

Taiwan's Challenge in Living Next to a Covetous Giant

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
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Hsieh's effort at formulating a new China policy for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) may deserve an "A" for effort and even a "B" for creativity, but bottom line, it still falls far short. Granted his suggestions certainly come closer to reality than the other world, pipe dream fantasies presented by Ma Ying-jeou, yet they still miss the mark. The problem of course does not lie with Hsieh or even Ma but with those on the other side of the equation of cross-strait dialogue, the rulers of China. Taiwan's misfortune like that of several smaller Asian countries is that it borders a state what can be likened to a 4000 lb. gorilla whose myopic leaders so far insist on only seeing Asia and the world through their covetous prism.

Examine the positions assumed by all involved in this dialogue. First take that of Frank Hsieh. His "two sides, two constitutions" with different interpretations is an imaginative effort but not without gloss. The People's Republic of China (PRC) would never buy it. Perhaps that is the reason why the PRC cancelled Hsieh's website there. For what he is really saying is that the PRC and Taiwan are two countries; each has its own constitution and interpretation on how that came to be. Each country is free to interpret this whatsoever way it wishes, but when finally dumbed down, the end result is that there are two separate countries that accept that they have at times had a limited common history. Thus they can both interpret the past from a totally different perspective. The leap of faith, of course, comes when they both supposedly accept that they can live with that. China's rulers at present will not make that leap. On the other hand, Hsieh's position could find some agreement with more moderate members of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) because it touches on a reality that they accept i.e. the reality that there are two separate countries. The fly in the ointment for the PRC remains that things could continue in this vein ad infinitum.

In contrast, the Ma position rests on the premise and belief that there will be an ultimate and inevitable reunification of these two countries either as the Republic of China (ROC) or the PRC. Because of its Constitution, the ROC as Ma sees it, still has a right to rule China even though it does not currently control that territory. Instead of simply changing its Constitution to adapt to the reality that the ROC will never rule the continent, Ma relies on trying to preserve that fantasy. Somehow in his vision there is the dream that the people on the other side of the Strait will say, "Yes, you were right all along. We have seen the light, and we will return to the fold." In this fantasy, the leaders and princelings of the People's Republic of China (PRC) allegedly will turn over their offices or share their power with their so-called "brothers" on the other side of the Strait. They will all give up their privilege, accept democracy and let the people freely choose their leaders.

The Ma fantasy is almost laughable not only because the KMT knew it could not retake China as far back as the 1960s but also in the way that it now twists and turns to accommodate

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China. Its most recent explanations are how the two countries will have offices in each other's "territory." Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) will have offices in the PRC and China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) will have offices in Taiwan. But they will not fly their national flags in said offices because though they are nations with different Constitutions, they are not "foreign nations" to each other. To add to the irony, the PRC wishes ten such offices in minute Taiwan. Does Taiwan have that many major cities that need an ARATS office? While Taiwan on the other hand would only have three SEF offices in the vastness of China, a country with a dozen or more cities with populations that dwarf the cities in Taiwan.

China of course is content with the alleged status quo since it is constantly changing and evolving in its favor. It prefers the Ma fantasy for the simple reason that the end result of that fantasy coincides with their agenda, which is one of eventual unification. In this they trust that in that unification process whoever controls the 4000 lb. gorilla will win out. For the moment, Ma repeats that it is "not yet the time" for it, but he never indicates what conditions must prevail for it to be considered the "appropriate time." As China grows in strength, the gorilla's size increases making it all the more dangerous.

The rest of the world is not exempt from all of this. It indirectly has become part of this fantasy, "it knows that the Chinese Politburo emperor has no clothes," but the country that that emperor controls is still a 4000 lb. gorilla and the countries of the world do not want to antagonize it unnecessarily, especially if there is money to be made by all involved. The Politburo Emperor provides these countries with a cheap, source of manufacturing for much of the goods they use while at the same time it offers a growing market for their many other products. It is a convenient solution. The smaller countries bordering the South China Sea are however beginning to question it because they see the claims that the growing gorilla is making there.

Frank Hsieh is right in that it is reasonable that the DPP should be open to and make efforts to talk with China if only to explain its perspective of their history. His two constitutions solution almost, I say almost, has a charm with its subtle way of saying there are really two countries. But while the real block is China, there is hope. When China meddled with the internal affairs of Cambodia, it both courted Sihanouk and Pol Pot. All concerned should remember that it ultimately backed Pol Pot and that did not fare too well for all concerned.

Source: [Jerome F. Keating's writings](#)