significant help to maintain the current status quo in diplomatic issues between Taiwan and mainland China.

Under the guidance of “Flexible Diplomacy,” Taiwan’s international participation is non-confrontational, nor is it aimed at promoting Taiwan independence. Most of the time, Taiwan’s international participation has been defined mainly as joining international governmental organizations in a meaningful way and preventing the international outreach of its non-governmental institutions from meeting political or diplomatic challenges imposed by mainland China. On top of this “classical” view, Taiwan’s

⁴ For example, Taiwan was invited to the 2010 Shanghai Expo, after its 40-year absence. At the planning phase the Taiwan Pavilion was arranged to be located together with the Hong Kong and Macau Pavilions in Area A, and they all were located by the largest pavilion of the Expo – the China pavilion. In addition, Taiwan’s, Hong Kong’s, and Macau’s Pavilions had the same size. All these would lead to an impression that Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau are three special administrative regions of the PRC. Being protested by the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA), the representative of Taiwan in the Expo, the Shanghai Expo compromised a bit to move the Taiwan Pavilion to another bloc (still in Area A) across the bloc where the China, Hong Kong, and Macau Pavilions were, as well as give the Taiwan Pavilion to have a larger display area (1,400 square meter) than that of the Hong Kong and Macau Pavilions (1,000 square meter).

international participation can be viewed as the expansion of Taiwan's international space of survival by engaging the international community and refining its performance – such as the negotiation and participation in bilateral or multilateral economic cooperation mechanisms in the region, to underscore the importance of Taiwan and make Taiwan an indispensable player in a lot of critical issues faced by the mankind. According to this view, Taiwan cannot be content with its observer status that allows it to attend a limited number of international institutions once a year or even once every three years like the case of ICAO. It is of greater importance for Taiwan to upgrade its participation – not necessarily its membership or status at the present time – in those international institutions in which Taiwan has been able to participate meaningfully. To achieve this goal, not only the support of the major players in those institutions is needed, but Taiwan's effort to build up sufficient capacity to fulfill whatever obligation it should as a dependable and respectful shareholder.

In addition to Taiwan's own effort, as analyzed above, the U.S. and mainland China are two key factors influencing the size of Taiwan's international space. The U.S. represents the major supporting voice arguing that Taiwan should have a space in the international community. But the support from the U.S. still has its limit – that is, bounded by its own “One China” policy, the U.S. simply “fully supports Taiwan's membership in international organizations where statehood is not a requirement for membership and encourages Taiwan's meaningful participation, as appropriate, in organizations where its membership is not possible.”⁵ Mainland China contends that, because of the “One China” principle, Taiwan should not be granted full membership of the international organizations, and that the degree of Taiwan's participation in international organizations must be first agreed by it. In line with these contentions, mainland China asks Taiwan to consult with it first whenever the latter is interested in joining international institutions, regardless of governmental or non-governmental.

⁵ “Statement on Signing Legislation Concerning the Participation of Taiwan in the International Civil Aviation Organization,” *DCPD Number*: DCPD201300495, July 12, 2013. Available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201300495/html/DCPD-201300495.htm>.

The priority of Taiwan's international participation is to join major functional international institutions to benefit not only the people of Taiwan but the rest of the world. Among these institutions, the specialized agencies affiliated with the United Nations (U.N.), such as ICAO, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), are chosen by the MA administration as the targets. Taiwan has suspended its attempt to apply for the full membership of the U.N., in the hope that this realistic approach could let mainland China understand the intent of Taiwan and lower the diplomatic tension between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. In the meantime, this realistic approach means that the Ma administration believes that the rights of the people in Taiwan to join the international community cannot be deprived, although the most direct and efficient way – joining the U.N. – is unavailable due to the obstruction by mainland China.

Limited and Well-planned Goodwill of Mainland China

It is of the view that mainland China knows what the MA administration thinks and wants to win the heart and mind of the people of Taiwan, but it feels worried about the accumulation of the effect resulting from increased Taiwan's international participation will become a cornerstone of ultimate Taiwan independence, in particular if the DPP wins the future presidential elections in the R.O.C. Accordingly, leaders of mainland China demonstrate in a very limited way their goodwill to Taiwan's international participation. Having agreed on Taiwan's observer status in the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2009, mainland China is still very cautious of Taiwan's further participation in such WHO-related events as regional committee meetings and sets a number of limitations on Taiwan, not to mention that, with the insistence of Beijing, the internal documents of WHO still calls Taiwan as "a province of China."

In addition to mainland China's first goodwill to Taiwan – the case of WHA, the second goodwill of mainland China for Taiwan's international space is HU Jintao's commitment at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit of 2012. There he met with LIEN Chan (former R.O.C. Vice President and then-leader's representative) and promised that in accordance

with ICAO's Constitution and rules of procedure, mainland China was willing to study seriously to find an appropriate way for Taiwan's joining ICAO.

The third goodwill released by mainland China is probably at the Boao Forum for Asia this April where XI Jinping met with Vincent SIEW (former R.O.C. Vice President). XI proposed to carry out some joint studies at an appropriate time and in a practical way to figure out the proper methods and feasible approaches that help link the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) and the process of regional economic cooperation.

The fourth goodwill expressed by mainland China about Taiwan's international participation is seen at the meeting between WU Poh-hsiung (Honorary Chairperson of KMT) and XI this June in Beijing. XI suggested that both sides of the Taiwan Strait should encourage benign interactions on the basis of enhanced communication channels and equal consultations in order to maintain the peace in the Taiwan Strait and solve problems in a sensible and reasoned way.

In comparison with these gestures of goodwill from the mainland Chinese side, however, there are disproportionally huge barriers mainland China already sets to downgrade or isolate Taiwan internationally. These barriers have led to a deepened frustration of Taiwan, including its government and people. Taiwan wishes to participate in and contribute to the international community with respect, not in the capacity of "a province of China." However, among so many important regional cooperation mechanisms in the region of East Asia, Taiwan can voice its concerns in and make concrete contribution to APEC and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) only. As mentioned before, in WHO, mainland China always imposes numerous restrictions preventing Taiwan from joining many occasions that help Taiwan and WHO jointly construct a sanitary and antiepidemic defense line. All these would go against mainland China's wish that it will anchor its hope for reunification on the people in Taiwan.

The goodwill of mainland China for Taiwan's international participation appears to be passive and well-planned, in the hope that mainland China's

gestures of goodwill should serve for future unification of China. Besides, mainland China deals with Taiwan's international participation on a case-by-case basis and never establishes any generalized principle, not to mention the so-called "One China" principle defined and upheld by it. That is why Taiwan has been always hesitant to communicate with mainland China – at least hesitant to do so before Taiwan speaks to the other major players – over its international space. This just brings to light the significance of the U.S. in the expansion of Taiwan's international space.

The Role of the U.S.

What can the U.S., the most important supporter for Taiwan's sensible and low-profile approach to international participation, help if Taiwan's policy toward international participation continues to meet the national interest and moral standard of the U.S.? The first thing that the U.S. can do for Taiwan is something it has kept on doing – i.e., to reiterate the U.S. support and upholding its existing policy at appropriate times. This sounds easy, almost like a lip service, but actually by doing so can the U.S. run the risk of harming the roller coaster relationship with mainland China.

The second thing that the U.S. can do is to work with Taiwan to identify potential research or information-gathering related sub-units (for example, the International Energy Agency under the Organization for Economic and Cooperation Development) in important but less politically sensitive inter-governmental organizations on which the U.S. can exert more substantial influence. This would be relatively easier because in these cases it is not very politically sensitive to let Taiwan participate and because it focuses on some international institutions where the U.S. is more powerful.

Similarly, the third thing this paper suggests to the U.S. is to help Taiwan set appropriate goals of international participation. For instance, Taiwan and the U.S. can carry out some joint studies or policy consultation talks to find out a few important functional international institutions of which Taiwan is not a member. The U.S. can also help Taiwan with the latter's capacity building in joining major international events. Having been excluded from

most of the mainstream international institutions for too long, officials of Taiwan have been unfamiliar with the rules or politics of the game in those institutions. It is thus a reasonable worry about a lack of the appropriate capacity to act if Taiwan begins to join more international institutions and meetings in the future.

Lastly, the U.S. can be also of help if it clearly suggests Taiwan about the right path to join the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPP) under the framework of APEC.⁶ To join TPP successfully relies in part on Taiwan's own endeavors to speed up its domestic economic reform and liberalization programs, but it cannot be realized if the political issues remain. These political issues may consist of the possibilities such as: Taiwan being invited to TPP will cause the revenge of mainland China, the U.S. and the other parties to TPP use TPP as a bargaining chip and win an advantage over Taiwan, and so on. Pursuing a huger international economic space is of strategic importance for Taiwan. Taiwan and the U.S. can make good use of multilateral mechanisms in which they participate commonly or employ whatever communication channels they have to clarify the true willingness and weaknesses Taiwan possesses and create more chances for Taiwan to join TPP as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Taiwan should not politicize its intention of joining TPP to get rid of unnecessary concerns of the existing parties to TPP.

Concluding Remarks

As stated before, Taiwan's international participation is more than joining inter-governmental institutions. It also has to do with the CSOs networking and the upgrading of participation. In addition to the domestic backing, internationally Taiwan hinges largely on the support of the U.S. with specific conditions and the limited, uncertain goodwill of mainland China that places its hope for reunification on the people in Taiwan. Moreover, Taiwan's domestic politics will further complicate the issue (which this paper rarely touches upon). To conclude, the future of Taiwan's international

⁶ As of August 2013, the member economies of TPP include Australia, Brunei, Chile, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the U.S., Vietnam, and South Korea.

participation will be full of opportunities and uncertainties in the context of Taipei-Washington-Beijing triangular relations.

APPENDIX

Full Member:

Organization	Acronym	Since
South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation	SPRFMO	2012
International Council for Information Technology in Government Administration	ICA	2010
Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission	IATTC	2010
Standards and Trade Development Facility	STDF	2010
Advisory Centre on WTO Law	ACWL	2004
Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission	WCPFC	2004
Extended Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna	CCSBT	2002
The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean	ISC	2002
World Customs Organization (Technical Committee on Customs Valuation)	WCO	2002
World Customs Organization (Technical committee on Rules of Origin)	WCO	2002
World Trade Organization	WTO	2002
The International Competition Network	ICN	2002
Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions	APAARI	1999
Association of Asian Election Authorities	AAEA	1998
Egmont Group	EG	1999
Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering	APG	1997
Study Group on Asian Tax Administration and Research	SGATAR	1996
Asia-Pacific Legal Metrology Forum	APLMF	1994
Association for Science Cooperation in Asia	ASCA	1994

International Association of Insurance Supervisors	IAIS	1994
Central American Bank for Economic Integration	CABEI	1992
International Satellite System for Search and Rescue	Cospas-Sarsat	1992
Conference of Governors of South East Asian Central Banks	SEACEN	1992
Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation	APEC	1991
International Organization of Securities Commissions	IOSCO	1987
AVRDC-The World Vegetable Center	AVRDC	1971
Food and Fertilizer Technology Center for the Asian and Pacific Region	FFTC/ASPAC	1970
Afro-Asian Rural Development Organization	AARDO	1968
Asian Development Bank	ADB	1966
International Cotton Advisory Committee	ICAC	1963
International Seed Testing Association	ISTA	1962
Asian Productivity Organization	APO	1961
World Organisation for Animal Health	OIE	1954

Observer:

Organization	Acronym	Since
World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization	WHA	2009
International Renewable Energy Agency	IRENA	2011
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Fisheries Committee)	OECD	2006
World Customs Organization (Revised Kyoto Convention Management Committee)	WCO	2006
Conferencia de las Fuerzas Armadas Centroamericanas	CFAC	2005
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Steel Committee)	OECD	2005
Kimberley Process	KP	2003
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Competition Committee)	OECD	2002

Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana	SICA	2000
Parlamento Centroamericano	PARLACEN	1999
Food Aid Committee	FAC	1995
International Grains Council	IGC	1995
Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna	CCSBT	1994
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	EBRD	1991
Foro de Presidentes de Poderes Legislativos de Centroamerica y la Cuenca del Caribe	FOPREL	1991
Inter-American Development Bank	IDB	1991

Sources: The R.O.C. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Policies and Issues: IGOs in Which We Participate. Available at
 <<http://www.mofa.gov.tw/EnOfficial/NationalOrg/OrgList/?opno=3400817f-1a5b-443c-8969-174b5c7819b2>> and
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