

**THE UNITED STATES & CROSS-STRAITS RELATIONS:
CHINA, TAIWAN AND THE US ENTERING A NEW
CENTURY,¹**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 2001

REVIEWED BY

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As noted by Yan Xuetong, one of the authors in this volume, the People's Republic of China (China) and the Republic of China (Taiwan) continue to be at risk of a future conflict undoubtedly involving the United States. This book provides a great deal of insight into the relations between Taiwan and China in particular and the United States' effect upon the relationship. The collection of essays follows a seemingly general consensus that no great crisis seems to be directly on the horizon after the election of Chen Shui-bian in 2000. A greater divergence occurs, however, when looking to the future, especially in examining specific policies of China, Taiwan and the United States. This divergence does not leave a reader confused about the future. It does, instead, result in a clear understanding of the myriad of paths the future holds and the complexity of the unique situation Taiwan presents in the global arena.

The book begins as a comprehensive history, which lays out the landscape for the policy-driven discussions that soon follow. The first essay by Jeh-Hang Lei provides more background than would be expected, detailing Taiwan's history from Dutch occupation in the 1600s to the modern times. Chen Jian's essay provides an insightful background into Beijing's policies towards Taiwan. The final two essays in the historical section focus on the modern history of Taiwan's 2000 presidential election setting the stage for, as well as foreshadowing, the discussions of this complex relationship found later in the book.

The second section of the book focuses primarily upon security and military relationships and the possibilities for an armed conflict. A fairly evident criticism of this section is, even though discussing hot-button issues such as Theater and National Missile Defense systems, the authors do not fully contemplate the effect of the Bush Administration's insistence upon establishing a National or Theater Missile Defense system. This problem is not significant as it does not effect or alter the central theses of the authors

¹ The United States & Cross Straits Relations: China, Taiwan and the US Entering a New Century, edited by Kenneth Klinker, Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001.

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however. The United States' position merely makes one path for relations discussed the obvious future reality.

Despite the ever-present possibility of an armed conflict, it is clear that the idea of a major regional, global, or nuclear war is not a significant possibility given the complexities of the modern world and the modern economy. It is apparent that most talk of any type of war, especially a major one, is puffery because the international impact of bringing military forces to bear is far too high. This is not to say these authors do not feel that security and military relationships are unimportant. The general feeling is as long as military engagement and security arrangements mean the involvement of the United States, the United States' goal of a peaceable solution will probably be the only choice to resolve differences in opinion which exist between Beijing and Taipei.

Following the discussion of military and security relationships, the third section of the book focuses on the economic ties and history between Taiwan and China. The title of Paul Bolt's article, "Taiwan-China Economic Cooperation: Ties that Bind?," is perhaps the central idea of all three essays. Both Taiwan and China have placed themselves in a precarious double bind, especially when looking at the economic data presented by the authors. Accordingly, any economic action against the other or taking an economic action that will anger the other will also severely harm themselves. The authors make it very clear that Taiwan is in the more precarious position, something displayed in Taiwan's shifting policy. It is also clear the strength of the two economies and their relationship is critical to both Taiwan's and China's success. Taiwan and China both weathered the recent Asian economic crisis better than neighboring southeast-Asian nations showing that maintaining good political and economic relations through a crisis can serve to prevent an economic-inspired war (either a regional or world war). A reader can gain an understanding that the economic relationship has bonded China and Taiwan closer together, even if the long term effects or benefits of that bond are uncertain.

Finally, the book includes four short essays stating hopes or expectations for the future. The first two, by Hung-mao Tien and Sheng-tung Yang, are very hopeful and express thanks to the United States for its role in providing stability to the relationship and for its friendship towards Taiwan. The third essay, by Yan Xuetong, is much less hopeful, seeing the Taiwan issue as one that is a ticking time bomb with each upcoming Taiwanese election. Despite being darker in his assessment, Yan Xuetong provides a dose of reality in reminding the reader of the uncertainty of the future without the international community as a whole working to find a solution. Lastly, Thomas B. Lee's essay, the last in the book, summarizes

the book as a whole quite nicely, highlighting the uncertainty of the future because of the political environment in Taiwan and the diverse interests of the people living there.

Looking to the volume as a whole, a majority of the authors note and discuss the rhetoric of independence and unity as a major factor in the relationship between China and Taiwan, though it is usually presented as a backdrop to the primary thesis of the chapter. An issue that could have been explored in greater detail and probably well worth consideration is whether rhetoric based positions² have any real value beyond the symbolism Taiwan and China place upon the definitions of status. Westphalian realism ranks sovereignty and statehood as the only real means to be an actor at the international level. Taiwan, however, as noted in the section on economics especially, exercises a great deal of power in the international sphere without being formally considered an independent state, challenging the idea of the existence of a realist world. Because of the rising prevalence of non-state actors (which Taiwan may or may not be) within the international sphere, the true value of the rhetoric-based positions held by China and Taiwan is questionable. More simply, do the words really matter in defining relations?

Even with the answer to the above question not directly addressed, the role of Taiwanese democracy is highlighted well. The authors show the emergence of a more liberal democracy in Taiwan as both sources of great hope and of great worry for the future relationship between Taiwan and China. The newfound democracy of Taiwan means Taiwanese leaders must heed the attitudes and opinions of their electorate instead of maintaining the doctrinal opposition to the mainland government. It also means, however, the diverse interests of the citizens of Taiwan, i.e. native Taiwanese versus mainlanders, businesses invested in China versus businesses invested outside China, can cause Taiwanese leaders and politicians near election times to become more aggressive in their positions. This aggressiveness has the ability to be matched by the Chinese government, in the form of military exercises in the past, in attempts to influence Taiwanese elections. Because Taiwan's multi-party democracy seems to be a lasting reality, the future of relations is truly an open question, one that the authors answer well even if definite answers cannot be reached.

The worries presented by Taiwan's changes are also very clear. While China can point to Hong Kong as an example of integration of two seemingly incompatible systems, a more liberal democracy in Taiwan makes the analogy between Hong Kong and Taiwan more difficult to sell.

² That is, defining the relationship as "a special form of state-to-state relations" or as "one-China, two-systems."

Presuming any unification of Taiwan and China would require approval by the Taiwanese electorate,³ China may be constrained in its governance of Hong Kong for fear of resistance against reunification in Taiwan or criticism of its' conduct by other nations, especially the United States. Additionally, involving the Taiwanese electorate in any resolution of the issue, absent drastic changes in attitude, will make any unification process slow and incremental for fear of a knee-jerk reaction and wild swings philosophy within the Taiwanese leadership. However, slow movement would not be a great burden to the relationship. The Chinese have demonstrated great patience in the past to bring itself and Taiwan closer together and the small incremental steps are already occurring, such as having separate Olympic teams, increases in investment and trade, and a special relationship for membership in the World Trade Organization.

The relationship of China and Taiwan is unique to the world and rapid political and economic changes, both domestically and internationally, are presenting new challenges for a new century. The limited possibility of an armed conflict is thankfully unlikely as peaceful political and economic changes have become the norm. The role of the United States has also shifted to a great extent, shifting from a polar opposite of communist states to a global hegemon. The United States' role will likely shift again as China asserts greater desire to be a regional or global hegemon in its own right, while at the same time the United States seeks to look out for its own interests, including promoting democracy but primarily economic growth, in the region. For these three governments, as the authors show, the future is open and largely full of hope to improve relations.

Overall, this book provides a good understanding of the Chinese/Taiwanese relationship in its short 264 pages. A reader with little understanding of cross-straits relations or the politics of Taiwan or China can gain a very quick yet thorough understanding thanks to the quality and expertise of the contributors to this volume. Even though major unexpected events can alter the international landscape in the future, it is clear Taiwan's democratic coming of age and China's return to greatness provide interesting challenges for the future if these two governments are to coexist and possibly become one again in a peaceful manner.

³ As the authors commenting on military/security issues point out, the likelihood of a forceful reunification is unlikely given the regional/global ramifications of such an act.

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