From a Two-Chinas situation to a Taiwanese nation in the making.
Democracy, nationalism and the US factor in the transformation of
Taiwan’s “national” identity

Frank Muyard
Director, Taipei Office,
French Centre for Research on
Contemporary China (CEFC)
E-mail: frank.muyard@gmail.com

This paper aims to bring greater clarity to the questions of the current “national” opposition between Taiwan and China and to the building of Taiwan’s “national” identity. Usually the explanation rests on an opposition of Taiwanese and Chinese nationalisms and on an analysis of the emergence of a Taiwanese Nation based on cultural and ethnic identity and its subsequent rejection of Chineseness. The huge pro-Taiwan/anti-China rally organized last year for 2-28 and Chen Shui-bian following presidential re-election, or the DPP’s policy of desinicization are then given or denounced as proofs of the ethno-national divide defining nowadays the relation between China and Taiwan. However this explanation is unable to restitute the whole picture of the formation of the Taiwan’s new national identity that took place in the last 25 years. It also leads easily to oversimplifying and blurring of the meaning and of the nature of the political entities of Taiwan and China, two phenomena very counterproductive to the understanding of the current cross-strait situation but encouraged by most parties on both sides of the Taiwan strait for their political interest and needs of legitimacy.

I will then try to reintroduce some measure of complexity in the analysis of this far from simple situation. To do that, I will bring together several aspects of Taiwan contemporary politics that are usually kept separated, namely Taiwanese nationalism and the democratization of Taiwan’s society, the impact of the two-China’s situation,
and the international influence, specifically the USA-China-Taiwan strategic triangle’s influence on the formation of Taiwan’s national identity.

But first we have to differentiate the Taiwanese nation from Taiwan’s new “national” identity. While the latter already exists and results from the common experience of the Taiwanese people during the last 30 years, there is not yet a Taiwanese nation or nation-state. The only institutional reality in Taiwan is a State called Republic of China – ROC – which is not a Taiwanese Nation-State and which in return is central to the Taiwan’s new national identity.

This paper will then argue 1. that Taiwan’s new “national” identity formed since the 1980s is centrally defined by an identification to democracy and individual freedom, and by the historical experience of a community of life on Taiwan government’s controlled territory. 2. that there is a “ROC dimension” in the Taiwan’s new national identity, in the sense that ROC institutional and political framework permitted the development of this Taiwanese democratic-centered national identity and is part of identity in the same movement that democratization reshaped and redefined ROC’s meaning for the Taiwanese; and 3. that China’s own national development and international events linked to China had a important impact on the formation of a Taiwan-centered identity, especially US’s de-recognition of the ROC as the legitimate representative of China.

The current national opposition between Taiwan and China is therefore based on 1. an opposition of political systems, ideologies and life experience and not only of “cultures”; 2. on the international debasement of Taiwan’s official Chinese identity through the de-recognition of the ROC. It could lead to a new Taiwanese nation under the name of Republic of Taiwan in the future, but by that time the nature and meaning of the new ROT’s national identity will not be the one projected by the Taiwanese nationalist movement in the 1980s and 1990s. This analysis goes then against the view that Taiwan’s national identity is an “ethnic” or cultural centered one. Saying that, I do not wish to invalidate any ethno-cultural perspectives on Taiwan’s identity but to complement them with a political/institutional analysis. Nonetheless I will dispute the idea that Taiwan’s “national” identity is similar in content with the Taiwanese nationalism.¹

¹ The use of Taiwan and Taiwanese terms in this paper is not, unless specified, restricted to so-called “native Taiwanese” (benshengren) or even Hoklo speakers, or to an ethno-cultural definition of what is
Taiwan’s “national” identity and its opposition to China

Taiwan’s local identity and distinct culture has always existed, under the Ming, the Qing, the Japanese, after the retrocession and since the KMT’s retreat to the island in 1949. But Taiwan’s “national” identity is a new phenomenon. It corresponds in part with the trend toward the building of a new Taiwanese nation that has been strengthening continually in the last 25 years to the point that a Taiwanese identity/consciousness has been substituted to the formally prevalent Chinese identity/nationalism as the main identification and discursive referent for the ROC/Taiwan population. But to understand the current opposition between Taiwan and China and the content of Taiwan’s national identity, one should not only look at the domestic political change fed on or feeding a growing Taiwanese nationalism. To do so would lead to a tautological analysis as the new national identity is already in the nationalism to be explained and vice-versa.

Before talking about Taiwan’s national identity, we have then to specify the use of Taiwan and China’s names. A great confusion about the meaning of these names dominates the political and even intellectual discourse about the Taiwan issue. In general, few clues are given about the actual legal and institutional status of Taiwan vis-à-vis Mainland China, or about the nature of China as an opposite to Taiwan. In all reality, Taiwan is an island that is a part of the ROC and in return constitutes the main territory of the ROC. Now China can be institutionally defined by the ROC or by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as the two still exist concurrently. Usually the name China refers to Mainland China and, as the mainland territory is controlled by the PRC, is often synonymous of the PRC. However, they are two different things and, if the PRC government would like everybody to believe it is not, we need to keep this distinction in mind to understand the Taiwan issue.

The political and ideological dimensions of the Chinese national identity that Taiwan is facing are indeed usually overlooked. It is as if the distinction between Nation, State,

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Taiwan. There are equivalent of ROC in terms of country’s name, and inhabitants of Taiwan and citizens of the ROC in terms of population.

government and political parties, always taken in account in political and critical analyses of European and American countries, were suddenly losing its relevance when the study turned to China and Taiwan and is largely replaced by acceptance of the official state definition of what these different dimensions of the national and political question are. However, the assimilation of China to the PRC and the view that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the legitimate voice of the Chinese people are just part of the discourse of legitimization of the CCP’s state-power in China and abroad. But the general acceptance of this discourse in the last 20 years by the rest of the world and by the Taiwanese themselves has great implications upon the redefinition of the Taiwan-China divide debate. The same thing can be said about the One-China principle. In both case, the acceptance of their validity for diplomatic reasons does not make them true facts.

The same thing goes again with the meaning of Taiwan’s independence or unification with China. A good example of confusion is offered in a recent article by Chen Lung-chu, a pro-Taiwan independence scholar and former advisor to the Taiwan’s president. It says: “Taiwan is a sovereign and independent state. Neither Taiwan nor China belongs to the other (…) Taiwan and China have never been unified and so there should be no question of secession”. 3 One problem is that independence can refer to two things: the independence of a new Taiwan republic, in other words the independence of Taiwan’s polity from its inherited institutional framework – the ROC; or the ROC independence. But only the ROC, and not Taiwan, is already an independent and sovereign country, and at the same time it is a Chinese state. Less than a proclamation of a new Taiwanese Nation-State, there is then no basis to discuss about Taiwan’s independence or unification with China. What we face is the independence of two Chinese states, the ROC and the PRC, on the two sides of the Taiwan straits and their eventual unification by termination of one or both of us as sovereign States. That said, as the ROC is now defined by the Taiwan’s territory, the two names are essentially equivalent if one does not forget their mutual implication. But in any case, this semantic equality is a new phenomenon and the result of the last 25 years of political development in the region.

Similarly, few clues are offered about the various factors, both domestic and international, that contributed to the growth of the Taiwanese consciousness and which coalesced together at a definite time in a changing world to make this Taiwanese identity a new national reference. We must therefore take a historical perspective on the ideological nature and evolution of the two Chinese States facing each other across the Taiwan Strait, as well as the influence of external (international) events on the building of a particular place and people’s identity. As a result, we may grasp better the “national” specificity of the ROC-Taiwan that Taiwanese people call their country.

1. The current opposition to China in Taiwan

To understand the content of Taiwan’s present “national” identity, we have to make light of the following facts revealed by a series of opinion surveys and electoral polls going back to the end of the 1980s.

The last significant survey was timed with the enactment of China’s anti-partition law and shows that 93% of the public opposes its threat of use of non-peaceful means while 84% rejects its claim that Taiwan is part of the China or the PRC. Surveys also indicate that, over the last ten years, between 75% and 80% of the Taiwanese reject the “one country-two systems” model proposed by China to resolve the Taiwan issue.

On the individual identity question now, polls show that at the end of 2004, 44.4% of Taiwanese saw themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese against 43.7% as only Taiwanese and 6.1% as only Chinese. Since 1992, the percentage of the first group almost did not change (between 39.1% to 50.9% with an average score around 44%). But the “Taiwanese only” group never stopped growing and jumped from 26% in twelve years while the “Chinese only” group fell 20% from 26.2% high (the number of non-response also fell by 5%). The identification to the sole China is then an ultra minority in Taiwan now. Reciprocally more than 85% of the inhabitants of Taiwan

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7 Cf. National Chengchi University, Election Study Center, http://www2.nccu.edu.tw/~s00/eng/data/Political%20Attitude02.htm
considers themselves fully or partly Taiwanese. On the other hand, 50% still see themselves as at least in some way partly Chinese.

If we look now at the election results, we can see that over the last 15 years, the parties identified with a “Taiwan’s independence” agenda, the DPP and later the TSU, kept on gaining bigger shares of the electorate leading to the presidential election and reelection of Chen Shui-bian and, for the DPP, to the position of Taiwan’s biggest political party. However, these parties only gathered together 50.1% and 43.5% in the last presidential and legislative elections after having run campaigns on very strong Taiwanese nationalist platforms. Moreover, even in the pro-independence camp, only the TSU officially advocates the creation of a brand-new Taiwanese State. Even if a large part of the DPP strongly leans toward the independence of a new Taiwanese nation (especially the New Tide faction), since 1999 and thus before its biggest electoral successes, the DPP has been recognizing the ROC as the official name and institutional body representing Taiwan. This position was once again stated clearly in the Chen-Soong consensus last February.

In terms of party identification, surveys’ results confirm this trend. While voters’ identification to the DPP rose from 2.7% in 1992 to 26.3% and the first place in December 2004, the KMT fell from 34.6% to 21.9%, while the PFP had a 7.1% party identification rate and the TSU only 2.7%. The Green camp and the Blue camp’s scores are now at the same level: 29% each, an all time high for the Green camp. Even more interesting is the “independent or non-response group” which, while decreasing from 62.8% in 1992, still constitutes 41.5% of the answers. The Green camp’s gains (+22%) stem then mainly from this independent voters group. But in the end, a majority of the Taiwanese still does not show strong party identification. This group is what the political analyst calls the middle-voters or the “realists” whose position is subject to change and whose support is crucial to win any election. The middle-stance of this group and its wish not to identify with political parties and their respective national ideologies indicate two things: 1. parties in Taiwan do not win election on a strong


\[11\] Cf. National Chengchi University, Election Study Center, http://www2.nccu.edu.tw/~s00/eng/data/Political%20Attitude01.htm
nationalist program basis; 2. this majority group, roughly equivalent in number (while different) to the dual Taiwanese-Chinese identity group, might not have a strong “nationalist” identity but has to be taken into account when we analyze Taiwan’s new “national” identity whatever it may be, as it forms the majority of the electorate.

Now if we turn to the unification/independence stances of the Taiwanese, we see that in 2004, only 4.8% to 7.4% want independence ASAP – meaning a new Taiwanese Republic’s independence -, 2% to 2.5% want unification ASAP, while a huge majority of 81.75% to 86.8% of the Taiwanese show their preference for maintaining the status quo. When the status quo answers are split according to desires for eventual unification, independence or postponing the decision in the future or indefinitely, results show that in 2004 the unification solution to the Taiwan issue gets a maximum of 9.9% to 12.7% (against 16.5%-20% in 1992), the independence solution (as ROC or ROT) gets up to 40.7%-44.1% (against 20.9% to 33.9% in 1992) while the “decide later” solution is favored by the biggest group at 35.1% to 39% of the people surveyed (36% to 38.5% in 1992). In any case, that means that up to 80% of the Taiwanese presently want to remain under the ROC’s framework for a reason or another.

Opposition to China and Chinese unification is then massive, while support for Taiwan nationalism and future Taiwanese independence is steadily growing but not yet overwhelming. Some would say that today the main obstacle to the official creation of such a new Taiwan nation, and the main reason that Taiwanese people prefer to keep the status quo as it is, is the threat of war and invasion by the PRC. In other words, if there were not a credible military threat from Mainland China, the Taiwanese would vote for outright independence of a new state. It is probably true but hides an important fact: the country Taiwanese do not want to join is not “China” in a general sense but specifically the PRC or communist China. Moreover, such huge opposition to the idea of unification has not always been the case, even as late as 1989 when 55% of Taiwan’s people favored unification. This is therefore a phenomenon coming out the 1990s.

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12 Cf. National Chengchi University, Election Study Center, http://www2.nccu.edu.tw/~s00/eng/data/Political%20Attitude03.htm; and Mainland Affairs Office, Taiwan, http://www.mac.gov.tw/english/english/pos/9312/9312e_1.gif
Another example of the complexity of the transformation of Taiwan “national” identity is offered by the “mainlanders” question and their attitude towards the China/Taiwan identification divide.\(^{14}\) Studies show that even the older generations of mainlanders, that is to say the most personally and emotionally attached to Mainland China, have in part or all been taiwanized and developed a Taiwanese identity as long-term inhabitants of the Taiwan island and citizen of the ROC.\(^{15}\) For the younger generations of mainlanders, it is even more obvious. Actually for any people older than 50 years old, the distinction between “native Taiwanese” and “mainlanders” does not make any sense. Most “mainlanders” are born in Taiwan and therefore are “native Taiwanese” and, if they would certainly preserve some of their parents’ culture and political preferences, they are also strongly influenced by the Taiwanese society they grew up in. This is particularly true for the 30 years old or less whose life coincides with the period of Taiwan’s democratization.\(^{16}\) As a result, this new generation tends to vote more than their parents for DPP’s candidates. But even when they do not vote for the Green camp, they still see themselves as Taiwanese and members of the Taiwanese society. Abroad they usually do not present themselves as Chinese nor want to be taken as such, as in foreign countries Chinese identity is identical to PRC identity. In the same time, most of them still consider their Chinese culture and heritage an important component of their personal identity. Their own definition of Taiwanese and opposition to Chinese is therefore not based on a rejection of “China” in general terms but of \textit{this} China, the PRC.

On the political level, as a result, no Taiwanese party calls or even wants quick unification with China in order to avoid an electoral disaster. The differences between the two societies and cultures are seen as too big, and freedom and democratic rights seen as too important to forsake them in the name of a national ideology. Only a small minority of Taiwanese would accept to live under the control of China to satisfy their radical Chinese nationalism or direct financial interests. Also the discourse saying that China is not communist anymore but capitalist, and therefore would be acceptable to Taiwan for unification does not convince the Taiwanese at the exception of some ultra-nationalists within the older generations of the mainlanders.

\(^{14}\) See Kuang-chun Li, “Mirrors and masks. An interpretative study of mainlanders’ identity dilemma”, in S. Corcuff (ed), \textit{Memories of the Future, op. cit.}, pp. 102-122.

\(^{15}\) Cf. Stephane Corcuff, “Taiwan’s “mainlanders” new Taiwanese?”, in S. Corcuff (ed), \textit{Memories of the Future, op. cit.}, pp. 163-195.

All this clearly shows that opposition to China and Chinese unification proposals runs much wider than support for the creation of a new Taiwanese State, and that this opposition is not merely related to the political emergence of a distinctive “native Taiwanese” ethno-cultural identity. It is also the product of a series of historical and political events that made the Taiwan identity discourse a discourse of opposition to China. To explain these conflicting identifications and political choices, we must understand that for the Taiwanese China is not an abstract concept of a “Chinese nation” but the reality of the PRC and its dictatorship. Furthermore, to understand the “national” identity of contemporary Taiwanese, we must differentiate it from the Taiwanese nationalism. Indeed, the new Taiwanese identity that is forming since the 1980s is built upon a democratization process and democratic institutions and therefore a political and ideological opposition to this China, communist China. Similarly, if the Taiwanese political nationalism movement was the standard-bearer of the democratization movement, it does not hold a copyright on it. Still, links between democratization and Taiwan nationalism are strong and make this political and cultural movement quite particular, while its success helped foster an identification of the Taiwanese nationalist and finally of all the Taiwanese people with democracy.

2. Taiwanese nationalism, the Taiwanese Nation, and democratization

The development of Taiwanese nationalism as a mass movement is a major phenomena of the last 20 years. Like the “national” opposition to China, this nationalism is generally mainly depicted as the expression of so-called “ethnic” and cultural differences based on a distinct language and a specific historical experience. But as anybody knows, nationalisms are also political and historical constructions.17 This does not mean that since Taiwanese nationalism is a new “historical construction” its legitimacy would be less than the Chinese identity/nationalism that it strives to replace. All established national identities as well are the product of cultural and political constructions and movements, or “imagined community”, that for reasons of good timing or/and use of force succeeded in creating a new Nation and imposing it to other nations and peoples in the Nation-States based international order that characterizes

modern history. None is less legitimate than another and none can be assured to be recognized, last or perish. In each case, a battle of discourses and arguments between competing nationalisms is waged to convince the different domestic and international actors of the greater validity of their respective national visions. In contemporary democratic countries, the outcome is generally decided in the ballot box resulting or not in the division of primarily institutionally unified but “nationally” divided countries (Czech Rep. /Slovakia, Canada/Quebec), or the unification of previously distinct countries (Germany). With non-democratic countries, agreement at the top or war led to partitions or unifications (break-up of the USSR and Yugoslavia, Vietnam unification, retrocession of Hong-Kong and Macao).

In Taiwan, as in most countries in the process of division/unification, there are conflicting nationalist discourses, namely: the Taiwanese nationalism and the Chinese nationalism. Actually, there are different kinds of Taiwanese nationalism. Hsiau A-chin has shown that we must first distinguish between political nationalism and cultural nationalism. In the political nationalist movement, following Schubert’s synthesis, we can then count three versions of Taiwanese nationalism. Briefly, the Taiwanese nationalist movement that first emerged as a political force in the 1980s is rooted in an ideology of cultural nationalism focusing on ethno-cultural and historical distinctiveness and the foundation of a new Taiwanese Nation-State. In the 1990s, the Taiwanese nationalism turned more inclusive for political reasons and electoral viability with multi-ethnic and state/political versions appearing.

As we saw in the polls’ results, support for Taiwanese nationalism and a new Taiwanese nation has indeed been steadily growing and has replaced for a large part of the population and the State apparatus the Chinese nationalism of the old KMT. But this growth is not enough to equal Taiwanese nationalism with Taiwan’s new “national” identity.

21 Cf. G. Schubert, *op. cit.*
When we look at the political parties’ platforms, no ruling party in Taiwan’s history, the old KMT of course, but also Lee Teng-hui’s mainstream KMT and the DPP since 2000, has ever officially supported the goal of a new Taiwanese Nation-State, while at the same time constantly opposing China. Moreover political discourses in both camps of the Taiwanese/Chinese nation divide have changed through the establishment of free electoral competition in the last fifteen years to the point that while holding different visions of what constitutes their “nation” in ethno-cultural terms, they both refers to the same institutional and political framework of a democratic Republic of China. And Chu and Lin show that both political camps have found out during the 1990s the diminishing utility of ethnic and nationalist mobilization, to the point that “the democratic process has helped narrow the formerly severe polarization on the independence-unification issue”.

Indeed, an important feature of the Taiwanese nationalism is that it is based on democratic values, respect of democratic process and has the implementation of a democratic system as its immediate goal. This may have been caused by historical circumstances. But not all nationalist movements are democracy-centered, especially the 20th century Chinese revolutionary nationalist movements and parties like the KMT and the CCP. In fact, the Taiwanese nationalist movement has its roots in a pro-democracy movement that is distinct from and merged with it at the same time. Before turning to a nationalist discourse to force democratic changes and gain some strength through the representation of the “native Taiwanese” feelings of ethnic injustice toward the mainlanders, the first DPP under Kang Ning-hsiang advocated above all a democratization line. As a result of this merge of objectives, the Taiwanese nationalist discourse based on distinct culture, history and political system fed off the democratization process at the same time that it bolstered it. This consequently defined the Taiwan nationalism movement as a democracy-centered, based on the principle of fair representation of the population and majority rule, giving a political legitimacy to

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24 Cf. A. M. Fulda, op. cit.
its demand of ethnic equality and a huge momentum when the Taiwanese political system really switched to democracy in the 1990s.

3. Taiwan’s “national” identity and democracy

It is useful to remember that democracy in Taiwan is a new phenomenon. Although it officially started in 1987, full democratic process did not come before the 1991-92 constitutional additional amendments, or even in 1996 with the direct election of the President.25 Although not older than 10 to 15 years, it is already taken for granted as it had a profound effect on the island’s identity.

In the new democratic system of the 1990s, the logical and seemingly inevitable outcome of the democratic process was the coming to power of the party representing the majority of the population, majority being defined on ethnic, ideological, and political or identity criteria. Actually, the 1990s electoral process and democratization had three outcomes: 1. to legitimize and broaden the discourse and appeal of the Taiwan-centered nationalism; 2. to relegitimize the KMT as a democratic and Taiwan-centered party; 3. to transform the ROC into a Taiwan-centered democratic state.

As the election results show, the DPP’s growing success was not achieved on a pure Taiwanese nationalism platform, but on a mix of “identity” politics, social justice and wealth redistribution among the different classes and groups constituting the Taiwanese society, moderation of the Taiwan independence goal and full democratization program.26 And these successes did not enable it to change the constitutional framework of the country nor to make its goal of a new Republic of Taiwan acceptable to the domestic electorate and the international community.27 In fact, very early, a large majority of Taiwan nationalists and independentists accepted the ROC as the Taiwan’s state.28 Besides, the success of the democratization movement against the KMT’s Chinese mainlander old guard gave the Taiwanese nationalist opposition its democratic

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credentials. Even now, one of the DPP’s main discourses and appeals is still its history of democracy pioneer and its efforts to deepen democratization and representation of the people’s rights and opinions through referendum and constitutional engineering.

At the same time, the taiwanization of the KMT under Lee Teng-hui and the mainstream faction encouraged the fusion/assimilation of the ROC with the whole Taiwanese population while undermining the identification of the defense of Taiwan’s “benshengren” interests with the sole DPP. And as democracy was implemented in Taiwan by the KMT and Lee Teng-hui’s pro-localization mainstream faction, it is the whole Taiwanese state and people that came to be associated to democracy. The KMT can since present itself as a democratic, multiethnic party and harbor its history of democratic achievements since Chiang Ching-kuo (with some good arguments).

Finally, and most important, the ROC is now defined and perceived in Taiwan and abroad as a democratic country, that is to say either a democratic taiwanized China or a democratic Taiwan with a Chinese heritage.

Studies and analyses of the 1990s political changes have confirmed that the electoral process and the democratization helped to create a new collective consciousness among the Taiwanese people, “transforming the term “Taiwan” from a geographic unit to a political society, and the term “Taiwanese” from an ethnic term for “native Taiwanese” to a civic term for “citizens of Taiwan”. But this collective Taiwanese consciousness is not equivalent to the Taiwanese consciousness expressed during the Japanese era or under the KMT’s authoritarian rule (and the misery of being Taiwanese expressed by Lee Teng-hui). Moreover, if the Taiwanese people are citizens of Taiwan, they are also still citizens of the ROC. This consciousness is then a “new” Taiwanese consciousness that is a product of democratization and opposition to the PRC and that defines the ROC-Taiwan as a democratic, modern, affluent, open and progressive society.

It would be wrong then to see the Taiwanese national issue in terms of pure competition between nationalisms. What has happened in the last 25 years is the development of a concrete “national” identity as a slow, two-way process and dialogue.

between the elites and the population and combining elements from different levels – cultural, political, social, ethnic – into an experience of sharing a community of life and interests that was open-ended and that the people were building together (without or not being fully aware of it). It is the identity of a Taiwan’s State and society transforming and creating the meaning of the “national”. And the only possible way to build it was through democratization of the State and the society and electoral participation.

As a result, the “national” opposition or association with China will be determined by the “national” political consensus reached by the Taiwanese: democracy, ROC-Taiwan’s state identity, and rejection of dictatorship. Before concluding on the consequences of this new “national” identity on the relation with China, we have then to look a bit more at the ROC’s dimension of Taiwan’s identity and the effect of the international events on it. Indeed, to have a proper idea of the China-Taiwan relation, it must be replaced in the context of PRC-ROC relations and the US-China-Taiwan strategic triangle.

China’s partition and its impact on the formation of a distinct Taiwanese “national” identity

Officially there is only one Chinese State and nation for Beijing, the UN and most of the international actors. Apparently, there are one Chinese State in the Mainland and one Taiwanese State on the island. But on the practical, legal, and institutional levels, there are still two Chinese States. We have therefore to assess the impact upon the development of the Taiwanese identity of the persistence of the ROC as a Chinese State in Taiwan.

1. The ROC’s dimension in Taiwan’s “national” identity

In the study of the impact of the ROC on Taiwan identity, analyses generally focus on the failure of the KMT’s Chinese institution in Taiwan (Wang32) or on the resistance the KMT’s state-sponsored formation of a Chinese national identity encountered from

32 Horng-Luen Wang, op. cit.
the Taiwanese society (Chu and Lin). It goes on as stating that “As soon as the political compression was loosened, the long-suppressed Taiwanese identity” that historically developed under the Japanese colonial rule and the mainlanders’ domination of the KMT party-state after the war re-emerged, and with it its quest for an independent statehood.\textsuperscript{33} However, this pre-democratization Taiwanese identity cannot be equaled to the post-democratization Taiwan’s “national” identity of the last ten years. Moreover it tends to overlook the effects of both the very presence of the Chinese State and its cultural policies in term of change in identity.

First, the KMT’s retreat in 1949 and the arrival of more than one million mainlanders in Taiwan had the immediate effect of creating an opposition between the island-province Taiwanese inhabitants and the overseas-arriving “Chinese” mainlanders that override previous intra-Taiwan group divisions and multiple links/oppositions between Taiwan and the different Chinese provinces or locales. As much as the “mainlander” identity is a new “ethnic” category that did not exist before 1945,\textsuperscript{34} the “benshengren” as an “ethnic” identification is a new creation of the KMT power in Taiwan.

On the other hand, the KMT has rather well succeeded in its sinicization of Taiwan: imposition and learning of the Chinese Mandarin language by the whole population, import of Chinese and specially Jiangnan high culture, development of a performing national system of middle and higher education anchored in the respect of the Chinese traditional culture. The reasons why it could not totally succeed were not only the crushing of the Taiwanese democrats and elite after the 228 incident. It was also because, first, without the control of mainland China it lacked a real Chinese legitimacy – something that would have enable the Taiwanese to be politically and practically Chinese on top of their own distinct local culture. On the contrary, they were Chinese only historically, ideologically and theoretically. And secondly because it refused to include Taiwan’s specific local history, culture and identity in the official and material ROC and Chinese identity.

But what the ROC gave to Taiwan was a modern state with full independence and sovereignty, \textit{de jure} as well as a \textit{de facto}. This new State identity was rejected by a part

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Y. H. Chu and C. L. Lin, \textit{op. cit.} p. 253.
\item \textsuperscript{34} See S. Corcuff, “Taiwan’s ‘Mainlanders’. A new ethnic category”, \textit{China Perspectives}, nº 28, March-April 2000, pp. 71-82.
\end{itemize}

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of the population on the basis of its “émigré regime” and foreign nature, and its oppression of Taiwan’s people rights under dictatorship.\textsuperscript{35} However, once the ROC State started, first, its taiwanization then its democratization under Chiang Ching-kuo, it practically endowed the Taiwan’s population with a legitimate state power that is \textit{de jure} as well as \textit{de facto} sovereign and independent. The debate about the \textit{de jure}/\textit{de facto} opposition is indeed a bit shallow. First because, even when we used the very useful distinction between internal, or positive, sovereignty and external, or negative, sovereignty, sovereignty is not something that is decided by other countries.\textsuperscript{36} They can only recognize it or not. It is true that the international system works on the basis of external or negative sovereignty.\textsuperscript{37} But then, it suffices that one foreign state recognizes another state’s sovereignty to double its \textit{de jure} internal sovereignty by a \textit{de jure} external one. As a matter of fact, the Europeans and Americans’ refusal to recognize the USSR after the Bolshevik revolution did not change its \textit{de jure} independence and sovereignty upon the former Russian Empire’s territory. Just as the PRC was a \textit{de jure} independent and sovereign state even when it was without a seat at the UN and not recognized by the Western powers. In the case of the ROC, the fact that it stayed for eight years an official diplomatic ally of the US after the loss of its seat at the UN in 1971 shows that \textit{de jure} sovereignty and independence do not require a presence at the UN. Besides, the ROC-Taiwan has still 26 allied States that \textit{de jure} recognized it as a full sovereign and independent country.

What the ROC is not anymore, but it does not pretend to be either since 1991, is the sole recognized representative of the Chinese people and the legitimate government of mainland China. Now, the ROC/PRC opposition and their refusal to mutually recognized themselves, mutual refusal up to 1991, PRC’s refusal since then, has also a strong impact on the emergence of the Taiwanese identity. This is specially true since the US de-recognition in 1979 and the start of the democratization process in the 1980s.

2. 1979: a year of significance, US realpolitik and its influence on Taiwan “national” identity

\textsuperscript{35} Yun-han Chu and Jih-wen Lin, “Political development in 20\textsuperscript{th} century Taiwan: State-building, regime transformation and the construction of national identity”, \textit{China Quarterly}, nº 165, March 2001, pp. 102-129.
\textsuperscript{37} Cf. P. Deans, \textit{ibid},. p. 44.
I would like to argue here that the possibility of the emergence of this Taiwan “national” movement is also to be found in the international interaction between Washington, Taipei and Beijing in the 1970s and 1980s, especially the refusal by Taipei and Beijing to recognize the reality of China’s partition into two Chinese States and two Chinas, and of the unintended consequences of US realpolitik and changing definition of its strategic interests. US influence on Taiwan’s society change and politics cannot be overstated. It is so strong that Taiwan can do almost nothing in foreign politics and even sometimes in domestic issues without first consulting with or being approved by the US. This was clear for everybody during the last years. But this is not new as the US official military and diplomatic alliance with Taiwan from the Korean War to the 1979’s de-recognition implied a thorough review of and constant pressure on Taiwan politics. In the same time, all US policies about Taiwan and influence on Taiwan are also linked to its relationship with China. This triangle is profoundly defined by realpolitik and is based not on the reality of the political and national situation but on the prime national interest and the balance of power of the two main actors of the triangle: US and China.

For that reason, the US de-recognition of the ROC as the sole legitimate government of China in January 1979 had a far greater impact than its expulsion from the UN. Most analyses state that the changes in the international system precipitated the legitimacy crisis of the KMT government and that the crumbling of the One-china principle aroused the local aspiration for an independent statehood subsequently. I would like to suggest that the blow was not merely to the KMT but more importantly to the Chinese nature of the ROC State in Taiwan, and the beginning of the transformation of a ROC-China into a ROC-Taiwan.

Under the ROC’s Chiangs’ dictatorship, the Taiwanese could not be anything but Chinese although the ROC did not controlled the “historic” China but only a peripheral territory that was linked with the mainland for merely four years during the 20th century.

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When the ROC lost its international recognition as the legitimate representative of China, it added to the material loss of Mainland China the symbolic loss of its Chinese identity. Once Taiwan could not be the ROC abroad anymore, and the PRC was considered the sole legitimate representative of the Chinese nation, the Taiwanese population had no choice but to gradually relinquish its Chinese identity for a sole Taiwanese one, not on the basis of rejection of Chinese culture, history and “ethnic” identity, but as a rejection of assimilation with the PRC. To further this trend, the new legal instrument that was to define the relations between the US and the ROC was to be named the “Taiwan Relations Act”, and all the texts and discourse relating to the ROC and its inhabitants since then are referred to as Taiwan and the Taiwanese, reinforcing the symbolic dissociation with China.

Already, the “native Taiwanese” did not share any of the historical experience of their mainlanders ROC “compatriots”. Now it was the whole Taiwan population, Hoklo, Hakka, mainlanders, aboriginals alike, who could not recognize itself in the new internationally legitimate China. They did not share China’s communist history, mythology and sufferings. They did not admire them, and did not, and still do not, want to be associated to, from the Communist 1949 take-over and the Cultural Revolution to the Tiananmen events.

Moreover, for the Taiwanese democracy activists, and with the start of the democratization movement, the gap with the still authoritarian PRC could only grow. This constitutes the second unintended outcome of the US realpolitik decision to de-recognize the ROC. At that time, the Carter administration and many experts considered, and view positively for the US-China relations, the unification of the ROC with the PRC – after all two dictatorships – to be a matter of just a few years. Indeed, the challenge was daunting for the KMT regime and Chiang Ching-kuo and led him to make two series of decisions during the following years that would foster the development of a Taiwan-centered nationalism. First, the sense of crisis within the KMT following the betrayal of their anti-communist and military ally led Chiang to call off the next round of local elections and stop all the political liberalization steps that had been slowly taken since the middle of the 1970s and the development of the Tang-

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Taiwanese movement. In December 1979, the Formosa magazine demonstration for political rights was crushed in Kaohsiung and its leader condemned to years in prison for subversion. But the democratic movement, which could not appear in public anymore, was not eliminated.\textsuperscript{41} Turning more clandestine and cultural for a while, it even grew in strength and recognition throughout the society as a cultural nationalism that would be the carrier of the anti-Chinese Taiwanese nationalism to come.\textsuperscript{42} When Chiang, under both the pressure of the US and the Taiwan’s population and activists to democratize, restart the liberalization process in 1985-86, he faced now a more unified and coherent democratic movement fed on ethno-cultural nationalism ideals.

3. The “new” ROC/PRC opposition

After the launch of the democratization process in Taiwan, the opposition between the ROC and the PRC then turned from an opposition between communism and capitalism into an opposition between dictatorship/autocratic China (PRC) and liberal democratic Taiwan (ROC). That was not always obvious in the 1980s because of China’s policy of reform and opening coupled with dramatic student demonstrations and the development of a new critical culture and art. And also because of the slow pace of the liberalization process in Taiwan coupled with the KMT old-guard resistance and higher expectations derived from its status as a capitalist, US-allied country. But it became clear in the years 1988-89 with the start of Lee Teng-hui’s presidency and the Tiananmen events in China. It was confirmed and enhanced throughout the 1990s when Taiwan became an advanced and progressive society, free and democratic, and China fell back politically in the regressive dictatorship category.

In the 1990s the international de-recognition of the ROC reached its full effect with the almost universal assimilation of China to the PRC. In the same time, the separation of China and Taiwan futures was becoming more apparent through the democratization and taiwanization of Taiwan.

\textsuperscript{42} See Hsiau A-chin, \textit{op. cit.
Moreover, the refusal by the PRC to recognize the ROC, and its “center-province mentality”, which sees Taiwan only as a province,\textsuperscript{43} strengthened the identification of the ROC’s citizens as Taiwan citizens and only Taiwan citizens, while the reality of the ROC-Taiwan independence made them feel that their Taiwan (province) was fully a country. The dialectics between the cross-strait strategic interaction and the democratic political process in Taiwan during the 1990s had then a profound influence on “the process of state-making and state-building in Taiwan”. But it is not only, as suggested by Chu and Lin, the Chinese government’s actions and declarations that “serve to distance the people of Taiwan from Chinese identity and strengthen the call for a separate identity”\textsuperscript{44}. Chinese domestic political events as well as Chinese society and people’s attitude toward Taiwan had also a strong impact on the Taiwan’s people self-image and attitude towards China. Among others: the Tiananmen events, the Great-Han and chauvinistic nationalism’s rise in China, the crush of the Falungong and of any non-State organized religious activities, the limits put on Hong-Kong autonomy, the Sars cover-up in China, and finally the Chinese people and intellectual’s aggressiveness towards the Taiwanese as expressed in Internet chat-rooms, in official newspapers or through face-to-face contacts.

Finally, in Taiwan, the direct presidential and legislative elections on the sole ROC-controlled territory had also the following psychological effects. 1. the Taiwanese, and only us, had the power to elect a head-of-state that represents us. 2. the ROC president they elected was the president of the Taiwanese people and only of them. 3. consequently the ROC represents only the Taiwanese people.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The focus on democracy and democratization as the core of Taiwan’s new “national” identity built around a community of life on Taiwan and the ROC-Taiwan institutional framework in the last 25 years help understand why any apparently generous offer of autonomy by the PRC in order to achieve unification of the two sides are constantly rejected not only by the ROC-Taiwan successive governments but by the Taiwanese population as well. Even the “nominal reunification” proposal more or less directly

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{43} Cf. He Baogang, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 8.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{44} Y. H. Chu and C. L. Lin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 258.}
suggested by Beijing since 2000 and that in practice would keep under a “China roof” all Taiwanese political institutions and way of life as they are now, is seen as not acceptable.\textsuperscript{45}

But if we perceive that nowadays the opposition between Taiwan and China is determined in the end by the choice of democracy against autocracy, then three logical consequences follow. First that Taiwan will never accept any resolution of the cross-strait conflict that cannot assure them democracy and individual freedom in Taiwan as well as in Mainland China. Secondly, that the democratization of China is therefore the prerequisite to any reunification. Actually, this request is not new as it is one of the preconditions laid out by the KMT’s government in the 1991 National Guidelines for unification. These guidelines may often be forgotten, but they are still officially preserved and reiterated by the Chen’s government and constitutes in fact one of its best defense against any pressure to unify with China.

Under these conditions, even a more flexible proposal for unification from the PRC would be rejected as long as China is ruled by dictatorship. Otherwise, as shown in the Hong-Kong case, Taiwan’s own democratic system will always been under threat and the Taiwanese, in their “new reunified country” of China, would not even have the right of freedom of speech and opinion they can enjoy now without any limit.

The third consequence, which is mainly ignored but very relevant to many in Taiwan, including the new “consensus-oriented” government of Hsieh Chang-ting is that in presence of a democratic China treating Taiwan on an equal basis, unification with the mainland would not be necessarily rejected by the Taiwanese in a public poll. Certainly, the opposite outcome – the preservation of ROC-Taiwan independence and sovereignty - would be also possible. That would be the ultimate test about the “true” content of Taiwan’s “national” identity. However, the longer the separation of Mainland China and Taiwan lasts – and it is already longer (56 years) than the period of Japanese colonization – the more the chances are that the Taiwanese would not find enough interests to rejoin the Mainland even under a democratic framework.

As we saw, the refusal by the PRC to mutual recognition with Taiwan is one of the factors of the growth of the Taiwan local identity into a national one. Therefore, the

\textsuperscript{45} See He on this proposal and its limits in term of international recognition of Taiwan, \textit{op. cit.}
recognition by the PRC of the ROC State, of the partition of China into a two-Chinas situation, and the acceptance of a dual-seat representation in the UN is not only the way to start political dialogue on unification and to help an eventual reunification short of a war.\textsuperscript{46} It is probably now the ONLY way to preserve the Chinese identity of Taiwan and to keep any hope of unification in the future.

Otherwise, with the time passing since the separation between Taiwan and China, the strengthening of democratization in Taiwan, and the maintaining of the dictatorship in China, Taiwan’s “national” identity could easily go from a non-PRC identity to a full non-Chinese identity. A war attempt, successful or not, would then only reinforce the gap between the two sides as any war would constitute a war of conquest by a new colonial or imperial power. The control and occupation of Taiwan by the PRC would also forbid any level of local democracy, even a restricted Hong-Kong style one, for as soon as a minimum of freedom of speech would be granted, there would be a outright rejection of the PRC’s power.

Fortunately for Taiwan and the Chinese, this scenario is very unlikely as that would mean that the US would have been pushed out of the region and replaced as a dominant power by China. And Washington, as well as Tokyo, is certainly not going to let that happen in the foreseeable future.

Actually, the success of the democratization in Taiwan places the US’s One-China policy in an ideological and strategic bind. The Second Bush administration will certainly keep on playing with the ambiguity of this policy to maintain the status quo as it is. But as this status quo is defined by a two-Chinas situation, if the US want to insure a positive outcome to the Taiwan issue, they might better try to slowly help reverse the denial of the two-Chinas reality while holding the democratic principle as the cornerstone of any solution to the ROC/Taiwan – PRC/China political deadlock. In doing so, it would paradoxically assure both sides of the preservation of their respective priority – democracy / China theoretical unity - as well as US long term interests.

Taipei. 20-03-2005

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. J. P. Cabestan, “Is there a solution to the China-Taiwan quarrel”, \textit{op. cit.}, and He Baogang, \textit{op. cit.}