

When dealing with China, Taiwanese constantly talk about maintaining the “status quo,” which is as much a realization and an attitude as it is a policy. There has been a rise in the awareness of national autonomy in Taiwan over the past few years, which has had a clear impact upon both how the “status quo” is defined and on how it might be maintained. This has seen the emergence of a logically consistent, internally coherent trend in public opinion.

It is only by clarifying the situation and understanding the core content of awareness, trends and public opinion, that it will be possible to mount a collective defense and allow Taiwanese to further protect their beliefs and ideas, prevent certain political parties or politicians from selling Taiwan out and stop China from further infringing upon the nation's borders.

With data from various public opinion surveys conducted over the long term, the following aspects of public opinion concerning the “status quo” can be determined, helping to reveal what Taiwanese think.

When Taiwanese talk about the “status quo” in cross-strait relations, they tend to approach it from an analysis of the current political situation or the similarities and differences of the respective political systems, rather than from any nostalgic sentimentality revolving around culture, ethnicity, historical roots or theories of provenance.

Figures released on June 28 last year by the Taiwan Thinktank revealed two important points about public opinion: Among Taiwanese, 73.8 percent support the idea of cross-strait relations being state-to-state relations and 82.9 percent consider both sides of the Taiwan Strait to be autonomous, independent countries — the Republic of China (ROC) on the one side and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the other.

Also, according to figures on ethnic identification released last year by National Chengchi University's Election Study Center, 60.6 percent of Taiwanese identified only as Taiwanese. From this evidence it is clear that, as far as Taiwanese are concerned, each country has its own national identity.

In a poll conducted by the 21st Century Foundation two years ago, 46 percent of Taiwanese

Public debunks 'status quo' myth

Written by Michael Hsiao 許介顯

Saturday, 07 March 2015 10:01

said that “Taiwan is Taiwan, China is China, and neither belongs to the other,” while 24 percent said they supported the idea of “the ROC on Taiwan” and 20 percent said “the ROC is Taiwan.”

Adding these three results together shows that as many as 90 percent of Taiwanese said that there exists a separate political entity on each side of the Taiwan Strait, that they do not belong to the same country and that Taiwan is absolutely not “a part of China.” Only 2 percent said that Taiwan was a part of China.

Consequently, there is little to recommend that the idea of “one China” holds any water in the eyes of Taiwanese. For Taiwanese, the idea that Taiwan and China are different countries could not be any more apparent. This is their “status quo.”

Since there is a country on either side of the Taiwan Strait, neither of which belongs to represents or overlaps with the other, and since each country has its own name, borders and levies its own tariffs, it is clear that Taiwanese are not Chinese citizens and Chinese are clearly not Taiwanese. Maintaining the “status quo” means maintaining these differences. In the university’s poll, the choices for how to maintain the “status quo” were given as follows: to “permanently maintain the status quo”; “to maintain the status quo and then decide”; “to maintain the status quo, but to lean toward independence”; and “to maintain the status quo, but lean toward unification.”

In the poll, 85.4 percent of respondents said that the “status quo” meant different countries on either side of the Taiwan Strait. Similarly, a Taiwan Thinktank poll conducted last year revealed that 57 percent of Taiwanese did not want to see Taiwan moving toward the “one country, two systems” formulation unilaterally advocated by Beijing. Put in more concrete terms, any suggestion of leaning toward unification with China would be a serious breakdown of the “status quo.”

On the questions of whether to declare Taiwanese independence or to drop ROC as the official name in favor of Taiwan, Taiwanese also tended to say that those are for Taiwan to decide, not China. Therefore, the idea of refusing unification with China, or versing it as “rejecting unification,” “opposing unification” or “no unification” are all clear expressions of the preferred way to maintain the “status quo.”

Public debunks 'status quo' myth

Written by Michael Hsiao 蕭師

Saturday, 07 March 2015 10:01

If public opinion is in favor of maintaining the nation's autonomy and independence, clearly any suggestion of "one country, two systems" is unacceptable. Furthermore, when the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) — under pressure from the PRC and hoping to secure the vanity project of a meeting between Ma and Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) — declared that it would not promote the idea of two Chinas, or of China and Taiwan as different nations, it was inappropriate. Such a declaration went counter to mainstream public opinion. Even more so, the formulation of "one country, two areas" as a definition of cross-strait relations is a heinous transgression. Only Taiwanese can decide the nation's future.

The idea that the nation's future is to be decided by "all Chinese," or as "a joint decision by all the people on either side of the strait" is destructive, while public opinion is firmly against it. Therefore, Taiwanese will absolutely not countenance any joint attempt by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to unilaterally sacrifice Taiwan's future.

Perhaps some parties or politicians will point out that the current incarnation of the Constitution retains the assumption that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to a single country, and this is the reason behind the Ma administration's insistence on using this as a foundation for leaning toward China.

However, understanding public opinion is one of the weapons with which this myth can be debunked and perhaps become a catalyst for amendments to the Constitution. The parts that are out-of-date can be amended to better reflect reality, so that the Constitution can protect the "status quo" rather than being used as a tool certain people can use to manipulate the situation.

Michael Hsiao is director of Academia Sinica's Institute of Sociology.

Translated by Paul Cooper

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2015/03/07](#)