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# The KMT–CCP Forum: Securing Consent for Cross-Strait Rapprochement

André BECKERSHOFF

**Abstract:** The recent rapprochement between China and Taiwan cannot be understood if our conceptual apparatus is unable to cope with the distinctive new quality of cross-Strait relations. A critical framework provides a transnational account of cross-Strait dynamics. An analysis of the KMT–CCP Forum through the lens of the neo-Gramscian notion of hegemony sheds light on the Forum’s strategies, mechanisms, practices and instruments to secure consent for cross-Strait rapprochement. While this mode of governance has broadened the KMT’s strategic options, it has also compromised Taiwanese democracy.

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**Keywords:** Taiwan, China, KMT–CCP Forum, cross-Strait relations, cross-Strait integration, transnational, hegemony

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## Cross-Strait Rapprochement and the Emergence of a New Mode of Governance

The past decade has seen tremendous change in social and economic relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan, Republic of China (ROC). What is puzzling is the reversal of the political interactions across the Strait: A relationship that until recently had been characterized by a state of “political alienation cum economic integration” (Wu 2000: 407) has more recently produced a series of substantial agreements in a variety of sectors. Moreover, this transformation has materialized with a swiftness, which only a few years ago seemed not only unlikely, but also implausible. While the state of affairs is still far from “normal” day-to-day politics between governments, a feasible and productive working relationship has developed. The most striking element of this development, however, is the form these interactions have taken: Rather than eroding the condition of political non-recognition, both sides have devised an array of channels and practices that circumvent the persisting ideological obstacles that have complicated cross-Strait relations ever since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. What at first glance seems like a potpourri of improvised, scattered and sporadic encounters, has developed into a more orchestrated and authoritative network that not only has emerged in close relation with civil society exchanges across the Strait, but also mirrors some of their characteristics and practices. The fact that the recent political cooperation across the Strait rests on the shoulders of party-to-party contacts, academic connections and business resources, rather than more conventional, formal and institutionalized intergovernmental channels, has manifold consequences. Thus, this paper looks at the transformation in more detail in order to better understand the specific nature of the transformation.

In order to grasp the complexity of the new political arrangement that has evolved across the Strait, it is necessary that we develop theoretical tools that are appropriate to and adequate for the nature of changing social and political relations. The most significant underlying element of the cross-Strait rapprochement is that of transnationalization – that is, the process through which social agents, structures, practices and resources are decoupled from their previous point of reference, the nation-state. While transnationalization across the

Taiwan Strait is mainly driven by the interests of the business sector (Dent 2003), the absence of formal intergovernmental decision-making structures between Taiwan and China has facilitated the emergence of a transnational form of governance, where the potential to shape outcomes has shifted away from formal treaties towards a network of social, economic and political actors. The past decade has seen the emergence of new transnational channels (for instance, the KMT–CCP Forum, Boao Forum for Asia, Straits Forum, provincial visits) and the revitalization of existing channels (for instance, the Straits Exchange Foundation – Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait, SEF-ARATS), which live outside the conventional analytic tools of politics between governments. While some of these channels are linked by personal or institutional connections, this paper<sup>1</sup> will draw on the neo-Gramscian notion of hegemony to argue that this network’s coherence is not to be found in formal linkages, but rather in a common logic of governance. From such a perspective, the most central and most consequential of these new political channels is the KMT–CCP Forum (国共论坛, *guo gong luntan*), also referred to as the Cross-Strait Economic, Trade and Culture Forum (两岸经贸文化论坛, *liang’an jingmao wenhua luntan*) or simply the Cross-Strait Forum (henceforth “the Forum”). It is characterized by its institutional originality, its relative longevity and persistence, the size and diversity of the participating delegations, and its subtle, yet steady, institutionalization. These qualities indicate that the Forum is more than a simple consultation channel between the Kuomintang (KMT, Guomindang) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). While pluralist accounts of the Forum portray it as a mouthpiece that enables the “participation of Taiwan’s civil society” (Hu 2010: 8) in cross-Strait affairs, this article argues that, on the contrary, it is the Forum’s reach into civil society and its ability to shape it that demands our attention.

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The aim of this paper is to show that the governance aspect of the new cross-Strait relationship is most adequately understood through the lens of neo-Gramscian hegemony, which puts the process of securing consent for the social order at the centre of attention. As the KMT–CCP Forum is the focal point of this practice, the following sections will look at both the KMT–CCP Forum itself (how it is organized and the tools at its disposition) and its social function within the broader process of creating a pro-integration consensus. In doing so, the misconception that the Forum is of secondary relevance will be challenged. Despite the Forum’s own claims that its major purpose is to marginalize or at least keep in check pro-independence forces (since the Lien–Hu meeting in 2005; see below), little research has been undertaken on the Forum compared to similar channels, such as the SEF–ARATS negotiations. This is problematic for several reasons.

First, it leads to a narrowing of the timeframe for the analysis of the change in cross-Strait dynamics. The turning point for cross-Strait relations is typically set in the year 2008, with Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九, Ma Yingjiu) victory in the Taiwan presidential elections lending itself to a seemingly natural watershed event (see, for instance, Schucher 2008; Hughes 2009; Hu 2010). Without a doubt, the change of government in 2008 represents an important contribution to the thawing of China–Taiwan relations. But there are persuasive arguments for enlarging the period of examination. As will be argued below, the process of constructing the cross-Strait platform was stimulated by the elections of 2000 and 2004. Their respective outcomes led to the founding of the National Policy Foundation (NPF) in Taiwan and initiated the party-to-party channel: two major platforms that coordinated and promoted the transformation of cross-Strait relations. These events not only occurred chronologically prior to Ma Ying-jeou’s 2008 election; they were also an important factor in making the change of government possible and portraying it as desirable in the first place, contributing to the election outcome by structuring the political debate. Such a comprehensive perspective moves away from policy-centric assumptions, and the election victory is depicted as the point of culmination rather than the point of departure of the “new” cross-Strait relations.

Second, the research focus on the channels that claimed attention after the 2008 elections entails a relative negligence of the other

channels. While the role of the SEF-ARATS negotiations in the dynamics of China–Taiwan relations has been addressed (for instance, Chen 2011), other channels have received less attention. A socially grounded approach results in a comprehension of cross-strait relations as being more than a simple aggregation of the different channels, and ultimately provides a clearer understanding of how they work in conjunction. While the present article also focuses on one channel, it ultimately seeks to reinterpret the broader picture. The KMT–CCP Forum is central to processes of legitimation and the construction of consent for the “new” cross-strait relations. This paper aims to substantiate this claim by analysing the social processes initiated by the Forum. To this end, the following section will outline the key concept of hegemony. Through this conceptual lens, further sections will cover the Forum’s history, its organizational aspects, its policy instruments and how these instruments are put to use.

The contribution of this study is twofold: First, it aims to systematize and deepen our empirical knowledge about the Cross-Strait Forum in terms of both its inner workings and its role within the transnational political relations between China and Taiwan. The second contribution concerns the current debate on how to conceptualize cross-strait integration. Recent discussions (Schubert 2010) have demonstrated the awareness that we are facing a new phenomenon that demands a conceptual apparatus that can improve our understanding of the social and political developments. Arguing that the crucial specificity of contemporary cross-strait relations lies in their transnational character, this article presents a set of tools particularly suited to this environment.

## Towards a Critical Approach to Cross-Strait Integration

What does it mean to look at the Cross-Strait Forum through the analytical grid of hegemony? The Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci used the notion of hegemony to describe a form of governance that is not based on coercion, but on securing active consent for concrete socio-political transformations. To this end, social groups seek to universalize their particular interests – that is, to portray them as being in the general interest. This struggle for hegemony is not only a question of ideology, but also one of making material concessions to groups, which otherwise might object to the political project. Rather than simply looking at the political society, which comprises the state

and its agents, Gramsci argued that the terrain on which the process of securing consent takes place is the civil society. Power does not rest

on the control of the coercive apparatus of the state, but [is] dif-  
fused and situated in the myriad of institutions and relationships  
in civil society (Overbeek 2004: 125).

What lies at the centre of attention is the process by which consent is constructed, maintained or challenged. In other words, the focus shifts from the explicitly political dimension to the permanent effort that is necessary to form an alliance by means of co-optation or compromise, or through the exertion of power (Gill 1991: 48). If a coalition of social forces obtains a position from which it can portray its vision of the world as being in the general interest and universalize it in the form of generally accepted ideas, norms, rules and institutions, the social formation attains a state of hegemony (Bieling 2011: 13).

In the case of cross-Strait relations, Taiwanese businessmen residing on the mainland have an interest in normalizing economic relations. The push for a stable investment environment across the Taiwan Strait is largely supported by these businessmen, who can be seen as a linkage community across the Taiwan Strait (Keng and Schubert 2010). While the SEF-ARATS negotiations arrange the details of the economic framework of cross-Strait relations, the KMT-CCP Forum is crucial to understanding how social and political forces attempt to secure consent for the social and political transformations that take place around those economic developments. Depicting good economic relations between Taiwan and China as being in Taiwan's general interest is where the KMT, the CCP and the business sector stand on common ground. From this perspective, the KMT-CCP Forum is not only a purely political body. Instead, it reaches out into Taiwan's civil society in order to broaden the social base for the transformation of cross-Strait relations from a zero-sum game towards a win-win situation. It is in this light that the Forum's instruments will have to be evaluated.

## The KMT–CCP Forum and the Transnationalization of Cross-Strait Relations

This section will interrogate the Forum's role in transforming the character of cross-Strait relations, focusing on how its social practices substantially impact social relations, thereby enlarging the group of people who have stakes in a stable cross-Strait environment. Two brief sections will cover the historical overview and insights into the organization of the Forum, before three further parts analyse the Forum's relation to other channels, its instruments and how these instruments are used to interact with the larger Taiwanese society.

### The Genesis of the KMT–CCP Forum

The origin of the Cross-Strait Forum lies in the aftermath of the two presidential elections of 2000 and 2004, in which the KMT was defeated. Following his defeat to opposition party leader Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁, Chen Shuibian) as a presidential candidate in the March 2000 elections, former Vice-President Lien Chan (連戰, Lian Zhan) set about reorganizing the Lien Chen-tung Cultural and Education Foundation, which was named after his father. The foundation was transformed into the National Policy Foundation (NPF), the KMT's think tank, within three months of the election defeat. This structure allowed him to group a number of former and future influential figures from cross-Strait relations around him, among them former Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairman Su Chi (蘇起, Su Qi) and Chiang Ping-kun (江丙坤, Jiang Bingkun), who became chief executive of the NPF.

After Chen Shui-bian was re-elected in 2004, two tendencies converged: First, the PRC leadership realized that it was impossible to achieve unification by coercive means, and that a declaration of independence by Chen was a genuine threat. Therefore, China seized the historical opportunity of an isolated Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and a defeated KMT to drive a wedge between the Taiwanese political camps. Second, the KMT's hopes of quickly regaining power in Taiwan were shattered; following this defeat, the party leadership opened up to new strategies. Under these constraints, and with the common ground of both parties' interests being threatened by the DPP government's steps towards independence, the then President



of the PRC Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) invited Lien to China. In late April 2005, Lien then embarked on what has been called a “journey of peace” (Anonymous 1 2012).

This eight-day visit was the result of a process that had already begun in January 2001, when NPF fellow and current SEF Vice-Chairman Kao Koong-liang (高孔廉, Gao Konglian) travelled to China with a group of legislators to probe the CCP’s views on the Three Links (*Taipei Times* 2001): direct postal, transportation and trade links between China and Taiwan. Then, in late March 2005, Chiang Ping-kun travelled to China in the capacity of KMT Vice-Chairman to meet high-ranking mainland official Jia Qinglin (贾庆林). This trip can be interpreted as a dress rehearsal for Lien’s visit, which was the culmination of party-to-party consultations only weeks after Chiang’s trip. Jia Qinglin also participated in subsequent Lien–Hu meetings as a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the CCP and has ever since been a leading figure in the PRC delegation at the Forum.

The Lien–Hu meeting on 29 April 2005 not only initiated the KMT–CCP Forum as a platform; the resulting “Five-Point Vision” (五点愿景, *wudian yuanying*) has also set the tone and basic agenda of every Forum meeting since then. The first “point” called for a resumption of cross-Straits negotiations on the basis of the 1992 consensus, which called for both sides to recognize the One China principle and arose from a November 1992 meeting in Hong Kong between ARATS and the SEF. This was realized with the reopening of the SEF-ARATS channel in 2008. Point two referred to a peace agreement, and while this has not been negotiated yet, it may become an issue for the later stages of Ma Ying-jeou’s second term. The third item on the list concerned the institutionalization of economic exchanges between the two sides, and was essentially implemented with the signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) in 2010. Point four raised the possibility of Taiwan participating in international activities, an issue that has not substantially progressed, but which has been addressed by Taiwan being invited as an observer to the World Health Assembly. The fifth and final point called for the establishment of a party-to-party platform between the CCP and the KMT. Originally, this platform was to comprise two forums, each alternating its location between China and Taiwan: the Cross-Straits Economic, Trade and Cultural Forum, which was even-

tually implemented, and the Cross-Strait Peace Forum, which was supposed to deal with political issues. The first Peace Forum was to be held in Taiwan, but since the Taiwanese authorities rejected the NPF's application to invite a Chinese delegation, the idea was dropped and only the Economic, Trade and Cultural Forum was retained (Anonymous 4 2012).

## Institutional and Organizational Background

Ever since the Lien–Hu meeting, the preparation for and organization of the Taiwanese delegation to the Cross-Strait Forum has rested with the NPF, while on the Chinese side, the Research Center for Relations across the Taiwan Strait of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council (TAO) has been in charge of the arrangements for the Chinese delegation (this and the following is based on Anonymous 4 2012). Once high-level contacts across the Strait agree to stage a Forum (usually one event per year), the KMT contacts the Foundation. The agenda is set primarily by the KMT – since 2008, by the Taiwanese government – while the details are negotiated during preliminary meetings between the TAO and the NPF. Before 2008, the location for the Forum was set by Beijing; however, since then, Chinese provinces have been allowed to apply for the right to host what is generally viewed to be an extremely prestigious event. In contrast to the SEF-ARATS talks, which alternate between venues in China and Taiwan, so far all nine meetings of the KMT–CCP Forum since 2006 have taken place in China. In 2005 and 2007, the CCP suggested holding the Forum in Taiwan, but as had been the case with the Peace Forum earlier, the DPP government rejected the application by the NPF to organize the event.

On the Taiwanese side, a group of about ten people is directly involved in the planning of the meetings, although specific tasks, such as the preparation of position papers, may be delegated to other research fellows at the Foundation or to external academics. The Forums generally take between two and three months to arrange. The members of each delegation, usually numbering between 150 and 300 persons, are chosen by the NPF and the TAO, respectively, and are partly composed of experts who are selected depending on the issues that are to be discussed – for instance, nuclear safety or food security. The composition of the delegations can therefore serve as an indicator of how the priorities of party-to-party negotiations have evolved

over time. The Taiwanese delegation comprises a large variety of social actors in order to create the impression of a broad social base for all the decisions taken during the Forum.

The change of government in Taiwan in the year 2008 had surprisingly little influence on the organization of the Forum. In the words of an organizer, “the issues change, but the way they are organized does not” (Anonymous 4 2012). The shift towards cultural issues in 2009 was partly made possible by delegating some of the issues to the SEF-ARATS channel after those talks had resumed. However, the Taiwan government has considerable influence in the agenda-setting process, where it also voices concerns on behalf of the MAC, as well as the SEF (Anonymous 5 2012). Since there have been no substantial conflicts between the KMT, the Taiwanese government and the NPF as far as the course of action is concerned, these shifts in power have not yet had any consequences. Moreover, it is difficult to attribute specific strategy calls and pinpoint their origin, given that central figures often have multiple memberships in the NPF, the KMT and government agencies. To a large degree, all the major architects of the party-to-party platform remained in the field of cross-strait relations even after the election of Ma Ying-jeou. While Lien Chan has stepped into the background and passed the baton of delegation leadership on to Wu Poh-hsiung (吳伯雄, Wu Boxiong) for the fourth Forum, he is still a respected figure in China and therefore remains an asset to the KMT’s strategic portfolio. This is manifest both in his chairmanship of the NPF and in his function as Honorary Chairman of the KMT, along with being expressed in his activity regarding the invitation of procurement missions from China. He also represented Taiwan at the APEC summit from 2008 to 2012. While Vincent Siew (蕭萬長, Xiao Wanchang) has taken over the APEC delegation, Lien Chan travelled to Beijing in February 2013 to meet with CCP leaders. Chiang and Kao lead the SEF, where Su Chi joined them in 2012 after a stint at the influential National Security Council. Rather than being superseded by the government, the KMT’s cross-strait platform has been successful in broadening its strategic options by extending its influence to other cross-strait channels. Table 1 provides an overview of the nine Cross-strait Forums to date, their central issues and the major results.

Table 1: Meetings of the KMT–CCP Forum (2006–2013)

No.	Date	Location	Major Issues	Recommendations
1 <sup>st</sup>	April 2006	Beijing	Economic cooperation; transportation links; agricultural and financial exchanges	7 joint recommendations; 15 unilateral policies by the PRC
2 <sup>nd</sup>	October 2006	Hainan	Agricultural cooperation	7-point joint proposal; 30 policies
3 <sup>rd</sup>	April 2007	Beijing	Transportation	Joint proposal; 13 policies
4 <sup>th</sup>	December 2008	Shanghai	Finance; investment; services	9 recommendations; 10 measures of economic cooperation in relation to the global financial crisis
5 <sup>th</sup>	July 2009	Changsha	Cultural exchanges and educational cooperation	6 joint recommendations focusing on media and cultural industries
6 <sup>th</sup>	July 2010	Guangzhou	Industrial cooperation and competitiveness	22 recommendations
7 <sup>th</sup>	May 2011	Chengdu	Nuclear safety	19 joint recommendations
8 <sup>th</sup>	July 2012	Harbin	Deepening of cross-Strait ties through institutionalization and civil society contacts	17 joint recommendations
9 <sup>th</sup>	October 2013	Nanning	Service trade; culture and education	19 recommendations

Source: Author’s own compilation.

### The KMT–CCP Forum in Relation to Other Channels

To assess the Forum’s power and functions, we have to take into account its position relative to other channels in the transnational field across the Strait. As shown above, Chiang Ping-kun and Kao Koong-liang link the SEF-ARATS channel to the KMT–CCP Forum through the NPF, while on the Chinese side Chen Yunlin (陈云林) participated in the third Forum before being appointed Chairman of ARATS. Chen has also participated in the eighth Forum, while his

successor Chen Deming (陳德銘) took his place in the most recent round in 2013. The main decisions of the early SEF-ARATS summits had been extensively prepared for by the preceding Forums (Anonymous 5 2012). The major resolution was the ECFA, the idea of which had already been part of the Five-Point Vision and was repeatedly addressed in the first three Forums. The fourth Forum in December 2008 laid the groundwork for the agreement before it was passed on to the SEF-ARATS channel to be negotiated in detail and signed. Even after the signing, the Cross-Strait Forum issued additional joint recommendations that called for the implementation of further amendments, showing that the Forum continues to be a part of the ECFA process, even years after the issue had been passed on to another channel. Table 2 shows that the interlock was particularly strong at the two Forums surrounding the election victory of Ma Ying-jeou. This highlights the characteristics of the transitional phase, where the central tasks of the Forum, including provincial visits and direct contacts between ministries at the vice-ministerial level in addition to SEF-ARATS, were delegated to other channels (Anonymous 5 2012).

After the KMT regained power in Taiwan, it proceeded with a deepening of the Forum's dovetailing with the state apparatus. Starting with the fourth Forum, cabinet-level officials in Taiwan began to participate in the event: San Gee (單驥, Dan Ji), Vice-Chairman of the Council for Economic Planning and Development; Chang Ming-daw (張明道, Zhang Mingdao), Director-General of the Financial Supervisory Commission; Lee Long-wen (李龍文, Li Longwen), Director-General of the Civil Aeronautics Administration; Janice Lai (賴瑟珍, Lai Sezhen), Director-General of the Tourism Bureau; and Berton Chiu (邱柏青, Qiu Baiqing), Director-General of the Investment Department of the Ministry of Economic Affairs (*Taipei Times* 2008). They represented government branches with a high and urgent demand for cross-Strait regulation, such as direct flights, Taiwan-bound tourism from China, cross-Strait investment and the institutionalization of cross-Strait economic cooperation. Those were the top priorities after Ma's election, showing that the government recognized the importance of the Forum. This development marks the beginning of an officialization of the Cross-Strait Forum. Although the cabinet-level members travelled to China in a private capacity, their presence can only be considered to have deepened the negotia-

tion potential within the Forum. In addition to creating synergies between the party-to-party channel and the government, the inclusion of these members of the government serves to broaden not only the expertise in the Forum but also the legitimacy of its members.

Similarly, the KMT achieved an interlock with the Legislative Yuan, with around 20 legislators participating in the Cross-Strait Forum, a measure that is expected to facilitate the process of passing cross-strait related laws in the Legislative Yuan (Anonymous 4 2012). Most recently, the Forum put pressure on the Legislative Yuan by inquiring about the state of the Services Trade Agreement, a deal that had been signed a few months earlier in June 2013, but had not passed into legislation yet (*Taipei Times* 2013b). These developments also demonstrate that the KMT–CCP Forum’s importance did not decline after the KMT became the government party and the semi-official channels resumed. On the contrary, it was revitalized by being recognized as the central platform for coordinating cross-strait integration and by incorporating unofficial ministry-to-ministry channels within its structures.

The Forum also maintains intensive relations with civil society representatives, KMT members accounting for only half of the Taiwanese delegations. As mentioned before, the NPF entrusts various preparatory tasks to academics outside the Foundation and invites them to the Forum. Furthermore, the delegations include prominent business representatives. In April 2007, for example, Lien Chan was accompanied by Hon Hai Precision Chairman Terry Gou (郭台銘, Guo Taiming), Landis Hotel and Resort President Stanley C. Yen (嚴長壽, Yan Changshou), Uni-President Group CEO Jason Lin (林蒼生, Lin Cangsheng), Taiwan Cement Corp. Chairman Leslie Koo (辜成允, Gu Chengyun), and representatives from the Evergreen Group and Farglory Group, among others. This represents a remarkable sample of Taiwan’s business elite, which only underscores the attractiveness of the party-to-party channel to transnational corporations. In addition to being part of the delegation, the business sector is in regular contact with the Forum through seminars hosted by the NPF.

## Shaping Politics: Instruments of the KMT–CCP Forum

Given these connections, how does the Forum actually shape political outcomes? In order to implement the result of its negotiations,

the KMT–CCP Forum utilizes two major instruments, the so-called “joint recommendations” (or joint proposals) and unilateral measures (or unilateral policies). In addition, provincial visits are also considered an extension of the Forum. These specific sets of practices derive from the historical and socio-political circumstances under which the Forum emerged and can be attributed to the transnational character of the arrangement.

Joint recommendations (共同建议, *gongtong jianyi*) are the principal resolutions that the delegations agree upon over the course of a meeting. At the end of each Forum, they are announced by the delegation leaders during the official closing ceremony. These resolutions primarily address policy-makers on both sides and their implementation is evaluated during subsequent Forum meetings. As a surrogate for a formal treaty mechanism, the public commitment generated by this exposure makes the recommendations stand out from less prominent channels and secret back-room deals, which always leave the possibility open of one side retracting from an agreement. Announcing the declarations during a plenary session, furthermore, gives them the weight of an overarching consensus from all participants, including not only party members, but also government personnel, legislators, think tank fellows, academics, business representatives and experts from other fields. The resolutions appear to be supported by a broad social coalition that reaches far beyond the actual party circles. Accordingly, the KMT’s transnational activities are legitimized in a circular and self-referential manner, representing itself as an agent acting on behalf of the whole of Taiwan, as a mere mouthpiece or proxy of Taiwanese society. A second aspect of the media coverage of these events is their function as a means to disseminate the Forum’s founding narrative, which closely links the economic well-being of the Taiwanese people to strong relations with China on the basis of the 1992 consensus, a discursive construct that is persistently reiterated like a mantra in all declarations and press statements before, during and after each Forum.

Table 2: Joint Recommendations by the KMT–CCP Forum by Sector

Sector	Number of Joint Recommendations at the Forum Conventions								
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>
Economy	2			2		2	6	1	4
Transport	1		<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>					
Agriculture <sup>a</sup>	1	7		1			1		1
Finance/Insurance	1			<u>1</u>			3	1	1
Service	1			1		1			
People-to-People <sup>b</sup>	1		<u>2</u>			2	1	2	2
Investment		1	2					<u>1</u>	
Science <sup>c</sup>		1				2	1		2
Education/Culture			2		2	5	2	3	4
Industry				1		3	1	2	1
Media					1	1		2	1
Energy/Environment					1	4	<u>1</u>	1	1
Intellectual Property						2	1	1	
Institutional							2	3	

Note: <sup>a</sup> Includes fishery; <sup>b</sup> Includes tourism, youth and sports exchanges; <sup>c</sup> Includes technology and R&D cooperation. Some recommendations may appear in several categories at once due to their scope. Underlined numbers denote sectors that were a focus of the subsequent round of SEF-ARATS talks.

Source: Author’s own compilation.

Table 2 provides an overview of the recommendations made per sector. The data documents two processes. First, a qualitative expansion into additional policy fields: while early events focused on pressing issues in a relatively abstract fashion, creating broad agendas for crucial sectors, aimed first and foremost at consolidating the common ground of the party-to-party platform, later conventions grew more confident in addressing more specific projects. Second, a quantitative increase in the number of recommendations within each sector: rather than being bold declarations of intent, the resolutions evolved into substantial and detailed preparatory work for the SEF-ARATS



talks and even for contact at the vice-ministerial level. For instance, the turn towards the cultural sector during the fifth Forum has endured, with each following event making several precise recommendations to improve cooperation in education and adjacent fields.

Furthermore, the change of government in 2008 put the KMT in a position that enabled it to actually implement the agreements that were reached at the Forum, making the instrument of joint recommendations more attractive. Conversely, this also accounts for the decline in the significance of unilateral policies.

Unilateral measures (单边措施, *danbian cuoshi*) constitute the second instrument at the Forum's disposal. Similar to the joint recommendations, they are announced publicly during the closing ceremony or in the immediate aftermath of the Forum, usually by the leader of the Chinese delegation. The difference lies in their asymmetry, with Taiwan being the beneficiary of the measures and China unilaterally committing itself to implementing a series of policies. Furthermore, especially during the early Forums, the joint recommendations were relatively abstract, while the unilateral measures were specific policy measures that addressed functional issues ranging from the recognition of diplomas to defining the conditions regarding the setting up of airline joint ventures. The instrument's practical significance stems from the KMT's initial circumstances as an opposition party when the Forums first commenced, which meant that it was unable to implement agreements in Taiwan. Accordingly, this instrument's importance has decreased since 2008. During the early stages, however, the value of this instrument cannot be overstated: Through the party-to-party platform, the opposition party KMT was able to negotiate substantial concessions from the PRC, while the DPP party in government had very little to show from its attempts to negotiate with China. The KMT was able to present itself as a party of action and thus embarrass the incumbent government by providing immediate and practical improvements for Taiwanese businessmen and their families, students, and other Taiwanese citizens living in or visiting China, by increasing their standard of living, reducing the bureaucratic intricacies and creating tangible employment and educational opportunities. Lastly, it allowed KMT leaders to showcase their competence in dealing with cross-Strait issues, setting into practice their claims that a KMT government would be able to successfully negotiate with China and thereby reduce economic uncertainty and the

security threat simultaneously. Similar to the outsourcing of issues to the SEF-ARATS channel, unilateral policy packages were announced during the Straits Forum (海峡论坛, *haixia luntan*) that took place in June 2012, the month preceding the eighth Forum (Taiwan Affairs Office 2012).

A third instrument that can be partly attributed to the KMT–CCP Forum is that of provincial procurement visits. These consist of relatively large delegations of several hundred members, made up of political figures and representatives from private and state-owned enterprises from China, which are often led by a governor or CCP party secretary. While the actual trips may be organized by a wide range of organizations, including the Chinese National Federation of Industries (CNFI), the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) and the NPF (Chien and Hsieh 2010: 18), their origin and political intent can be traced back to the KMT–CCP Forum. On the Chinese side, the TAO has to approve each delegation and can therefore exercise direct control over the missions (Chien and Hsieh 2010: 3). Its main purpose is to attempt to co-opt social forces that have traditionally supported the DPP, such as the farmers of central and southern Taiwan. It is also the Forum's main instrument for directly supporting industry sectors that have suffered during the global economic crisis in order to consolidate their support by integrating them into China's domestic market.

The procurement missions started to visit Taiwan in May 2009, after the PRC had pledged to purchase flat-panel displays from Taiwan for two billion USD as one of the ten measures announced during the fourth Forum. One of the measures announced during the first Forum also encouraged procurement missions to Taiwan, albeit with the purpose of relieving Taiwanese farmers of excess fruit production during peak harvest periods. In the months around Taiwan's 2012 presidential elections, both sides refrained from organizing provincial visits due to the sensitivity of the issue. They only resumed at the end of March with the delegation led by Su Shulin (苏树林), the governor of Fujian Province (*Taipei Times* 2012b). As high-profile provincial visits regularly attract media attention, they serve the secondary function of further diffusing the discursive elements of the KMT–CCP Forum's principles.

One of those people interviewed in the course of this research attributed the provincial visits to a vulgar Marxist belief held by the

CCP decision-makers that considers the buying missions to be part of a conscious strategy of changing the material base of Taiwan's society in order to promote a pro-China superstructure (Anonymous 3 2012). But although the delegations sign contracts in the range of up to several billion USD per visit (netting more than 14 billion USD in 2009, an amount equal to 7.6 per cent of Taiwan's exports), the actual impact is hard to calculate (Liou 2011: 171–172). While the missions primarily target regions considered to be DPP strongholds, they do not seem to have influenced the outcome of recent elections in these constituencies (Anonymous 2 2012). The fact that so many organizations participate on both sides in organizing the visits makes it even harder to assess their impact. At the same time, it demonstrates how well synchronized these channels are, especially on the Chinese side under the direction of the TAO.

## More than Sticks and Carrots: The Forum as an Agent of Hegemony

The functions of the Forum within the transformation of cross-Strait relations are manifold. They include the orchestration of, the creation of synergy among, and the delegation of certain tasks to other channels (such as the recent announcement of unilateral measures during the Straits Forum). The party-to-party platform also provides a setting for elite familiarization, which is particularly crucial in times of leadership transition on either side. Preliminary meetings, such as the one between Taiwan's Vice-President Wu Den-yih (吳敦義, Wu Dunyi) and Chinese Vice-Premier Li Keqiang (李克強) at the Boao Asia Forum in April 2012, assure a continuity among party members on both sides, while the provincial visits provide the environment for similar meetings at the lower levels of the party ranks. Moreover, the Forum serves as a stage for the dissemination of its ideological narrative. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to include the discursive dimension of the KMT–CCP cooperation, it has to be pointed out that the KMT–CCP Forum gives the narrative of the 1992 consensus a practical manifestation. Every meeting and every enacted decision refers to the One China principle as the foundation of the party-to-party dialogue, thereby linking all the progress in cross-Strait relations, especially the advantages and concessions made to Taiwan, to the 1992 consensus.

Two of the Forum's functions, however, are of particular interest for the analysis of hegemony across the Taiwan Strait. While both seek to secure consent in Taiwanese society for the ongoing transformation of cross-Strait relations through civil society, their specific methods differ. One strategy is concerned with providing material concessions to integration-sceptical groups, while the other aims to marginalize or isolate groups that question this transformation in order to reduce their influence within Taiwanese society. A few examples will help to outline how hegemony works in practice.

To secure consent around the cross-Strait rapprochement, the Forum has made huge efforts to create opportunities not only for businessmen, but also for other professions (such as doctors and architects) and students. The most profound effort, however, has been concentrated on Taiwan's farmers, who are generally considered to be supporters of the pro-independence DPP. The Forum has resorted to all the instruments at its disposal in order to alleviate local farmers' fears that Chinese agricultural produce will flood into Taiwan, and instead portrays cross-Strait integration as being beneficial for Taiwan's agricultural sector. In the early stages, the Forum passed recommendations and unilateral measures with a focus on short-term effects. The PRC lowered its tariffs in order to encourage agricultural imports from Taiwan, while provincial procurement missions specifically targeted excess fruit in Taiwan. In a second step, a long-term strategy was put into place to create structures that consolidate demand for Taiwanese agricultural products in China. To this end, the PRC has set up a network of agricultural trade centres in Shanghai, Xiamen, Xiapu, Dongshan, Zhangzhou and Quanzhou (*People's Daily* 2010). These efforts are closely intertwined with fairs and conventions that promote Taiwanese agricultural produce, mostly as luxury goods.

After the change of government in 2008, the KMT made the issue of agriculture a central focus of semi-official negotiations. For example, the "early harvest" list of tariff concessions under the ECFA reduced to zero the tariff on many of Taiwan's agricultural product imports to China, while at the same time the agreement set a limit on agricultural exports from China to Taiwan in order to mitigate fears of cheaper Chinese products flowing into Taiwan's market. While fruit has continued to be an important target of Chinese provincial procurement missions, these one-time acquisitions are coupled

with long-term structures, such as tea distribution centres, set up in China (*China Post* 2011).

A prominent case is that of 100 aquaculture farmers in Xuejia (學甲, Syuejia), a district in Greater Tainan that is a DPP stronghold. In 2011, the state-owned Shanghai Fisheries General Corp. placed an order with commercial fish farmers in Xuejia for milkfish worth 4.5 million USD (*Taipei Times* 2012a). This was accompanied by campaigns to promote milkfish in agricultural and trade fairs in China (*Taipei Times* 2012d). Although the Forum used every policy tool in its box – namely, joint recommendations, unilateral preferential policies, and procurement missions, as well as its connections to other channels such as the Straits Forum and the SEF-ARATS talks – at least in the case of Xuejia, these endeavours had no significant impact on the results of the presidential and legislative elections in 2012 (*Taipei Times* 2012b), and Xuejia retained elected representatives from the opposition DPP.

The second important process of hegemony, marginalizing integration-sceptical groups, appears to have been effective both during the DPP's time in government and since 2008. The main example is the Forum's success in putting pressure on the DPP by helping to portray the KMT as "pragmatic" and the DPP as "unsettled" in its China policy. During the KMT's time in opposition, the Forum successfully constrained the range of possible options for cross-strait relations available to the DPP government. According to a senior official at the MAC during Chen Shui-bian's second term, the government was frustrated by the fact that the opposition party had entered into negotiations with the CCP, while the government was isolated (Anonymous 3 2012). The DPP government had authorized private groups to enter negotiations with the Chinese side in Macau in order to discuss the issue of direct flights, but the CCP could afford to stall these talks, because the KMT–CCP Forum provided an alternative negotiation channel. A similar episode relates to the issue of agricultural products. After the Lien–Hu meeting in early 2005, the PRC unilaterally lifted tariffs on a limited range of fruit from Taiwan. Subsequently, Beijing extended an olive branch to the DPP government by inviting a Taiwanese delegation to discuss the issue of fruit imports. However, ultimately, the MAC refrained from sending a delegation over fears that China would regard the talks as a domestic issue (*Taipei Times* 2005).

The unilateral concessions made by the CCP during the KMT's time in opposition had a similar effect. From the first Forum in 2006 onwards, unilateral policies were used to create tangible opportunities for Taiwanese businessmen and other citizens, something that the DPP government failed to negotiate for itself. These KMT-led successes included an expansion in the number of cities allowed to issue permits for Taiwanese to enter China; the recognition in China of diplomas issued by Taiwanese institutions of higher education; and the lifting of restrictions on the practice of certain professions (for instance, architecture and medicine) in China by Taiwanese citizens (*Taipei Times* 2006).

In these cases, the unilateral policies negotiated during KMT–CCP meetings helped to change the political landscape in Taiwan in that they made the DPP government seem ineffective at responding to society's demands for improved civil and economic cross-Strait exchanges, particularly when compared with the KMT which, as an opposition party, was actively negotiating concessions in Beijing. After the change of government in 2008, the KMT was able to reinforce this impression by quickly signing agreements addressing several pressing issues, the groundwork for all of which had been prepared at Forum meetings earlier.

The substantial effect of this on public opinion put pressure on the DPP to rethink its China policy. Basically, the DPP has to choose between the lesser of two evils: either stand back and be excluded from substantial transnational relations across the Taiwan Strait, or agree to a subordinate position. With the 1992 consensus being the non-negotiable foundation of the party-to-party channel across the Strait, the second choice would risk alienating DPP supporters. The effectiveness of this dynamic at putting the DPP under pressure was demonstrated when two members of the DPP accepted the Forum's invitation to participate in the 2009 Forum. Former DPP Minister of Agriculture Fan Chen-tsung (范振宗, Fan Zhenzong) and former DPP legislator Hsu Jung-shu (許榮淑, Xu Rongshu) travelled to Changsha, where the July 2009 Forum was taking place, prompting widespread discussion in Taiwan about the DPP's cross-Strait policy. As a consequence, the DPP decided to suspend both members temporarily, before expelling them from the party. This episode shows how the Forum actively sets agendas, even within the opposition party, due to its structural power.

The internal debates about changing the DPP's course continue, however. Even before the DPP candidate Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文, Cai Yingwen) had lost the 2012 presidential election, an August 2011 DPP white paper entitled *National Security Strategy* had taken a distinctively transnational stance:

A visible world with traditional state boundaries will co-exist with an invisible societal network connected by mega-cities through information, capital, trade, technology, services, and migration (DPP 2011: 1).

The term “transnational” is used five times and the word “globalization” 11 times in the nine-page white paper, which calls for the construction of a “framework for peaceful and stable interaction between Taiwan and China” (DPP 2011: 6), as well as “multifaceted social and cultural exchanges between Chinese and Taiwanese civil society” (DPP 2011: 7). These are signs of the DPP's awareness of the challenge that marginalization in relation to the transnational mode of governance across the Taiwan Strait represents. However, these points did not become essential parts of Tsai Ing-wen's election campaign, not least because the PRC continues to insist on the acceptance of the 1992 consensus, the opposition to which was a central pillar of Tsai's election platform.

After the election defeat of 2012, it seemed that the DPP felt compelled to set a new course vis-à-vis its relations with China. The election of Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌, Su Zhenchang) as Chairman of the DPP can be considered a limited move towards a more conciliatory approach to China. Su restored the party's Department of China Affairs and then convened a new China Affairs Committee. But by the time the DPP decides to open itself up to transnational relations, which is by no means a self-evident outcome, it will most likely have accrued one decade of backlog: While the KMT and its NPF have accumulated more than a decade of practical knowledge and expertise in orchestrating a large network of summits, meetings, seminars, academic conferences, visits, cooperations with the business sector, think tank symposia, and interactions with students and youth groups, as well as synchronizing these activities with government agencies, the DPP's restraint in entering the transnational field means that it suffers a deficit in a very practical sense. The lack of this practical knowledge, and the fact that the KMT and the CPP have constructed a strong network of interlocked channels, as well as the fact

that entering into party-to-party contacts will most likely mean subscribing to one form or another of the 1992 consensus, shows the structural power that the CCP–KMT alliance holds over the DPP. Even eight years after the initiation of party-to-party cooperation between the KMT and the CCP, the DPP is still divided on how to react to this development. Recent surveys show that DPP supporters are still split on the party’s course regarding China (*Taipei Times* 2013c). While viewing the Forum as the only source of intra-party tension within the DPP would represent an exaggeration, the Cross-Strait Forum is the embodiment of the KMT’s “pragmatism” towards cross-Strait integration and the DPP’s lack of substantial channels to connect political and civil society groups.

## Conclusion: The KMT–CCP Forum and a Critical Approach to Cross-Strait Integration

The Lien–Hu meeting of 2005, with its declared goal of curbing the Taiwanese independence movement, has found its institutional expression in the KMT–CCP Forum. But this institutionalization itself can only be adequately understood as part of a broader development that started when the KMT lost the presidential elections in the year 2000 and shifted its attention towards civil society and the CCP. The Forum’s centrality within this development is hard to grasp, if studied from a policy-centric perspective. But once we open our analysis to other forms of social power, the Forum not only represents an integral part of the various cross-Strait channels but also stands out for its ability to coordinate efforts to organize consent for what is portrayed as a natural process of integration in a globalizing world. Given the extensive portfolio of strategies and instruments that were engendered by the Forum, it becomes clear that the Forum has tremendously increased the KMT’s strategic options against the independence movement. More significant, however, is the Forum’s role as the centrepiece of a social project that seeks to legitimate the transformation of cross-Strait relations not by coercive means, but by securing active consent through and within Taiwan’s civil society.

On the one hand, the Forum employs its resources to coordinate a serious effort to provide tangible opportunities for a growing number of Taiwanese citizens. The Forum’s ability to channel billions of US dollars (directly through procurement missions or indirectly by



opening trade and investment chances or providing streams of tourists) and to open up employment and educational opportunities for Taiwanese people might ultimately change the criteria used by Taiwan's citizens to judge China–Taiwan relations. This effort is especially directed at groups that have been characterized as traditionally integration-sceptical, such as Taiwan's farmers. By actively encouraging cross-Strait cooperation and civil society exchanges, an increasing number of sectors (from banking to media to education) will have an important stake in the cross-Strait rapprochement, which means that social dynamics are increasingly shifting in favour of the 1992 consensus. While it is too early to assess the impact of the Forum's efforts to forge a One China identity through cooperation in the fields of education, the cultural sector and media industries, the initiation of these measures shows that the CCP and the KMT are confident in investing in long-term projects.

On the other hand, the Forum has also been able to limit the discourse on alternative options promoted by other agents, such as those sceptical of integration. This has not been achieved by direct coercion, as the example of the DPP expelling two of its members shows. Rather, it works by limiting the possible range of options to the DPP, while at the same time applying pressure to the DPP to make policy decisions.

Obviously, the results of both strategies have been mixed. For instance, there are indications that farmers in Taiwan are not easily bought off. The voting behaviour of the above-mentioned milkfish farmers did not significantly change between the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections (*Taipei Times* 2012b), nor is it necessary that the DPP subscribe to one form of the 1992 consensus or other in order to succeed in future elections. This does not imply that hegemony cannot help us to understand these social transformations; it only shows that hegemony is not about outcomes, but about the process. The concept of hegemony provides a framework that allows us to relate these conflicts, negotiations and concessions to each other; to put each single struggle into context; and to evaluate their importance within a framework that stresses governance through consent.

This degree of contingency makes the future role and importance of the Forum hard to assess. However, there are indicators that the Forum will continue to play a crucial role in China–Taiwan relations. It has made the successful transition from the asymmetric

state of affairs that existed while the KMT was not the ruling party to the integrated manner it has worked with the government since the KMT took back the reins of power in 2008. The increasing officialization, the deepening of institutional interlock and the enlargement of the Forum's base of legitimacy show that the Forum is in a strong position to shape the dynamics across the Strait. Furthermore, the transnational platform has established a path dependency: The KMT cannot withdraw from its cooperation with the CCP without risking complete isolation. Perhaps the most important reason to believe in the continuation of the Forum lies in its role as a potential back-up channel. In the case of a future DPP election victory, the Forum could still orchestrate political sway against Taiwan's democratically elected government, as it did rather successfully over the course of the first three Forum conventions.

At the same time, the platform is not immune to tensions. The ideological difference between the KMT and the CCP concerning the One China principle should not be underestimated, especially if the CCP decides to push for a peace accord, which might risk putting Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou into difficulty in the domestic arena. And while the CCP, the KMT and the business sector share the same mid-term interests of guaranteeing a stable investment environment through the prevention of Taiwanese independence, their long-term goals differ to a large degree. While the CCP overtly seeks unification, the KMT entered the party-to-party platform first and foremost to gain a strategic advantage over pro-independence forces in Taiwan. And while the business sector seeks to facilitate cross-Strait economic exchange, its privileged role as a linkage community depends on territorial fragmentation (van Apeldoorn 2004: 165) that allows it to build its power on combining the comparative advantages of the Chinese and Taiwanese economies. These discrepancies might result in tensions among the different parties involved. In terms of Taiwan's civil society, the liberalization of cross-Strait markets is bound to create discontent (Wong 2010). Overall unemployment rates in Taiwan rose to 4.25 per cent in August 2013, with young people under the age of 24 being particularly hard hit with an unemployment rate of 12 per cent (*Taipei Times* 2012c, 2013a). It is not easy to see how the CCP, the KMT and the DPP might deal with the possible emergence of forces of discontent, especially if China came to

doubt the effectiveness of injecting billions of dollars into the Taiwanese economy.

Taken together, these insights show that critical theory, here in the form of Gramscian hegemony, can help to reinterpret the dynamics of cross-Strait relations. The critical framework provides a new account of cross-Strait relations that embeds political relations in civil society processes to counter the tendency of conventional approaches to overlook or understate political processes beyond intergovernmental relations. This new perspective does not address the question of whether China has power over Taiwan. Rather, it shifts the attention to networks that lie transversal to states. Systematically questioning conventional dichotomies, such as “state vs. society” and “domestic vs. international”, the concept of hegemony highlights the importance of governance beyond formal governmental politics, mediated through civil society.

Future studies should take the complementarity of cross-Strait channels seriously. In addition to looking at single actors, future empirical analyses could examine how a specific policy issue is negotiated in parallel or in succession to different channels, and how the transnational form of governance enables certain potential outcomes and precludes others.

However real and tangible some of the opportunities created by the KMT–CCP cooperation may be, ultimately a closer analysis shows that unilaterally implemented decisions depend on the goodwill of the CCP. Furthermore, the channels are only open to the pan-blue camp and the negotiation channels structurally favour the KMT’s interests. The fact that consent is organized in the terrain of civil society means that power is dispersed over many actors, channels and mechanisms, most of which are not checked by democratically elected institutions. And even when the results of negotiations are presented to the Legislative Yuan, the actual process that leads to the proposed law is not transparent. If the DPP were to participate in these channels, it is hard to imagine that it would be in a position to actually shape the arrangement of cross-Strait negotiations, as the DPP would find itself in a subordinate position within a network dominated by the CCP and the KMT.

While this network is made up of a plethora of channels, this is only an apparent pluralization of cross-Strait politics, as the arrangement is conditioned by the emergence of the party-to-party platform

as the central pillar of cross-Strait cooperation. The politicization of the Taiwan Strait in general and the emergence of the KMT–CCP Forum in particular are not simply reactions to quasi-natural economic and social processes. They are part of a conscious strategy for legitimating the transformation of cross-Strait relations. Transnational politics across the Strait represent a political form which both results from and ultimately aims to resolve the political standstill across the Strait. But the fact that the transnational political channels are limited to the pan-blue camp has already severely distorted Taiwan’s democracy.

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