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By: Russell Hsiao

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Throughout 2021, China's unrelenting crackdown on liberty in Hong Kong continued to widen, with the mass [arrests of democracy activists](#) and the [shuttering of the last few remaining independent media outlets](#) in the Special Administrative Region (SAR). Under the draconian National Security Law (香港國家安全法) passed by China's National People's Congress (全國人民代表大會) in June 2020, the naked suppression of people's civil rights was masked by authorities holding so-called "[patriots-only](#)" elections in December 2021 despite all pro-democracy candidates having effectively been barred from running. While the December election had the lowest turnout of voters in the SAR's history, a record number of Hong Kong persons have been voting with their feet instead and emigrating to other countries, including Taiwan.

Wave of Hong Kong Emigrants to Taiwan Continues 2020 Trend in 2021

The number of Hong Kong people applying to establish residency or permanent residency has continued its notable increase from 2020 in 2021. [Statistics](#) from the Immigration Department of Taiwan's Ministry of the Interior show that from January to November 2021, there were 9,772 Hong Kong persons granted residence permits (居留許可), an increase of 271 from 9,501 over the same period last year. Similarly, 1,572 Hong Kong persons were granted permanent resident permits (定居許可), an increase of 175 persons from 1,397 last year. Both numbers break the [all-time record](#). The January-November 2021 number represents a 67 percent increase from the 2019 full year number. (Notably, these figures do not reveal the total of number of applicants received.)

The emigration figures show a continuation of the significant increase of migrants from

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Hong Kong to Taiwan starting a year earlier. In [2020](#), Taiwan issued 10,813 resident permits to Hong Kong residents (for work, study, etc.) and 1,576 permanent residency permits. The 2020 count significantly exceeded the 5,858 residency permits that Taiwan issued in 2019—when the extradition law was first introduced—as well as the 4,148 issued in 2018 and 4,057 issued in 2016.

Hong Kong Students in Taiwan

In addition to the significant number of visitors from Hong Kong to Taiwan, which [averaged](#) well above 1 million on a yearly basis from 2013-2015, the significant increase in the number of emigrants since the beginning of anti-extradition law protests—while remarkable—does not capture the full extent of people-to-people flow between Hong Kong and Taiwan. According to Taiwan's [Mainland Affairs Council](#) (MAC, 大陸委員會)—a cabinet agency in charge of implementing the government's cross-Strait, Hong Kong, and Macao policies—"[t]here were 10,960 Hong Kong and Macao students enrolled in Taiwan universities in 2020; Hong Kong students accounted for 7,807 of the total, representing the largest share of overseas Chinese, Hong Kong, and Macao students studying in Taiwan. [...] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and border control measures, about 105,100 Taiwanese people traveled to Hong Kong and approximately 162,000 Hong Kong residents traveled to Taiwan in 2020." This figure stands in stark contrast to the shrinking number of mainland Chinese students coming to Taiwan. Short-term and degree-seeking [students from China](#) dropped 76 percent to 6,036 in 2020 from 25,049 in 2019.

National Security Concerns

Public support in Taiwan for Hong Kong's political struggle has been growing for several years, which reflects growing concern about its implications for Taiwan, as well as solidarity with the Hong Kong protestors. Yet these concerns are being checked by increased caution about the potential national security risks posed by unvetted migrants. Indeed, due to potential risks to "national security," Taiwan has [reportedly](#) tightened its policy for vetting Hong Kong residents attempting to move to Taiwan. For instance, some people born in China, or who have worked for Chinese-state owned companies or the Hong Kong government, have been

subjected to tighter scrutiny.

Despite enhanced scrutiny, the top leadership in Taiwan continues to express support for Hong Kong's plight. Underscoring this high-level support, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) spoke again on the crisis in Hong Kong to the Taiwanese people in her [2022 New Year's Address](#):

"The pursuit of democracy and freedom is not a crime, and Taiwan's position in support of Hong Kong will not change. Aside from showing our concern, we will cherish our own hard-earned freedom and democracy even more deeply. We will make Taiwan even better. We will show the world that democratic Taiwan has the courage to step out from the shadow of authoritarian China, and that we will not bow to pressure."

Even though support for Hong Kong may be rising, the Taiwanese public at large remains unsure at best about what to do about Hong Kong. A recent survey of Taiwanese citizens' views revealed somewhat ambivalent attitudes about Hong Kong immigration. According to a [survey](#) conducted in Taiwan in May 2021 by researchers Lev Nachman, Shelley Rigger, and others, "about 36 percent of Taiwanese support Hong Kongers immigrating to Taiwan while only 23 percent oppose it. Still, the largest group—42 percent—are ambivalent."

This ambivalence may also be reflected in the rejection rate of Hong Kong applicants immigrating to Taiwan. Although the [Mainland Affairs Council](#) noted that the percentage of Hong Kong people who were rejected was "extremely low," this could be attributed to the bar being set prohibitively high, thereby deterring some migrants from even applying. In addition to "national security concerns," the MAC [stated](#) that the main reason for the rejection was that the parties did not provide supplementary information as required, or that there was a situation of "fake investment and immigration."

As indicated in its "[Analysis Report: 24 Years After Hong Kong's Handover](#)," which the MAC published in September 2021:

"Relevant government agencies are now reviewing certain provisions of the Act Governing Relations with Hong Kong and Macao to effec-

tively prevent the CCP from infiltrating Taiwan through capital or personnel exchanges coming from Hong Kong and Macao. Article 60 of the Act Governing Relations with Hong Kong and Macao, i.e. a clausula rebus sic stantibus (a legal doctrine which allows laws to become inapplicable as a result of a fundamental change of circumstances), has the nature of an emergency order. It expressly stipulates that application of this provision would require situations “endangering the security of the Taiwan Area.””

The Taiwan government’s concerns about potential national security risks have been reinforced by a number of high-profile espionage cases and alleged spies in recent years, as well as a long history of Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) infiltration into Taiwan through Hong Kong and mainland agents. One recent prominent example was the 2019 case of self-professed Chinese spy [Wang Liqiang](#) (王立強), who alleged that the Chinese military’s General Staff Department (中國人民解放軍總參謀部) had used two Hong Kong-listed companies to control media in the city and recruit agents among the territory’s students. The indictments of [Xiang Xin](#) (向心) and [Xie Xizhang](#) (謝錫璋), who were allegedly involved in money laundering and setting up a spy-ring while masquerading as businessmen from Hong Kong, are two other cases that underscore the national security risks of those may be seeking to exploit an open-door attitude in Taipei toward Hong Kongers.

Conclusion

The ongoing exodus from Hong Kong to Taiwan is happening against the backdrop of some indications that Hong Kong is on the precipice of another wave of emigration—similar if not exceeding past displacements in the 1960s. Indeed, Hong Kong saw a [net outflow](#) of 89,200 residents year over year in June 2021. As COVID restrictions ease, continued—if not increased—migration is to be expected in 2022 and beyond.

Since there are no asylum laws currently on the books in Taiwan that would consider those seeking refugee status, this makes Taipei an easy target for criticism that it is not doing enough to assist those seeking political asylum from Hong Kong. Such a law, [advocates claim](#), should spell out conditions for letting Hong Kong

people stay for political reasons. There are at least [470 Hongkongers](#) currently seeking asylum abroad according to data gathered between 2019 to May 2021.

In response, some [local lawmakers](#) in Taiwan argue that the country’s existing legal mechanisms are sufficient and that promulgating an asylum law would pose additional national security risks, as it could potentially also apply for persons claiming to be refugees from the PRC. For its part, the Taiwan government appears to be trying to thread the needle of trying to help Hong Kongers while also ensuring its national security. Taiwan’s [administrative procedures](#) for processing residency requests by persons from Hong Kong are handled in accordance with the “Regulations Governing Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents Entering the Taiwan Area and Setting up Residence or Registered Permanent Residence in ROC” (香港澳門居民進入台灣地區及居留定居許可辦法). The new “[Law on the Acquisition and Employment of Foreign Professionals](#)” (外國專業人才延攬及僱用法), which also applies to Hong Kong students studying in Taiwan, would extend from 3 years to 5 years the duration of those students’ eligibility to remain in Taiwan if they are employed.

In a speech delivered at a [virtual event](#) organized by Taiwan’s Legislative Yuan in December 2021, Hong Kong activist-turned-politician Nathan Law (羅冠聰) warned, “Taiwan is the next target of the CCP’s attack on the free world.” Law—who was granted political asylum by the United Kingdom—also appealed to the Taiwan government to conscientiously address the plight of Hong Kong protesters stranded in Taiwan. He called on the Taiwan government to amend its laws so that Hong Kong people can live, work, and even naturalize, allowing those people to live and contribute to Taiwan’s society. Ultimately, these migrants could [use their own experiences](#) to help maintain Taiwan’s democratic defense mechanisms, and work to defend democracy and freedom internationally, according to Law.

The main point: The number of Hong Kong people applying to establish residency or permanent residency in Taiwan has continued its notable increase from 2020 in 2021. Despite public support within Taiwan for Hong Kong, these concerns are being checked by increased caution by the government about the potential national security risks posed by unvetted migrants.

Russia: China's Force Multiplier for Its Taiwan Strategy

By: Stephen Blank

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In a recent [article](#) about Sino-Russian collaboration in Afghanistan, Elizabeth Wishnick observed that “Beijing and Moscow, once bitter adversaries, now cooperate on military issues, cyber security, high technology, and in outer space, among other areas. While it falls short of an alliance, the deepening Sino-Russian partnership confounds US strategists.” While this collaboration does not represent a formal alliance like NATO—and scholars remain averse to characterizing this relationship thusly—this author [has and continues to maintain](#) that it is an alliance in fact.

The nature of the Russia-China alliance has confounded experts and policymakers alike. Nevertheless, this alliance's [qualities and ambitions](#) are visible, and have been particularly manifested in the military sphere. Indeed, People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) recently [proclaimed](#) that Russia and China can work together to maintain global order. While few have endeavored to ascertain Russia's potential role in China's Taiwan strategy, Russia actually offers numerous advantages to China in its unrelenting campaign to “reincorporate” Taiwan. Therefore, in regards to Taiwan, Russia is a force multiplier for China.

Political Advantages

Although Moscow rarely comments on Taiwan, it did so in October 2021 when Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov [stated](#) that, “Russia, like the overwhelming majority of other countries, considers Taiwan to be part of the People's Republic of China [...] We have proceeded and will proceed from this premise in our foreign policy.” Similarly, Moscow also supports Beijing on key issues of Asian security beyond Taiwan, maintaining [staunch opposition](#) to US efforts to strengthen cohesion among India, Australia, and Japan (under the concept of the “The Quad”), as well as mechanisms like the Australia-United States-United Kingdom (AUKUS) collaboration on maritime security. In general, Moscow apparently strives [to weaken the U.S. network of](#)

[allies](#) in Asia.

Thus, this relationship manifests itself in other Asian issues like Korea, where discussions of great power policies often [no longer include Russia](#), a telling sign of its eclipse by China. In addition, Russia's coordination with China on overflights and naval threats to both [Taiwan](#) and [Japan](#) has led to a tightening of alliance relationships—as evidenced in Japan's [many new accords with Australia](#) and the US against Sino-Russian threats, [increased defense spending](#), and [South Korea's](#) clear if quiet decision to take sides in the growing tensions between China and the US. This support for the PRC's Asian policies displays China's ascendancy in this relationship, even as China enhances its diplomatic power in Asian security issues. At the same time the [Sino-Russian alignment in the UN](#)—including Russian support for China's efforts to gain control of UN international organizations—also reinforces China's campaign to oust Taiwan from independent representation and presence in the UN.

Beijing's insistence on a “One-China Principle” in and beyond the UN is also critical to the diplomatic-political dimension of its overall strategy. Chinese diplomats firmly [maintain](#) that “Taiwan was a province of China and therefore not qualified from participating independently in international organizations such as the UN.” Accordingly, Moscow's [position on Taiwan](#) exemplifies the broader process by which Russia's position on Northeast Asian issues like relations with both Koreas and Russo-Japanese relations have been subordinated to the quest for coordination if not alliance with China, often at considerable cost to Russian interests in Asia. Nevertheless, President Putin—notwithstanding virtual unanimity among Western analysts that Moscow cannot ultimately accept Chinese dominance here—has [explicitly stated](#) that “the main struggle, which is now underway, is that for global leadership and we are not going to contest China on this.” Already in 2014, he postulated that Russia and China were natural allies. [1] In China's eyes, Russian support for Chinese positions on Taiwan and other critical issues ultimately validates Beijing's sense of its leadership in Asia and its stance on those issues.



Images: Two views of mutually-supportive Sino-Russian diplomatic statements.

Image left: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in a March 2021 interview with PRC state media, in which Lavrov advocated “the main values that Russia and China hold” in international relations. (Image source: [CGTN](#))

Image right: PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian (趙立堅) in October 2021, stating that “We highly appreciate Foreign Minister Lavrov’s remarks on Taiwan” during a trip to Kazakhstan, in which Lavrov had expressed support for PRC sovereignty claims over Taiwan. (Image source: [PRC Foreign Ministry](#))

Military

Russo-Chinese coordination is strongest in the military sphere, a fact that has duly triggered [foreign apprehension](#) regarding possible concerted action against the United States and its allies in Asia and Europe via simultaneous probes directed against both Taiwan and Ukraine. Bilateral support from the two militaries for the alliance has grown steadily and has proven to be durable. Moreover, Russian elites very much favor enhanced collaboration.

Moscow believes that bolstering China’s military position in East Asia is very much in Russian interests: as the official in charge of Russian arms exports stated in April 2015, “if we work in China’s interests, that means we also work in our interests.” [2]

Building on this, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu [remarked](#) in 2017 that:

“Russia’s strategic partner is the People’s Republic of China. Bilateral military cooperation is developing actively. Primarily it is focused on the fight against international terrorism. Joint actions are regularly practiced during the military exercises Naval Interaction and Peaceful Mission. The Russian Federation continues to prepare specialists

for the People’s Liberation Army of China. In total more than 3,600 Chinese servicemen have been trained in the universities of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.”

Subsequent bilateral cooperation continues to expand in many directions. First, the greatest Russian military policy contribution in a Taiwan contingency would likely be its ability to tie down US forces and policy attention in Europe, the Arctic, and the North Pacific, while also deterring them by means of its nuclear threat and political support for China. Second, Russia’s continuing arms sales to China have almost exclusively consisted of systems that would threaten US assets and capabilities in the Pacific Ocean and Asia. [3] These systems have greatly enhanced Chinese reconnaissance and strike capabilities against targets from Japan and Korea. In turn, they have [enabled China](#) to threaten not only US and local forces but also Japan by overflights and naval probes, while also challenging US Air Force superiority in these theaters. Third, Russo-Chinese exercises not only familiarize Chinese forces and commanders with Russian weapons and operational concepts, but also facilitate potential inter-operability should a Taiwan conflict expand beyond Taiwan, as is quite possible. Fourth, thanks to Russia’s alliance with China and both governments’ shared interest in putting Central Asia

under their exclusive sphere of influence, Russia's role as the "gendarme of choice" in that region relieves China of the potentially draining experience of two-front operations in Taiwan and Central Asia. Fifth, there are mounting signs not only of coordination but of [emulation and learning](#) regarding tactics and operations in information and cyber warfare. Such cooperation could assist China in its [global cyber and information campaigns](#) against Taiwan.

In this regard, Russian arms sales have led to an expanding and mutually rewarding high-tech partnership that could further complicate Taiwanese, US, and overall allied defense planning throughout the Indo-Pacific, while also generating a mutually beneficial arms and technology transfer environment. As Samuel Bendett and Elsa Kania [observe](#):

"Traditionally, China has also looked to Russia for access to aero-engines. Today, China's tech sector and defense industry have surpassed Russia in certain sectors and technologies. For instance, China has developed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that are far more advanced than those currently operational in Russia. Nonetheless, the Russian military has been unwilling to acquire Chinese UAVs, instead deciding to attempt to develop indigenous counterparts in mid-range and heavy unmanned combat models. Nonetheless, for Russia, near to mid-term access to certain Chinese products, services and experience may become the very lifeline that Russia's industry, government and military will require in order to wean themselves off high-tech imports, although even that approach may be challenged by limited availability of Chinese components."

Economic Advantages

The primary economic advantage that China could gain through an alliance with Russia is that it undermines the threat of the long-feared "[Malacca Dilemma](#)," in which the US and/or its allies could interdict Chinese energy imports in a time of crisis by closing off the Straits of Malacca. Alternatively, the breakdown of Sino-Australian relations due to Chinese aggressiveness has now led China to pursue a [new campaign](#) to obtain contracts for Russian energy. Although China's efforts to frustrate such eventualities comprise many global

policy lines, its investments in Russian hydrocarbons from Siberia, the Russian Far East, the Arctic, and Central Asia all attest to Russia's critical economic role in the event of a crisis or war concerning Taiwan. Likewise—and this becomes more important as European allies and NATO now support Washington on China—is the possibility of a [Russian energy squeeze](#) on them and the US in case of such a crisis.

Conclusions

Russia clearly serves China as a force multiplier, even without committing any forces to potential conflicts over Taiwan. Clearly China gains enormous benefits thereby not least an increasing ascendancy over Russia and enhanced capability to threaten not only Taiwan but other Asian states. Thus this alliance now facilitates a much more precarious threat environment for not only Taiwan, but across Asia. How being China's force multiplier benefits Russia remains unclear, although China's gains are palpable. Nevertheless the most important question is: who really benefits from a much more dangerous Asia-Pacific?

The main point: The increasingly close relationship between Moscow and Beijing offers diplomatic, economic, and potentially even military support to China not only in regards to Taiwan, but also in broader issues throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

[1] Thomas J. Fingar Ed., *Uneasy Partnerships: China's Engagement with Japan, the Two Koreas, and Russia In the Era Of Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017): 202.

[2] Michael Yahuda, "Japan and the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership," *Japan and the Sino-Russian Entente: The Future of Major-Power Relations in Northeast Asia* (Seattle: National Bureau of Research Asia, NBR Special Report no. 64, 2017): 6.

[3] Paul Schwartz, *Russia's Contribution to China's Surface Warfare Capabilities: Feeding the Dragon* (Pennsylvania & Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

The 13th Straits Forum and Beijing's United Front "People-to-People Exchanges"

By: John Dotson

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On December 10-11, 2021, the "[13th Straits Forum](#)" (第十三屆海峽論壇) was convened in the city of Xiamen, in China's southeastern Fujian Province. First held in 2009, the forum has become an annual event hosted by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to promote cross-strait ties. The 2021 forum was [organized under the slogan](#) of "Expanding People-to-People Exchanges, Deepening Integrated Development" (擴大民間交流, 深化融合發展). Official PRC outlets [claimed](#) that "nearly 2,000 Taiwan compatriots from all walks of life" attended the forum, [including](#) "representatives of political parties, co-sponsors of the forum, industry elites, social organizations and religious circles." State media further [asserted](#) that "10,000 people joined the forum online and in-person and nearly half were from the Taiwan region," although the actual number of people from Taiwan who may have participated in the event is unknown.



Image: Wang Yang, the CCP Politburo member with primary responsibility for the united front policy portfolio, gives an address to the 13th Straits Forum in Xiamen, December 10. (Image source: [CGTN](#))

In keeping with the forum's linkage to the united front work (統戰工作) bureaucracy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 共產黨), the opening of December's forum featured an [address by Wang Yang](#) (汪洋), the CCP Politburo Standing Committee member who bears primary responsibility for the united front policy port-

folio. [1] Wang's address contained much of the usual CCP boilerplate about "achieving the complete unification of the motherland" and the Chinese people's "rock-solid determination to oppose separatism," but also attempted to strike a positive note in characterizing the event as a "common people's forum" (百姓論壇) intended to build a "bridge of trust" (連心橋) across the Taiwan Strait.

For its part, Taiwan's government was harshly critical of the event. On December 6, Chiu Chui-cheng (邱垂正), the vice-chairman of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (大陸委員會), preemptively [criticized](#) the Straits Forum as a "large-scale united front platform [directed towards] Taiwan, completely dominated by and with an agenda designed by the Chinese Communists," and discouraged Taiwan citizens from taking part. When speaking subsequently before the Legislative Yuan, Chiu advised political figures and others from Taiwan to steer clear of such events, and therefore to avoid becoming "Chinese Communist united front targets" (中共統戰對象).

Themes from the 13th Straits Forum

PRC [state media coverage](#) of the forum showed a range of carefully stage-managed activities, ranging from political speeches, to testimonials by Taiwanese businesspeople who had found success in China, to music performances, and even a children's "street dance" competition. As alluded to in the official slogan and the speech by Wang Yang, the forum emphasized the promotion of "people-to-people" (or "among the people") exchanges (民間交流), divided among four [specified](#) sub-categories: "youth exchanges" (青年交流), "grassroots exchanges" (基層交流), "cultural exchanges" (文化交流), and "economic exchanges" (經濟交流).

The promotion of business ties was a major theme, with PRC state media [claiming](#) that "in the business cooperation meeting [...] some 15 deals were signed worth more than 3.7 billion yuan (\$580 million)." A significant emphasis was also placed on outreach and career programs for Taiwan youth, which have been a major point of focus for CCP propaganda and united front efforts throughout 2020 (see [here](#) and [here](#)). The state news network [CGTN proclaimed](#) that "Over 1,600 jobs and internship opportunities are available

to young people from Taiwan through the forum, in fields including rural development, entrepreneurship, talent training and industrial cooperation.”

PRC state media coverage also gave significant focus to a propaganda line that accused—without specificity or evidence—Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) of suppressing participation in the forum via intimidation. *Chinese Taiwan Net* (中國臺灣網), an official PRC website for Taiwan-related news, [accused](#) the DPP of conducting a campaign of “green terror” (綠色恐怖) on the island. Per this account, Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council “successively disgraced itself” by “preventing relevant people from attending,” and the “DPP authorities” had further employed counter-subversion laws to “intimidate the Taiwan masses” from attending. In [remarks](#) made about the forum on December 15, Ma Xiaoguang (馬曉光), a spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the PRC State Council (國務院台灣事務辦公室), stated: “We ask the DPP authority: they crack down on dissidents on the island, stir up ethnic antagonism and divisions in Taiwan society. What kind of democracy is that?”

Kuomintang Participation in Forum Events

Questions regarding the nature of the Straits Forum further connect to domestic political controversies within Taiwan itself. While Taiwan’s DPP-led government discouraged any participation, [senior figures](#) from Taiwan’s leading opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨), participated in some of the forum’s events via remote video connection from Taiwan. On December 10, KMT Deputy Chairman Hsia Li-yan (夏立言) presented a speech to the “19th Cross-Straits Youth Forum” (第十九屆海峽青年論壇), one of the component events of the broader forum. As [covered by pro-KMT media](#), Hsia praised the past policies on cross-Straits relations under the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), and stressed initiatives in “three directions” (三個方向): (1) supporting the rights of young people to engage in “lawful and legitimate exchanges” (合法正當交流); (2) expanding the scope of exchanges across a range of areas, to include politics, economics, history, and culture; and (3) employing exchanges as a means to “seek common ground while acknowledging differences [...] [to promote] mutual understanding, [and] from this point resolve differences [and] eliminate the distance between the two sides.”



Image: Kuomintang Deputy Chairman Hsia Li-yan (right) speaking via remote video link with Deputy Director of the PRC State Council Taiwan Affairs Office Long Mingbiao (龍明彪) (left) during the “19th Straits Youth Forum” on December 10. (Image source: [China Times](#))

KMT Chairman Chu Li-lun (Eric Chu, 朱立倫), who has expressed support for the annual event as a “people’s” (民間) forum [dating back to its creation in 2009](#), also participated via a pre-recorded speech presented to the forum on December 11. In the speech, Chu [stated](#) that “today’s Kuomintang [...] bears a heavy responsibility for promoting stable cross-Straits relations,” and that the KMT would promote “peaceful cross-Straits development” within the framework of the “party constitution and party platform.” Chu also vowed to uphold the interests of Taiwan citizens living in China, and expressed his support for “exchanges in the six people’s social fields” (民間六大社會領域的交流) of culture, urban affairs, scholarship, commerce, religion, and sports.

Conclusions

The 13th Cross-Straits Forum once more demonstrated the CCP’s ongoing focus on “people-to-people” exchanges in cross-Straits relations: one that eschews formal state-to-state interactions, while emphasizing non-governmental contacts, particularly in terms of inducements offered to Taiwanese businesspeople and young adults. This follows a pattern clearly demonstrated throughout the tenure of President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), in which Beijing has sought to deny any legitimacy to Taiwan’s DPP-led government—and even, in more recent propaganda, to level the risible charge that Tsai’s administration is conducting a campaign of “green terror” against opponents within Taiwan (an accusation that was undercut by Beijing’s own claims of widespread Taiwanese participation).

The highly critical position towards the 13th Straits Forum taken by Taiwan's DPP-controlled government on the one hand, and the more positive stance taken by the leadership of the KMT opposition on the other, further demonstrate Taiwan's stark partisan divide in responding to PRC united front initiatives. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council was correct to [caution](#) that this event was "completely dominated by and with an agenda designed by the Chinese Communists," and that it is part and parcel of the CCP's broader united front effort to seek avenues of influence within Taiwan, with the ultimate aim of subverting Taiwan's autonomy and its liberal democratic society.

It is noteworthy that, in their remarks to the Straits Forum, KMT Chairman Chu Li-lun and Deputy Chairman Hsia Li-yan both attempted to frame their remarks within language that, while positive towards enhanced civic exchanges with the PRC, did not compromise the KMT's traditional emphasis on a Republic of China (ROC, 中華民國) identity for Taiwan. This space for a state identity for Taiwan separate from the PRC (sometimes termed *huadu* [華獨]), as discussed by J. Michael Cole in our [previous issue](#) is fundamental to the KMT's conception of cross-strait relations. However, it is anathema to Beijing, which is steadily insisting, ever more impatiently, on moves towards unification on the terms of its own "One China Principle" (一個中國原則). In these circumstances, the KMT faces a fundamental quandary in seeking to pursue warmer cross-strait ties, while adhering to a position on Taiwan autonomy that Beijing is intent on eroding.

The ultimate irony of the Straits Forum (as well as the many other stage-managed "exchange" fora sponsored by the PRC) is the matter of nominally civic, non-governmental exchanges being advocated through an event that was itself carefully controlled and stage-managed by the CCP united front bureaucracy. In this context, any such civic exchanges are "among the people" only on one side of the equation—which is exactly how the leaders of the CCP want it to be.

The main point: The "Cross-Strait Forum," an annual event organized by the Chinese Communist Party's united front bureaucracy to promote "people-to-people exchanges" between the PRC and Taiwan, held its most recent meeting in December 2021. The contrasting positions towards the event taken by Taiwan's

DPP-controlled government on one hand, and by the leadership of the KMT opposition on the other, illustrate Taiwan's stark partisan divide in responding to PRC united front initiatives.

[1] Alex Joske, "The Party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party's United Front System," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, June 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-you>.

The Kuomintang's Lessons of Defeat: Implications for 2022 and Beyond

By: Dafydd Fell

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In the aftermath of losing the December 2021 referendum votes, politicians from Taiwan's largest opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT, 中國國民黨), have again spoken critically about the state of Taiwan's democracy. Former President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has [argued](#) that Taiwan has become an illiberal democracy, while KMT Party Chair Eric Chu (朱立倫) has [described](#) Taiwan under the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) as having an autocratic government. So, is Taiwan's democracy in crisis?

The political scientist Kharis Templeman has [examined](#) each of Ma's justifications for describing Taiwan as an illiberal democracy, concluding that "Taiwan is not an illiberal democracy. It's as liberal, robust, and resilient as any of the Third Wave cases, and it's made major strides over the last 20 years in addressing some of its remaining democratic shortcomings." Key ingredients of a consolidated democracy include strong opposition parties and routine changes of ruling parties through elections. Taiwan is quite distinct from Japan, where a single party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has won almost all democratic elections, to the point that

it is hard to imagine the LDP losing power in the medium-term.

Despite the KMT's talk of one-party dominance, for much of the most recent presidential election campaign in 2020 and the 2021 referendum campaign, the KMT actually led in the [polls](#). A more important question for the KMT to answer is why it failed to hold on to these leads and allowed the DPP to win. At the local level, the KMT still remains much more powerful than the DPP. Despite the KMT's current struggles to find support at the national level, it is still quite possible that the KMT will be able to come back to power in 2024, especially if it has a strong showing in the 2022 local elections.

Nevertheless, if we compare the popularity of the KMT to earlier cases of opposition parties, then the prospects of the current KMT do not look so rosy. In the autumn of 2005, the opposition KMT won landslide local election victories, while the ruling DPP's support levels collapsed on the back of a string of corruption scandals. Similarly, the ruling KMT's support declined dramatically after it won re-election in 2012, with Ma's presidential approval levels remaining in the [low teens](#) for most of his second term. In other words, at this point in the 2006 and 2014 electoral cycles, the opposition party looked poised to retake power. In contrast, the current DPP administration has enjoyed surprisingly high levels of party support throughout President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) second term, while the opposition KMT has shown no signs of bouncing back. For instance, in December 2021 the [National Chengchi University's Election Study Center survey](#) showed the DPP's party identification at 29.7 percent compared to only 17.1 for the KMT. The way the KMT has responded to the latest referendum defeat follows a pattern set since 2014, in which it appears to have struggled to learn lessons from defeats.

Previous changes of ruling parties through elections have tended to feature both failures of the incumbent government and the opposition party learning key lessons of defeat. In the aftermath of the DPP's disastrous 1996 presidential campaign—the country's first direct presidential election—it not only reformed its nomination system but also adopted a more moderate position on the independence versus unification issue that placed it closer to the median voter. Such reforms al-

lowed the DPP to take advantage of the KMT's divisions and come to power in 2000. The KMT has also had its own experiences of successfully learning from defeat. In the aftermath of losing power in 2000 and failing to recover it in 2004, the KMT also embarked on a range of reforms designed to draw lessons from these setbacks. These included changes to its nomination system, its policies towards China, reuniting the Pan-Blue parties, and adjusting the way it made national identity appeals. Such reforms, together with the DPP's political corruption scandals, allowed the KMT to return to power on the back of landslide election victories in 2005 and 2008. [1]

Three crucial areas where the current KMT appears to have failed to learn lessons of defeat are in the realm of party leadership, appeals to younger voters, and on the issue of relations with China. The party's struggles to recover support since 2014 are closely tied to this inability to learn lessons of defeat in these fields.

In the final years of their presidencies, both the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou and the DPP's Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) were very unpopular. It may have appeared that the KMT was learning a lesson of defeat when Ma resigned as party chair in 2014 to take responsibility for local election defeats. However, the KMT has found it much harder to come out of the shadow of Ma. Even today, he remains the most powerful figure in the KMT. We can contrast this with the way the DPP recreated its leadership image after 2008: its new leader Tsai Ing-wen projected a very different leadership image from previous party elites, while Chen was marginalized in the party soon after leaving office. [2]

A similar example of the KMT's failure to learn lessons of defeat concerns its one-time 2016 presidential candidate Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱). The [party chose to replace Hung](#) during the campaign, partly as a result of her perceived unpopular positions on relations with China, which were seen as too extreme. However, in the aftermath of the election, when it came to electing a new party chair, the KMT's party members elected Hung, someone whom the party had deemed unelectable as its presidential candidate just months earlier.



Image: Supporters of Hung Hsiu-Chu, who was selected as the KMT's presidential candidate during the party's primary process in 2015, protest in October 2015 outside National Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall in Taipei, where a special KMT party congress had been called to oust Hung and replace her with KMT Chairman Eric Chu. (Image source: [Taipei Times](#))

In 2020, the KMT again lost the presidential election with the then-Kaohsiung Mayor Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜) as its candidate. To make matters worse, Kaohsiung voters then went on to punish Han for joining the presidential race just a few months after being elected Kaohsiung mayor: in June 2020, Han became the most high-profile Taiwanese elected politician to be [recalled](#). Despite these electoral setbacks, Han remains the most popular figure in the KMT, and some party elites still see him as their best chance of regaining national power in 2024. Of course, Han's campaign style was deliberately quite different from establishment KMT figures such as Ma and the unsuccessful 2016 candidate Eric Chu. However, when it comes to policy positions, Han showed no signs of any deviation from the same policies that had led to KMT defeat in 2014 and 2016.

A key factor in the DPP's ability to return to power in 2016 and retain power in 2020 has been the support of younger voters. In contrast, the KMT has become a very unpopular party among younger voters since early in the Ma presidency. A key reason for this has been the KMT's decision to repeatedly ignore the concerns of younger voters. While President Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) was able to reach a limited consensus when he met the ["Wild Lily" student leaders in 1990](#), the meeting between Sunflower Movement leaders and Premier Jiang I-hua (江宜樺) in 2014 saw no common ground. [3] Additionally, some of the [KMT's 2016 election advertising](#) was described by analysts as stirring up inter-

generational conflict, or else highly patronising in the way it portrayed younger generations. Moreover, the KMT has repeatedly taken positions at odds with most younger voters on a range of issues, such as opposing pension reforms and LGBT rights.

The 2020 election defeat and recall of Han Kuo-yu should have led to a round of deep reflection on why the party had been defeated again. Instead though, the party has chosen to lash out and engage in [revenge recall votes](#) that have especially targeted younger politicians from social movement-linked parties. Recall votes against figures such as Freddy Lim (林昶佐) are widely perceived as an attack on the younger generation. Although the KMT has often spoken about rejuvenating the party's support base, it does not appear to have made any progress since the Ma era. Here it is important to recall that this pattern was not inevitable: the KMT was able to win back the youth vote after it first lost power in 2000. [4] Today, however, it is hard to imagine that the KMT was far more popular among younger voters than the DPP by 2008.

Academic research suggests that the most influential issue affecting voting behaviour in Taiwan concerns national identity and relations with China. [5] It is therefore not surprising that when Taiwan's parties have reflected on defeat, this has been the first place they look at to reform in a bid to win back voters. Despite the fact that concerns over the KMT's China policies have been at the heart of a number of its defeats since 2014, this has been an area where the KMT has either chosen not to learn from setbacks or has learned the wrong lessons of defeat.

For instance, in the aftermath of a number of popular social movement protests caused by rising social concern about the dangers of closer integration with China, the KMT's original 2016 presidential candidate Hung Hsiu-chu proposed accelerating the integration process. In place of Ma's model of "one China, different interpretations" (一中各表), Hung's preferred model was ["one China, same interpretation"](#) (一中同表). During the 2020 campaign, Han revealed that his vision of cross-Strait relations was actually very similar to that of Ma. [6] This was highly damaging to Han, as increasing Chinese pressure on Taiwan, together with the harsh crackdowns on the democratic movement in Hong Kong, made the KMT's China policy look defeatist

and unrealistic. In the aftermath of the 2020 defeat, the new KMT party chair Johnny Chiang (江啟臣) did propose [moving away from the “1992 Consensus”](#) (九二共識). However, Ma Ying-jeou’s influence within the party meant that these reforms went nowhere.

The lack of learning from defeat on the China issue was again apparent in the [2021 KMT leadership contest](#). During the chairperson debates, there were no signs of any attempts to move the party back towards the preferences of the median voter, the support of whom the KMT needs if it wishes to return to national power. The incumbent Chiang came in a distant third, while the closest challenger to the eventual winner was Chang Ya-chung (張亞中), a former advisor to the unelectable Hung. Notably, Chang was the most pro-unification of the four candidates, and proposed a peace treaty with China in the debate. Although the eventual winner, Eric Chu, attacked Chang for supporting rapid unification, there were no signs that Chu had reflected on the KMT’s earlier defeats. In fact, his China policy appeared little different from Ma’s.

The last three decades have seen numerous examples of the ways by which Taiwan’s parties have recovered from defeats by conducting reforms based on lessons learned from electoral setbacks. In contrast, the unpopularity of the largest opposition party today, the KMT, is largely due to its failure to truly reflect in its string of defeats since 2014. The fact that in some [recent surveys](#) a party as ideologically empty as the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP, 台灣民眾黨) has similar levels of support as the KMT reveals perhaps just how far the KMT has fallen.

The main point: At this point in Taiwan’s electoral cycle, the incumbent party has tended to have poor poll ratings compared with the main opposition party. However, today the opposition KMT remains unpopular and has suffered a number of mid-term electoral setbacks. The KMT’s inability to recover is largely due to its failures to learn the lessons of its defeats since 2014.

[1] Dafydd Fell, *Government and Politics in Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 2018): 255-265.

[2] Ibid. 270-272.

[3] Ian Rowen, “Inside Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement:

Twenty-Four Days in a Student-Occupied Parliament, and the Future of the Region,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 1 (February 2015): 5-21, 11.

[4] “Poll One Day Before the 2008 Presidential Election,” TVBS Poll Center, March 21, 2008, https://cc.tvbs.com.tw/portal/file/poll_center/2017/20170602/even-20080328162638.pdf.

[5] Christopher Achen and T.Y. Wang (eds), *The Taiwan Voter* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

[6] Dafydd Fell, “Challengers to Mainstream Parties in Taiwan’s 2020 Elections: Continuity Rather Than the Expected Change,” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 1 (2021): 141-160, 149-150, <http://www.tfd.org.tw/export/sites/tfd/files/publication/journal/141-160-Challengers-to-Mainstream-Parties-in-Taiwans-2020-Elections.pdf>.

Taiwan’s Dual Challenges in Joining the CPTPP

By: Henry Walsh

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Since both Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) [announced](#) their intentions to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in September 2021, discussions about their relative chances of success have largely centered around a binary construct: economic policy and geopolitics. Attention to—and [skepticism](#) of—the PRC’s application has centered on its ability to adhere to the agreement itself, in contrast to Taiwan’s CPTPP application, discussion of which has [identified](#) geopolitics as the major obstacle.

While the PRC will need to convince CPTPP countries that [watering down](#) the agreement is worth enhanced access to its market, Taiwan’s ambitions will rely on convincing CPTPP members that the benefits of Tai-

wanese accession outweigh the risks of upsetting Beijing. Although Taiwan is far closer to CPTPP compliance than the PRC, there are also significant steps that Taiwan would have to take before coming into line with the terms of the agreement. Therefore, Taiwan faces a double challenge: managing the geopolitical sensitivities surrounding its application, while also enacting reforms that move Taiwan closer towards CPTPP compliance.

The CPTPP Application Process

The [first step](#) in applying to become a member of the CPTPP is to submit an application to the depositary, New Zealand. [Next](#), the CPTPP members will decide whether or not to proceed with the application by establishing an Accession Working Group (AWG). Within 30 days of the first AWG meeting, the applicant country must [submit](#) its list of proposed market access offers, followed by a long negotiation process. If the applicant country can come to an agreement with all CPTPP members, it will receive a formal [invitation](#) to join. However, consensus among all members is [required](#). While Malaysia, Brunei, and Chile have [not yet ratified](#) the CPTPP and are therefore not yet parties to the [agreement](#), their positions will be taken into serious consideration. [1]

An additional procedural question that has arisen is whether the PRC will join first, as was the case in its World Trade Organization (WTO) accession, or if the PRC and Taiwan will join simultaneously, as was the case with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. If the PRC is to join the CPTPP first, it will have an opportunity to block Taiwan's entry altogether. [2] However, if both Taiwan and the PRC are able to join, they will need to liberalize trade towards each other. [3] The concerns here for Taiwan are both economic and security-based. The enormous size of the PRC's economy would pose an increased threat to Taiwanese producers, and growing PRC investments may exacerbate concerns of economic interdependence in Taiwan that [contributed](#) to the 2014 Sunflower Movement. Furthermore, liberalization may allow PRC entities to get closer to critical Taiwanese technologies in spaces such as semiconductors, which may ultimately be of concern to Taiwan's national security. [4]

Geopolitical Challenges

Taiwan's ambition to join the CPTPP will continue to be something that the PRC vehemently opposes. While no CPTPP member country has told Taiwan that it will not be allowed into the agreement, overcoming geopolitical challenges will be the hardest task facing Taiwan. [5] When it comes to individual countries' reactions to Taiwan's application, CPTPP member states have largely remained silent on the matter. Apart from Japan's [statements](#) of support, the closest thing to an official sign of support for Taiwan has come from [Singapore's](#) assertion that "any economy that is willing and able to meet the high standards" can join (New Zealand has issued a similar [statement](#)).

While the reason for this silence may be an aversion to upsetting the PRC, simple diplomacy may provide further explanation. On one hand, a statement supporting Taiwan's application would anger Beijing. On the other hand, according to GTI Senior Non-Resident Fellow Riley Walters (whose own article on Taiwan and the CPTPP can be read [here](#)), "CPTPP members want to be diplomatic—meaning they generally won't say whether they support or oppose any one country/economy joining CPTPP—in an effort to temper expectations and not presuppose the outcome of negotiations. I wouldn't say its necessarily based on offending the PRC." In this sense, Taiwan can remain confident that silence from CPTPP members does not necessarily reflect a deference to the PRC. However, Taiwan can and should continue to meet privately with each member as it had been doing prior to submitting its application, leveraging the benefits of its membership both from an economic and standards-setting perspective. [6]

Challenges in Complying with the CPTPP

Although Taiwan is much closer than the PRC to meeting the standards of the CPTPP, work remains to be done. In addition to introducing badly needed reforms to its [labor](#) market, and other areas, Taiwan should eliminate bans on certain agricultural products and adopt a high standard of trade liberalization. [7] These two requirements will be the largest challenges Taiwan faces in fully complying with the CPTPP. With regard to the first measure, [Taiwan's ban on agricultural imports](#) from five Japanese prefectures following the

2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster has been a persistent rough spot in Taiwan-Japan relations. According to former Director of the British Trade and Cultural Office in Taipei [Michael Reilly](#), “Japanese support for [Taiwan’s] application is essential.” However, Taiwan’s progress on lifting the ban on Japanese agricultural products has been “slow,” said Reilly. Despite Japan’s consistent support for Taiwan’s CPTPP ambitions, the issue remains difficult. While both President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) have [attempted](#) to make progress on the issue, the primary force keeping the ban in place has been Taiwanese voters, whose broad opposition to its lifting has been [used](#) by opposition parties against Tsai. Although chief trade negotiator John Deng (鄧振中) has [acknowledged](#) the importance of lifting the ban, convincing the Taiwanese public ([86 percent](#) of whom support the ban), will be extremely difficult. If the Taiwanese government is unable to resist domestic pressure against its lifting, it will be up to Japan to decide how it wants to proceed with support for Taiwan’s CPTPP bid.

It will also be difficult for Taiwan’s protected agricultural sector to stomach the market liberalization aspects of the CPTPP. [8] Member countries impose almost no tariffs on each other and for Taiwan to join, it will need to eliminate 99 to 100 percent of its tariffs. Doing this will be easier in some ways than others. Taiwan already has free trade agreements with [Singapore](#) and [New Zealand](#), and [tariffs](#) on the [major imports](#) from Malaysia and Brunei are also quite low. However, the remaining CPTPP countries all export agricultural products to Taiwan. To take Vietnam as an example, the country faced [tariffs](#) of around 100 percent on the roughly [13 million kilograms](#) of rice it exported to Taiwan in 2021. For Taiwan to join the CPTPP, it will need to eliminate the high tariffs it imposes on agricultural goods. This means that farmers in Taiwan could face pressure from [imports](#) of fruit and fish from Chile and Peru, [vegetables](#) from Vietnam and Japan, [pork](#) from Canada, and a list of other imports from CPTPP countries.

Of course, Taiwan should still join the CPTPP if given the opportunity. While its domestic agricultural industry may face challenges from foreign exporters, increased overall trade would lead to a two percent increase in GDP, according to government [projections](#). Additionally, having to allow Japanese food imports and elimi-

nate protectionist trade policies are not reasons to not join the CPTPP; they are simply challenges that Taiwan must face in pursuit of its membership.

Conclusion

Although Taiwan may not currently be perfectly compliant with the CPTPP, and while reaching this level of compliance may prove challenging in some areas, Taiwan is much closer to compliance with the CPTPP than is the PRC. Taiwan does not provide massive levels of support to its state-owned enterprises, its environmental regulations have become relatively robust in the decades since industrialization, and its labor rights issues are solvable. Most importantly, Taiwan has demonstrated itself to be a cooperative player on global issues. While the geopolitical challenges Taiwan faces in joining this trade agreement are substantial, the fact remains that Taiwan’s admission into the CPTPP would be beneficial for all member economies. It is a commonly held and understandable viewpoint that Taiwan’s participation in multilateral organizations should be encouraged on the ideological basis that Taiwan is a free and open democracy that believes in rules. However, Taiwan’s membership in the CPTPP agreement can also be considered on entirely pragmatic grounds. Allowing Taiwan to join the agreement would bolster the standards the CPTPP promotes, and lead to increased trade. The more Taiwan can show that it can and will comply with the rules of the CPTPP, the more valuable a potential partner it will become, and the harder it will be for CPTPP members to reject its application.

The main point: In addition to significant geopolitical challenges, Taiwan’s application to join the CPTPP faces challenges in terms of compliance with the agreement. As Taiwan continues to carefully navigate the diplomatic aspects of its accession, it should take further steps to assure that its economic policies are completely in line with CPTPP standards.

[1] Kristy Hsu, Director, Taiwan ASEAN Studies Center, Chung-Hua Institution for Economic Research, personal communication, October 14, 2021.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Fernando Mariano Schmidt Hernandez, "Understanding Taiwan's Agricultural Protectionism: Is the Strong State Argument Still Valid?" *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 16, no. 1 (2017): 86.