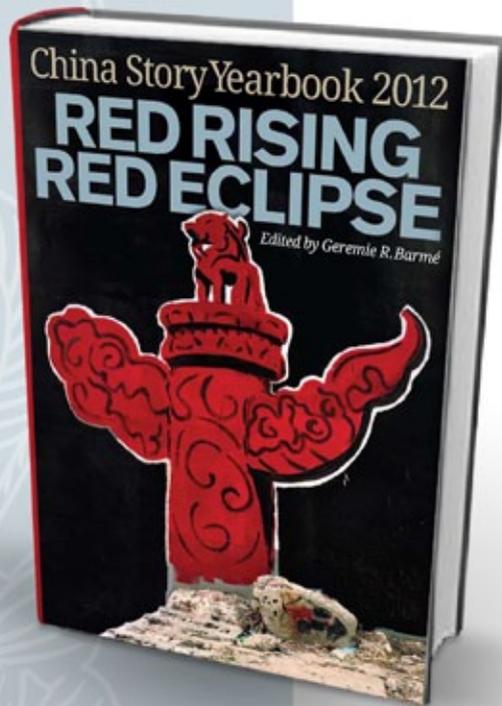


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## CROSS-STRAITS RELATIONS

Mark Harrison

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Excerpt from  
*CHINA STORY YEARBOOK 2012*

### **RED RISING RED ECLIPSE**

Edited by  
Geremie R. Barmé

with  
Jeremy Goldkorn  
Carolyn Cartier and Gloria Davies



Australian Centre on China in the World  
中华全球研究中心 / 中華全球研究中心



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**ANU College of Asia & the Pacific**  
Canberra, Australia

## CROSS-STRAITS RELATIONS

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ISBN 978-0-9873655-0-7

First published in August 2012  
THIS PUBLICATION IS NOT FOR SALE

Published by:  
Australian Centre on China in the World  
The Australian National University

Edited, typeset and illustrated by Markuz Wernli Design Works  
Printed by Blue Star Print Canberra, Australia

The Australian Centre on China in the World is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government of Australia and The Australian National University

*In January 2011, the wealthy mainland Chinese businessman Chen Guangbiao announced his intention to visit Taiwan before the Chinese New Year with NTD500m (US\$16.5m) in donations for low-income Taiwanese families. Purportedly inspired by Bill Gates's 'Giving Pledge', the money was to be handed out in hongbao 紅包, or red envelopes in the traditional Chinese practice, with the inscription: 'The day is cold, the ground freezing, but the people's hearts are warm. The Chinese nation is one family and a fire in the winter' (天寒地凍人心暖、中華民族一家親, 冬天裡的一把火).*

**The visit**, which occurred towards the end of President Ma Ying-jeou's first term, created a media storm in Taiwan. In a telephone survey by the newspaper *Apple Daily*, which is always ready to stoke controversy, 36.16 percent of respondents agreed with the statement: 'If he has money to bring, it is a good thing and he should be thanked.' But 39.8 percent agreed with the question-response: 'Who does he think he is? Bringing money humiliates the Taiwanese people!'

Cross-straits relations (*liang'an guanxi* 兩岸關係) have evolved in complex ways since the 'hot stage' of the

Chinese Civil War officially wound down some thirty years ago (when the two sides agreed to cease their desultory, ritualistic, every-other-day shelling of islands and coastline).

The term ‘cross-straits relations’ refers to the intersecting political, military, economic, cultural and social relationships between Taiwan and mainland China. They have an institutional basis in governmental organisations, such as the Mainland Affairs Council (*Dalu weiyuanhui* 大陸委員會) in Taiwan, and the Taiwan Affairs Office (*Guowuyuan Taiwan shiwu bangongshi* 国务院台湾事务办公室) in the People’s Republic of China. Because neither state recognizes the other, relations are also institutionalized at the ‘private’ level through the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF, or *Haixia jiaoliu jijinhui* 海峡交流基金會) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS, *Haixia liang’an guanxi xiehui* 海峡两岸关系协会). Since the mid-2000s, there have also been meetings at the highest level between the Chinese

Communist Party (CCP) and the current ruling party of Taiwan, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT).

Cross-straits relations are also an economic relationship, as Taiwan’s economy integrates with that of the mainland through two-way trade, investment and tourism. Taiwanese people have been able to travel to the mainland since the early 1990s for tourism and business and from 2008, Taiwan has allowed mainland tourists, first in groups and then as individuals. From less than 100,000 in 2008, the number rose to over two million mainland visitors in 2011.

Despite the economic links, military tensions remain palpable across the straits, with the deployment by the mainland of an increasingly formidable array of weapons aimed at Taiwan. ‘Cross-straits relations’ can in this context stand as a shorthand for a complex mix of regional military tension, US-China relations, Chinese expansionism, US regional hegemony, and Taiwanese nationalism. Indeed, the term, whether

in English or Chinese, is commonly employed in centres of power such as Washington, Brussels, Tokyo or Canberra to avoid naming either side and so reproducing a discourse of Taiwan as either differentiated from or as a part of China. ‘Cross-straits relations’ as a phrase acknowledges only the most irrefutable, empirical facts of geography and the presence of a stretch of ocean between two coasts.

Overlapping and interposing histories ensure, of course, that cross-straits relations are much more than the multidimensional interface of capital, people and military hardware that provides the facts by which we can measure them.

The People’s Republic of China, founded in 1949 and led by the Chinese Communist Party, claims Taiwan as part of the territory of China. It refers to it as ‘Taiwan province’. Its decision-makers and spokesmen have expressed that claim in different ways over many decades in rhetoric that has reflected mainland politics and an evolving un-

derstanding of Taiwan’s socio-political development. These range from emotional appeals to ‘Taiwan compatriots’ (*Taiwan tongbao* 台湾同胞) to belligerent threats and displays of military power.

As for the island of Taiwan, the state is officially known as the Republic of China. The Republic was founded on the mainland in 1912, at the end of the Qing dynasty. At the time the island of Taiwan was a colony of Japan, ceded in perpetuity by the Qing in 1895. Following the Japanese surrender in World War II in 1945, the Republic of China, led by the KMT under Chiang Kai-shek, took control of the island. In 1947, after eighteen months of disastrous and corrupt governance by the KMT administration, the native population of Taiwanese, that is, those with generational ties to the island, and who refer to themselves as ‘natives’ (*bensheng ren* 本省人), rebelled. The bitter legacy of the brutal suppression of the ‘February Twenty-eighth Uprising’ led to the emergence of the modern Taiwanese independence movement. In 1949, the

Nationalists lost the Civil War to the Communists and relocated the national government of the Republic of China to Taipei. A million or more Nationalist refugees and demobbed soldiers arrived to live among a hostile population of nearly five million Taiwanese.

Despite complicating factors like the intermarriage of Taiwanese and mainlanders (called *waisheng ren* 外省人), resulting in a new generation with mixed heritage, this history continues to play out in Taiwan's divisive and often rancorous democratic politics. National identity is the subject of a vigorous and self-aware debate in Taiwan. In the rhetoric of this debate, Taiwan is divided between the 'greens' and the 'blues' – those who support self-determination for the Taiwanese and Taiwanese cultural nationalism, and those who support close relations with mainland China and a broader, Chinese cultural identity. (Green symbolizes the island's natural beauty for Taiwanese nationalists; blue is the representative colour of the KMT). The blues claim the

ability to manage cross-straits relations in the interests of Taiwan, while the greens accuse the blues of selling out the island to the People's Republic.

On Taiwan, in areas like trade and politics, cross-straits relations are characterized by ambiguous boundaries between the official and unofficial, the public and the secret. Within the Taiwanese electorate there is no consensus, as a result, about the state of cross-straits relations at any one time. Hundreds of thousand of Taiwanese live and work on mainland China. But there is no reliable, publicly available information on their precise number and political affiliation. Relations (or non-relations) between the People's Republic and Republic of China are intersected by those of the Communist and Nationalist parties; the 'truth' about the relationship between China and Taiwan is contested and politicized.

In the late 1980s, the KMT let go of its claim to be the legitimate government of all of China. (The Communist Party still loudly trumpets itself as the

legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.) In a democratic Taiwan, this accords with electoral sentiment: surveys reveal that the vast majority of Taiwanese reject the idea of unification with the People's Republic, preferring, at the very least, to maintain the status quo of the island's de facto sovereignty.

From 2000 to 2008, for the first time since the KMT assumed control of the island in 1945, a party other than the KMT governed the Republic of China, when President Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won the presidential election in 2000. The DPP is the party of Taiwanese nationalist politics, established by an older generation of Taiwanese who were educated under the Japanese as well as a younger generation of anti-KMT and pro-democracy activists and Taiwanese nationalists who grew up under KMT authoritarianism. In his first term, Chen moderated the rhetoric of Taiwanese nationalism, taking significant steps to reach out in a conciliatory

manner to mainland China. However, understanding that the DPP's ultimate goal was an independent Taiwan, Beijing's policy towards Taiwan in Chen's first term was to use every opportunity to accuse it of 'provocation' in its pursuit of Taiwanese self-determination. Beijing also exploited the mishandling of Taiwan's relations with the US by the DPP government. The Chen government misread the shift in US policy after 11 September 2001 and pursued referenda legislation to enable plebiscites (for example, on a formal declaration of independence) at the same time as failing to secure arms procurement bills through the legislature, stretching the status quo of cross-straits relations while assuming ever greater reliance on US military protection.

Chen was re-elected to a second term in 2004, signalling Taiwan moving further away from unification with mainland China. For the People's Republic, this was considered a failure of its Taiwan policy. Cross-strait relations entered a downward spiral. Playing off

the domestic politics of division, the Chen government's rhetoric and policy positions became increasingly shrill and explicitly anti-China.

Beijing was thus much relieved by the return of the KMT to power with the election of Ma Ying-jeou in 2008, and with his re-election in 2012. Ma came to office with the stated aim of improving relations with the mainland. He would do this in a distinctive way, with cross-straits policies that deliberately operated at the level of the tacit or the unspoken.

In an attempt to improve relations with mainland China, Ma announced a policy called the 'Three Nos': 'no unification, no independence and no use of force'. It builds on the so-called '1992 Consensus', the outcome of talks between the SEF and ARATS in Singapore in 1992 in which both sides agreed that there is one China but each side interprets what that means and leave that interpretation unspoken in any negotiations. 'Mutual non-recognition of sovereignty'

(*hu bu chengren zhuquan* 互不承認主權) and 'mutual non-denial of jurisdiction' (*hu bu founen zhiquan* 互不否認治權) allows each side to agree that they do not recognize the other, to agree to disagree as it were.

Ma Ying-jeou's goal was to 'engage in negotiations on issues of more pragmatic concerns while shelving our political disagreements'. The centrepiece of his first term was the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) or, in Chinese, *Haixia liang'an jingji hezuo jiagou xieyi* 海峽兩岸經濟合作架構協議. ECFA is a preferential trade agreement that eliminates tariffs on 539 goods from Taiwan to China and 267 goods in the other direction. ECFA is notable for being especially generous in its terms towards Taiwan.

In keeping with the policy approach of the Ma administration, the agreement itself was not signed by either of the governments of the People's Republic or the Republic of China, but by the representatives of ARATS and

the SEF. It is an agreement between states that accepts that neither side recognizes the other. The document uses language such as 'both sides' (*shuangfang* 雙方), or the 'Taiwan side' (*Taiwan fangmian* 台灣方面) and the 'mainland side' (*dalü fangmian* 大陸方面). There is no talk of either 'province' or 'nation' in regards to Taiwan.

Ma Ying-jeou won a strong victory in the presidential election in January 2012, yet opinion polling shows him to be a notably unpopular president. His approval rating dropped below twenty-five percent shortly before the inauguration for his second term in May 2012. The gap between what is said and what is left unsaid by the Taiwan government about relations with China has created a well of unease and uncertainty among the Taiwanese electorate in which neither the Taiwanese nationalism of the DPP nor the rosy rhetoric of the KMT with its language of 'win-wins' (*shuangying* 雙贏) expresses the reality of how the people of Taiwan experience cross-straits relations.

It was against this background that Chen Guangbiao arrived on the island with his *hongbao*, bringing on a 'water-cooler moment' (*remen huati* 熱門話題) in Taiwan's national conversation with which its political rhetoric is unequipped to come to terms. In a Chinese cultural context the *hongbao* is a gift that expresses reciprocal social relations of dependency. It passes from parent to child, from boss to worker. Chen Guangbiao's visit spoke of a social understanding of Taiwan's relations with China in which the people of Taiwan recognize at a symbolic level that a rising China is more and more able to dictate the terms of cross-straits relations – Chen Guangbiao positioned himself as the patriarch or boss over Taiwan in the symbolic language of red envelopes. It is a far cry from the threats, shrill nationalism and military intimidation of the 1990s and 2000s; but for many, the metaphorical significance of the envelopes is just as controversial.

— Mark Harrison

