

# CONTEMPORARY CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS: A GLANCE AT THE PAST AND THE NEW RISING NATIONAL IDENTITY

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## Abstract

Ever since Tsai Ing-wen came to power, the relations between People's Republic of China and Taiwan, also known as the Republic of China, has been hitting a new low point. Now, China's domineering stance towards the small island across the strait is stronger than ever. Before Tsai Ing-wen, under the rule of Kuomintang (KMT) the situation was not like this, it was calmer and more cooperative. The regime change brought about major changes towards Taiwan's stance and opinion towards China. It is very important to understand what the main cause of this turning point is. This article looks back at the history between KMT and the now reigning party, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to explain this phenomenon and has found that there is a fundamental difference between the two. Using the Social Identity Theory, this article tries to explain the difference between KMT's and the DPP's point of view on the Cross-Strait Relations. DPP has long viewed Taiwan as an independent nation, dating back to 1999 when the 'Resolution on Taiwan's Future' was written. Now, as the elected president is from the DPP, their resolution is on full swing.

**Keywords:** *Cross-Strait Relations, 1992 Consensus, Tsai Ing-wen, Democratic Progressive Party, Kuomintang*

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, the Cross-Strait Relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan, Republic of China (ROC) has deteriorated. Beijing has started hostility towards Taiwan in many ways, such as an extravagant show of power just before Tsai Ing-wen inauguration (The Straits Times, 2016). This started when the Democratic Progressive Party won the presidential election over Kuomintang party on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2016. With this victory in hand, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) brought about major changes in Taiwan's government – especially on the foreign policy sector; as a matter of fact, this should provide no surprise at all. However, as Kuomintang and the DPP has a very fundamentally different ideology and perspective regarding the current status with PRC.

This matter is quite important to talk about as the current Cross-Strait Relations is getting tense as time went on. To understand why this phenomenon happens, it is of utmost importance to know the beginning point of it and also the reason behind it. This article tries to explain why the Cross-Strait Relations between PRC and ROC is worsening by looking at the root cause of those turn of events: The fundamental difference between Kuomintang and DPP on the Cross-Strait Relations. Nowadays, many journal articles talk about the events that is happening right now and tries to analyze what it means for the current status between PRC and ROC. Such as this writing by *Jean Pierre Cabestan*, titled “*Beijing's Policy Towards President Tsai Ying-wen and the Future of Cross-Strait Relations*” (Cabestan, 2017). This article talks about the consequences of the DPP's decision as the ruling party to refuse to acknowledge the '92 Consensus and United States' involvement in the Cross-Strait Relations especially with the trade war between US and PRC happening right now. It also explains what steps has been taken by Beijing to resolve the situation.

Another insight on the Cross-Strait Relations after the fall of Kuomintang in the presidential election is an article written by Yves-Heng Lim, titled “*The Future Instability of Cross-Strait Relations: Prospect Theory and Ma Ying-Jeou's*

*Paradoxical Legacy.*” (Lim, 2017). This article dives deep into the future of the Cross-Strait Relations, specifically how dangerous the sudden change of stance by the Tsai Ing-wen administration. As we can see, the future has been talked about in many articles but few has tried to explain the root of this problem in a simple way. This article will try to provide just that, a simple explanation of why this phenomenon happens in the first place, by looking at the stark difference between Kuomintang’s and DPP’s stance toward the Cross-Strait Relations.

The purpose of this article is to set a clear explanation of why the Cross-Strait Relations began to deteriorate contemporary by looking back at the fundamental differences between two major parties in Taiwan, the Democratic Progressive Party and Kuomintang. In which the difference is magnified when the DPP took office in 2016, taking their own perspectives and goals in regards to the Cross-Strait Relations.

This article uses the historical research method to explain the current situation, describing and explaining the different point of view between Kuomintang and DPP that started this phenomenon. In doing so, this paper will use the the Social Identity Theory, formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and 1980s, to further analyze both parties’ stance on the Cross-Strait Relations. To collect the data required, this article will use both parties official statement on the 1992 Consensus and also news of relevant events from reliable and acceptable sources. Historical approach is preferred to scrutinize the problem of contemporary Cross-Strait Relations as one should understand the sequence and the checkpoints of events of PRC and ROC relations. It may not necessarily diplomatic, but the relations between two parties deserved a thorough elaboration.

Social Identity Theory application on International Relations is as a tool to explain the influence of status on identity over foreign policies (Larson, 2017). The usage of the Social Identity Theory here is an attempt to clarify statements from the DPP, especially on their ‘Resolution on Taiwan’s Future’ congress result. DPP is strongly calling for a new national identity as one of the three

important major reforms they deem necessary for Taiwan. There is a similar study albeit an old one, written by Mikael Mattlin in 2004. This study is titled “*Same Content, Different Wrapping: Cross – Strait Policy Under DPP Rule*” (Mattin, 2004) And it had explained quite clearly the glaring difference between Kuomintang and DPP on the 1992 Consensus. However, no further explanation is given regarding why DPP opposes the 1992 Consensus or the Kuomintang’s view in general.

## **Discussion**

### **Brief History of Democratic Progressive Party**

Democratic Progressive Party starts with the *Tangwai* Movement back in the 1970s and 1980s. It was built by people who oppose the Kuomintang and because the emergence of an opposition party is illegal, they made the movement and ran for election as independent candidates. Therefore, effectively making them an ‘outside the party’ candidates and therefore if some of them were elected, and some of them were, they would be elected legally.

*Tangwai* Movement had no way of gaining power in the government. As the majority of seats in the Legislative Yuan were appointed from Mainland China. In the early days, they were able to influence some aspect of the governance by making a dialogue forum to debate the Kuomintang’s way of governance. *Tangwai* Movement successfully formed the Democratic Progressive Party in 1986 and became a legal party in 1991, especially since the end of the so called ‘White Terror’ in Taiwan. The early years of 1990s also marked a progress for Taiwan’s democracy, signifying citizen’s political awareness and loosening journalism.

### **Fundamental Difference between Taiwan’s National Identity and Democratic Progressive Party**

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) opposes the Kuomintang in the way of governance. It opposes the authoritarian regime in favor of true democracy.

Although Kuomintang served as one of the vital keys in ensuring Taiwan's status quo and existence towards mainland China (and the world, actually), DPP believed that the superiority of Kuomintang has created a democracy deficit for Taiwan. More importantly, they also oppose Kuomintang's point of view regarding the Cross-Strait Relations. This is manifested in DPP's "Resolution of Taiwan's Future". DPP made seven proclamations in that document, where they see Taiwan as an already independent and sovereign nation. They also stated that Taiwan is not a part of People's Republic of China. Here are the contents of the "Resolution of Taiwan's Future" (New Taiwan, Ilha Formosa, 2000).

1. Taiwan is a sovereign and independent country. Any change in the independent status quo must be decided by all the residence of Taiwan by means of plebiscite.
2. Taiwan is not a part of the People's Republic of China. China's unilateral advocacy of the "One China Principle" and "One Country Two Systems" is fundamentally inappropriate for Taiwan.
3. Taiwan should expand its role in the international community, seek international recognition, and pursue the goal of entry into the United Nations and other international organizations.
4. Taiwan should renounce the "One China" position to avoid international confusion and to prevent the position's use by China as a pretext for annexation by force.
5. Taiwan should promptly complete the task of incorporating plebiscite into law in order to realize the people's rights. In time of need, it can be relied on to establish consensus of purpose, and allow the people to express their will.
6. Taiwan's government and opposition forces must establish bi-partisan consensus on foreign policy, integrating limited resources, to face China's aggression and ambition.

7. Taiwan and China should engage in comprehensive dialogue to seek mutual understanding and economic cooperation. Both sides should build a framework for long-term stability and peace.

Taking into consideration the stance of Democratic Progressive Party on this matter, it came as no surprise that when Tsai Ing-wen was elected in 2016, Taiwan's stance on the Cross-Strait Relations also changes.

Taiwan's Identity is a basic discussion in every study about the Cross-Strait Relations. Especially, after the establishment of the DPP in 1986. Following DPP's formation, many democracy-centered activities and decisions began to spring in Taiwan. The first and the most notable decision is the lifting of the Martial Law in 1987, the end of restrictions on freedom of speech and public assemblies and last but not least, the legalization of opposition political parties (G. Andy Chang, 2005). Numerous identity-building activities took place also in the education sector, one such activity is the decision to deviate from the previously PRC-centered education programs into a more Taiwan-centered one, focusing on the history and cultures of Taiwan, Taiwanese literature and so on. All of that, can be credited to the Democratic Progressive Party effort in building a new identity for Taiwan to realize their "Resolution for Taiwan's Future".

The effort by DPP on slowly building a new Taiwan Identity has paid off. In recent times, 'identity' has been the main voice of the independence movement, especially on the younger generation (Schmitz, 2018). One of the most recent important move on Taiwan Identity is the decision to hold a vote to decide under what name should Taiwan's athlete compete on; Taiwan or Republic of China? (Regan, 2018). Under DPP, there is no doubt that the 'identity' dialogue inside Taiwan will flourish as there are now no barriers to hold its progress.

### **Brief History of Kuomintang Party**

Nationalist Party of China or often called as Kuomintang (KMT) is a party in Taiwan that have a very long history to hear about. KMT was founded by Sun Yat Sen after the *Xinhai* Revolution on 1911 that overthrow the Qing Dynasty

from China and ended the era of feudalism that already ruled in China since the beginning of their history. But if we look deeper into the history of KMT, it already took its first shape at 1894, during a period of crucial importance in the First Sino-Japanese War. (Kuomintang, n.d.)

The modern China founding father, Dr. Sun Yat Sen, had traveled to Honolulu, Hawaii on 24 December 1894. The trip was done with purpose in order to muster the support of overseas Chinese compatriots, and it was there that he established the Revive China Society, a revolutionary organization committed to saving China. In 1905, the Revive China Society merged with the other anti-monarchist group to form the United League (also known as the *Tongmenghui*) in Tokyo, Japan. Later, the United League further merged with several political parties in Beijing to form the Chinese Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), in August, 1912. (Kuomintang, n.d.)

### **Fundamental Difference between Taiwan's National Identity and Kuomintang Party**

Beijing and Taipei had long been competing for other countries to recognize one government over another, or had tried to have the other expelled from international organizations. In 1992, the KMT and the CPC held a semi-official meeting which produced a consensus that was often referred to as the "One China Policy". Both sides recognize there is only one "China": both mainland China and Taiwan belong to the same China, but both sides agree to interpret the meaning of that one China according to their own definition. The consensus did not go really well, because President of Taiwan, Lee Teng Hui and the DPP has not agreed and denied that term. DPP critics that term, because there was no agreement on the meaning and mutual understanding of China and which government. Since then, making the difference opinion and point of view between the KMT and the DPP more visible. (Matsuda, 2017). It was proven since then, when the difference of

opinion somehow swayed the voters in every election after the 1992 Consensus, creating a KMT-DPP-KMT-DPP government in the process.

List of Taiwan President and the Party after the 1992 Consensus:

1. Lee Teng Hui (1988 – 2000) from Kuomintang Party
2. Chen Shui-bian (2000-2008) from Democratic Progressive Party
3. Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2016) from Kuomintang Party
4. Tsai Ing-wen (2016-present) from Democratic Progressive Party

The official dialogues between Taiwan and China were halted in 1999, when the Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui advanced his “two-state theory” and will not resume and recognize the 1992 Consensus until the end of Chen Shui-bian’s presidency in 2008. During the period in which the KMT was the opposition party, the major communications channel between China and Taiwan is from communication of KMT-CP. The increased communication gave hope to people of Taiwan that if the KMT won back control of the Presidency, economic relations with China would continue to develop. (Lim, 2017)

Until late 2008, China’s policy towards Taiwan had been to support the measures of the KMT, a policy they were able to pursue due to their adversarial relationship with the Chen Shui-bian administration and the clashes between Mainland China and Taiwan that occurred during his time in office (Matsuda, 2017). However, after Ma Ying-jeou was elected, a different policy towards Taiwan was needed.

Ma Ying-jeou endorsed the status quo with the slogan “no unification, no independence, and no use of force (*butong, budu, buwu*).” More than anything, Ma Ying-jeou administration concluded that the source of conflict with China during both the latter half of the Lee Teng-hui administration and the entire Chen Shui-bian administration, is the way both administrations dealt with the principle of “one China.” Therefore, the Ma Ying-jeou administration looked to the so-called 1992 Consensus to build a stable relationship with China. (Lim, 2017)



On the election of 2008, Ma Ying-jeou not only won and become the president. But, the KMT won a major victory by large margin. This condition made it possible for Ma administration to change their policy in a bold manner in favor of approaching China. Shortly after he won the election, he said that he want to end the diplomacy war between Taiwan and China and want to increase the relation of both sides. And it turned out that this policy was responded to well by the Chinese, because on 2008 Hu Jintao announced his “Hu’s Six Point” which revealed policies for these new issues. As a result of the policy changes of the Hu Jintao administration, there have been tangible changes to the Cross-Strait Relationship and to Taiwan’s relations with other countries. (Matsuda, 2017)

The tangible manifestation of increased relations between Taiwan and China is a high-level meetings between the Straits Exchange Foundation (Taiwan) and the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits (China). The biggest deal from that meeting is the establishment of “Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement” (ECFA) at the fifth meeting, in Chongqing in June 2010. Since Ma Ying-jeou took the control of the government, there have been already 10 high-level meeting between the both sides. Taiwan’s participation in the international community has also changed. An example of this is that the Taiwanese team was able to participate in the August 2008 Beijing Olympics under their preferred team name. The Taiwanese team has always been referred to in English as “Chinese Taipei.” (Matsuda, 2017)

The Kuomintang Party was the founder of the Republic of China since the establishment of the country after the *Xinhai* Revolution on 1911, they are is the ruler of China until finally their defeat in the Civil War against the Chinese Communist Party which caused them to flee and form a new government in Taiwan. Since the inception of Taiwan, they must immediately think about how they can survive in this world, in their economy or military aspect, because they only possess a very small island compared to the area that they previously controlled in China and that is not their only problem, because Taiwan still must

thinking about the efforts of China to annex Taiwan and include them as part of China, even till now China is still claim Taiwan as part of their province.

The Kuomintang Party decided to use a more soft or friendly approach to maintain and establish their relations with China and the stability of Taiwan Strait. KMT considers that Taiwan has the same identity as China, it can be seen from the support of KMT to “One China Policy”. Rather than focusing on achieving independence, Taiwan also focuses more on fostering good relations with China and conducting various types of cooperation, the unwillingness of the KMT to be independent can be seen from the formed of the 1992 Consensus pioneered by their party politicians, namely Su Chi. This approach from KMT also make China softened and was not too aggressive with Taiwan. Ma further aligned his position what had been Beijing’s long-standing demands stating, in April 2013, that Taipei “does not promote ‘two Chinas,’ ‘one China and one Taiwan,’ or the independence of Taiwan.

## **Conclusion**

Nowadays, the relationship between Taiwan and China or better known as Cross-Strait Relations in the era of Tsai Ing-wen's leadership can be considered a very fragile and tense one. Looking at the past and the fundamental difference of the two prevalent political parties in Taiwan, it is very interesting to know that big changes can occur when a new leader from a different party is elected. In this case the Kuomintang Party and the Progressive Democratic Party. For a long time, the relation between Taiwan and China were very well established under Kuomintang’s rule, even though there had previously been a civil war between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party, there was plenty of cooperation between the two countries in that era. One of the real manifestations is the achievement of the 1992 Consensus and also the "One China Policy" which increasingly makes the two countries more focused on working together.

However, it all changed when Tsai Ing-wen was elected. The DPP from the beginning always stressed that Taiwan is an independent, sovereign state and not part of China so that they indirectly also do not recognize the existence of "One China Policy". Thus, the result of the approach chosen by the DPP resulted in a gap between Taiwan's relations with China, as can be seen on the recent development in the relation of the two nations.

The differing views between the two parties not only led to differences in carrying out politics in the country, but there were also differences in the views of the two parties looking at Taiwan's identity. The KMT Party always believes that there is no difference between China and Taiwan which can be seen from their recognition of "One China Policy". The KMT also did not fight for independence too much for Taiwan because it was seen as only harming themselves. The views on national identity of the DPP are very different, the DPP seeks to create a new identity for Taiwan as one of their forms of struggle for independence. So, the DPP wants Taiwan to leave behind all the old influences or identity from China in Taiwan.

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