

The futility of the ‘1992 consensus’

Written by Jerry Liu 劉建群

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During his visit to the US, Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Eric Chu (朱立倫) said that the KMT is a pro-US party that has always fought against communism, and that the “1992 consensus” is a “consensus without a consensus” for the sake of “creative ambiguity.”

When trying to persuade others of his “pro-US, anti-China” stance, Chu’s intended audience was actually inside the KMT, not the people he was speaking to in the US.

After all, it is nothing new for certain individuals in the pan-blue camp to repeatedly and publicly express their doubts about Washington or their support for Beijing.

In January 2019, I once showed my opposition to the “1992 consensus” as a serving diplomat, when the issue was widely discussed. The main reason for my opposition was that, as a professional diplomat, I should not keep sending the wrong message to the international community.

If the “1992 consensus” does not exist at all, or if it is a so-called “pseudo-tacit agreement” without any factual or legal basis, then it is better to recognize the reality as soon as possible, instead of “drinking poison to quench one’s thirst,” as the old Chinese saying goes.

The greatest damage the “1992 consensus” inflicts on Taiwan is that it misleads the international community into believing that China has ultimate power over Taiwan’s participation in global institutions.

During former president Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) eight-year tenure, Taiwan was able to participate as an observer in the World Health Assembly, the International Civil Aviation Organization and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, but Taiwan’s inclusion was all at the mercy of Beijing.

Such international participation at that time, to a degree, reinforced a misperception of Taiwan’s subordination to China. This was no reason for celebration, and in fact made many sigh, yet the

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Ma administration took it as a “diplomatic achievement” and was content with itself.

Since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) took office in 2016, the negative consequences of the “1992 consensus” to Taiwan’s diplomatic efforts have gradually emerged.

The authorities of those international organizations certainly have no doubt about what contribution Taiwan can make. Unfortunately, they continue to follow the will of Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平).

The “1992 consensus” carries no legal weight in international law. It does not even exist in any official documents jointly recognized by both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and there is certainly no written version of the “1992 consensus” jointly recognized by Taiwan and China. So exactly what does “a consensus without a consensus” mean?

Perhaps Taiwan can learn a lesson from the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. Signed by then-Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang (趙紫陽) and then-British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the declaration was approved by the two countries and registered at the UN.

However, this international document, which was crucial to the fate of Hong Kong, was later redefined by the Chinese government as a historical document without any significance, and this is how the Chinese side now views it.

I would like to ask Chu: What kind of protection can the empty words of the “1992 consensus,” based on respective interpretations, bring to Taiwan?

It is not a creative ambiguity, but a destructive constraint. As Chu traveled thousands of miles just to play the old tune again, did his remarks please Washington or make it sigh?

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