

If the much-debated claim by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) that Taiwan adhering to the so-called “1992 consensus” allows for the recognition of the Republic of China (ROC) on equal footing with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) internationally ever held water before, it does not now.

After the meeting between KMT Chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) yesterday in Beijing, the “1992 consensus” — the formula allegedly agreed to by the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in 1992, which, by the KMT’s definition, entails recognizing “one China, with different interpretations” — has nothing left of the original, ambiguous concept except “one China.”

On Wednesday last week, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) warned the public of the consequences of not complying with the “1992 consensus.” Ma’s speech was similar to the warning Xi sent to Taiwan at the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference on March 3. Chu, at the Chu-Xi meeting, also echoed Xi’s position.

Xi, in the statement, defined the “core element” of the “1992 consensus” as “the mainland and Taiwan belonging to the same ‘one China.’” Chu yesterday used the exact same words as Xi when he explained what he said was the meaning of the “1992 consensus” — that the consensus reached in 1992 was that “both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the same one China, with differences in its connotation.”

It comes as no surprise that Chu continues to worship at the shrine of the “1992 consensus.” He has repeatedly said that it remains the foundation upon which progress in cross-strait relations has been advanced. However, it was absolutely unnecessary for Chu to go one step further and redefine the “1992 consensus” on Beijing’s terms and to Beijing’s liking.

Chu could have just repeated the KMT’s definition of the “1992 consensus.” However, he chose to dispense with the part about “different interpretations” and highlight the “one China” component. Chu could have told Xi that China’s ever-increasing suppression of Taiwan’s international space runs counter to the “1992 consensus.” He could have said any number of things. However, not only did he fail to mention anything about that, he wanted to see the application of the “1992 consensus” expanded into Taiwan’s participation in international affairs.

Chu casts consensus on China's terms

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Before the Chu-Xi meeting, KMT sources said in private (and Ma in public) that Chu aimed to use the occasion to “consolidate” and “deepen” the “1992 consensus.” If the statement Chu delivered at the meeting was how he did that, the KMT has betrayed its commitment to the “1992 consensus,” which did not even exist before then-Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起) made it up in 2000.

If China's assertion that Taiwan and China belong to the same “one China” is acceptable, on what grounds can Taiwan ensure its right to participate in international organizations or to negotiate with its trading partners when its attempts to do so are rejected because of the “one China” principle?

Maybe this is not a problem that the chairman of a pro-China party cares about. Maybe Chu might as well defend himself with a bit of help from other attendants of the closed-door Chu-Xi meeting by saying that he did mention to Xi that the “1992 consensus” refers to “one China, with different interpretations,” as he said at the post-meeting news conference.

Nevertheless, Chu has left the impression that he dare not speak up for the interests of Taiwan if they are unpleasant and unfavorable to Xi in public. This leads to another question: Will Chu be able to put cross-strait relations on a track that can benefit society as a whole — and not just a privileged few — as he has promised?

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