

## **Discuss the implications of democratisation in East Asia for violent conflict and conflict prevention.**

### **1. Introduction**

The global spread of democratisation since the mid-1970s, which Huntington called “the third wave,”<sup>1</sup> is one of the most prominent political phenomenon in the twentieth century. The wave also stretched to East Asia such as the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia and other countries, and had a variety of impact on violent conflicts and conflict prevention in each country.

This essay focuses on Taiwan amongst many cases and aims to clarify the implications of democratisation in Taiwan for conflict prevention with the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The discussion begins with explaining the process of democratisation and the ‘one China’ policy in Taiwan. This is followed by the analysis of democratized Taiwan’s policy and the PRC’s reaction. The fourth section deals with the possible military options and looks at the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The fifth section describes the Taiwan’s dilemma and lingering fear from the PRC. And the discussion is concluded by showing the fact that preventing conflicts with the PRC hinders the democratic consolidation.

### **2. The process of democratisation and the ‘one China’ policy in Taiwan**

In the first half of the Cold War era, the Kuomintang (KMT) government on Taiwan had been greatly given the advantages economically and militarily from the US policy towards Communist China.<sup>2</sup> But after the tensions had mounted between the PRC and the Soviet Union, the US built the anti-soviet alliance with the PRC and switched the recognition from Taiwan to the PRC. The US fully normalised the relationship with the PRC in 1979, started formal diplomatic relations with the PRC, and severed its diplomatic ties with Taiwan.<sup>3</sup>

Taiwan then faced a legitimisation crisis. In the 1980s, “only a handful of foreign governments”<sup>4</sup> recognised Taiwan as a sovereign state. Internationally isolated Taiwan had to focus efforts on maintaining Taiwan’s relations with other countries by “replacing diplomatic relations with economic ties”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the US “increased its pressure on Taiwan to democratize in order to justify continued American economic and security guarantees and the US promises to prevent Taiwan from being absorbed against its will by the People’s Republic of China.”<sup>6</sup>

Taiwan began democratising in 1986 when the only ruling party (KMT) declared a political liberalization programme and when the opposition formed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), although its formation was still technically illegal at that time. The democratisation in Taiwan was promoted by the four steps of constitutional amendments commencing 1991 and was told to be completed by the

direct presidential election.<sup>7</sup> Taiwan is now regarded as one of the most democratic countries. However, the issues such as accountability and voting design “remain on the agenda of Taiwan’s democratic consolidation.”<sup>8</sup> And despite the significant improvement of freedom of speech on the island, Taiwan has no functional journalism that “facilitates fair and balanced public discussion of contending views.”<sup>9</sup>

The present situation and institutional framework as democracy still have some weaknesses that keep Taiwan from matured liberal democracy, although it experiences a change of the governing party from the KMT to the opposition party, the DPP, for the first time since 1949 when the KMT withdrew to the island of Taiwan from the mainland.

Democratisation and resultant economical deregulations eased the state’s legitimacy crisis. On the other hand, the ‘one China’ policy, which had justified the KMT’s authoritarian control since 1949 and had required Taiwan to leave the UN in 1971, was “a bottleneck in the reform process.”<sup>10</sup> As the democratisation proceeds, more Taiwanese attained positions in the centre of power. The ‘Taiwanisation’ of the political structure stimulates the aspiration of the people who hope themselves to gain the international recognition.<sup>11</sup> Lee Teng-hui’s pragmatic diplomacy and constitutional reforms accelerated this tendency and ‘one China’ policy was gradually weakened.

### **3. Democratized Taiwan’s policy and the PRC’s reaction**

#### *The PRC’s attempt to enhance exchanges and stalemated diplomatic dialogue*

Before the democratisation in Taiwan began, the PRC revised its strategy toward Taiwan in order to adapt to the changing situations across the strait. In the initial stages of democratisation, the PRC considered the implication less importantly, but as democratisation in Taiwan progresses, the PRC became more suspicious to Taiwan’s policy.

For nearly thirty years since the establishment of the country, the PRC’s threatened to ‘liberate Taiwan’ and it “attempted to seize territory under Taipei’s control.”<sup>12</sup> But this slogan, along with the Taiwan’s ‘counterattack on the mainland,’ became gradually less of a real possibility and the cross strait relations were ostensibly peaceful. In the late 1970s, “the PRC dropped this policy.”<sup>13</sup>

The new PRC strategy aims to realise ‘peaceful unification’ through the formula ‘one country, two systems.’ In 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration concerning Hong Kong’s reversion to China was signed and the PRC became more optimistic on realising ‘peaceful unification’ under the formula ‘one country, two systems.’

“The long period when there was no direct contact between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits has hindered mutual understanding.”<sup>14</sup> However, since the late 1980s the PRC attempted to gather intelligence about Taiwan and to enhance communication in order to comprehend policy making and public opinion in Taiwan. The PRC “had hoped

that an increasing amount of cross-Strait economic and cultural exchanges would lead to political negotiation and finally reunification.”<sup>15</sup> It believed that mutual understanding and interdependent ties by promoting lively exchanges across the strait would become a driving force for ‘peaceful unification.’ In fact, cross-Strait exchanges have reached an outstanding level since democratization began and the travel law was lifted in 1986.

Semi-official institutions were established to facilitate dialogue across the strait in both sides, and Wang Daohan, a chairperson of the mainland’s Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), and Koo Chen-fu, a chairperson of Taiwan’s Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF) had the first highest-level talks in 1993. Millions of Taiwanese have visited the mainland and tens of thousands of mainland Chinese have visited Taiwan since democratisation. “Investors from Taiwan have established a significant presence in China, thanks to preferential treatment from the PRC authorities.”<sup>16</sup>

However, the direction of Taiwan’s democratization seems to interrupt the efforts of ‘peaceful reunification.’ Despite the increase of cross straits exchanges, Taiwan disappointed the PRC’s expectations and never tried to lead a political dialogue. Jiang Zemin, PRC president and a head of the Chinese Communist Party, even suggested a reciprocal visit to Lee Teng-hui, President of Taiwan, in his eight-point proposal in 1995. Although Jiang was confident that his proposal will effectively break the deadlock across the strait,<sup>17</sup> Lee replied in negatively passive manners to the proposal and disgraced Jiang and the PRC by deciding the US visit.

As democratisation has evolved, calls for independence from China, which was long forbidden topic on the island, were “no longer deemed seditious.”<sup>18</sup> The lifting of the bans on newspaper and the legalisation of opposition political parties “gave independence advocates legitimate vehicles for political competition.”<sup>19</sup> Surveys told that “support for de jure independence from China has grown to roughly 20 percent of the population”<sup>20</sup> and recognise themselves as ‘Taiwanese’ which has different political systems, cultures and languages.

### *Taiwan’s ‘Pragmatic diplomacy’*

Since Taiwan withdrew from the UN in 1971, diplomatic recognition had been switched off by dozens of nations and Taiwan had appeared to be internationally isolated. However “in order to update and break through a foreign policy based primarily on substantive relations,”<sup>21</sup> president Lee adopted a new diplomatic strategy called ‘pragmatic diplomacy.’ Taipei succeeded in maintaining various relations with more than 120 countries with or mostly without diplomatic relations. “Taiwan no longer considers its battle over diplomatic recognition with the PRC as a ‘zero-sum’ game,” and officials began to told that there existed two political entities in China which had politically, economically and culturally different structures and emphasised that united China was envisioned by Taiwan, not by the PRC, although Taiwan still stuck to the

position of 'one China' policy.<sup>22</sup>

Both Taiwan and the PRC agreed that there is only 'one China' and that Taiwan is a part of China, but they never agreed in terms of 'national unification.' Even though the PRC stressed that Taiwan "can retain its own social system, judiciary, armed forces, political parties and government" and "will be governed by the 'Taiwan authorities'," <sup>23</sup> Taiwan has not accepted the recognition as a 'special administrative region' by the PRC, nor admitted that China is represented by the PRC.

### *The PRC's response to legitimise itself*

Taiwan refused to come to terms with the PRC and promoted 'pragmatic diplomacy.' Democratisation and constitutional reforms in Taiwan also invited increasing support from legislatures in the liberal democracies. Lee Teng-hui launched the campaign for readmission to the United Nations in 1992, and he was allowed by the Clinton Administration to visit the US for his attendance to alumni association in 1995.<sup>24</sup> The PRC initially attempted to ignore the reclaim of the sovereignty by Taiwan on the ground that the PRC "has been recognised in international society as the legitimate government of a Chinese state, of which Taiwan is a part, it would be a violation of the sovereignty of the Chinese nation to grant one section of the population the right to secede."<sup>25</sup> However, since dozen of countries, including the US, Japan and many EC countries, upgraded substantive relations with Taipei<sup>26</sup> and Taiwan issue appeared to be more internationalised, Taiwan was admitted to join or rejoin several international institutions, while the PRC failed to become a founding member of the World Trade Organisation and was condemned by the western states as a country of infringing on human rights.<sup>27</sup> China started to consider that any diplomatic initiative taken by democratic Taiwan threatened the 'peaceful unification' policy and the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party.

The PRC criticised the US for its attempt to intervene China's domestic problem and emphasised to respect the three Sino-U.S. communiqués, which China had persuaded the US not to pursue the policy of two Chinas or one China, one Taiwan. And the PRC reconfirmed the reason Jiang Zemin's 'eight-point' proposal had not eliminate the possibility of use of force. It accused Lee Teng-hui "of working with the US to stop unification and of promoting independence in his words and actions."<sup>28</sup> It also openly declared that the rising tension was caused by the Lee's operations and that the PRC would use armed forces not to invade the island, but to protect it.<sup>29</sup>

### *Increasing tensions across the Taiwan Strait*

The PRC threatened Taiwan with ballistic missile tests in March 1996 to warn against the first direct presidential election. Since then the risk of a military clash between the PRC and Taiwan has remained high. Some actions, including Lee

Teng-hui's assertion below, added fuel to the flame.

The 1991 constitutional amendments have designated cross-strait relations as a state-to-state relationship or at least a special state-to-state relationship, rather than an internal relationship between a legitimate government and a renegade group, or between a central government and a local government. Thus, the Beijing authorities' characterization of Taiwan as a "renegade province" is historically and legally untrue.<sup>30</sup>

Every time Taiwan attempted to challenge against the PRC's 'peaceful unification,' it has been given pressure psychologically by the PRC's military exercises and aircraft sorties across the Taiwan Strait.

The next section explores possible China's military options against Taiwan.

#### **4. China's military options against Taiwan**

According to James Anderson, the PRC has five possible military options against Taiwan.<sup>31</sup>

The first option is to increase the size and scope of aggression exercises, which are highly propagandised to send a shiver of fear to Taiwan. This option is attractive for the PRC the following reason. Those manoeuvres enable it to prepare better for the actual attack to Taiwan. As long as the exercises are carried out within its borders, the PRC can claim that it is only exercising its sovereign right of self-defence. Mobilising forces as countermeasures place a burden on Taiwan's military expenditure. There are also some disadvantages. Macro scale exercises might allow its adversaries to collect valuable information about the PRC military capabilities. They would also cost the PRC a lot.

The second option is to launch information warfare, which attempts to take advantage of Taiwan's growing dependence on computers. After the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the PRC became interested in overall military modernisation and high-tech warfare including information warfare.<sup>32</sup> The PRC could infiltrate Taiwan government's World Wide Web sites and to spread rumours through the Internet. However, Taiwan might possess more sophisticated information warfare capabilities and the PRC could be counterattacked.

The third option is to harass the traffic of Taiwan's commercial shipping. Even limited harassing action along Taiwan's sea lanes could disrupt Taiwan's commerce because 99 percent of its trade comes by sea. This option consists of not only imposing a conventional naval blockade, which would almost certainly lead to a wider conflict, but also encouraging piracy against Taiwan vessels and laying naval mines in the sea around Taiwan.

The fourth option is provocative missile tests. The PRC has already used this option to threaten Taiwan in response to the visit of Taiwanese president to the US in 1995 and the first free democratic election for the presidency of the island in 1996.<sup>33</sup> To

increase the pressure, the PRC might design future tests to fire missiles flying over Taiwan or carry out cruise missile tests near Taiwan or its offshore islands. Those tests would “pose a psychological effects rather than military threats.”<sup>34</sup> However, they also provide the US pretexts to deploy battle groups and Taiwan an excuse to accelerate development of their antimissile systems, which the PRC has strongly opposed.

The last option is to seize Taiwan’s offshore islands. The PRC currently does not have enough capability enough to threaten Taiwan with outright physical invasion, but possesses enough to threaten its offshore islands. Among the Penghu islands, lying in the southeast of the Taiwan Strait, there are many islands which are uninhabited or scarcely defended. It would be considerably easy and cause a great shock to people and the government in Taiwan to seize some of them. However, this “would include some significant political and military risks” as the US and the PRC went on the verge of war in 1955 and 1958 over the islands, Quemoy and Matsu.<sup>35</sup> International society will oppose any unreasonable land seizure.

In sum, although the PRC does not have military strength or effective strategy to liberate Taiwan at present, it has several options to threaten Taiwan. But each option has its own risk which can be fatal to the PRC. Any action considered excessive can cause the US intervention on the ground of 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which the US must be prepare to support Taiwan in the event of Chinese aggression. The PRC can use these options to the extent that the US is not provoked.

The PRC must consider that the psychological stresses which people in Taiwan will suffer may decrease the amount of investment in the PRC. Taiwan is now “the chief investor in mainland China” and its investment is “helping China modernize its economy.”<sup>36</sup> A threat to Taiwan can damage the PRC itself. The PRC will suffer economically if it took aggressive action against Taiwan.

## **5. Taiwan’s dilemma and lingering fear**

Thanks to the ‘pragmatic diplomacy,’ Taiwan has succeeded in expanding bilateral exchanges on a variety of levels with many countries. However, Taiwan’s economy is still highly dependent on the relations with the PRC as Taiwan’s Ministry of Economic Affairs reported “more than three-quarters of Taiwan’s companies have an investment on the mainland”<sup>37</sup> in 2001. Taiwan has been continuing to propose “the establishment of a collective security system in South-East Asia that could later be expanded to include the entire Asia-Pacific Region”<sup>38</sup> and trying to ensure a more stable and more secure environment. But the aim has not been realised.

As the democratisation process in Taiwan advanced, the PRC began to emphasise their position that the PRC would not to rule out the use of force to realise ‘one country, two systems.’ The PRC’s military options are just a possibility and it seems much less probable that the PRC takes aggressive actions to the extent which

Taiwan suffers substantial or serious damages. However, since the possibility can not be denied perfectly, the government of Taiwan is obliged to restrain their policy toward the PRC. The progress of 'Taiwanisation' in Taiwan that accompanies democratisation can not simply lead to Taiwan independence. Far from it, in the present situation Taiwan will not declare nor become independent unless the PRC itself changes their policy.

On the one hand, democratisation in Taiwan has transformed the political structure inside of Taiwan. It "brought freedom to Taiwan on a scale not seen in its history."<sup>39</sup> Freedom of speech has been guaranteed and a multiple party system has been developed. A wide range of diverse opinions exist in Taiwan from the unification into the PRC to independence from China within the society. On the other hand, it is fairly difficult now for the government of Taiwan to assert its sovereignty. Taiwan is facing with a serious dilemma with lingering fear of the possible attack from the PRC.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the early stage of democratisation, Taiwan experienced drastic changes. Domestically, it realised 'Taiwanisation' of political structures and brought freedom and open discussion. And internationally, it developed political, economic and cultural ties with many countries, and strengthened its presence with growth of economy.

The economic relations between the PRC and Taiwan have significantly deepened when first direct presidential election took place in 1996. Since then, the PRC started using intimidation to prevent independence and any related actions toward independence of Taiwan.

This situation has not changed much even after experiencing a change of the governing party from the KMT to the DPP. The DPP, which "made its position clear by passing a resolution to pursue Taiwan independence in its national convention of 1998,"<sup>40</sup> won the presidential election and Chen Shui-bian became a president. In his inaugural speech he clearly stated that "he will not declare independence as long as China does not attack."<sup>41</sup>

There seems to be little possibilities of aggressive attacks toward Taiwan. But lingering fear from the PRC will continue to reverberate. Democratisation in Taiwan was successful. But in order to prevent conflicts with the PRC effectively, Taiwan is facing with a dilemma. In Taiwan, preventing conflicts hinders the process of democratic consolidation. (3039words)

## End note

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