

Don't blame Taiwan for cross-strait challenges

Written by Michael Danielsen
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Despite inking bilateral trade agreements, China has not changed its fundamental view on Taiwan. In Beijing's eyes, Taiwan is a part of the Chinese family and this position continues to cause international challenges for the US and headaches in the EU.

After the Nov. 29 nine-in-one elections and the Sunflower movement's occupation of the legislative chamber last year, commentators have begun talking about strained cross-strait relations after a possible change in government next year.

Who is to blame for such concerns about cross-strait ties? Even the most stubborn supporter of China would realize that Taiwan is not at fault.

Blaming Taiwan shows a disconnection from reality and a misjudgement of the policies of the opposition and of social movements within the nation — policies that are aimed at protecting the interests of Taiwan while engaging with China.

This is not an advocacy for policies based solely on political values, which can lead to conflict, but it is a warning that the failure to adopt realistic policies can do the same.

In Taiwan, implementation of the wrong policies would create social and democratic conflict for years to come.

The fundamental question is: Why should Taiwan's political future be based on historical events that bear no relevance to modern society?

The nation must acknowledge its history, but formulate policies that are based on the present and the future, not chained to the past. Many politicians appear blinded by historical baggage that keeps them from seeing necessary compromises that benefit the nation.

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Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) is able to form democratic, mutually beneficial policies, as illustrated by his proposed “four mutuals” — mutual knowledge, mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual cooperation.

Others remain trapped in the past, focusing on the so-called “1992 consensus” — which refers to “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means — that has been used as a building block for cross-strait relations. Evidence shows that the consensus is not resonating with younger Taiwanese, many of whom believe that the “1992 consensus” meetings took place in a distant historical era, and believe that Taiwan is not China.

Moreover, as former National Security Council secretary-general Su Chi (蘇起) said in February 2006, there was no consensus at all.

The Chinese Civil War, the misinterpretation of the Cairo Declaration, the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) conflict with Japan before the party came to Taiwan and the Cold War are historical events that should not chain Taiwan to the past and prevent Taiwanese from making their own free choice about their future. These historical events hold little relevance to modern society.

A change in Taiwan's leadership would give China an opportunity to prove that it can engage with any government. However, Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) has given no indication that he would change his position on Taiwan, and China's nationalist tendencies suggest that it has failed to evolve in the way that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has.

It is important that the international community provide a nuanced view on Taiwan instead of promoting potentially damaging statements about the nation's relationship with China.

Taiwan's politicians need to agree on a clear cross-strait policy; they might seek inspiration from the Scandinavian political environment. Transparency and compromise are crucial, as is the protection of the welfare of the people in a globalized world. Still, Taiwan's challenging situation is not its own fault.

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