

Doubts grow over ‘1992 consensus’

Written by Fan Shih-ping 范世平
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Beijing used to think that after President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) took office in 2008, the so-called “1992 consensus” — which refers to a tacit understanding between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese government that both sides of the Taiwan Strait acknowledge there is “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means — had become a sure thing.

However, Beijing may not be so sure any more. Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) said that the “1992 consensus” is outdated and instead proposed the idea of “two countries, one system,” supporting the idea that Taiwan and China are two separate countries.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) does not acknowledge the “1992 consensus” either; she has instructed DPP lawmakers to prioritize the cross-strait agreement oversight act during the current legislative session. Since the DPP endorses the version of this law that was drafted by Sunflower movement leaders — which emphasizes that cross-strait agreements should be signed by the Taiwanese government of the Republic of China (ROC) and the Chinese government of the People’s Republic of China — this is as close as it gets to directly supporting the position that Taiwan and China are two independent countries.

Thanks to Ko’s popularity, Tsai’s momentum after leading the DPP to a landslide win in last year’s nine-in-one elections and the post-Sunflower movement anti-Chinese atmosphere in Taiwan, doubts over the validity of the “1992 consensus” continue to grow.

On Jan. 3, New Taipei City Mayor and Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫) said the KMT’s biggest crisis is its inability to connect with younger generations. This raises the question of whether the KMT will adjust its stance regarding the “1992 consensus.”

In January, Chu was elected as KMT chairman. On hearing the news, Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) sent Chu a letter of congratulations, stressing that Taiwan and China should strengthen the “1992 consensus” and oppose Taiwanese independence.

Chu replied: “Your party and mine have for the past six years actively pushed for cross-strait

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interactions and cooperation on many aspects on the basis of the '1992 consensus,'" implying that the "1992 consensus" has become a thing of the past rather than pointing a way into the future.

Chu even went to former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) to seek advice. This must make Beijing's hair stand on end.

On the other hand, the ruling and opposition parties reached an agreement on Wednesday last week that all constitutional amendment proposals will be given to a constitutional amendment committee for review and that no proposal by any party would be rejected by the other parties.

The Additional Articles of the Constitution of the Republic of China defines cross-strait relations as between "the people of the Chinese mainland area and those of the free area" of the ROC. This makes the question of whether the Taiwan Solidarity Union and others in the pan-green camp will propose to change the current "one country, two areas" rhetoric to "two countries" especially noteworthy.

That is why Xi felt he had to draw the line, stressing that "we have all along insisted that the '1992 consensus' is the basis and requirement for Taiwanese authorities and political parties to interact with us... As long as this requirement is met, there will be no obstacles to interaction between the mainland and any Taiwanese political parties and groups."

China even began to regard those who do not support the "1992 consensus" as proponents of Taiwanese independence and warned Tsai that there is no room for ambiguity regarding the consensus, pressing her to take a clear stance.

Since Ma's re-election in 2012, Beijing has gradually moved from the "1992 consensus" toward the "one China" framework, emphasizing that both Taiwan and China are parts of one country.

Basically, the term "country" is a more inflexible and political term, whereas the "1992 consensus," which was championed in the past and posited that both sides of the Strait are part of one and the same country, is more ambiguous in that the "one China" it referred to

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could be more loosely interpreted as a cultural, historical and racial China.

However, after last year's Sunflower movement protests, cross-strait relations swiftly worsened, prompting China to bring up the "1992 consensus" again in its conference on the affairs of Taiwan.

Recently, China conceded on the matter of its proposed M503 flight route. However, while Beijing seems to have relaxed its stance over that issue, it is starting to play tough over the "1992 consensus."

With most Taiwanese holding the opinion that Taiwan and China are two separate countries, and the new political stars are echoing the public's views, it would seem that further cross-strait debate over the "1992 consensus" is likely to cause more conflict — which is worrisome.

Fan Shih-ping is a professor at National Taiwan Normal University's Graduate Institute of Political Science.

Translated by Ethan Zhan

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