

How Not to Play the Blame Game of Cross-Strait Relations

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Cross-Taiwan Straits relations since 1979 : policy adjustment and institutional change across the straits / edited by Kevin G. Cai. - Singapore ; Hackensack : World Scientific, c2011. - xxii, 384 p. - (Series on contemporary China ; 28). - ISBN 978-981428260-4 ; 978-981-4282-61-1(ebk)

The future of United States, China, and Taiwan relations / edited by Cheng-yi Lin and Denny Roy. - New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. - xvii, 245 p. - ISBN 978-0-230-11278-0

Strait talk : United States-Taiwan relations and the crisis with China / Nancy Bernkopf Tucker. - Cambridge ; London : Harvard University Press, 2011 (c2009). - xii, 390 p. : ill. - ISBN 978-0-674-03187-6 ; 978-0-674-06052-4 (pbk)

The discussion of cross-Strait relations is so politicised that it may be impossible for academics to take a neutral stand. No matter how hard they might try, sympathies will always be revealed by signs such as whether they dare to call the elected leader of Taiwan its 'president', or whether the other side of the Taiwan Strait is deemed to be 'China' or

'the mainland'. Maybe the best way to get a balanced view, then, is to compare one book leaning to the pan-Blue side of the political spectrum, that is sympathetic towards the claim that Taiwan is part of China, with one that leans towards the 'pan-Green' preference of seeing the island as a separate nation-state. After that, test the different perspectives against a more conventional historical narrative.

Cross-Taiwan Straits Relations Since 1979, edited by Kevin G. Cai, certainly falls into the first category. Although it contains some chapters by Taiwanese academics, its contributors are mainly scholars from Chinese think tanks and Chinese academics based in the United States. Decidedly more Green is *The Future of United States, China, and Taiwan Relations*, edited by Cheng-yi Lin and Denny Roy, which contains several chapters by Taiwanese academics who have been active in the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Chen Shui-bian administration, as well as by American and European academics who are sympathetic to the Green cause. As for a good historical account, the detailed narrative of Taiwan-US relations that has been produced by Nancy Bernkopf Tucker is hard to beat.

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The best place to start is with the chapter by Yan Anlin (“Cross-Taiwan Strait Relations and Beijing’s Taiwan Policy Adjustment Since 1979”), which opens a section on the perspective from Beijing in the volume edited by Cai. Being one of China’s leading experts on Taiwan, based at the prestigious Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, Yan can be relied on to present the orthodoxy of the Chinese government, according to which all the problems that dog cross-Strait relations can be attributed to Taiwan’s last two presidents, Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian. The latter is singled out for a special degree of demonization, as Yan accuses him of having pursued an “extremist” Taiwan independence policy and a series of “provocative actions”, such as announcing that there is “one state on each side [of the Strait]” and launching referendums on joining the World Health Organisation and the UN. Key actions taken by China during these two presidencies, such as the attempt to influence Taiwan’s first presidential election by shooting missiles toward the island, or the snatching away of one of Taiwan’s few remaining allies, Nauru, just before Chen announced his one state on each side formula are not even mentioned in this version.

An entirely different perspective is presented in the chapter by Jaushieh Joseph Wu in the volume edited by Cheng and Roy (“The United States as a Balancer in Cross-Strait Relations, 2000-2008”). This is not surprising, given that Wu, now an academic, is one of the DPP’s most able thinkers and served in the Chen administration as deputy secretary general to the president, chairman of Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council, and as Taiwan’s ‘representative’ to the United States. According to Wu’s version, it was “China’s hostile actions”, such as its diplomatic offensives,

harsh rhetoric and use of united front tactics to create domestic controversies in Taiwan that were the key factors that raised tensions in the Taiwan Strait. It was this behaviour that forced the Chen administration to seek a stronger position on Taiwan’s national identity in order to raise domestic and international awareness of the island’s precarious situation.

Unlike Yan, Wu also insists that Taiwan’s domestic politics should be the starting point for understanding cross-Strait tensions. This again puts the ball in China’s court, because it was never able to adjust to the reality of a party coming to power in Taiwan that had grown from fighting for local interests against a Kuomintang (KMT) dictatorship that was legitimised by the myth that Taiwan was still fighting for national unification in the unfinished Chinese civil war. Given this nature of the DPP, Chen Shui-bian actually took big risks with his domestic supporters by adopting a moderate and pragmatic policy in his first two years as president. Pressure from China, however, coupled with the way in which the KMT maintained control of parliament and aligned itself with the CCP in 2005, destabilised the government in Taiwan. It was because of this that elections began to focus on issues of national identity and loyalty, which spilled over into China policy and ultimately also had a negative impact on Taiwan’s relations with the United States.

This is not to say that Yan Anlin ignores Taiwan’s domestic political development altogether. He certainly acknowledges that the cooling of cross-Strait relations during the Chen administration was a result of political and social transformation within Taiwan through democratisation and localisation, as well as a rapidly rising sense of Taiwanese identity. But he insists that the

generally negative view of “the mainland” that came to be held by “some Taiwanese” was due to “the vicious provocation of the DPP administration” and that this was “further fuelled by some politicians” (Yan, 31). From this perspective, the formation of the KMT-CCP alliance can be presented as a positive development, because it “broke the spell of localization plotted by the DPP administration and helped people in Taiwan make a more accurate value judgement of the mainland cross-Strait relations” (Yan, 39).

Even the passing of China’s Anti-Secession Law (ASL) in 2005, which codifies the conditions under which military force is to be used against Taiwan, is presented by Yan as intended to “facilitate the development of cross-Strait relations”, “maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan region” and “protect Taiwan compatriots” (Yan, 35). Again, a different view is given in the Chen and Roy volume by John Tkacik of the Heritage Foundation (“The ‘ASL’ as the ‘Anti-TRA’: The Impact of China’s Anti-Secession Law on US Relations with Taiwan”), who explains that this use of legislative mandates for unification is nothing more than a propaganda tool that is derived from the doctrine of ‘Lawfare’ developed by the Chinese military. Tkacik also points out that Chen Shui-bian waited for a year before he responded to the ASL by scrapping the National Unification Guidelines that he had inherited from the KMT government, in the vain hope that the US would live up to its commitments to support Taiwan by reacting firmly to China’s intimidation.

If Wu and Tkacik are right, then clearly it was China that was undertaking “provocative acts” rather than Chen Shui-bian. Their view tends to be supported in a more cautious way in the chapter by George Tsai (“Cross-Taiwan Straits

Relations: Policy Adjustments and Prospects”), one of the few Taiwanese academics included in the Cai volume. Although Tsai accepts that the “ups and downs” in cross-Strait relations were due in some part to “Taiwan’s provocations”, he puts more emphasis on “China’s stubborn stance” (Tsai, 117). He argues that this could have been because Beijing had unrealistic expectations of Lee Teng-hui, only for hostility to be fed by mistrust, and because of the different levels of development between the two sides and Beijing’s heavy-handed approach of isolating Taiwan internationally and threatening to use force if it were to seek *de jure* independence. Although Tsai acknowledges that Chen Shui-bian had no emotional attachment to China, he again points out that the moderate approach to cross-Strait relations that characterised the early part of his presidency and the liberalisation of transactions between the two sides of the Strait that he oversaw, show that he was in fact a realistic politician.

Chen also comes out of the blame game looking relatively good in the historical narrative provided by Bernkopf Tucker, who blames Lee Teng-hui more for the breakdown of trust. Chen thus came into power facing the immediate challenge of not only calming tensions with China but also restoring trust in Washington. Bernkopf Tucker deserves praise, above all, for drawing attention to the organisational and personnel problems that plagued DPP policymaking. She points out that the Americans had to deal with a leader who could barely speak English and had risen to power as a dissident fighting against a KMT dictatorship supported by the United States. The DPP also lacked the KMT’s cosmopolitan elite of diplomats and had to worry about the loyalty of the military. Such matters have received scant

attention from academics until now, and do not feature in the otherwise useful surveys on the institutional structures of decision-making across the Taiwan Strait that are provided by Cai and Wang in the volume edited by Cai (“The Evolution of the Institutional Structure of Beijing’s Taiwan Policy Making Since the Late 1970s” and “The Evolution of the Institutional Structure of Taipei’s Mainland Policy Making Since the 1980s”, respectively). Ultimately, though, Bernkopf Tucker is right to point out that it was the shift in Washington’s strategic priorities after 9/11 that drove Chen to take increasingly desperate measures to resist pressure from China.

Placing the blame for cross-Strait tensions on Chen’s shoulders is clearly useful, however, for anybody who wants to portray his successor, the KMT’s Ma Ying-jeou, as more successful in building cross-Strait economic and cultural transactions. Such is the case with Yan, who hopes that Ma will move towards signing a peace agreement that will formally end the state of hostility across the Strait “on the basis of the one China principle” (Yan, 50). The fact that progress has been painfully slow so far can be explained again by blaming the DPP for using Taiwan’s two-party system to “contain” Ma’s policy by criticizing him for not “loving Taiwan”.

By implying that the DPP has so much power over shaping national identity, however, Yan has to accept that the views promoted by Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian have permeated Taiwanese society to some extent. Interestingly, Bernkopf Tucker makes the same point, albeit from a less politicised perspective, when she argues that “many of the ideas that fuelled Chen’s presidency remained popular afterwards, including assertive sovereignty, access to international organisations, and

pride in Taiwanese identity” (Tucker, 277). George Tsai, too, remarks that “. . . Chen Shui-bian boasted that his greatest achievement was to have dragged the Blue Camp to the Green Camp side” (Tsai, 124). He also notes how Chinese academics tend to be shocked when they discover that even the KMT has had to start to accept the DPP’s stance and ideology (Tsai, 136).

That Yan Anlin has to accept that Taiwan’s population has steadily drifted away from identification with China illustrates the difficult challenge that faces Chinese academics who want to argue in support of Beijing’s working for unification by increasing transactions between the two sides of the Strait. This can be seen in a chapter on economic relations in the Cai volume (“Economic Relations Across the Taiwan Straits and Beijing’s Policy of Adjustment”) by Sun Shenliang of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which boldly claims that Ma can benefit from Beijing’s policy of promoting economic links, which is designed to unite and win over the business community of Taiwan for “creating conditions for the reunification of the motherland” (Sun, 72), only to then admit that Taiwan’s export dependence on China experienced its highest growth rate during the eight years of the “self-isolation” policy of the Chen administration. He is left dismissing the political significance of this by the somewhat inscrutable observation that Chen’s liberalisation measures “were adopted only passively in response to what had happened before” (Sun, 82–3).

Although Sun has no doubts that Ma won the presidency in 2008 largely because Beijing’s economic policy “won over the hearts and minds of the people” (Sun, 83), he leaves no room for complacency when he accepts that there are limits to

the benefits that Taiwan can expect from economic integration. This is due to structural factors, such as the fact that the service sector now accounts for 70 percent of Taiwan's GDP and Taiwanese manufacturing firms are starting to relocate from China to Southeast Asia. Similar caution can be found in Yang Jian's chapter ("Non-governmental Exchanges Across the Taiwan Straits and Beijing's Policy Stance since the 1980s") on non-governmental exchanges across the Strait in the same volume. He expresses the hope that market forces can break through the political restrictions on cross-Straits non-governmental exchanges by Ma Ying-jeou's principles of 'no unification, no independence, no use of force', but warns that these are "far from sufficient to help form a new common identity across the Straits" (Yang, 111).

The Taiwanese academics included in the Cai volume also find it difficult to deal with the fact that the strengthening of the Taiwanese identity occurred while the Chen administration vastly expanded cross-Strait transactions. Liou To-hai, of Taiwan's National Chengchi University ("Cross-Taiwan Straits Economic Relations and the ECFA"), does not seem to realise this when he acknowledges that an unprecedented increase in cross-Strait trade and investment took place between 2000 and 2008, but then goes on to argue that all Ma has to do now is to "pragmatically take advantage of China's soft diplomacy and build a cross-Straits peaceful coexistence mechanism through economic interactions" (Liou, 178). His remark that "one of the features of Taiwan's mainland China policy is that government policy is always secondary to the cross-Straits business operations of Taiwanese enterprises" (Liou, 179) might also raise a warning for those who are concerned about the way in which

China was able to help secure Ma Ying-jeou's 2012 presidential victory by using the influence of Taiwanese business people based on the mainland.

George Tsai is more sensitive to the political implications of such a strategy when he warns that Beijing should not expect too much of the united front it has forged with the KMT. He is even more astute when he points out that some people in China's inner policy circles even see Ma's call for a "diplomatic truce" and more international space for Taiwan as making him dangerously similar to Chen Shui-bian. He also warns Beijing may not be pushing the debate over whether China should be treated as an enemy, threat or opportunity in the direction it desires when it humiliates Taiwan through actions that make its participation in international organisations appear to depend on Beijing's mercy, such as limiting its membership of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to one year at a time. If China really wants to have any hope of shaping the growing sense of Taiwanese consciousness, he argues, it would do better by taking limited but concrete steps such as initiating confidence-building measures (CBMs) to reduce its military threat and being willing to sign a peace accord without insisting on using terms like 'unification' and 'one China' and declaring opposition to Taiwanese independence.

Even though the Taiwanese authors in the Cai volume tend towards the Blue camp, it is notable that they are at one in saying that a key test for Beijing will be whether it allows Taiwan to break out of its growing economic isolation by signing FTAs with other states. Lee Ming, writing on the "diplomatic truce" between the two sides ("Cross-Taiwan Straits Relations and Ma Ying-jeou's Policy of Diplomatic Truce"), reinforces this point by quoting

the view of Ma's foreign minister that China's response to Taiwan's bid for more international space will be a barometer for future relations. Even though Lee is relatively upbeat in his assessment of progress so far, pointing to achievements like Beijing's decision not to take away any more of Taiwan's diplomatic allies and Taiwan's improved relations with the EU, Japan and the US over issues such as visa waivers, he too is aware that people are concerned about the possibility of China starting to impose increasingly tight conditions for such concessions.

Again, it is Tsai who explores this dilemma for China's policy further, when he argues that the trend of increasing numbers of people supporting Taiwanese independence (or at least not opposing it) shows that the policy of 'mutual non-denial' will not be enough to postpone the addressing of highly sensitive political, military and symbolic sovereignty issues indefinitely. Yet, given that Ma has promised not to engage in political talks, his proposals for a way forward are limited to taking steps to increase mutual trust and understanding such as second and third track dialogues and research. He hopes that this will lead to better definitions of the contents, processes and sequences required for CBMs to start and for a peace agreement to be penned, and even for the creation of "a sense of common fate, shared values and shared history between the two sides in the common people" (Tsai, 154).

The one conclusion that can be drawn from all of the contributions to these two volumes is that cross-Strait relations may appear to have been stable since Ma came to power, but the underlying dynamics that drive tensions and mistrust have yet to be addressed. Reading these two volumes alongside Bernkopf Tucker's history also heightens awareness of the dangers of

using terms such as 'provocation' to describe Chen Shui-bian's actions, a tendency that can be found as much in the chapter by an American commentator like Denny Roy ("The U.S.–China–Taiwan Relationship: New Circumstances, Persistent Challenges") as in the work of observers from Chinese think tanks. Particularly noteworthy in this respect is Cheng-yi Lin's exploration of how the notion of a 'status quo' is defined differently in Taiwan, China and the United States ("A Status Quo with Different Interpretations: Taiwan, China, the United States, and Security in the Taiwan Strait"), with Bernkopf Tucker again providing an enlightening overview of how the term's meaning has shifted over time in Washington's discourse.

Greater awareness of how key terms are used should be important for deciding who wins the debate in Washington over the commitment to Taiwan's security, which is likely to intensify as Ma Ying-jeou approaches the end of his second and last presidential term in 2016. In this respect, Michael Pillsbury ("US Debates About Taiwan's Security, 1979–2009"), provides a reassuring perspective when he finishes the Cheng and Roy volume by showing that this debate has been through two peaks already, first when Sino-US relations were normalised in 1979 and then again in 1999, when Bill Clinton tried to repair relations with Beijing after the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. Bernkopf Tucker goes further by explaining that there has never been a time when this debate did not take place in Washington. This provides an interesting counterpoint to the belief of Chinese experts like Yan Anlin that cross-Strait rapprochement "will likely worry the US and Japan" (Yan, 45). Many in Taiwan must be hoping that this is indeed the case.