It is generally claimed that greater political liberalisation in mainland China would ease cross-strait relations and increase the prospects for a negotiated solution to the conflict between the PRC and the ROC. Two arguments are frequently invoked to support this view. Firstly, the “democratic peace” theory, which maintains that democracies tend to not fight each other. Secondly, that both the ROC’s authorities and citizens would have more incentives to reach a unification agreement with a democratic regime than with an authoritarian regime. As a matter of fact, the government of the ROC have signalled since 1991 the democratization of the PRC as a prerequisite for any unification settlement.

It is argued in my paper that the above exposed stance misreads the eventual repercussions that a greater political liberalisation of the mainland could have on cross-strait relations under the current circumstances. The PRC is far from being a consolidated democracy and the “democratic peace” theory only applies to consolidated democracies. Moreover, comparative studies have collected abundant empirical evidence that depicts liberalising regimes as unstable and prone to war. This seems could be the case in the PRC, since the bulk of the army, the population, and the minority factions of the CCP share a harsher position on the cross-strait conflict than the technocratic leaders who are in charge at the moment. Consequently, political liberalisation in the mainland, as it has already done in Taiwan, would draw cross-strait diplomacy from a top-down to a down-top approach, increasing the role of political actors which hold more inflexible views on the conflict.