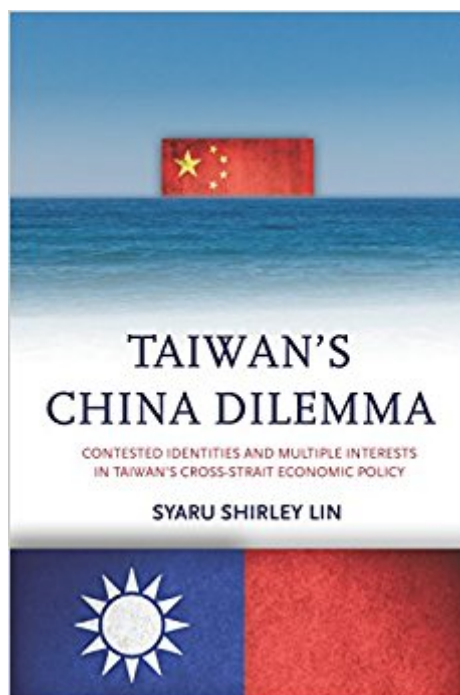




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Taiwan's China Dilemma: Contested Identities And Multiple Interests In Taiwan's Cross-Strait Economic Policy



Synopsis

China and Taiwan share one of the world's most complex international relationships. Although similar cultures and economic interests promoted an explosion of economic ties between them since the late 1980s, these ties have not led to an improved political relationship, let alone progress toward the unification that both governments once claimed to seek. In addition, Taiwan's recent Sunflower Movement succeeded in obstructing deeper economic ties with China. Why has Taiwan's policy toward China been so inconsistent? Taiwan's China Dilemma explains the divergence between the development of economic and political relations across the Taiwan Strait through the interplay of national identity and economic interests. Using primary sources, opinion surveys, and interviews with Taiwanese opinion leaders, Syaru Shirley Lin paints a vivid picture of one of the most unsettled and dangerous relationships in the contemporary world, and illustrates the growing backlash against economic liberalization and regional economic integration around the world.

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"Taiwan's China Dilemma: Contested Identities and Multiple Interests in Taiwan's Cross-Strait Economic Policy"

Identity politics are one of the toughest issues to resolve. They are formed of intangibles, that are often times constructed, potentially distorted, and contested. Thus, when two countries are more are caught in a historical struggle, the right and wrong are hard to separate. Making the issue more too complex to explicate. Invariably, even when one side is right, while the other side is wrong, facts don't necessarily make an issue any easier to overcome. Take Taiwan's view of Chinese history, for example. Beijing often insists that One China is a must. As a political principle this may yet be valid. But, historically, even by China's own account, the "actual" history of China is based on the ebbs and flows of various dynasties-----often several dynasties co-existing together at the same stage. This is has been the "norm" which scholars and Sinologists in Taiwan have adopted. During the Warring period, various dynasties would fight and gnaw at each other's influence, forming fluid and flexible alliances, around a central area called "Zhong Guo," or Middle Kingdom. As anyone taking a course with Professor Peter Bol in China X would attest, this argument has strong historical, archaeological and scientific basis. But the prevalence of such historical epochs----what Sir Paul Collier at University of Oxford called "re-productive scales of violence," all with the single aim to neutralize the other, in order to form an ever larger state, unitary or otherwise-----is normal. So normal in fact that the actual oddity is "one China," not several Chinas; never mind the belief that Qin Dynasty had reunified China since 200 B.C. This is where Shirley Lin's excellent book on Taiwan and China comes into sharp relief: It tells a story in the contemporary parlance, but with all the facts that showcase the fluid nature of Taiwanese identity politics; which increasingly are pro Taiwan. Backed by facts, in addition to nascent nationalism, more than half of the population in Taiwan, according to Shirley Lin, had across the last 30 years, become more and more "Taiwanese," or "Taiwanese Chinese." Such numbers continue to trend ever higher since 1992, the year when these polls were first recorded. Indeed, the number of people identifying themselves as (mainland) "Chinese" is declining, and dropping precipitously. And, this will remain the case, as Taiwanese feel more connected to the social political system of their own construction; rather than something across the Taiwan Strait, which seems more and more removed-----even if Taiwanese businessmen do prefer to trade with China, and have actually increased the trade volume. But, even as the economic interdependence of Taiwan and China continues to grow, political discussion of the future of China and Taiwan remain far and few between, especially after the "Koo-Wang Dialogue" hosted by Singapore in 1999, of which the author Shirley was a translator, thus, a direct observer. This is where her book is both powerful, and objective, as she was right there in the whole process. But "Taiwan's China Dilemma: Contested Identities and Multiple Interests in Taiwan's Cross-Strait Economic Policy"

China Dilemma" is impressive in three other ways too. First, the graphs and info-graphics, which show the 'feedback loop' of the identity politics, were extremely complete, and well laid out, throughout the book. This helps the students understand the "co-evolutionary narrative," where the independent and dependent variable is understood, not in a uni-dimensional manner, which can defeat the entire purpose of the book if one is not careful. Second, Shirley Lin has interviewed a huge number of policy makers on both sides, especially Taiwan, which is her forte. The views of Morris Chang, a major industrialist who is well respected in Taiwan and Hong Kong, not excluding China, helped to complement the opinions of other politicians in both sides of the aisle. The book is replete with the views of such high flyers, which makes the narrative even more compelling, since the "identity politics" of China and Taiwan are tied like a Gordian knot. Unless the influential leaders and decision makers take a crack at it first, no one can touch it with the proverbial ten feet pole. Third, the book is a primer that is useful not merely to Taiwan and China, but the United States too. US is currently managing its relations with China based on the Shanghai Communique in 1972, the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, and The third and final communiqué, also known as August 17 communiqué in 1982, reaffirms the desire of both sides to further strengthen economic, cultural, educational, scientific, and technological ties. Both sides also reaffirmed the statements made about the Taiwan issue in the previous communiqué. Although no definitive conclusions were reached on the issue of arms sale to Taiwan, the United States did declare its intent to gradually decrease its sale of arms to Taiwan; something which the US has been hard put to do, as close to 1700-2000 Chinese missiles are still aimed at Taiwan as of the end of 2016. Due to the "strategic ambiguity" that exists in Sino-US relations---given neither side's willingness to address the issues face on---there is room for mis-judgement, if there is a lack of appreciation of Taiwan's growing identity assertion. Indeed, this assertiveness can only grow, not relent, with time. All sides, including ASEAN Regional Forum, have to keep pace with the issues at work. In 1996, the Cross Straits issue suddenly blew into the open, when President Jiang Ze Ming, in an attempt to challenge the Taiwanese credentials of President Lee Teng Hui, started lobbing missiles into the north end of Taiwan, in a display of sheer power. This move back fired, as it made the surrounding neighbors of China even more afraid---rather than accommodating---with its rise. Shirley Lin's book helps to unpack all the real and fictive nationalist and hyper nationalist emotions that have gone into the Sino Taiwan issues over the last thirty years at least. It deserves to sit on the book shelf of all top politics thinkers. Barring the attempt to learn from this book, the relations of Taiwan and China will resemble a cockerel fight.

An excellent and very informational book about contemporary Taiwanese identity and how it connects to economic Cross-Strait policy.

Thank you!

A former partner at Goldman Sachs, Lin teaches part of the year in Hong Kong, and the part in Virginia. She was born in Taiwan and comes from humble stock: one of her grandmothers sold gong wan in the Yuanhuan Market on Nanjing W road for decades. Few people have her breadth of experience in both the financial and academic worlds, as well as her deep Taiwan roots, making her uniquely qualified to write this work. The major idea of this work is that "Identity is treated as an integral part of a more comprehensive understanding of how the Taiwanese have dealt with their China dilemma." Following Alexander Wendt, she argues that values, such as identity, are how economic interests are chosen. Lin supports her argument with a (1) comprehensive historical review of the debates over the economic approach to China and the rise of the modern Taiwan identity that is (2) not pro-China or pro-KMT but well balanced and inclusive and (3) buttressed by charts and graphs of every type and kind. In addition to placing identity at the heart of the cross-strait decision-making process, Lin also uses the distributive effects of the economic engagement with China on Taiwan, effects that have strong explanatory power for the choices the Taiwanese have made over the last 15 years. Up to date, she observes that Taiwan's identity is rooted in shared democratic values. She also puts her finger on the recent changes in identity as class and socio-economic cleavages created by interaction with China. In short, this is a meaty and informative work that demonstrates a deep grasp of the topic at hand. Lin's framework for understanding the debates is eclectic, and she has little patience with the propagandistic pro-China mutterings of the kind of Blue scholar who regards Taiwanese rejection of economic ties with China as a form of irrationality, dismissing them as facile: "Because of the shortcomings of these perspectives, a highly influential line of analysis attributes the otherwise inexplicable to the role of identity in Taiwan's domestic society. One approach views identity as artificially constructed by opportunistic politicians engaged in "identity politics," appealing to groups to adopt or sustain a certain identity in order to mobilize support for particular political leaders or public policies on that basis. According to this approach, such identity politics has led Taiwanese voters to act emotionally or even irrationally when considering Taiwan's economic policy towards China (K. Chen 2004). National identity has no intrinsic value in this kind of analysis; it is simply an outcome of political contestation, in which entrepreneurs are manipulating identity for political gain. But even though

"identity politics" can be an easy way of explaining behavior that departs from rationalist predictions (L. Cheng and Keng 2009; S. C. Hsu 2007), this perspective can overlook the fact that Taiwan's unique history and values have created a deep sense of national identity that should not be dismissed simply as false consciousness created by a small group of extremists"(p19).Historically, the book focuses on the period between the missile crises in the 1990s and the run-up to the signing of ECFA under the Ma Administration in 2008-2010, and carries the history through to the Sunflowers, chronicling the shifts back and forth under successive Administrations. Under the Lee Administration the debates over how to engage China were forthrightly painted by both sides in terms of identity, with the diehard KMTers throwing language at the Taiwan side that will be familiar to anyone who has followed the debates over ECFA and the services pact. Little has changed in that regard.The Lee era gave way to Chen Shui-bian and the debate over the opening to China, which resulted in an economic boom in Taiwan. Lin uses the semiconductor industry as a case study for understanding the cross-currents of economic decision-making and identity. That industry is the perfect choice: in 2008, when the DPP was fielding Frank Hsieh for the presidency, I sat down with a friend of his to chat about the election, and the semiconductor industry was the topic of conversation, and not very happily either.Lin's up-to-date understanding shines in her discussion of the Sunflowers and the Ma Administration. Unlike so many authors who assigned Sunflower objections to the services pact to identity politics, Lin's analysis recognizes that their objections were rooted in practical and informed understandings of the effect of the pact on the Taiwan economy.I can't recommend this book enough. Detailed, packed with information and statistics, and very conservatively argued, this work should be on the shelf of everyone interested in the debates over Taiwan's economic future.

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