

**Reformation of a Nation: Taiwan's Mainland China Policy
after the 2004 Presidential Election**

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Summary

President Chen Shui-bian's reelection in March 2004 has been viewed as an important battle for defending the sovereignty of Taiwan. The election is a show of force for a huge political and social movement that is currently under way to reformulate and restructure the nation and the political culture that lies under it. The Rectification of the National Designation campaign that was launched in September, 2003, the "Holding Hands to Safeguard Taiwan" campaign held on February 28, 2004 to commemorate the historical tragedy that happened the same day fifty-seven years ago and more importantly, to mobilize support for President Chen, the holding of a referendum along with the presidential balloting and the proposition to write a new constitution are all parts of this nation-building drive. It is a campaign to "nationalize Taiwan."

President Chen Shui-bian's reelection in March 2004 has been widely acclaimed as a victory for Taiwan's consciousness and identity.¹ Polls after polls indicate that those who identify themselves as "Taiwanese" have climbed to new heights. A poll conducted by the United Daily newspaper in October 2003 showed 67% of the respondents accounted "national identification" as possible reason for their voting inclination in the upcoming presidential election.² For many, the victory of Chen was attributed to his successful embrace of Taiwan's mainstream opinions while the loss of his opponents, a joint ticket of KMT Chairman Lien Chan and People First Party Chairman James Soong, was resulted from an incapacity of developing a discourse reflective of local values and interests.

As the election was viewed as an important battle for "defending the sovereignty of Taiwan" a DPP victory is interpreted as proof that Taiwan has walked out of the shadow of China, rendering the "one China framework into the dustbin of history."³ For many, Chen's victory is more than a consolidation of Taiwan's democracy. It is a victory for Taiwan as a nation. Actually, the election is a show of force for a huge political and social movement that is currently under way to reformulate and restructure the nation and the political culture that lies under it. The Rectification of the National Designation campaign that was launched in September, 2003, the "Holding Hands to Safeguard Taiwan" campaign held on February 28, 2004 to commemorate the historical tragedy that happened the same day fifty-seven years ago and more importantly, to mobilize support for President Chen, the holding of a "defensive referendum" (for many it is a plebiscite) along with the presidential balloting and the proposition to write a new constitution are all parts of this

¹ See for example Chen's interview with the *Washington Post*, March 29, 2004.

² *Lienho bao* (United Daily) (Taipei), October 2, 2003, p. A3.

³ "Both Ruling and Opposition Parties Should Take Good Care of the Interests of the People and the Future of Democracy," *Zhiyou shibao* (Taipei) editorial, March 26, 2004; "To Oppose Referendum Is Tantamount to Opposing People First and Taiwan First," *Zhiyou shibao* (Liberty Times) (Taipei), editorial, March 13, 2004.

nation-building drive. The old political order is deemed indicative of the “greater China” thinking brought over by the “alien regime” from China and is out of touch with the reality.⁴ It is a campaign to “nationalize Taiwan.”⁵

Although President Chen tried to tamp down the rhetoric in his inauguration speech on May 20, 2004, by stating that the new constitution is to be written within the current constitutional framework and will not touch upon the sovereignty, the territories as well as the issue of independence or unification,⁶ this paper argues that the pace of Taiwan’s nation-building has been intensified, moving from that of cultivating a local culture to building a new state.⁷ However, the movement is quasi-nationalization in nature because part of the old order such as the name and national flag are intentionally preserved for now in order not to sabotage the status quo to much to be generally accepted. The maneuvering is made easier because it is proceeded in sync with and under the name of democratization. The quest is more than a few victories at the international arena. The country at its present form is now considered “abnormal.” To make it “normal” it takes localization of the thinking of the people and reformation of its political structures so that a new sovereignty and a new culture can be reborn. As such, the interpretation of the status quo is not static; it is dynamic. Cross-Strait relations are inevitably reshaped as a result of this reorientation.

Cultivation of Taiwanese Consciousness

⁴ “China Misreads Chen Reform Plan,” *Taipei Times* (Taipei), April 18, 2004, p. 8.

⁵ Michael Xinghuang Xiao, “Denationalization of Taiwan vs. Desinicization,” *Zhongguo shibao* (China Times) Taipei), February 18, 2004, p. 4.

⁶ *Zhongguo shibao*, May 21, 2004, p. A 10.

⁷ Years ago, the author argues that cross-Strait relations were redefined as Taiwan’s local consciousness was in direct conflict with Chinese nationalism. See, Chien-min Chao, “Taiwan’s Identity Crisis and Cross-strait Exchanges,” *Issues & Studies* (April 1994), pp. 1-13; “Taiwan’s Mainstream Consciousness vs. China’s Nationalism: Cross-Strait Relations Facing the 21st Century,” *Zhongguo dalu yanjiu* (Mainland China Studies) (Taipei), (January 1998), pp. 54~71.

The process of the nation-building has two major ingredients: a cultural campaign to foment Taiwanese consciousness and a political campaign to reconstruct the sovereignty of the country. While former President Lee Teng-hui spent a great deal of time reforming the old political structures and building new institutions, Chen Shui-bian has taken this reformation to new frontiers, hoping to complete the restructuring before his second term ends in 2008.

To foment a Taiwanese identity in order to stand up to China's ferocious quest to obliterate the country as a sovereign state has been a major concern since former President Lee Teng-hui's second term in office. In his acceptance speech to the KMT nomination to run for reelection in August 1995 Lee broached the ideas of "Taiwanese consciousness" and the "new Taiwanese,"⁸ heralding the significance of pursuing a distinctive sense of Taiwanese as top political agenda for his second term in office. For him, Taiwan's past experience with various cultures including China, Japan, Portugal, and the Netherlands has put it in a unique position to recast the different ethnic groups currently residing in the island into a people different from that of the Chinese. Anyone who identifies with and loves Taiwan is considered a "new Taiwanese." Politically, the ROC on Taiwan has been a sovereign country never before ruled by the PRC. Six rounds of constitutional amendments in the 1990s have been cited as evidence that the ROC's sovereignty is only extended to those territories under its effective control, i.e. Taiwan and its offshore islands such as Penghu, Lanyu, Jinmen and Mazu.

To prevent Taiwan's sovereign status from further erosion because of the anemic recognition by the international community and to deny Beijing the right to make illicit claims over Taiwan former President Lee Teng-hui commissioned a task

⁸ Lee Teng-hui, *Taiwan de zhuchang* (With the People Always in My Heart) (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Co., 1999), pp. 76-77.

force to “strengthen the sovereign status of the ROC” in August 1998.⁹ Suggestions made by the task force, headed by Tsai Ing-wen, chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council during President Chen Shui-bian’s first four years in office, included (A) revision of the constitution to redefine the territories of the country as those where the jurisdiction of the constitution is enforced; (B) revision of relevant laws to substitute names like Taiwan and mainland China with the Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China and (C) abolition of the National Unification Guidelines. It was believed that Taiwan’s sovereignty would be renewed partly through letting go those territories not directly under its jurisdiction and ambiguous terms such as “free China” and “mainland China”.¹⁰ The reformation drive culminated when Lee gave an interview to a German journalist in July 1999 in which the former President shocked the world by declaring that the current state of relations between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait was that of a “special state-to-state.”

Lee seemed to be convinced that Taiwan had been made a different country after the Provisional Articles Effective during the Communist Rebellion was abolished in 1991 and major overhauls of the constitution in the 1990s. Now that the president of the nation is elected popularly, unlike the past practice when it was decided by the National Assembly seated with deputies chosen in China, and its relationship with China has naturally become that of between two states. The most urgent task for this new polity was to gain international recognition (the word is understood as identity in Chinese) and status, i.e. to make the “ROC on Taiwan” or “Taiwan in ROC” a reality.

Handicapped by a long KMT tradition immersed in Chinese history and culture, what Lee Teng-hui was able to accomplish in his capacity as head of the state was to cultivate a new identity magnanimous enough to encompass all the ethnic groupings

⁹ Lee Teng-hui, *Lee Teng-hui zhizheng gaobai shilu* (True Stories of Lee Teng-hui’s As the President) (Taipei: Chengyang chubanshe, 2001), pp. 222-223.

¹⁰ Lee Teng-hui, *Lee Teng-hui zhizheng gaobai shilu*, p. 225.

without destabilizing the legitimacy of his rule and yet distinctive enough to put a decent distance with China. For him, a Taiwanese identity cannot be realized simply by embracing some jargons such as localization and recruiting some locally born politicians into the ruling circle. It has to come through a cultural renaissance.

From Nativization to Quasi-nation-building?

President Chen Shui-bian takes this process of political re-socialization and restructuring one step further, making it a goal culture to push for the realization of a new country. Old values and belief systems solidified by years of ruling under an “alien regime” have gradually been transformed and given way to a new “mainstream consciousness”. As a political party which made displacement of the old political order their aim the DPP has been aggressively looting and working for the deepening of localization.

However, due to a number of reasons the party has not been able to come up with set of policies inclusive and coherent enough to be embraced by people from both ends of the ideological spectrum. Instead, it has opted for a more rigid, unyielding and exclusionary policy on the issue of identity. Anything remotely related to “China” or “Chinese” have to be exorcized. Those who are showing signs of divergence from the “local values,” defined by the largest ethnic group, the Fukienese, are expected to conform, or risk being excoriated. As a result, a full-fledged desinicization seems to be in place. Although the ROC is retained to avoid domestic tumult it is seldom referred. It was decided that from now on all government papers would address the PRC as “China”.¹¹ Instead of being part of the ROC the president said in an important speech that “Taiwan is the ROC and the ROC

¹¹ *Lienho bao*, September 25, 2004, p. A4.

is Taiwan”.¹² The expression “the ROC on Taiwan,” a term invented by Lee Teng-hui, has ceased to exist. The expression the “New Taiwanese”, another invention of Lee to resolve the ethnic tension by including both the old as well as the new settlers, has been nudged out by a more native-oriented “Taiwanese”.

It is suggested that to win any election in the future at all and avoid being marginalized the pan-blues, the KMT and the PFT, need to embody themselves with more “local values” and jettison their “burden on China.” It is better for the Chinese Nationalist Party, the KMT, to rename itself as the “Taiwanese Nationalist Party” if it still broods any hope of returning to power. Taiwanese consciousness is no longer perceived as something to differentiate the old settlers, the Taiwanese, from the new, the mainlanders, but a political force necessary for standing up to China.

Transformation of the character of the nation is not only desirable but also necessary.

Obviously, Taiwanese quest for more localized values in what has been labeled by some as “desinification” has been turned into a political campaign of nation-building. At the heart of this reformation lies the issue of identity. The “mainstream consciousness” (taiwan zhuti yishi), touted as the main force thrusting Chen into victory, is composed of the following ingredients: localization of values and beliefs; rejection of China and the values it stands for; and a process of reforming and redefining the sovereignty of the country.

Localization started off as a political expedient to force redistribution of political powers and wherewithal that were skewed unevenly in mainlanders’ favor at the national level of the political machinery. As the mainlanders were successfully driven off from the central political arena, it began to spill over to other areas. During the last years of Lee’s presidency, a debate raged over whether Taiwanese culture was independent from Chinese influence or not. Starting from 1993, calls to

¹² President Chen made the point in his Double Ten day speech in 2004.

“reformulate the society as a whole” and to “localize the education” came to the fore. Consequently, history and geography textbooks at the elementary and secondary schools were rewritten, bringing more Taiwan-related facts and stories into students’ life. Chinese history is no longer categorized as “domestic history.” It was thought that past education that had encapsulated values and orientations of China was obstacle to the forming of Taiwan’s own identity.

The rediscovery of the beauty of Taiwan and the policy of “Taiwan first” are commendable. However, tensions that had existed between various ethnic groups and dissatisfaction with the cause set by the mainlanders dominated the development of the localization. Subsequently, it is the largest ethnic group the Hoklo, or the Fukienese, who account for roughly seventy percent of the population dictating the direction of the change. It is a process of “Hokloization”.

Table 1. Redistribution of Political Resources

Year		President	Vice President	Premier	Vice Premier	Cabinet Members	Total (%)
1993	Taiwanese	1	0	0.5*	0	17	18.5 (54.5%)
	Mainlander	0	1	0.5	1	13	15.5 (45.5%)
2001	Taiwanese	1	1	1	1	35	39 (95%)
	Mainlander	0	0	0	0	2	2 (5%)

* Lien Chan, the Premier at that time, is *banshan*, an offspring of a Taiwanese and a mainlander.

Sources: a. The Executive Yuan website,

<http://www.ey.gov.tw/web/index-m4.htm>.
b. *Singtao Ribao* (Hong Kong), February 27, 1993, p. 9.

Because of its diplomatic suppression and unification policy China is highly resented by the Taiwanese.¹³ Some even attribute its heavy-handed policy as the primary cause to the rise of the “mainstream consciousness” in the island.¹⁴ Taiwan’s new identity is to a large degree reflection of the hostility and aversion towards China. President Chen has repeatedly rejected the “one China” formula as embodiment of the spirit of “one country, two systems” and acceptance would mean degradation of Taiwan to a status not dissimilar to that of Hong Kong. This is why the “one China, different interpretations” formula reached between the Strait Exchange Foundation and its Chinese counterpart, the Association of Relations across the Taiwan Strait, in November 1992 is unacceptable. This is also why Lien Chan and James Soong, Chen’s opponents in his reelection bid, were condemned as “pro-China.” Whether viewed as defensive or peaceful, the two referendums held during the March 2004 presidential election were intended to portray the unfriendly posture of the Chinese missile threats. The “Holding Hands Campaign to Save Taiwan” held on February 28, 2004 in which two million Taiwanese around the island were mobilized by the DPP and its junior partner, the Taiwan Solidarity Union, to link hands was described by the President as “safeguarding Taiwan and resisting China.”¹⁵ Throughout the election expressions like “caring for Taiwan and fighting against China” were often heard.

In the wake of pushing for local consciousness, redefining the future of the

¹³ See Chien-min Chao, "Will Economic Integration between Mainland China and Taiwan Lead to a Congenial Political Culture?" *Asian Survey*, vol. 43, no. 2 (March/April 2003).

¹⁴ “Taiwan Deserves More Respect,” *Taipei Times*, May 8, 2004, p. 8.

¹⁵ President Chen used the words when meeting with a delegation from the United States. See *Zhongguo shibao*, April 5, 2004.

nation (guojia dingwei) is the most important. Leaders including the President, the Vice President and former President Lee have all expressed that identity (rentong) is the utmost urgent task. It is argued that although Taiwan is an independent and sovereign county it is not a normal country. This is because the country has not been able to fully function at the international arena. Nor does it have the autonomy to decide its future. The constitution that is bestowed on the island republic is one major stumbling block on the road towards normalcy. A reformation is necessary.

While the desire for change is evident, it is not intended as a revolution. As some of the old structures can either be kept for now or are inopportune for change under the present conditions, status quo is opted. It is quasi-nationalization. What needs to be undone is the parts that still carry the legacies of China. As the old political structures were rejuvenated through rounds of constitutional amendment, the official designation and the constitution itself are the remaining obstacles to the metamorphosis of the new country.

Reformation is also different from an outright declaration of independence. Some of the old structures and institutions such as the name and flag of the country can be kept intact, at least for now. Therefore, the old mantra that “the ROC is a sovereign country” is no longer fit after this grand transformation. The new line is that “Taiwan is a sovereign country and its current name, according to the constitution, is the ROC.” A subtle distinction has been made in that the symbols that have been considered as indices of independence have been carefully avoided separated from other components in the drive towards building a new country.

Actually, former President Lee Teng-hui was fed up with the old system and wanted to have it reshaped. Six rounds of constitutional amendments witnessed to that. However, restricted by intervening forces the “special state-to-state” dictum, the closest move that he had undertaken in the grand strategy of reconstructing a new

country, was only a reckless acknowledgement of the political reality across the Strait of Taiwan. Chen is different.

The Resolution for the Future of Taiwan, passed by the DPP in 1999, has been the guidelines for President Chen Shui-bian's mainland China policy. Two days after resuming the DPP chairmanship Chen asked top party brass to "pay special attention to the Resolution." In yet another party gathering in July 2002, Chen again underlined the importance of the document in saying that the Resolution "is the unrivalled principle in dealing with issues related to the two sides [of the Taiwan Strait]." ¹⁶ A close check of the Resolution reveals amazing resemblance to what Chen has been crafting in policies towards China.

The document dictates that Taiwan is a independent, sovereign country, unrelated to China; that the "one China" should be ditched lest the international community be confused which in turn might allow China opportunity to annex Taiwan; that a referendum law should be enacted as soon as possible; and that a "peace and stability framework" should be struck with Beijing.

Reformation of a Nation

The Republic of China as a country has been in existence for over a respectable period of time and there is no need to destabilize the status quo. What needs to be done is to have its sovereignty redefined lest it is mistaken as part China. Democracy comes in handy in this respect. What underscored the significance of the referendum (or plebiscite) is the stark contrast that the mechanism has been able to portray across the Strait of Taiwan. Contrary to China's closed system, the people of Taiwan not only enjoy autonomous rights enabling them to decide their own affairs but also participating in the making of key policies concerning their livelihood. This

¹⁶ <http://gptaiwan.org.tw>

is also why a new constitution is needed. It symbolizes severance from the past.

To give the people the powers to decide their own future through a popular vote, or what has been known as referendum, and writing a new constitution have been essential parts of the cause that the DPP has been pursuing in its short history since creation in 1986. The two tasks were epitomized in both Resolution for the Future of the Taiwan passed in 1991 and 1999 respectively. The 1991 resolution went a step further by linking the two together. President Chen paired referendum with the “one country on each side” and called them “spirit” of the DPP.¹⁷

Taiwan’s democratization has seen a redistribution of political resources between the mainlanders and the Taiwanese in what has been termed as a process of nativization. (see Table 1) Taiwanese consciousness first helped President Lee consolidate his powers in the treacherous struggles with the KMT conservative old guards in what was known as a fight between the “mainstream faction” and the “non-mainstream faction” in the years following his assumption of the presidency in 1988.¹⁸ It then helped President Chen defeat his pan-blues opponents twice. Consequently, localization has become a precious commodity that politicians and political parties are competing against each other in order to prove their love to the people and the land is unmatched. It is also something that the KMT and its pan-blue allies, the PFP and the New Party, have had difficulty in holding onto. They are forced to make concessions and accept policies that have compromised their traditional positions.

When Tsong Tsai, a DPP legislator, proposed in 1993 to legislate a referendum law he failed to win any support from the KMT. However, signs that the old

¹⁷ *Lienho bao*, August 14, 2003.

¹⁸ Murray A. Rubinstein, *The Other Taiwan : 1945 to the Present* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 118; Wu, Hsin-hsing, *Bridging the Strait : Taiwan, China, and the Prospects for Reunification* (Hong Kong : Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 210.

authoritarian party was about to abandon its past position and embrace the popular voting mechanism which they regarded as synonymous to Taiwan independence came after the first presidential election. In April 1996 former Speaker of the National Assembly Chen Jinrung made clear that referendum was one of the four issues that the chamber which was empowered to elect the president and the vice president and write and amend the constitution would tackle. One of the recommendations given to President Lee by the task force formed in August 1998 to “Strengthen the Sovereign Status of the ROC” was enactment of a referendum law so that major issues concerning the future of the country could be decided through popular votes.

In a speech delivered in January 1999 then Vice President Lien Chan suggested that the KMT administration study ways to “institutionalize referendum.” Finally, in a dire attempt to save the presidential election held in March 2004 in which they were not able to find a way to effectively counter the DPP offensive that the old political force represented “old and alien interests and values” the KMT decided to support the referendum legislation. The Referendum Law, passed in November 2003, was based on a draft prepared by the pan-blue camp. The right to referendum has finally emerged as a unified policy endorsed by all political forces across the ideological spectrum.

Nevertheless, there is difference between the two versions of referendum. For the pan-blues, the new mechanism was intended for the public to express their preferences over policies through a collective mechanism; but for the DPP, it was deemed as undeniable right endowed to people to decide matters concerning the future direction of the country. In this sense, the latter interpretation is tantamount to plebiscite.

The right to a new constitution is pivotal in development of the new political discourse. President Chen has repeatedly suggested that the current constitution,

promulgated in January 1, 1947 in Nanjing, China, is anachronistic and ill-suit to Taiwan's democratic reality. It is further suggested that two thirds of the legal code need to be revamped.¹⁹ At the center lies the argument that it is less than clear whether the political system is that of a presidential system or a parliamentary system. The five-branch government designed by Sun Yat-sen is condemned as incompatible with the Western constitutional thinking. The gridlock that the pan-greens and the pan-blues finds themselves in in the Legislative Yuan is often cited as evidence that a more efficient government is urgently in need. The size of the Legislative Yuan, with 225 seats at present, needs to be downsized. Some even cite the recall demanded on the President by the opposition pan-blues immediately after Chen Shui-bian was sworn in for the first term in March, 2000 for the decision to stop construction of the fourth nuclear power plant and lower the age of citizens eligible for vote from that of twenty to eighteen to justify the need for a new constitutional code.²⁰

When Chiang Ching-kuo was alive, the DPP advocated a parliamentary system so that powers enjoyed by the former strongman would be checked. The President was urged to respect the constitution and gave the powers back to the people. That position was reversed when Lee Teng-hui came to power. The party has since been publicly promoting a presidential system similar to that of the U.S. The trend is clear. The powers of the president have been immensely enhanced after six rounds of constitutional amendments in the 1990's. Some even contend that the powers endowed to the president now surpass that of the U.S. president. In any rate, the current constitution is not so unworkable as to warrant a total abandonment.

It is then not unreasonable to assume that what is objected to by the President

¹⁹ *Lienho bao*, November 12, 2003.

²⁰ Hsiao Bi-Khim, "An Updated Constitution Nothing to Be Afraid of," *Taipei Times*, May 15, 2004, p. 8.

and his followers is not the part of systemic ambiguity but the part of its Chinese connotation: that the constitution was enacted in China and the two extra powers, the examination and the control, added on top of the three branches of the government in line with the Western political experience, were derived, according to Sun Yat-sen, the author of the Three Principles of the People, from China's political tradition. Yao Jiawen, President of the Examination Yuan, said in February, 2003 that he intended to "downsize the institution and make it part of the Executive Yuan." While affirming the 2004 election as victory for Taiwan's "mainstream consciousness," former President Lee urged Chen to "integrate this consciousness" in the future writing of the constitution.²¹

Polarization and Radicalization

The efforts to create a new identification has sabotaged the old political values and belief system and the society has been polarized as a result. Taiwan's policy towards China is not likely to be conciliatory as politicians are trying to forge nationalism on the antipathetic feelings towards China.

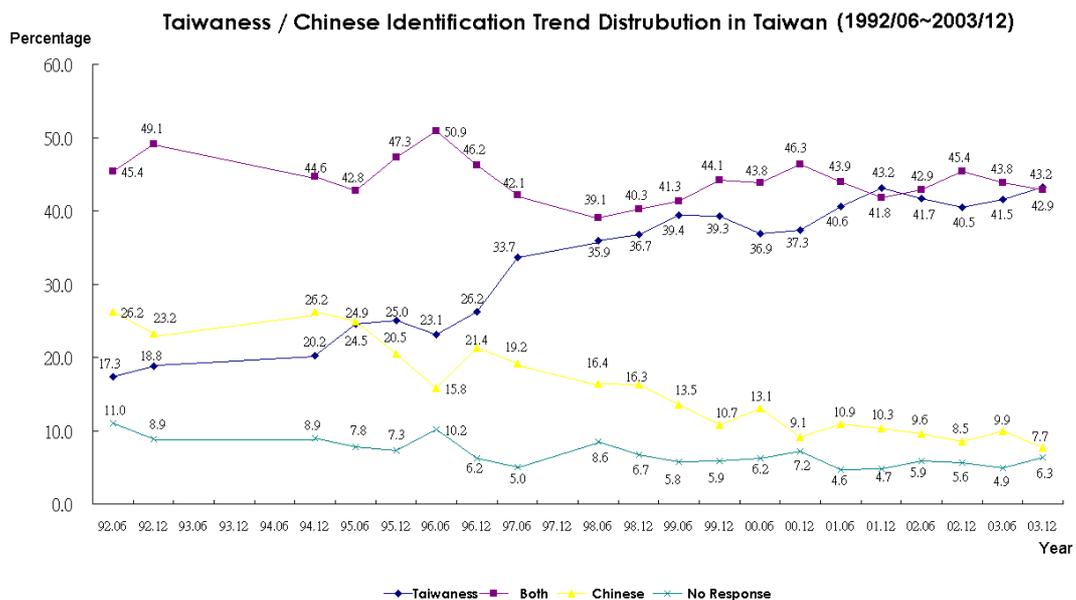
Ethnic tensions have been running high since the nationalist regime resettled itself in Taiwan in 1949. The shooting incident over a Taiwanese old lady on February 27, 1947 which led to widespread demonstrations and protests and subsequent crackdown by the government has alienated the old settlers from the new. The hatred derived out of the incident has been the most potent weapon that the DPP has been able to harness in its drive to first nudge the KMT out of power and then sustain the status as a ruling party. For the DPP, the unjustifiable history in which the KMT came all the way from China and imposed itself as rulers over the inhabitants of the island was the primary contradiction needed to be redressed.

²¹ *Zhongguo shibao*, May 9, 2004, p. 4.

Taiwan independence was first and foremost raised in defiance of the policy of unification of China set arbitrarily by the “alien regime”.

The ethnic tensions have not dissipated following the transfer of powers from that of an “alien regime” to a “localized regime”. On the contrary, schism has been exacerbated and intensified as the DPP confronts China head on over the issue of Taiwan sovereignty. Loyalty of those who are showing signs of conciliation towards China is questioned. They are likely to be labeled as unpatriotic and betraying the cause if they fail to demonstrate aversion to the regime on the other side of the Strait. As China is tightening its nook to annihilate the ROC as a country, it is urged that the most effective counter-measurement be the consolidation of local identify. (see Figure 1) “One China” means acceptance of China as the central authority and reneging Taiwan to that of a local status and thus, the end of the country as a sovereign.

Figure 1



Sources: The is from the Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, <http://www2.nccu.edu.tw/~s00/eng/data/Political%20Attitude02.htm>.

If the answer to China's threat to its autonomy is the forge of independent identity, then pan-blues' adherence to the "one China" is to be condemned. Pan-blues' past opposition to the referendum, because it was proposed in tandem with Taiwan independence, was accused of "standing in opposition to the people of Taiwan and the Taiwan-first policy and disrespect of the Taiwan identity." The advice to put aside the disputes with China over sovereignty was disparaged as "not in line with the discourse of Taiwan sovereignty" and was intended to "denationalize the country."²²

To what extent should Taiwan engage China economically has been debated heatedly in recent years.²³ For those Taiwanese who have brooded the idea of establishing a new country, the suggestions that Taiwan should take advantage of China's immense market and cheap labor and speed up the "three direct links" are brushed aside as conspiracy to marginalize Taiwan and in support of China's tactics to "facilitate unification through economic means."²⁴ The popular Taipei mayor Ma Yin-jiou was condemned as part of a "new group to sell out Taiwan" during his contestation of the mayoralty against the DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian in 1998. In a similar election held in 2002 against DPP's Lee Yingyuan, Ma was castigated as having an "athlete feet," alluding to his birth in Hong Kong as a possible reason of buckling under to Beijing authority. During the 2004 presidential campaign, Chen stated publicly that the Chinese communists (zhonggon) assisted the pan-blues covertly.²⁵

²² "A Display of Will and Determination of the People Is the Most Effective Way to Deter Annexation by China," editorial, *Zhiyou shibao*, March 4, 2004, p. 2.

²³ Chien-min Chao, "National Security vs. Economic Interests: Reassessing Taiwan's Mainland Policy under Chen Shui-bian," *Journal of Contemporary China* (November 2004); "One Step Forward, One Step Backward: Chen Shui-bian's Mainland Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 11, no. 34 (February 2003).

²⁴ "Was Prostration a Kiss of Taiwan's Land? Or Land of Taiwan Province of China's?" editorial, *Zhiyou shibao*, March 15, 2004.

²⁵ The President made the point in an interview by John Pomfret of the Washington Post on May 6,

Chen Shui-bian's abandonment of a more moderate "middle of the road" policy proposed during the last presidential campaign in 2000 in favor of a more radical policy has forced the KMT and its allies to retreat. Pan-blues camp's inability to meet the challenge of localization was exposed relentlessly during the 2004 presidential campaigning. Pressured by opponents and supporters alike, the pan-blues abandoned their oppositions to the referendums and pushed through a legislation for that cause. Ultimately they paid dearly for the indecision as Chen took advantage of the law by linking the presidential election with the holding of the first referendum in Taiwan's history.

Pan-blues faced the same dilemma with the issue of writing a new constitution. The KMT, the Chinese nationalist party, has even considered renaming itself by purging the term "Chinese" out of the old nomenclature.²⁶ In an even more conspicuous move to prove the party's assimilation with local values one KMT heavyweight proposed to call the party the "Taiwanese Nationalist Party." Lines were also heard from the party's top brass that independence could not be ruled out as an option.

The polarization is no longer drawn on ethnic divisions but on ideological differences. All citizens are forced (or perceived) to choose sides, as fence-leaning is not tolerable. As mainlanders are in general considered by some as more susceptible to Chinese influence ethnic tensions are aggravated. In the wake of reshuffling the cabinet posts after the 2004 presidential election, ethnic representation was considered important as Hakka and the aborigines featured their status in the new line-ups. One group that was deliberately ignored was the mainlanders. (see Table 1) Heightened domestic tensions would make it hard for the government to develop a set

2003.

²⁶ *Zhongguo shibao*, May 15, 2004, p. 1.

of coherent and nuanced policies towards China.

Challenges Ahead: Unification on the Agenda?

Taiwan's switch to a more combative gear has put Beijing in a difficult mode. Past experiences have shown that assertive policies coming from the giant neighbor have proven to be counter-productive to sway Taiwan back. Beijing has to come up with new set of measures to put itself in the driver's seat again. Tactics of intimidation have evidently been given new lease of life lately. Three days before President Chen was to be sworn in for a second four-year term in office, China's Taiwan Affairs Office issued a stern statement, warning Taiwan to choose between peace and war. In the same statement, Beijing also lashed out at Chen for violating the "five noes" promises, "mustering all separatist forces to drive Taiwan towards independence" and bringing cross-strait relations to the brink of danger.²⁷ Talks about the possibility of a surgery-like invasion is gaining popularity. Has unification been forced upon Beijing's political agenda?

For many Taiwanese, the rise of local consciousness and indeed, the anti-China sentiment, is attributable to the saber-rattling and diplomatic squeezing that Beijing has imposed on the island.²⁸ But for China, what Chen has been doing in the past four years as president has been no less than an unambiguous demonstration of "gradually moving towards de jure independence." Commenting on the referendums that were held in tandem with the presidential election, the Liberation Daily criticized the voting as important means to "move gradually to independence" and a rehearsal for a final vote on independence.²⁹ Chinese scholars came up with the conclusion that Chen Shui-bian had adopted a three-phased program to achieve final

²⁷ *Zhongguo shibao*, May 17, 2004, p. 1.

²⁸ "Taiwan Deserves More Respect," *Taipei Times*, May 8, 2004, p. 8.

²⁹ *The Liberation Army Daily*(Beijing), February 9, 2004, p. 1.

independence: referendum, reforming legislature through an election to be held at the end of 2004, and then writing a new constitution in 2006.³⁰ It seems that Beijing is moving to manage the crisis in an attempt to stop the trend that it sees as irreversibly splitting.

First, Beijing's "bottom line" is emerging as observers have made unequivocal warnings that an exclusion of the mainland from the territories contained in Article 4 of the current ROC constitution is tantamount to de jure independence.³¹ A sense of urgency is clearly detectable. In his political report delivered to the CCP's Fifth Central Committee Plenum Meeting of the 15th Party Congress two months after the "state-to-state" theory was first broached by former President Lee Teng-hui in July 1999 Jiang Zemin expressed the need to set a timetable for unification. In his political report to the 16th Party Congress convened in November 2002 Jiang, who gave up the post of the CCP General Secretary at the convocation but retained the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission for two more years until September, 2004, suggested that the Taiwan issue "is not allowed to drag on sine die."

The conviction that military options can not be excluded has been reinforced, too. New proposals such as to "contain independence with military might" and to "get ready without publicity" have been trumpeted. It is argued that the PLA will be "violating the PRC constitution and dereliction of duties" if Taiwan independence is left unchecked and getting out of hand.³² Lo Yuan, director of the Research Department at the Military Science Academy, suggested that the country must "pay necessary dues," including disruption of the 2008 Olympics, slow down of economic development in the coastal areas and degradation of relations with certain foreign

³⁰ This is from Li Jiaquan, a senior Chinese scholar with a background on Taiwan. See *Huanqiu shibao* (Beijing), February 2, 2004, p. 18.

³¹ Li Jiaquan and Lo Yuan, a general at the Military Science Academy, have made the delineation. See Xinhua she (the New China News Agency) news dispatch, November 27, 2003.

³² *Dalu qinshi shuangchoubao* (Mainland Situation Fortnightly) (Taipei), no. 1426, December 10, 2003.

countries, etc., to keep Taiwan independence in check and safeguard territorial integrity.³³

In light of the fact that legislation has been playing a very important role in the Washington-Beijing-Taipei trilateral relations (the Taiwan Relations Act and the Referendum Law are cases in point), calls for the enactment of a “National Reunification Law” have been the vogue. It is said that the law might be “an ultimatum to Taiwanese splittists.”³⁴ Premier Wen Jiabao consented to the proposal during a trip to Europe in May 2004, days after the Europe Union was enlarged to include ten more new members. It is also suggested that the National People’s Congress, the parliament, should declare the country in a “state of war” should an independence program is implemented in Taiwan.

Commenting on the legislation of the Referendum Law, Zhang Mingqin, assistant to the director of the Taiwan Affairs Office, admonished dire consequences by making public the “six noes.” In a tone similar to that of the statement issued on the eve of Chen’s inauguration, Zhang reiterated Beijing’s policy of “no ambiguity, compromise, and retreat” against the legislation and “no toleration, appeasement, and sitting idly by” against Taiwan “splittist independence behaviors.”³⁵

On the eve of a demonstration staged by the pan-blue camp one week after the presidential election to protest against the allegedly unfair impact on the outcome of the election by the shooting of the DPP candidates on the eve of the balloting, Beijing warned that it would not “sit idly by should the situation get out of control.”³⁶ In its first press conference held nearly one month after Taiwan’s presidential election, Taiwan Affairs Office spokesman Li Weiwei belittled the “peace and stability

³³ Lo made the remarks in Liaowang and was reported by Hong Kong media on December 2, 2003.

³⁴ Willy Lam, “New phase in struggle,” *CNN*, May 19, 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/asiapcf/05/18/china.willycolumn/index.html>

³⁵ *New China News Agency*, November 26, 2003.

³⁶ *Zhongguo shibao*, March 27, 2004, p. A2.

framework” that Chen put out as “deceiving” and the move to write a constitution “timetable for independence.”

The “three direct links” may be the first victims of the deteriorated relations across the Strait of Taiwan. In its policy statement released in December 2003, the links were defined by Beijing as “cross-Strait lines” and “internal affairs of the Chinese across the Taiwan Strait.”³⁷ However, in the first press conference given after the presidential election Li Wei-yi reverted to the original line that they are “internal matters of a country.” The statement issued by Taiwan Affairs Office on May 17 put the realization of the three links under the premise of “one China” principle. It remains to be seen if Beijing’s position on the issue is irrevocably reversed.

Conclusion

Taiwan’s unending quest for identity has undeniably altered its relations with China. As some Taiwanese are enjoying a new sense of “national consciousness” others are increasingly wary about the possible consequences that this quasi-nationalization movement might accrue. Politicians in both sides of the Strait are sure to exploit contradictions both within Taiwan and across the Strait for political gains, especially at election times. What has happened in Taiwan since the democratization process started at the turn of the 1990s has been a fierce competition for “localization” between the two sides of the ideological spectrum, the pan-greens and the pan-blues. Cross-Strait relations are set back as a result of this infighting. Beijing’s uncompromising heavy-handed policies which often find clamping down on Taiwan’s

³⁷ Beijing’s past stance on the “three direct links,” see Chao Chien-min, “National Security vs. Economic Interests: Reassessing Taiwan’s Mainland Policy under Chen Shui-bian.”

international space as a way to “suppress Taiwan independence” has added fuel to the alienation that Taiwan has felt towards China.

Looking to the future, how could the two archrivals advance their relations and avert conflicts as their umbilical cord gradually are growing thinner? Will Beijing view this heightened quest for local consciousness as auspicious sign of cultural diversification? Or ominous political stratagem calculated to split the country? Signs at present seem to suggest that a benign circle in which political barriers may melt down as a result of growing civic contacts is not quite fit in this part of the world.