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The Political Thinking of the Mainland *Taishang*: Some Preliminary Observations from the Field

Gunter Schubert

Abstract: This article explores the political thinking of Taiwanese business people (*taishang*) and factory managers (*taigan*) on the Chinese mainland by drawing on qualitative data gathered between 2006 and 2008 in the Pearl River Delta and the Shanghai/ Kunshan metropolitan area. An ideal type of *taishang* is constructed to explain the major features of their identification with Taiwan, their perspectives on cross-Strait relations, their integration in Chinese society and their self-assessment as political actors in the shaping of cross-Strait relations. An important finding of this study is that the *taishang* is a rather apolitical figure who does not see much leeway to develop autonomous political leverage. However, this may change gradually as cross-Strait relations have eased significantly since the Kuomintang (KMT) (Guomindang) came to power in mid-2008 and the governments in Beijing and Taibei have experienced a rapprochement.

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Keywords: Taiwan, *taishang*, cross-Strait relations, cross-Strait integration, Taiwanese Business Associations

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Introduction

The long-term residence of a rising number of Taiwanese business people (*taishang*) and factory managers (*taigan*) in the People's Republic of China (PRC) together with their spouses and children has become a striking phenomenon with regard to cross-Strait relations over the last decade. Whereas many of the "first-generation" entrepreneurs who invested in China in the late 1980s and early 1990s – mainly in labour-intensive enterprises along the Pearl River Delta (*zhu san jiao*) – still commuted between Taiwan and the mainland, many of their predecessors have chosen to stay in China on a permanent basis. The motivation for this cross-Strait migration is basically economic. Rapid structural changes in Taiwan's economy, along with new opportunities on the Chinese market, have made it increasingly imperative for Taiwan's entrepreneurs to expand their business activities on the mainland. At the same time, many *taishang* are forced to remain close to their factories to survive in this difficult environment. Certain locally based actions have become indispensable, such as quick decision-making and problem-solving, learning to adapt to new laws and regulations, and permanent moves to establish and maintain good relations with local government and party cadres (*zuo guanxi*). Moreover, the tightening labour market in Taiwan has been inducing a growing number of young people to turn to China in pursuit of employment, careers and perhaps even fortunes – all objectives that are no longer easily attainable on the island itself. Meanwhile, Jiangsu province, or more precisely the Shanghai-Kunshan-Suzhou metropolitan area (*da san jiang*), has become a new centre of Taiwanese investment, mostly attracting high-end and high-tech ventures. This area now hosts a community of "Taiwanese compatriots" (*taibao* – the official designation for the Taiwanese in the PRC) – with more than 500,000 members by some accounts. Although exact figures remain elusive, other claims, especially from voices in the Taiwanese media, estimate the total number of *taibao* currently living on the mainland at roughly one million.

The *taishang* are not only one of the major forces driving mainland China's economic development and integration in the world market, with probable investments of more than 150 billion USD in the region to date. They have also arguably become a key constituency in the shaping of cross-Strait relations. Some general ideas on the political role of the *taishang* have been discussed by Taiwan scholars in recent years, though with little empirical substantiation. Keng (2005), Keng and Lin (2005) and Keng and Schubert (forthcoming) have introduced a four-

dimensional typology to put this discussion into perspective, thereby presenting arguments to characterize the *taishang* in their varying roles as hostages, agents, partners and lobbyists. This framework was designed to systematize the current assumptions on the political implications of *taishang* migration to the mainland and on the putative agency that Taiwanese business people might be developing in the ongoing process of cross-Strait integration. Drawing on empirical data gathered in a series of field studies conducted in the Pearl River Delta and the Shanghai-Kunshan metropolitan area between 2006 and 2008 (cf. below), this article[1] intends to substantiate the suggested typology with empirical data and, in particular, shed more light on the political thinking of the *taishang*.

Taiwanese business people have often been described as potential victims of China's Taiwan policy, especially in times of cross-Strait tension. The PRC government, it is held, would then target the *taishang* to hit Taiwan's economy and reign in any "independence-minded" government on the island (Niou, Ordeshook, and Tan 1992; Wu 1994; Leng 1998a; Gang et al. 2004; Cheng 2005; Chan 2006; Qiu 2008). At the same time, in Taiwan, the *taishang* have been repeatedly accused of selling out their country's interests by channelling their investment capital to the mainland and appeasing the Beijing government for their own benefit, hence undermining Taiwan's sovereignty and security. These viewpoints have mainly been expressed within the Pan-Green camp and figured prominently in the 2008 Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential campaign. Nevertheless, others in Taiwan view the Taiwanese business people working in the PRC with a good deal of sympathy as they link them to increasing interaction and integration across the Taiwan Strait and thus to greater economic opportunities for the island. They are also seen as important political agents who might facilitate constructive cross-Strait dialogue since they have important contacts to local Chinese governments and, depending on their individual standing, even to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership. Seen from this perspective,

1 This article stems from a joint project directed by the author and Prof. Keng Shu of the Graduate Institute of East Asian Studies at National Chengchi-University, Taibei, who has meanwhile taken a position at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics.. We are grateful to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange for its generous support of this project.

the *taishang* are an important asset for any Taiwanese government in the shaping of peaceful cross-Strait relations.[2]

During Chen Shui-bian's (Chen Shuibian) presidency (2000-2008), the mainland *taishang* became a major bone of contention in domestic Taiwanese politics. Since the KMT takeover in May 2008, this has changed considerably, although there still seems to be much uncertainty in Taiwan – particularly in the Pan-Green camp – as to what extent the *taishang* can be trusted to safeguard the island republic's fundamental interests. A critical degree of economic independence from the mainland often tops this list. Given this background, it is surprising how little is known among both Chinese and Western scholars about the political thinking of Taiwan's entrepreneurs and managers working and residing in China. Apart from numerous media reports and a few academic articles largely based on assumptions rather than sound empirical data, there has not been one systematic study on this subject to date. Most research on Taiwan's mainland *taishang* has focused on economic issues, such as investment and business strategies, and related structural problems that Taiwanese companies face on the mainland (e.g. Leng 1998b, 2002, 2005; Chen 2005), while the development of specific mainland localities or regions exposed to Taiwanese entrepreneurship has also been subject to some scrutiny (e.g. Zhang 1996; Chuan 2002; Zhang 2006; Zhu 2006). Moreover, there have been a fair amount of studies on the political economy resulting from *taishang* activities in mainland China, many of which examine the interaction between the *taishang* and local governments, and on network-building between Taiwanese and Chinese entrepreneurs (e.g. Hsing 1996; Wu 1997; Tian 1999; Huang 2003; Lee 2008). The development of Taiwanese business associations in China has also received some attention (Schak 2003; Lin 2004; Keng and Lin 2007). Finally, Taiwanese scholars have recently focused on various other issues concerning cross-Strait migration, including the social interaction of *taishang*/ *taibao* and mainland Chinese residents, the transnational identity formation of different Taiwanese émigré groups, including the *taishang* (Deng 2005; Lin 2006; Keng 2007; Lin and Keng 2008), labour relations

2 This is certainly the mainstream opinion within the Pan-Blue camp led by the KMT. Hundreds of Taiwanese business people participate in the Cross-Strait Economic Forum, an annual event held since 2005 when the top echelon of CCP and KMT politicians met for the first time since the end of the Chinese Civil War and agreed to arrange for regular consultations. Regarding the latest Forum held in Changsha, Hunan province in July 2009 (*Xinhua* 2009).

in Taiwanese companies on the mainland (Deng 2002), the domestic consequences of cross-Strait marriages, and even the famous *er nai* problem, i.e. the extramarital relationships between many *taishang* and mainland Chinese women (Shen 2005). Most of the recent research, however, has barely dealt with the political aspects of the *taishang*'s role on the mainland with regard to cross-Strait relations.

Thus, a detailed investigation into the political mindsets of these actors is long overdue. The politics of cross-Strait relations is certainly a highly sensitive topic that sparks some reticence among the *taishang* (and awkwardness among mainland authorities when presented as a topic of scholarly investigation). The *taishang* prefer to disconnect politics from economics in order to avoid potential negative fallout for their business operations that might arise from any personal positioning in the "minefields" of cross-Strait relations, national identity and Taiwan's independence. Nevertheless, this article sheds light on the perspectives of the *taishang* with regard to some of the most salient and controversial issues in Taiwanese domestic politics and Sino-Taiwanese relations. Moreover, it investigates how they define their political role – if any – in the cross-Strait conflict. The answers to these questions provide us with clues to help us understand the self-conception of the *taishang* in a reality characterized by growing integration between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, but also – notwithstanding the results of the March 2008 presidential elections and the return to power of a so-called pro-China party – by continuing dissent in Taiwan proper with respect to the future political status of the island republic and its eventual relationship to China. Knowing how the *taishang* think helps us to understand what kind of political agency they might develop in cross-Strait relations if the opportunity should happen to arise.

As will be seen, identifying the *taishang* (or *taibao*) with either strong support for unification or a unidimensional preference for windfall profits over any concern for the protection of Taiwan's democratic achievements or sovereignty, as is often claimed in Taiwan by pro-independence observers and activists, produces a flawed and oversimplified picture that does not do justice to the worldview of the *taishang* or to the complex reality of cross-Strait relations either. The pragmatism of Taiwanese business people on the mainland is driven as much by economic interest as their confidence to combine their Chinese and Taiwanese identities successfully to get the best of both worlds, i.e. prosperity and freedom on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

It hardly makes sense to speak of a homogeneous "group" of actors in this case. The *taishang* differ not only with respect to their socio-economic origin and status, the content of their business activities, their age and their initial arrival on the mainland, but also – and this is closely related to the factors just mentioned – in their political views and perspectives. To address this complexity, I shall begin by constructing an ideal type of *taishang*. Although this approach is problematic from a methodological viewpoint, it presents an adequate means to begin structuring our qualitative data and stimulate further debate on the political significance of these actors in evolving cross-Strait relations.

After a brief note on the methodology applied, in the remaining sections of this article I shall present some observations and preliminary conclusions drawn from our data and formulate some hypotheses to guide future research.

Remarks on Methodology

Qualitative data for this study was gathered in 2006 and 2007 during three separate trips to Dongguan City in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong province and the Shanghai-Kunshan metropolitan area, complemented by a number of interviews held in Taiwan itself in March 2008, just before the latest presidential elections held on 20 March that year. The first field trip to both localities in March and April 2006 was largely exploratory and paved the way for more systematic interviews in the later round of field studies conducted in August 2006 and August and September 2007. In Taiwan, we spoke with a number of *taishang/ taigan* who do business in China, but do not reside there on a permanent basis and hence are Taiwan-based. We conducted interviews based on a semi-standardized questionnaire that we set up before our first visit and revised thereafter.[3] This article draws on data from 35 Taiwanese entrepreneurs (*taishang*) and factory managers (*taigan*),[4] although our interviews were not solely limited to these two groups.[5] However, for this

3 See Appendix Ia. Data gathered from the second part of this questionnaire is not integrated in this article.

4 For background information concerning our respondents, see Appendix II.

5 All in all, we interviewed some 50 *taishang/ taigan*, but also a fair number of their spouses (some of them from the mainland) and children, and even a few mainland Chinese girlfriends of married *taishang*, colloquially termed *er nai* ("second milk") in Chinese. Moreover, we talked to cadres of the local Taiwan Affairs Offices (*taiban*)

article, I only considered those interviews that were the most comprehensive and systematic concerning the issues at stake: national identity, cross-Strait relations and the self-perceived political role of the *taishang*. Moreover, data related to the *taishang*'s perception of their lives on the mainland is also included as this information supplements an understanding of their political perspectives.

Research of this sort can prove to be tricky due to the politically sensitive nature of the topic and, moreover, the great caution practised by the *taishang*, stemming from fears of repercussions on the mainland. At the beginning of our first field study, we located respondents with the help of our own acquaintances in the Taiwanese business community who introduced us to their local *taishang* friends. "Snowballing" our way forward, we met more *taishang* who were willing to talk to us, although some of them withdrew their readiness on learning the content of the interviews. It therefore became necessary to return to some of our interviewees during our following visits, among them renowned *taishang* representatives in terms of personal reputation and institutional influence – most notably a top official at one of the local Taiwanese business associations (TBAs) – in order to build up more trust and thus gain better access to the field.

Our interviews, which usually lasted between one and two hours, and sometimes much longer, could be characterized on the whole as candid and relatively casual. Most of our respondents spoke at length about their business operations, while providing relatively circumspect answers to our more pointed questions. Quite often, much of our interview time involved lengthy "factual" descriptions. On our part, we never touched directly on the more "political" questions that we wanted to pose, but instead began by engaging each of our respondents in an informed discussion about his or her business and company-related problems. By taking this approach, it was clearly unlikely that we would receive answers to all of our questions since many of the respondents shied away from certain – although often different – issues, and we chose not to push them too hard for answers. Our data pool is therefore incomplete, as is made clear in Appendix Ib.[6] Many of the following

in Dongguan and Kunshan and to Chinese researchers dealing with cross-Strait economic issues in Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Shanghai.

6 We have rigorously standardized our respondents' answers in the sense that only those containing clear statements on the issue discussed have been integrated in the

statements and assessments are consequently based on the overall impression gained from our interviews and hence are not always convincingly supported by the restricted quantitative data documented in the appendix. However, the following analysis should provide an initial empirical basis for understanding the political thinking of the *taishang* and their potential significance for the shaping of cross-Strait relations.

Taishang Survey Data – Preliminary Observations

Identification with Taiwan

Most of our respondents were still very (63 per cent) or at least somewhat (26 per cnet) interested in Taiwan's domestic politics and claimed to follow the island's political developments regularly and attentively. They subscribed to Taiwanese newspapers and journals (often more than one), received Taiwanese TV channels via satellite and claimed to discuss Taiwanese politics among themselves. At the same time, the large majority of our respondents reported little interest in Chinese television programmes, which they found to be "boring" or even "stupid". Even though the *taishang* criticized the Taiwanese media, especially television, as too superficial, too commercialized or too biased vis-à-vis the mainland, in the end these sources were more acceptable to them than mainland TV programmes and newspaper journalism.

Most interviewees (86 per cent) stated that they regularly return to Taiwan for important national elections (such as the 2008 presidential elections). Even if they criticized Taiwanese party politics and the island's polarized political culture, many of our respondents insisted on the importance of their individual votes. This confirms the relatively strong concern of the mainland *taishang* for Taiwanese domestic politics and its impact on the development of cross-Strait relations. Surprisingly enough, in explaining the reasons for their political engagement, our respondents did not address the domestic controversy that had sprung up prior to the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections regarding the quantitative significance of the *taishang* who returned to cast their votes. Indeed, we met very few people who felt that the *taishang* vote had a strong impact in numerical terms. Instead, voting was viewed as a necessity in

table in Appendix Ib. Therefore, the different sub-samples remain very small in most of the cases.

order to express one's support for Taiwan's democracy, one's disdain for the DPP regime (as most of our respondents appeared to be Pan-Blue voters),[7] or one's hope for a new (KMT) government that would provide for more stable and economically advantageous relations over the Taiwan Strait. However, those few respondents who reported that they did not return to Taiwan for elections were also very negative towards the democratic system; they viewed Taiwanese politics as "corrupt" and the island's politicians as "hypocritical". This group revealed a deep-seated alienation from Taiwanese politics in general and from the DPP government in particular.[8] It must be emphasized at this juncture that we did not find evidence that those respondents who denied any inclination to participate in important Taiwanese elections and expressed disregard for Taiwanese politics instead felt an increased identification with mainland China's political system. Frustration with Taiwanese politics obviously did not produce advocates of one-party rule.

In many cases, our respondents stressed that they seldom spoke openly about their political preferences as this could endanger their business operations and destroy the tacit consensus between the *taishang* and the local authorities that all is well as long as politics is left aside and the official party line on the status of Taiwan remains unscathed. This may imply that at least some of the *taishang* were Pan-Green supporters as this allegiance would pose no risk based on public advocacy of the KMT's pro-China policies or self-identification as KMT voters. Moreover, there are many rumours among the Taiwanese business people on the mainland that the Chinese authorities are well informed about the political affiliations and credentials of most *taishang* (especially those leading big companies). The authorities are also said to be familiar with past supporters of the Pan-Green camp, financial contributors to the DPP and, in broad terms, who backs which policies in Taiwan. Hence, it is preferable to (falsely) claim political allegiance to the KMT rather than none at all.

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7 Our respondents rarely exposed their party affiliation, and most of them who did so claimed to support the KMT. None of our respondents claimed to be a DPP supporter.

8 Not one respondent commented positively on the DPP government, while many fiercely attacked the Chen administration (or Chen Shui-bian himself) for its political ignorance and deleteriousness with regard to the development of cross-Strait relations.

Our enquiry into the self-ascribed identity[9] of the mainland *taishang* produced a multifaceted picture. It seemed to us that some of our respondents oscillated between different conceptions of their identity, and no clear profile took shape when we looked at the whole sample. While nine out of twenty-two *taishang* identified most strongly as "Taiwanese" (*Taiwanren*), four defined themselves as "Chinese" (*Zhongguoren*) and four more opted for "both Taiwanese and Chinese". Two interviewees avoided choosing between these categories and stated that they were *Huaren*, thus expressing their resistance to accepting the other terms, which were too political in their eyes. Finally, three respondents said that their identity was not very clear-cut, but instead shifted according to the circumstances. Interestingly, many of those respondents who made a choice between "Taiwanese" and "Chinese" were rather circumspect in their style of argumentation and ambivalent in their responses, which reinforced our overall impression of the "negotiated identity" cultivated by most Taiwanese business people. The following statements are fairly representative of the stances taken by our respondents:

> I feel that I'm a Taiwanese from mainland China whose culture is different from the mainlanders'. I like to spend time with my fellow Taiwanese. I like to shop in Taiwanese stores. And as long as the boss in our company is Taiwanese, there's a feeling of closeness (*qinqiegan*) among the Taiwanese staff (R13).

> I consider myself Chinese, but saying this, it's clear the PRC can't represent China completely. If foreigners ask me, I say I come from Taiwan; if I said 'ROC', only a few people would understand (R30).

> There's no conflict between being Chinese or Taiwanese. When I talk to foreigners, I say I'm a Mainlander (*daluren*) coming from Taiwan (sic!), just to prevent them from thinking I'm a Communist. I myself think that I'm both Taiwanese and Chinese, but certainly not a Chinese mainlander (*dalu de Zhongguoren*). At the end of the day, both sides of the Taiwan Strait have been separated for several decades, so they're rather different (R16).

> It all depends on who you're talking to. In Taiwan they'd say that I'm a Mainlander. Here they'd say that I'm Taiwanese. Among themselves, the Mainlanders would say they're Chinese. If you asked this question

9 We did not make a specific distinction between "personal identity" (*shenfen rentong*) and "political" or "national identity" (*guojia rentong*) in our questionnaire to give our respondents as much space for their own definition and explanation of their identities as possible.

in Taiwan, the *bendiren* would say that they're Taiwanese and the Mainlanders would say they're Chinese. Before the handover, the people in Hong Kong thought of themselves as *Xianggangren* as they distinguished themselves from China when the economy was still strong. However, as Hong Kong's economy became more and more dependent on the Chinese mainland, they'd say that they were Chinese. In terms of blood relations, we're all Chinese – just Chinese governed by different parties (R9).

If I'm asked in Taiwan, I say that I'm Chinese (*Zhongguoren*). If I'm asked here, I first look to see who I'm talking to. This is a matter of politeness (sic!). Even now, both sides still don't agree on the issue. In Taiwan, half of the people continue to want independence. So if we *taishang* are confronted with this problem, we have to think about who we're talking to. If a foreigner asks me, though, I say I come from Taiwan. It all depends on the situation (R28).

If people from Shanghai ask me, I tell them I'm Taiwanese (*Taiwanren*). There's a difference in the way we and the Chinese lead our lives. When I'm abroad, I tell everybody I'm Taiwanese, but I add that my ancestors were from China (R25).

If local mainland Chinese ever ask me about my identity, I either tell them I'm Chinese or from southern China (*Zhongguo nanfangren*). In this case, I'm cautious. If foreigners ask me, I tell them that I'm Taiwanese. Taiwan is a regional concept (*diqu gainian*); it isn't a concept of statehood (*guojia gainian*) (R4).

We're all *huaren*! Considering our history and culture, I'm Chinese, but with respect to geography, I'm Taiwanese. […] Right now, the living standards on both sides are too different, so we Taiwanese would feel dragged along by China. Once these standards are equal, though, there'll be no reason to resist unification any more.

I was born in Taiwan, but my ancestors came from the mainland. If foreigners ever ask me, I say I'm from Taiwan – a *huaren*. The real Taiwanese are the island's aboriginal inhabitants; all the others come from the mainland. […] The word *huaren* isn't restricted to a place, so I'm Taiwanese and also a member of the *huaren* (*huaren de Taiwanren*) (R34).

We're all *huaren*. But I'd still often say that I'm Taiwanese. When I'm on the mainland and say that I'm Chinese, the Chinese are so astonished, they're speechless as this means I'm a native. I think we should name ourselves *huaren*. Saying "Chinese" or "Taiwanese" doesn' seem to be an option (R32).

I'm a Chinese Taiwanese (*Zhongguo de Taiwanren*) (R5).

For the *taishang* residing on the mainland – or in Taiwan with frequent business trips to China – a "situational identity" can be said to have emerged, which most of our respondents appear to have internalized. Judging from most statements, the *taishang* adjust their identities to the different contexts, to the areas where they live or are required to position themselves in. In China, they would, if forced to answer, claim to be Chinese from Taiwan, suggesting that Taiwan is an integral part of China, though not always expressing the latter explicitly. Asked by foreigners, however, they would say they come from Taiwan to accentuate a difference between them and the mainland Chinese, usually invoking some degree of cultural superiority. Only in Taiwan, as a *bendiren*, would it go without saying that a straightforward statement that one is Taiwanese is likely to be the norm, although most *taishang* try to distance themselves from the ideological battle over national identity. As a matter of fact, most of the *taishang* we interviewed believed that identity should not be an issue at all. Our respondents were often reluctant to utter any opinion (as the incomplete sample of just twenty-two listed answers suggests) and thought it was unnecessary or useless to think about the identity issue too much. In the end, as many of them said explicitly, their lives were all about business, free passage between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, and friendly relations between everyone on the mainland and Taiwan. Most of our interviewees, as it seemed to us, felt it was fine to be called Chinese, not only in terms of strategic thinking, but also as an identity that spans or ought to span the China-Taiwan divide. The *taishang* regard themselves as being part of a cosmos that – from their perspective – does not necessarily need to be politicized.[10]

Perspectives on Cross-Strait Relations

Asked for their opinion on the current state of cross-Strait relations, the great majority of our respondents (87.5 per cent) subscribed to the descriptor "unstable", with only one interviewee qualifying them as stable. This does not sound very surprising, given the sharp confrontation over

10 Most *taishang* stated that their opinion on the identity issue had not changed in the course of their residence on the mainland, and it seemed that their "situational identity" was rather stable. However, these impressions require further research, especially since the political context has changed a great deal since the takeover of a new KMT government in Taiwan in mid-2008.

the Taiwan Strait during Chen Shui-bian's (Chen Shuibian) second period of administration. However, our respondents did not seem to be particularly uneasy about these tensions, which most of them thought would not directly impinge on their mainland operations. This was much more the case, they claimed, with China's legal reforms – most notably concerning customs and employment – and the steady rise of production costs that these entailed. When asked more precisely about how the political climate surrounding the Taiwan Strait impacted their investments, our respondents became rather vague. They seemed quite detached from cross-Strait politics at the national level, although deeply entangled in pragmatic problem-solving at the local one. Many *taishang* – perhaps most of them – were not very preoccupied with (or worried about) the state of cross-Strait relations, although all of them would agree that smooth relations are conducive to the overall business climate.

All those who replied to this question emphasized that direct links across the Taiwan Strait would benefit Taiwan, and they would not increase the island's economic dependence on the Chinese mainland to a dangerous level. Moreover, our respondents did not seem to understand why trade dependence should be a problem at all. On the one hand, direct links were of practical significance for the *taishang* as travel and transport costs are substantially lower, helping their businesses to become more competitive in an increasingly difficult Chinese market. On the other hand, economic integration across the Taiwan Strait was seen as the only way for Taiwan to survive in the era of global capitalism. The *taishang* we interviewed thought overwhelmingly in terms of a common Chinese market in which Taiwan would still be able to make strategic use of comparative advantages for a long time to come, especially in R&D. Some of our respondents pointed out that they would probably repatriate more profits and reinvest in Taiwan if the free flow of people, goods and capital were guaranteed. Others, however, were so pessimistic about the future of Taiwan that they attributed very little importance to an eventual establishment of the "three links", i.e. direct transport, trade, and communication between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. These respondents felt that it was already "too late" for Taiwan's economy and they saw the island on an irreversible path to isolation, poverty and social decay.

Our respondents' viewpoints on the best option for a future political agreement between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait were quite different. Ten out of sixteen respondents (63 per cent) supported the so-

called status quo, whereas six (37.5 per cent) favoured unification; one of these six favoured a union created by the implementation of the "one country, two systems" model. As could be expected, none of the respondents claimed to support Taiwan's independence. Although one cannot dismiss the possibility that these statements were influenced by the interview situation and the political sensitivity of the issue at stake, our impression was that most of our respondents thought that the *tongdu* issue was anachronistic. For them, relations between Taiwan and China should be depoliticized and placed completely at the service of cross-Strait economic interaction. In the eyes of most of these *taishang*, there was simply no point in claiming independence as this would run counter to the inevitable trend of cross-Strait integration and thus only harm Taiwan:

> Independence doesn't make sense. After independence, the Taiwanese market would still be too small. Do you want to do business with poor people or with rich people? Unification must be conditioned, of course, because it would increase the size of the market considerably. But without unification your options are limited. […] Taiwan will only gain in competitiveness if the interaction between the two sides increases (R31).

The best strategy for politicians on both sides of the Taiwan Strait was seen in avoiding the sovereignty issue in the first place and focusing all efforts on trade liberalization and cross-Strait co-operation, which would then facilitate any future political agreements. To some extent, this attitude confirms reproaches by many Pan-Green supporters in Taiwan as to the *taishang*'s lack of patriotism. For our respondents, however, patriotism does not translate as Taiwanese nationalism. "A *taishang* does not have a motherland" was a statement repeated by our respondents, one which highlights their transnational orientation and longing for open borders and greater government support for their undertakings. Pragmatism and cosmopolitism may thus be the most striking features of the mainland *taishang*'s political thinking – a stance that questions both the unification and independence ideologies in contemporary Taiwan.

At the same time, all of our respondents claimed that the *taishang* helped to foster and stabilize cross-Strait relations through their economic activities. Many of those we interviewed were clearly taken aback when confronted with the (pan-green) suspicion or accusation of "selling out" Taiwan, meaning that by shifting all their capital to the mainland, they would hollow out the Taiwanese economy and weaken Taiwan's

political morale. Obviously, for most *taishang* it is their investments on the mainland that have helped a politically and economically isolated Taiwan to stay alive for so long, and they think it is deeply unfair to blame them for Taiwan's current problems. Our respondents deplored the lack of resonance concerning their suggestions in Taiwan proper on issues of how to revitalize the Taiwanese economy and capitalize on their access to and familiarity with the mainland market; Taiwan, as our interviewees repeatedly stated, was missing out on a big opportunity by ignoring the *taishang*:

> Taiwan worries that the *taishang* serve the mainland, but as a matter of fact, we only focus on earning money. And how could we become involved in cross-Strait politics? How would the Taiwanese government ever listen to us "little business people"? (R13).

> Coming to mainland China and investing here means loving Taiwan even more, because we are the ones who are responsible for Taiwan's trade surplus, who make it possible for Taiwan's economy to continue (R21).

> The *taishang* would never sell Taiwan out. But Taiwan will never let the *taishang* gain an important position in the process of globalization. It wasn't easy for the *taishang* to get where they are now with their parents arguing like this. It's very important to make your father and mother stop arguing, because then the *taishang* will be able to bring a big economic profit home to Taiwan. If the *taishang* hadn't violated the law in the past, Taiwan wouldn't be enjoying such a huge trade surplus now regarding China. If you did away with the mainland's *taishang*, Taiwan would quickly suffer from a deficit […] In the past, the *taishang* were all orientated towards Taiwan. Even if they were hurting it, they still cared about Taiwan. But certain political parties called the *taishang* traitors. Taiwan needs more self-confidence and shouldn't claim that the *taishang* who came to the mainland are harming Taiwan. In fact, Taiwan can only grow stronger if we're here (R9).

Mainland Life

Concerning our respondents' experiences and viewpoints on their (and their families') integration in mainland China's society, we came across a very varied picture here as well. 74 per cent felt there were many or at least significant differences between the Taiwanese and the local Chinese people. Many more respondents expressed a certain distance to their mainland environs or even felt that strong differences existed between

the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese, as opposed to those who claimed relations with the mainland Chinese were amicable and even close and that the integration (*rongru*, *dangdihua*) of the *taibao* in China was a smooth process. The following statement reflecting a *taishang*'s thinking about the way in which Taiwanese business people in the PRC are perceived by the mainland Chinese is a typical one:

> How do Mainlanders look on us Taiwanese? Well, Mainlanders think that the activities of the *taishang* here are eating, drinking, whoring and gambling, and that they know how to earn money. What they can do best, though, is cheating people. Mainlanders don't make friends with the Taiwanese; on the contrary, there are people in high-level positions here who disdain them (R16).

There seems to be a widespread belief among the *taishang* that their acceptance by the mainland Chinese is shaky at best.[11] Interestingly, some respondents pointed out that the mainland Chinese distinguish between different generations of *taishang*. As one respondent (R27) noted, the first generation of Taiwanese business people, viz. those who came to China in the 1980s and early 1990s, stirred up many negative feelings among the locals. Their attitudes towards the mainlanders were often condescending and, as he recalled, they were only interested in earning money. Of even more importance to this respondent was the fact that many of those first-generation *taishang* failed on the mainland market and became so-called *tailiu*, i.e. jobless, impoverished *taishang* who are supposedly the most despised group of Taiwanese in the eyes of Chinese mainlanders. It was the *tailiu* who damaged the reputation of their predecessors, even that of the second-generation *taishang* who started to arrive in the mid-1990s and have been much more successful in the Chinese economy than earlier generations.

Overall, many respondents emphasized that the mainland Chinese respected the *taishang* for their business skills and the economic opportunities they brought to the locals − hence their preference for "second-generation" over "first-generation" *taishang*. None of our interviewees had experienced any form of open discrimination, whether directed towards themselves or their families, but neither did any respondent claim

11 The relatively even distribution among our respondents who felt respected and those who felt disrespected in China (see Appendix Ib) is not very meaningful as only those few answers that referred directly to our question are taken into account here.

that the Taiwanese were generally accepted as equals by their Chinese counterparts. We became acquainted with many *taishang* who regarded local Chinese residents as their friends, people with whom they socialized regularly. An even greater number of respondents, however, reported having few contacts among the mainlanders; these were restricted to business partners or clients with whom they only spent a limited amount of time:

> It's very rare that Taiwanese become completely integrated in mainland Chinese society. Take me, for example – I stay at home after work, watch TV and don't go out. So I don't meet any Chinese people (R21).

The reasons for this reality are numerous. Concerning relations within a Taiwanese company, for example, Taiwanese managers (*taigan*) are still privileged over qualified mainland employees (*lugan*), even if most Taiwanese companies – large or small – have systematically reduced the number of their Taiwanese staff over the years. As a rule, the *taigan* are still regarded as more qualified and more trustworthy than any mainland Chinese mid-level manager, who is, on average, judged as less experienced and, as our respondents often put it, much more likely to fall prey to a good opportunity arising in a competitor's company. Trust and reliability seem to be the major obstacles to equal relations between Chinese and Taiwanese in Taiwanese companies, resulting in mutual estrangement, which has not been overcome yet.

Although there were very few of them, the respondents who directly addressed our question on their own and their families' perceptions of integration in mainland Chinese society and daily life were positive on this issue. During our interviews, however, we were told about many problems concerning security, education, job-market perspectives and, consequently, the heavy social pressure on Taiwanese children, who face fierce competition from their mainland counterparts. Also, most notably in southern Dongguan, *taishang* families live in close proximity and still tend to rely exclusively on a Taiwanese infrastructure when it comes to medical treatment, restaurants and shops, suggesting a relatively high degree of social segregation from mainland China's society for the *taibao*:

> The *taishang* are a rather aloof (*shuli*) group; they live apart from the local Chinese. They're very conservative and isolate themselves from the local people of Dongguan. They've built their own *huiguan* and school, for instance. And the city government of Dongguan, in order to placate the *taishang*, is giving them special treatment. That's why

> they aren't integrated (*dangdihua*) (Interview with a Dongguang *taishang*, 29 March 2006. This respondent was not integrated in the table of Appendix Ib).

As for our impression, the *taishang* and their families are currently much less integrated in mainland Chinese society than they might claim, although the interviewees in Shanghai and Kunshan do so with more credibility than those in the Pearl River Delta. Most of our respondents had not brought their families to the mainland yet, although a considerable number of them had already done so and other *taishang* claimed to be making preparations to resettle their families. Those who moved to the mainland later, i.e. in the late 1990s and after that, seemed to be more inclined to take their families along with them than those who came at an earlier date. This may indicate an accelerating rate of social integration in the future.

The responses were also varied regarding the question of where the *taishang* wanted to reside after retirement. Though 50 per cent of our respondents planned to return to Taiwan, 25 per cent said that they would stay on the mainland and another 25 per cent were still undecided. However, the majority of our interviewees were not completely certain of their plans yet. Many of our respondents appeared to view their retirement with a certain ambivalence: they praised the mainland's advantages (e.g. lower living costs, cheaper services, no typhoons, more amusement and no democracy (sic!)), yet became quite pensive when we brought up the topic of going back to one's "homeland" or recalling one's "roots" – notions which commonly gain importance with age and while contemplating the past. In addition, there seemed to be a striking difference between the younger and older generations of *taishang*: the younger (and more successful) they are, the more they are determined to stay on the mainland, it seems. The older *taishang* left Taiwan at an early age and thus foresee that they would lack a network of social relations there on which to rely after retirement. The older generation of the *taishang* also have a stronger attachment to their *laoxiang* (their home county or town) in Taiwan, even if they often do not (want to) admit this directly. One might infer from our findings that the *taishang*/ *taibao* will become more and more socially focused on the mainland as time goes by, gradually shifting their identity from being Taiwanese to some sort of Chinese. This may or may not imply an abandonment of their "situational (or contextual) identity" in favour of a (more) stable identity as Chinese. However, there is also good reason to believe that as long as

Taiwan figures as a political alternative to mainland China, the *taishang*'s Taiwanese identity will be much stronger and pronounced than the identities of the Cantonese or Shanghainese within China proper, for instance. Quite a number of respondents alluded to this when talking about the relative freedom – also in relation to lifestyle – in Taiwan.

Self-assessment of Political Roles

One of the most engaging aspects related to the *taishang*'s political perspectives, especially as regards their significance for cross-Strait relations, is their alleged role as "hostages" or "lobbyists" of the Chinese government or as autonomous "agents" pursuing their own political agenda vis-à-vis the authorities in both Beijing and Taibei. These categories, however, said little to our respondents. Both the "hostage" and "lobbyist" concepts were dismissed as counterfactual: on the one hand, *taishang*-cadre relations were viewed as sound due to the importance of *taishang* investments for China's local governments. On the other hand, at the aggregate level of the Chinese economy, it was held, this economic engagement diminished in scale in comparison to other foreign investments (*waizi*), making Taiwan's business people a relatively ineffective instrument for Beijing. Our interviewees repeatedly indicated the shrinking comparative advantages that the *taishang* enjoy on the mainland market as labour and energy costs rise and international competition becomes increasingly fierce:

> The advantages of the *taishang* are gradually fading away; domestic enterprises are on the rise. Large-scale state projects are all given to domestic firms. It's all about an ideology of excluding foreign entrepreneurs, including the *taishang*. You only have a chance of getting a piece of the cake if you're a big Taiwanese company – otherwise you can only be a supplier (R25).

Interestingly, our Shanghai and Kunshan respondents did not see themselves as a particularly important factor in China's current economy, although they often manage very profitable high-tech companies and hence pay high taxes, and are of paramount concern to China due to their key roles in high-level knowledge and technology transfer. The Dongguan *taishang*, whose companies are overwhelmingly labour-intensive, mainly complained of the growing pressure caused by China's legal reforms (which reduced the net value of their *guanxi* networks) and, also, increasing production costs. Given these problems, it was difficult for

this group to locate its own strategic political value for the Chinese government.

> Does China use the *taishang*? This idea was fabricated by the DPP to deceive ignorant people in Taiwan. The whole world knows about the capabilities of China, so how could China need the *taishang*? Are business people really of any importance to China? […] I've never heard about a *taishang* who was used by the Chinese communists and then went back to Taiwan in order to lobby for them (R16).

Moreover, our respondents did not feel particularly threatened by the Chinese authorities in political terms, although they all agreed that it was disadvantageous to any *taishang* in China to be identified by the local authorities as a DPP supporter. China was described as being too self-confident to become overly preoccupied with the political viewpoints of the *taishang* as long as they kept to themselves:

> In the era of Jiang Zemin, the Chinese government used to try to work through the TBAs to influence the *taishang*'s voting behaviour. That was the case between 2000 and 2004, and then it sounded rather threatening when the government expressed its hope that no one would vote for independence. But the Chinese are cleverer now; they know that the more the Taiwanese feel threatened, the more they rebel. So those campaigns have now stopped and the Chinese government has become more discrete (R32).

The "lobbyist" argument was equally refuted by most of our respondents, who denied that the *taishang* had any leverage over the politics of cross-Strait relations at the national level, either in China or in Taiwan. In reality, there is only scant empirical evidence that the *taishang* as a group have been or are specifically targeted by the Chinese government in order to pressurize the Taiwanese authorities. Under the former DPP government, such pressure could hardly have been effective as the Chen administration appeared ready to pay a high price for a downscaled economic relationship across the Taiwan Strait. Since the KMT's takeover, however, pressure of this sort has no longer been necessary because Ma Ying-jeou's (Ma Yingjiu) administration actively promotes greater cross-Strait interaction and gradual integration. We had the impression that our respondents did not see a role for the *taishang* as lobbyists or as autonomous agents who would pursue specific agendas to shape cross-Strait relations. Instead, they viewed themselves as being powerless politically, caught between two hostile governments, but at least treated fairly well by the local authorities in China. Any sense of political entrepreneurship

at the national level was completely lacking, and the TBA structure, which even formed a national umbrella organization in April 2007, was not regarded as a powerful lobbying instrument, but rather as a "toothless tiger", only capable of performing via submissive co-operation with and appeasement of the administrative hierarchy in China's central and local state:

> The *taishang* do not have the slightest influence on cross-Strait relations because their investments remain relatively minor. 300-400 million USD is a lot for an individual investor. Foreign companies now invest billions of USD, so they may have more influence, like INTEL (R26).
>
> The TBAs' role and function are very limited. As the Chinese government has strengthened its legal foundation, the TBAs have increasingly lost their influence. This is the case at both the national and the local level (R 32).

However, there were a few *taishang* who thought slightly differently:

> The *taishang* do, in fact, influence cross-Strait relations. China knows that their contribution to the mainland economy is tremendous. Without the *taishang*, China could not have progressed as quickly as it has. If the Taiwanese government stirs things up, it will face serious repercussions. If war breaks out, we *taishang* will certainly be controlled by the Chinese government (R27).

Generally speaking, our respondents had no political vision concerning the evolution of cross-Strait relations and the role that the *taishang* should or could play therein. From our point of view, their perspectives were surprisingly apolitical.

Creating an Ideal Type for the *Taishang*

What can we gather from the preliminary findings of our research on the political thinking of Taiwanese business people on the mainland? Drawing on Max Weber's methodology in the following section, I shall create an "ideal type" (*Idealtyp*) for the *taishang* in order to make more sense of our empirical data and draw some tentative conclusions:

- In the above sense, the "typical" *taishang* is interested in Taiwan's domestic politics and follows developments on the island regularly. At the same time, he/ she is not very interested in Chinese media journalism or television programmes. Frequent returns to Taiwan to

take part in important elections are also characteristic, although sharp criticism of Taiwanese election politics is rare and voting is not perceived as making any significant difference to the outcome of an election. A typical *taishang* claims to be a KMT supporter and was highly critical of the DPP government under Chen Shui-bian (Chen Shuibian). However, the mainstream *taishang* usually avoids public discussions of politics as well as any debate with a Chinese on the issue of Taiwan's sovereignty or independence.

- The *taishang* possesses a "situational identity" in the sense that he/ she switches from a "Taiwanese" to a "Chinese" identity, depending on the context in which this issue is relevant. The extent to which this situational identity has actually been internalized and the genuine applicability of descriptors such as "transnational", "cosmopolitan", "global" or "hybrid" in referring to *taishang* identities is difficult to assess.[12]
- During the Chen Shui-bian era, the *taishang* views cross-Strait relations as unstable, but is not particularly concerned about this state of affairs. It may thus be argued that the 2009 government change in Taiwan does not matter too much to him/ her. The *taishang* does not consider cross-Strait tensions to be too risky for his or her business operations in China and is much more worried about economic pressures stemming from Chinese legal reforms and the steady rise of production costs.
- The *taishang* has little interest in cross-Strait politics at the national level, but is very much focused on his or her political connections (*guanxi*) to local mainland authorities. He/ she is certainly in favour of direct links across the Taiwan Strait and supports economic, social and even political integration between the two sides, although he/ she is unable to explain what political integration would entail in institutional terms. His/her top priority is (political) stability, regardless of how this is attained.
- The *taishang* believes that economic integration and the eventual establishment of a common market across the Taiwan Strait are not only paramount to his/ her own business, but also Taiwan's only

12 It could, of course, also be argued that the accounts we heard do not reflect our interviewees' real perspectives as the issue of identity is politically sensitive. Thus, there may still be a sort of "master identity" lurking behind the alleged situational identity that most of the *taishang* described to us. Further research is required on this topic.

option to survive both economically and politically. Thus, the *taishang* believes that maintaining the status quo – at least for the time being – is the best option for cross-Strait relations.

- The *taishang* believes that the battle between the unificationists and the advocates of Taiwan's independence has become anachronistic. Free trade and traffic across the Taiwan Strait would ultimately resolve the cross-Strait conflict and produce a mutually acceptable political solution.[13] He/ she also believes that the *taishang*'s investments and business operations on the mainland help to ease tensions between Taiwan and China and that they strengthen Taiwan economically (at least in the long run). He/ she thinks that the Taiwanese government should pay attention to the *taishang*'s experiences on the mainland and make better use of their informal access to Chinese officials to benefit cross-Strait talks and negotiations. Nonetheless, he/ she does not think that the *taishang* should be an important political actor in managing cross-Strait relations (see below).
- The *taishang* thinks that even though life in China has its conveniences, a considerable cultural and social gap still exists between the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese, nurturing a parallel *taishang* society within Chinese society. He/ she does not believe that the *taishang*/ *taibao* are fully accepted by the Chinese, mostly for reasons related to the *taishang*'s economic prowess and superior social status. Thus, he/ she only interacts with mainland Chinese sporadically, and all such relations are usually restricted to Chinese colleagues or clients.[14] Also, he/ she tends to live in areas populated by other Taiwanese and to frequent places (like shops and restaurants) owned by fellow countrymen.[15]
- The *taishang* denies being a "hostage" or a "lobbyist" of the Chinese government's Taiwan policy and thinks that any political role for the *taishang* can only be a highly limited one, mostly because of the

13 This argument was made by most of our respondents, although it has not been documented in the table in Appendix Ib.

14 However, this generalization must be qualified as it draws on a supply of almost equally divided qualitative data. Many of our respondents insisted that they had as many Chinese as Taiwanese friends and that this difference was unimportant to them.

15 This was certainly more so in Dongguan and Kunshan than in cosmopolitan Shanghai.

taishang's declining economic significance on the mainland market. Also, he/ she is not interested in assuming a role as an autonomous "agent" to pursue any specific agenda in defence of *taishang* interests against both the Chinese and Taiwanese governments. In this context, the TBA structure is not an effective political lobbying instrument for the *taishang* (yet), and if the *taishang* is not an official of a local TBA, his/ her opinion of these organizations tends to be surprisingly low.

This finding is interesting as it contradicts the fact that the TBA structure has continuously expanded over the years and is highly institutionalized today. However, for most of our respondents, the value of their local TBA was primarily based on its service functions: it helped to resolve legal conflicts, provided important business information and was a platform for making (non-business) contacts and finding new business partners. It was also considered important for maintaining good relations between the local *taishang* community and government cadres, but definitely not a political or economic instrument in the hands of Taiwanese business people. As a matter of fact, most of our respondents felt that the TBAs did not have much negotiating power vis-à-vis the local governments.

- The *taishang* tends to keep a rather low political profile and expend the bulk of his/ her political energy dealing with local officials and customs authorities. In that sense, the *taishang* is an apolitical figure.

It should again be emphasized that this analysis is a tentative preliminary one. It really needs to be based on a larger sample and should also be controlled with respect to the respondents' age, date of arrival in China, area of residence and type of business. It may also be useful to distinguish between Taiwanese *taishang* and *taishang* of mainland descent as it can be hypothesized that the "ethnic" factor impacts significantly on a number of our analytical variables, most notably national identity – although our impression was that this impact is rather limited. Most importantly, it should be kept in mind that the *taishang* live in a steady state of flux concerning the dynamics of cross-Strait relations. The change of government in Taiwan in May 2008 and the economic crisis that took hold of coastal China in late 2008 and continued throughout 2009, forcing many Taiwanese factories to close down or relocate to other countries, may influence our future findings. It could be argued, for instance, that the rapprochement between the governments in Taibei and Beijing

since the second half of 2008 has encouraged the mainland *taishang* to speak out for their interests more courageously and to gradually expose political agency. It may also be assumed in this new context that the TBAs will strive to become more autonomous over time and actively lobby for more institutionalized negotiations between the *taishang* and the Chinese authorities at both the local and the national level. Whether different features of the *taishang*'s political perspectives, as stated in this article, continue to remain stable or disappear in the aftermath of the Chen Shui-bian era merits the attention of future research.

Appendix Ia: Complete Survey Questionnaire

Identification with Taiwan and Perspectives on Cross-Strait Relations

1. To what extent do you follow Taiwanese domestic politics? Are you very interested in events on the island? What do you think of Taiwanese politics in general?
2. What is your party preference in Taiwan?
3. Do you plan to visit Taiwan to vote in important elections?
4. What do you consider to be the most important political developments in Taiwan in recent years concerning cross-Strait relations? Do you think that cross-Strait relations are stable or unstable?
5. Concerning cross-Strait relations, the *san tong*-issue has been hotly debated for some time now in Taiwan. Some say direct links across the Taiwan Strait threaten to unduly increase Taiwan's economic dependence on the mainland, while others disagree and consider such ties a big opportunity for Taiwan. What is your opinion on this issue?
6. How do you think will cross-Strait relations develop in the future? How would you like to see them develop? What do you think about the discussion in Taiwan on unification and independence? What do you think would be the best option for Taiwan's future: unification, independence or the status quo?
7. Some people think the *taishang* (*taibao*) act as an important bridge between Taiwan and the mainland, and have the potential to facilitate integration, and even *political* integration (*zhengzhi tonghe*) between the two ends of the Strait. Others think that the *taishang* are selling out Taiwan or are easily instrumentalized by Beijing to pressure the Taiwanese government. What do you think about these viewpoints?
8. As a *taishang* (*taibao*), do you see yourself as "Taiwanese", "Chinese" or both "Taiwanese" and "Chinese"? What do "Taiwanese" and "Chinese" mean in your opinion? What does it mean to consider oneself both "Taiwanese" and "Chinese"?
9. Do you think that your self-perception as "Taiwanese" or "Chinese" has changed since you live on the mainland? How has it changed and why?

Mainland Life

10. As a *taibao*, do you feel accepted by the Chinese people on the mainland? Or have you experienced disrespect, or even discrimination? If so, why do you think that people on the mainland disrespect or discriminate against the *taibao*? Can you give examples that clarify your opinion?
11. Do you think that there are many differences between the mainland Chinese and the *taibao* living in China? What are the most striking differences? Can you give examples?
12. If you live with your family in China, how do your wife/ husband and children feel about living in China? Do they feel integrated in mainland society or not? Would they like to stay indefinitely in China or would they prefer move back to Taiwan some time in the future?
13. After your retirement, would you like to stay on in China, return to Taiwan or go somewhere else?

Relations to Local Chinese Governments and Significance of TBAs

14. Do you think that the cadre bureaucracy on the mainland is helpful or useful to the *taishang*? What do you think are the most important problems for the *taishang* in their dealings with party and government cadres?
15. Does having a TBA make a substantial difference over not having one? Are such associations important to your business?
16. What do you think are the mains tasks of a TBA? Have you ever approached your business association for help in a personal or business matter?
17. Do you think that TBAs are more important for the *taishang* than their personal connections to mainland cadres when pursuing their business interests?
18. In your understanding, how exactly does a TBA communicate with mainland party and government cadres to pursue the interests of the *taishang*? How much autonomy do these associations have from the mainland authorities? How much influence can/ do the TBAs exert on these authorities?

19. Do you think that the *taishang* are treated differently from other business people in China? If so, how and why are they treated differently?
20. What do you think are the most important current problems for the *taishang* on the mainland? And how should they be resolved? Do you think that the Chinese government truly supports the *taishang* as it constantly claims?
21. Do you think that the *taishang* are used by the Chinese government to exert pressure on Taiwan? If so, how much does this affect their business operations on the mainland?

Appendix Ib

	Respondents	Per Cent of Sample
1. To what extent do you follow Taiwanese domestic politics? Are you very interested in events on the island?		
Very interested	17	63
Somewhat interested	7	26
Not very interested	3	11
Sample	***27***	***100***
2. Do you often visit Taiwan to vote in important elections?		
Yes (regularly)	19	86
No (not regularly)	3	14
Sample	***22***	***100***
3. What is your party preference in Taiwan?		
KMT	12	67
DPP	---	---
PFP	---	---
NP	---	---
TSU	---	---
No specific party ("it depends on a candidate's quality"; "depends on the party's performance"… etc.)	6	33
Sample	***18***	***100***
4. Do you think that cross-Strait relations are stable or do you think that they are unstable?		
Stable	2	12.5
Unstable	14	87.5
Sample	***16***	***100***
5. Some say direct links across the Taiwan Strait threaten to unduly increase Taiwan's economic dependence on the mainland, while others disagree and consider such ties a big opportunity for Taiwan. What is your opinion on this issue?		

	Respondents	Per Cent of Sample
Direct links pose a risk	---	---
Direct links are a big opportunity	11	100
Sample	***11***	***100***
6. What do you think would be the best option for Taiwan's future		
Unification	5	31
Unification by "one country, two systems"	1	6
Independence	---	---
Status quo	10	63
Sample	***16***	***100***
7. Some people think the taishang (taibao) act as an important bridge between Taiwan and the mainland, and have the potential to facilitate integration, and even political integration (zhengzhi tonghe) between the two ends of the Strait. Others think that the taishang are selling out Taiwan or are easily instrumentalized by Beijing to pressure the Taiwanese government. What do you think about these viewpoints?		
Taishang aid in cross-Strait relations/play a positive role	6	100
Taishang have sold out Taiwan/have been instrumentalized	---	---
Sample	***6***	***100***
8. As a taishang (taibao), do you see yourself as "Taiwanese", "Chinese", or "both Taiwanese and Chinese"?		
"Taiwanese"	9	41
"Chinese"	4	18
"both Taiwanese and Chinese"	4	18
Other ("*huaren*", "cosmopolitan"…)	2	9
No clear answer ("it depends"…)	3	14
Sample	***22***	***100***

	Respondents	Per Cent of Sample
9. Do you think that your self-perception as "Taiwanese" or "Chinese" has changed since you live on the mainland?		
Has changed	2	33
No change	4	67
Sample	***6***	***100***
10. As a taibao, do you feel accepted by the Chinese people on the mainland? Or have you experienced disrespect, or even discrimination?		
Feels respected	5	56
Feels disrespected	4	44
Sample	***9***	***100***
11. Do you think that there are many differences between the mainland Chinese and the taibao living in China?		
Many/strong differences	17	74
Few/little differences	6	26
Sample	***23***	***100***
12. How do your wife or husband and children feel about living in China? Do they feel integrated in mainland society or not?		
Feel integrated	3	100
Do not feel integrated	---	---
Sample	***3***	***100***
13. After your retirement, would you like to stay in China, return to Taiwan, or go somewhere else?		
Would like to stay indefinitely	2	25
Would rather return to Taiwan	4	50
Other/still undecided	2	25
Sample	***8***	***100***
14. Do you think that the cadre bureaucracy on the mainland is helpful or useful to the taishang?		
Cadres are helpful/useful	4	67

	Respondents	Per Cent of Sample
Cadres are not helpful/useful	1	17
Unclear answer (e.g. "cadres just do their jobs", "are neutral"… etc.)	1	17
Sample	***6***	***100***
15. Does having a TBA make a substantial difference over not having one? Are such associations important to your business?		
Important	8	50
Somewhat important	1	6
Unimportant	5	31
Depends on the business/ company	2	13
Sample	***16***	***100***
16. Have you ever approached your business association for help in a personal or business matter?		
Has approached a TBA	---	---
Has never approached a TBA	7	100
Sample	***7***	***100***
17. Do you think that TBAs are more important for the taishang than their personal connections to mainland cadres when pursuing their business interests?		
TBAs are more important	3	23
Personal networks are more important	7	54
Both are important/ it depends	3	23
Sample	***13***	***100***
18. In your understanding, how much autonomy do TBAs have from the influence of mainland authorities, and how much influence can/ do the TBAs exert on these authorities?		
Much autonomy and influence	2	33
Little/ some autonomy or influence	3	50
No autonomy or influence	1	17
Sample	***6***	***100***

	Respondents	Per Cent of Sample
19. Do you think that the taishang are treated differently from other businesspeople in China?		
Receive different treatment	3	75
Receive the same treatment	1	25
Sample	***4***	***100***
20. Do you think that the Chinese government truly supports the taishang as it constantly claims?		
Supports	1	100
Does not support	---	---
Sample	***1***	***100***
21. Do you think that the taishang are used by the Chinese government to exert pressure on Taiwan?		
Agrees	2	40
Disagrees	3	60
Sample	***5***	***100***

Appendix II

Respondent Information

Respondents	Gender		Status		Location		
	Male	Female	*Taishang*	*Taigan*	Dongguan	Shanghai/ Kunshan	Taibei
R1	•		•		•		
R2	•		•		•		
R3	•			•		•	
R4	•			•		•	
R5	•		•			•	
R6	•			•		•	
R7	•			•		•	
R8	•		•		•		
R9	•		•			•	
R10	•			•	•		
R11	•		•		•		
R12	•			•	•		
R13	•		•		•		
R14	•		•		•		
R15	•		•		•		
R16		•	•		•		
R17		•		•	•		
R18		•	•		•		
R19		•		•	•		
R20		•	•			•	
R21	•		•			•	
R22		•	•			•	
R23	•			•		•	
R24	•			•		•	
R25	•			•		•	
R26	•			•		•	
R27	•		•			•	
R28	•			•		•	

Respond-ents	Gender		Status		Location		
	Male	Fe-male	*Tai-shang*	*Taigan*	Dong-guan	Shanghai/ Kunshan	Tai-bei
R29	•			•		•	
R30	•		•				•
R31	•			•			•
R32	•			•			•
R33	•		•				•
R34	•			•			•
R35	•			•			•
Total	*29*	*6*	*17*	*18*	*13*	*16*	*6*

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