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Power position and Taiwan policy: how Beijing responds to Taipei’s stimuli during the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao periods

Kuan-Wu Chen and Yu-Shan Wu

a Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan; b Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

Cross-Strait relations between China and Taiwan have experienced wild fluctuations in the past decades. Although the existing literature has investigated the link between domestic politics and Taiwan’s mainland policy, our understanding of how politics in China impacts Beijing’s policy toward Taiwan is woefully insufficient. This article fills the gap by exploring the relation between the power position of the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and Beijing’s response to Taiwan’s Cross-Strait initiatives under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao (1989–2012). We identify 19 significant events during the period of observation that prompted official interactions, brought about changes in policy statements, and received widespread attention. The nature and intensity of China’s reaction to Taiwan’s stimuli is measured against Cross-Strait Interaction Index. We then look into power position of the general secretary by identifying whether he is in a period of power transition or power consolidation. The former (transition) entails a vulnerable power position, hence the reluctance by the general secretary to respond actively to Taiwan’s positive proposal, and the need to show aggressiveness in responding to Taiwan’s negative stimulus. The latter (consolidation) brings about a strengthened power position for the general secretary and leads to an opposite pattern of response: active engagement with Taiwan when positive messages are received, and limited retaliation when Taiwan acts provocatively. Hence the strength of the top leader in China is inversely related to the toughness of Beijing’s Taiwan policy. This finding has great theoretical and policy implications.

KEYWORDS

Cross-Strait relations; China and Taiwan; Jiang Zemin; Hu Jintao; political succession

1. Introduction

Cross-Strait relations are of paramount importance to Taiwan. There has been an abundance of theoretical frameworks that profess to explain cross-Strait relations. Some of these theories concentrate on the interactions between Taiwan and the...
Chinese mainland. Some stress the importance of domestic political factors on both sides. Some argue international forces are behind the permutations of cross-Strait relations. Various synthetic theories have also been advanced to claim a higher degree of explanatory power than the “pure” theories. Typically, synthetic models integrate domestic and international factors in an analytical framework. The way the factors are selected and integrated determines how coherent and effective the model is. Despite the proliferation of theories in the field of cross-Strait relations, a conspicuous defect of the literature is its concentration on the Taiwan side of the coin. This seems to be inevitable as information concerning decision-making in Beijing’s Taiwan policy is scarce, to say the least. Take for example the domestic–international nexus approach that links domestic politics and external behaviors; we can find empirical works on how elections drive Taiwan’s mainland policy and Washington’s China policy, but very little on how the PRC’s politics drives its Taiwan policy. Obviously, there is a hole to be filled.

To explore into the connection between domestic politics and external behaviors of the PRC, it is clear that there is a certain degree of institutionalization of political succession in the CCP’s top leadership. Since the death of Mao Zedong and political ascendance of Deng Xiaoping, the party has been holding regular quinquennial national congresses, followed by the people’s congresses, which determine the top leadership of the party-state. However, it was not until the Sixteenth Party Congress that there appeared a first-ever predictable political succession by Hu Jintao to Jiang Zemin. Even that succession was marred by Jiang’s sustained control of...
the military after he stepped down from the position of general secretary, and Hu’s mandate that actually came not from any institutionalized succession mechanism, but from the will of Deng, the deceased paramount leader. The 2012 succession of Hu by Xi Jinping seems to be an unprecedented event, marking the height of China’s political institutionalization. However, even that was not non-problematic, as one saw great political turbulence before and after the succession, even the rumor of a military coup by those who were opposed to Xi’s ascendance. Despite the remaining instability of the system, it still guarantees regular power turnovers, a feature that separates it from most of the authoritarian systems in the world. Term limit and age limit have been meticulously executed, providing a high degree of predictability of the top leadership, and making our investigation into the connection between domestic politics and Beijing’s Taiwan policy feasible.

In the following pages, we will explore into the impact of political succession/leadership position on Beijing’s Taiwan policy during the Jiang and Hu periods (1989–2012). This time frame is chosen because there was relative stability and predictability of the leadership and its succession, so that we can explore into the possible connection between the CCP’s high politics and Beijing’s Taiwan policy.

The present article is organized as follows. In Section 2, we identify independent and dependent variables of our analytical framework and introduce 19 major cross-Strait events that will be used to test our hypotheses. Section 3 offers an in-depth analysis of the above 19 events centering on their Cross-Strait Interaction Index (CSII) score and how the score relates to the power position of the CCP’s top leader. In Section 4, we turn to a comparison of the peaks and nadirs of cross-Strait relation in Jiang’s and Hu’s eras, offering four sets of case studies. The comparison is to focus on key cases for proving our hypotheses. In conclusion, we summarize our findings, note their implications, and suggest further lines of enquiry.

2. Analytical framework

In this study, we separate the power position of the general secretary of the CCP into two periods: “succession transition” and “succession consolidation”. It is assumed that during the transition period, the top leader is in a relatively weak position, for political succession is arranged in a Leninist party system and not based on an open selection process that can provide legitimacy for the new top ruler. As such, the new leader is vulnerable to criticism by his colleagues and even the broad public for actions/inactions that can be interpreted as weak in the face of external challenges. This would prompt the new leader to make tough response. Also during the transition period, the new leader is worried about being double-crossed by foreign leaders, who may make attractive overtures to lure the inexperienced new leader into a trap. This would then make the new leader behave in a

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10The sensational events culminated in the arrest of Bo Xilai (薄熙来), the powerful secretary of Chongqing, one of mainland China’s four provincial-level municipalities. For the cause of sustained instability in China’s top leadership, see Wu, “Rejuvenation of the Party-State.”

11It may also be the main reason for China to be immune from the turbulence during the heights of the Arab Spring, a widespread protest movement against authoritarian leaders who perpetuated their rules. Whether China will be able sustain this feature of institutionalization in the Xi’s era remains to be seen.

12For an early attempt along this line of investigation, see Chu, “Power Transition.”

13Power position refers to how advanced the top CCP leader is in accumulating power after he succeeds the forerunner. We shall operationalize the concept in Section 2.
cautious manner, hesitant to respond to positive signals sent by foreign countries. Taken as a whole, the new leader may underreact to positive signals, and overreact to negative signals. The common cause for both phenomena is the inherent weaknesses of the new leader, whose inauguration lacks system-wide legitimacy.

During the consolidation period, on the contrary, the new leader is in a much stronger position, being able to rely on political capital accumulated in the previous period. The greater confidence and less vulnerability/anxiety then translate into a more daring attitude when faced with opportunities offered by foreign leaders. The new leader is in a position to withstand domestic criticism if his cooperative strategy is not seen as properly reciprocated. This mentality also helps the new leader in making measured response when faced with challenges in the interest of long-term strategic benefits, for his political capital is enough to sustain domestic criticism that would surely arise when the new leader is perceived to have taken a “weak” position to an external challenge.

The following table shows the indicators of the two periods based on the pioneering work by David Backman. The two periods are “succession transition” and “succession consolidation,” both defined in terms of leadership, military, governance, and competition. We detect a new leader in a succession transition period who has just acquired de jure leadership position, received endorsement by the military, accumulated reasonable experience of governance, and accumulated relatively more resources than competitors. A leader is in a succession consolidation period when he is able to make decisive decisions based on his personal authority, remove leftovers from the previous administration, and appoint his own protégés, set the party’s ideological line, and hold overwhelming advantage over competitors (Table 1).

Based on the criteria set above, we can determine that Jiang’s transition period began in 1989, when he was appointed general secretary of the CCP after the Tiananmen crisis. He assumed the post of chairman of the military commission in November 1989 and became the first party leader to combine supreme command of both the CCP and PLA since the downfall of Hua Guofeng. In 1993, Jiang further took the position of state chairman, and one year later the leader of the Central Leading Group on Taiwan Affairs (CLGTA). In mid-late 1992, Jiefangjun Bao ran a series of articles, pledging allegiance to the party center with Jiang at the core (yi Jiang Zemin tongzhi wei hexin de dangzhongyang). Jiang was also able to put Huang Ju, Wu Bangguo, and Jiang Chunyun into leading positions, demonstrating his political prowess. However, since Deng remained the ultimate power holder and kept the last say on the CCP’s Taiwan policy, besides putting senior (Liu Huaqing) and junior (Hu Jintao)

| Table 1. Succession transition and consolidation. |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| **Succession transition** | **Succession consolidation** |
| Leadership | Acquisition of de jure leadership position | Capable of making decisive decisions based on personal authority |
| Military | Endorsement by military | Removal of leftovers and appointment of protégés |
| Governance | Experience of governance | Capable of setting the party’s ideological line |
| Competition | Relative more resources than competitors | Holding overwhelming advantage over competitors |

Adopted from Bachman, “Succession, Consolidation and Transition”.

14See, Bachman, “Succession Politics and China’s Future”; Bachman, “Succession, Consolidation and Transition”; and Bachman, “The Paradox of Analysing Elite Politics under Jiang.”

15See, for example, Wen, “Dui Jiang Zemin Yingzhi Gongjun Lingdao Diweizhi Yanxi.”
members in the Standing Committee of the Politburo to outflank the general secretary, Jiang’s power had not been consolidated before the death of Deng in early 1997. After that watershed, Jiang significantly consolidated his power position, as witnessed by the removal of his arch rival Qiao Shi at the 15th Congress, and the enshrinement of the “Three Represents” theory in the party chapter at the 16th Congress. Put together, we define Jiang’s succession transition as from 1989 to 1996, and his succession consolidation from 1997 to 2002.

Hu experienced a similar shift from transition to consolidation during his ten-year tenure. His de jure succession began with assuming the position of general secretary in 2002 (and concomitantly head of the CLGTA), and state chairman in 2003. In 2004, Jiang belatedly transferred his command over the PLA to Hu, but still managed to wield great influence by keeping his protégé vice chairmen of the Central Military Commission. Between 2002 and 2005, Hu was unable to fully exert control over the party-state apparatus. The new general secretary’s power consolidation began in 2006, when Hu reshuffled high PLA personnel across China’s military regions, and replaced Jiang’s principles of governance in the military with his own. In the same year, Chen Liangyu, party secretary of Shanghai and a political rival, was removed from power ostensibly for committing embezzlement. At the 6th Plenum of the 16th Congress, Hu’s “Harmonious Society” was enshrined as the party’s overall goal. This shows Hu was in a position to define the CCP’s ideological line. Hence, we would treat 2002–2005 as Hu’s transitional years, and 2006–2012 his years of consolidation.

Now we can shift to the dependent variable: the CCP’s response to Taipei’s stimuli. After carefully reviewing the major cross-Strait events in 1989–2012 and the existing measurements, we come up with a scale of 13 categories, with 6 in the positive realm, 6 in the negative realm, and one at 0. They are shown in Table 2.

| Description                                                                 | Cross-Strait Interaction Index | Characterization         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| End of cross-Strait hostilities and signing of a peace accord               | 6                             | Active reciprocation      |
| A declaration that recognizes the status quo as divided governance          | 5                             | Active reciprocation      |
| Signing of significant non-political agreement                              | 4                             | Active reciprocation      |
| Reaching important administrative agreement, or advocacy of historic engagement | 3                             | Limited reciprocation     |
| Reciprocation by full state-level (zhengquoji) leader(s)                   | 2                             | Limited reciprocation     |
| Reciprocation by full ministry-level official(s)                            | 1                             | Limited reciprocation     |
| Medium                                                                     | 0                             | No response               |
| Rebuttal by full ministry-level official(s)                                | −1                            | Limited retaliation       |
| Rebuttal by full state-level leader(s)                                     | −2                            | Limited retaliation       |
| Freezing or abrogation of cross-Strait cooperation or agreement             | −3                            | Limited retaliation       |
| Major declaration with military implications                               | −4                            | Aggressive retaliation    |
| Military maneuver with intent to change the status quo (drill, etc.)        | −5                            | Aggressive retaliation    |
| Outbreak of direct military confrontation                                  | −6                            | Aggressive retaliation    |

*Full state-level officials are those at the top echelon of the Chinese party-state, including members of the CCP’s Standing Committee of the Political Bureau. Full ministry-level officials are the ministers, secretaries of provincial CCP committees, and especially the director of ARATS.

Developed by the authors.

16 See, Bo, China’s Elite Politics, 336–345.
17 For measurement of cross-Strait relations, see Lai, “Jianli Liangan Ziliaokuzhi Fangfalun Chutan.”
The 19 responses are grouped into 5 categories with decreasing friendliness: active reciprocation (4 ~ 6), limited reciprocation (1 ~ 3), no response (0), limited retaliation (−1~−3), and aggressive retaliation (−4~−6). These are the various kinds of responses by the CCP to stimuli from Taiwan.

After defining the independent variable (general secretary’s power position: transition, consolidation) and the dependent variable (the CCP’s Response to Taiwan’s Stimuli as measured by Cross-Strait Interaction Index, or CSII), we propose the following: as reflective of the general secretary’s power position, the CCP’s Taiwan policy tends to limitedly reciprocate Taipei’s positive signals or aggressively retaliate Taipei’s negative signals when the general secretary is in power transition; and the CCP’s Taiwan policy tends to actively reciprocate Taipei’s positive signals or limitedly retaliate Taipei’s negative signals when the general secretary is in power consolidation. The difference between the two modes of responses is a reflection of the weaknesses/strengths of the general secretary’s power position.

In order to test the above assumptions, we identify 19 major cross-Strait events during the 1989–2012 period. These events marked significant turns in the bilateral relationship.\textsuperscript{18} They prompted official interactions, brought about changes in policy statements, and received widespread attention. The identification and investigation of those events is made possible by a thorough reading of *Renmin Ribao* and *Jiefangjun Bao* for the period covered by the study, field interviews with ten scholars in mainland China and Taiwan, and consulting existing literature.\textsuperscript{19} The 19 events are as shown in Table 3.

In order to test our theory that the PRC’s Taiwan policy tends to be tougher during transition (limited response to positive signals and aggressive retaliation against negative

**Table 3. Nineteen major events (1989–2012).**

| Number | Event                                      | Time               |
|--------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1      | Kinmen Accord                              | September 12 1990  |
| 2      | Guidelines for National Unification         | February 23 1991   |
| 3      | One-China, Respective Interpretations      | August 1 1992      |
| 4      | The Koo-Wang Talks                         | April 27 1993      |
| 5      | Jiang’s Eight-Point proposal               | January 30 1995    |
| 6      | President Lee’s Private Visit to U.S. (Taiwan Strait Crisis) | May 22 1995–March 25 1996 |
| 7      | The Second Meeting between Koo and Wang    | October 14–18 1998 |
| 8      | Two-State Theory                           | July 9 1999        |
| 9      | Mini-Three-Links                           | January 1 2001     |
| 10     | New “One China Three-Sentences”            | March 5 2002       |
| 11     | One Country on Each Side                   | August 2 2002      |
| 12     | Cross-Strait Lunar New Year Charted Flights| January 26 2003    |
| 13     | Defensive Referendum                       | March 20 2004      |
| 14     | Anti-succession Law                        | March 14 2005      |
| 15     | Cease to Apply The National Unification Guidelines | February 27 2006   |
| 16     | Four Imperatives and One Non-issue         | March 4 2007       |
| 17     | Direct Cross-Strait Transport Links        | November 4 2008    |
| 18     | Hu’s six proposals on Taiwan               | December 31 2008   |
| 19     | ECFA                                       | June 29 2010       |

Compiled by the authors.

\textsuperscript{18}We do not include events that are initiated by mainland China and responded to by Taiwan, for the simple reasons that during the period that we cover, Taipei kept most of the initiative in cross-Strait relations, and that we are primarily interested in Beijing’s responsive mode, not Taipei’s.

\textsuperscript{19}Such as Lee, *Jiedong Liangan 20 Nian*; and Su, *Liangan Botao Ershinian Jishi*. 
stimuli) than during consolidation (active reciprocation to positive signals and limited retaliation against negative stimuli), we will measure all the 19 events and compare two sets of scores, one for the transition period, the other for the consolidation period. The comparison is always made between the two periods under the same general secretary, not between the two general secretaries. We will first look at the CSII Overall Mean for both the transition and consolidation periods under Jiang and Hu. CSII Overall Mean is the mean of CSII scores of all the responses from Beijing to Taiwan’s stimuli during a particular period under the reign of a given general secretary. Then we will analyze and compare the CSII Positive Mean and the CSII Negative Mean for the four periods. The CSII Positive Mean records the average value of CSII scores of Beijing’s responses to Taiwan’s positive stimuli during a particular period, and the CSII Negative Mean is the average of CSII scores of Beijing’s responses to Taiwan’s negative stimuli during a particular period. Finally, we will compare the events that register the highest and lowest CSII scores in transition and consolidation under the same general secretary. These are the peaks and nadirs. Specifically, they are H_j1 (most friendly response to Taiwan during Jiang’s transition), H_j2 (most friendly response during Jiang’s consolidation), H_h1 (most friendly response during Hu’s transition), H_h2 (most friendly response during Hu’s consolidation), L_j1 (most hostile response to Taiwan during Jiang’s transition), L_j2 (most hostile response during Jiang’s consolidation), L_h1 (most hostile response during Hu’s transition), and L_h2 (most hostile response during Hu’s consolidation). Here subscripts “1” and “2” refer to the transition period and the consolidation period, and “j” is for Jiang and “h” for Hu. Then we will compare H_j1 and H_j2, H_h1 and H_h2, L_j1 and L_j2, and L_h1 and H_h2, respectively. Our hypothesis is H_j1 < H_j2 and L_j1 < L_j2; hence, we should have H_j1 < H_j2 and H_h1 < H_h2, and L_j1 < L_j2 and L_h1 < L_h2. Those inequalities show transition period (1) tends to yield tougher response than consolidation period (2). Since we are comparing the highs and lows of the same general secretary, and not between them, we have controlled for the leader.

3. Measurement and comparison

We shall first go through the 19 events and measure their CSII score, followed by an initial analysis of the means for each period and for the highs and lows. Then we will compare the peaks and nadirs under the same leader at different periods. Both the means of the highs/lows and the peaks/nadirs give us an idea about the trends in Beijing’s Taiwan policy at different periods.

During Jiang’s reign as general secretary, the Kinmen Accord of 1990 was a historic administrative agreement signed by the two Red Cross Societies, gaining a score of 3. The Guidelines for National Unification of 1991 was welcomed by Jiang and Li Peng, two PRC national leaders. It reached 2 on the CSII scale. In 1992, the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) “respected” the Straits Exchange Foundation’s (SEF) suggestion that the two sides express the “one China” principle separately.20 This is a full ministry-level interaction, although the resultant “1992 Consensus” later became the cornerstone of cross-Strait exchanges. The “one-China, 20In order to deal with cross-Strait relations without mutual official recognition, both Taiwan and mainland China created “white glove” semi-governmental organizations. Taiwan founded the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) in March 1991, followed by the mainland with its Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) in December of the same year.
respective interpretations” got 1 point on our scale. The Koo-Wang Talks next year produced several administrative agreements for the first time between the semi-officials from the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. It received 3 points. This was followed by Jiang’s Eight-Point proposal in 1995 that suggested exchanging visits by leaders of the two sides and starting political negotiations. It was a 3-point proposal. The initial rapprochement between Taiwan and mainland China took an abrupt downturn when Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui was able to secure a “private invitation” from his alma mater and visited the U.S. in 1995. The entailing “missile scare” sent cross-strait relations to a tailspin, reaching −5 on our scale. The second Koo-Wang meeting of 1997 managed to give the relationship a slight lift, but not beyond 2 scores. However, the relationship again took a nosedive with Lee Teng-hui’s “two-state theory” of 1999, which received a −3 rebuttal from the mainland. With the inauguration of Chen Shui-bian, and the initial friendly approach by the new DPP president, the CCP responded favorably to Taiwan’s proposal to open the “three mini-links” in 2001, scoring 3. As a reward to Chen’s “five no’s” and his honoring the “1992 Spirit,” Beijing officially granted Taiwan an equal status with the mainland in a new political formula of “one China” in March 2002: “There is only one China in the world. Both the Mainland and Taiwan belong to that one China.” This was a 5-point award. However, that upbeat mode was swiftly replaced by a −1 rebuttal to Chen’s “One country on each side” remark in August (for details, see Figure 1 and Table A1). In sum, from Kinmen

![Figure 1. Nineteen major events (1989–2012).](image)

*The white areas denote the transition periods, and the shaded areas the consolidation periods. A CSII score of 6 is maximum reciprocation, while −6 is maximum retaliation. Based on Table A1.*
According to missile scare, the average CSII score for Jiang’s transition period is 1.17, with the average of the highs at 2.4 and the average of the lows at −5. During Jiang’s consolidation period, namely from the second Koo-Wang meeting to Chen’s “One country on each side” provocation, the average CSII score was 1.2, with the average of the highs at 3.3 and the average of the lows at −2. For the vicissitudes of cross-Strait relations and volatility of CSII scores, see Table 4.

The Hu Jintao era began with a positive response in 2003 to Taiwan’s request for cross-Strait Lunar New Year chartered flights, an act that scored one point. However, those flights were suspended one year later when Chen advocated referenda on Taiwan’s missile defense and cross-Strait negotiations, a setback of −3. Referenda had long been hailed as the instrument for Taiwan independence, hence Beijing’s hypersensitivity to them. After Chen won the presidential race in 2004, his electoral promise of rewriting Taiwan’s constitution posed a substantive threat to Beijing, provoking the enactment of the 2005 “Anti-Secession Law,” a −4 retaliation. In early 2006, Chen declared that the National Unification Guidelines ceased to apply, practically abrogating Taiwan’s commitment to unification with the mainland. This provocation was met with rebuttal by both Hu and Wen Jiabao, the PRC’s prime minister. Beijing’s action was a measured −2 response. In March 2007, Chen geared up his advocacy of Taiwan independence by declaring the “Four Imperatives and One Non-issue.” This blatant provocation received only mild response from mainland China, scoring −1. Once Ma Ying-jeou was inaugurated, Beijing rushed to reward the new Taiwan president for his commitment to the “1992 Consensus” by establishing the three links and signing agreements with Taiwan, a 3-point response. Furthermore, Hu changed the main goal of the CCP from “peaceful unification” to “peaceful development,” with implications of divided governance that scored 5. Finally, responding to Taiwan’s interest in building an FTA tie with the mainland, Beijing made a lot of economic concessions in the early harvest list of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA). This was a 4-point response (for details, see Figure 1 and Table A1). In sum, from cross-Strait Lunar New Year charted flights to Anti-Secession Law, the average CSII score for Hu’s transition period is −2, with the average of the highs at 1 and the average of the lows at −3.5. During Hu’s consolidation period, namely from the “freezing” of the National Security Guidelines to the signing of ECFA, the average CSII score was 1.8, with the average of the highs at 4 and the average of the lows at −1.5.

As can be clearly seen in Table 4, in each pair of CSII scores, consolidation is higher than transition. In terms of CSII Overall Mean (Table 4, third row), under Jiang Zemin, the transition score is 1.17, compared with the consolidation score of 1.2. Under Hu Jintao, the gap between the transition score and consolidation score is 3.8, with the

| Table 4. Measurement of the 19 events. |
|-----------------------------------------|
| Leader | Jiang Zemin | Hu Jintao |
| Period | Transition | Consolidation | Transition | Consolidation |
| CSII Overall Mean | 1.17 | 1.2 | −2 | 1.8 |
| CSII Positive Mean | 2.4 | 3.3 | 1 | 4 |
| CSII Negative Mean | −5 | −2 | −3.5 | −1.5 |
| Peak | 3 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| Nadir | −5 | −3 | −4 | −2 |

Calculated by the authors.
former at –2 and the latter at 1.8. This shows the transition period under the two general secretaries witnessed tougher Taiwan policy than the consolidation period. In terms of CSII Positive Mean, namely the mean of the scores of the positive responses to Taiwan’s stimuli, the consolidation period always outperformed the transition period. Under Jiang, the CSII Positive Mean is 3.3 for consolidation, and 2.4 for transition. Under Hu, the corresponding figures are 4 and 1, respectively. This shows when faced with positive stimuli from Taiwan, mainland China tends to respond more favorably when its top leader is in fuller control.

Consolidation also outperforms transition when the CSII score is in the negative realm. For Jiang, his CSII Negative Mean is –2 for consolidation, compared with –5 for transition. For Hu, consolidation brought him a CSII Negative Mean of –1.5, compared with –3.5 under transition. This shows that Beijing’s response to Taiwan’s negative stimuli was more restrained when the top leader was in fuller control. The same tendency is evident if we look at the peaks and nadirs of the CSII score in different periods under Jiang and Hu. Jiang’s peak in transition, or $H_{j1}$, stands at 3. It rises to 5 in consolidation ($H_{j2}$), hence $H_{j1} < H_{j2}$. Hu’s peak in transition ($H_{h1}$) is 1. It surged to 5 in consolidation ($H_{h2}$), hence $H_{h1} < H_{h2}$. H2 is always greater than H1, no matter under which general secretary’s reign. For the nadir, it stands at –5 in Jiang’s transition, rising to –3 in his consolidation, hence $L_{j1} < L_{j2}$. For Hu, his transitional nadir is at –4, compared with –2 in consolidation, hence $L_{h1} < L_{h2}$. Again, $L_{j2}$ is always greater than $L_{j1}$, under whichever general secretary. In sum, through all the comparisons between transition and consolidation, the latter outperforms the former. In essence, when the general secretary is in fuller control, he tends to respond more vigorously to Taiwan’s positive signals, and shows restraints when faced with negative stimuli (as shown in Table 4).

4 Peaks and nadirs

In this section, we will make four comparisons between (1) $H_{j1}$ (Jiang’s Eight Points) and $H_{j2}$ (New “Three-Sentences for One China”), (2) $L_{j1}$ (Taiwan Strait Crisis) and $L_{j2}$ (Two-State Theory), (3) $H_{h1}$ (Lunar New Year Chartered Flights) and $H_{h2}$ (Hu’s Six Proposals), and (4) $L_{h1}$ (Anti-Secession Law) and $L_{h2}$ (National Unification Guidelines Ceases to Apply). The hypothesis is $H_{j1} < H_{j2}$ and $H_{h1} < H_{h2}$, and $L_{j1} < L_{j2}$ and $L_{h1} < L_{h2}$.

4.1. Comparison between two peaks in Jiang’s era

When it comes to comparing the two peaks in Jiang’s era, we find that despite similar stimuli that Taiwan provided, the responses from Beijing were quite different. To begin with, after Lee Teng-hui was elected president in 1990, he founded the National Unification Council, issued the Guidelines for National Unification, and formulated Taiwan’s version of One China. President Lee sent an unmistakable message to the Mainland that he was committed to the one-China principle and national unification. Although not fully satisfied, both Jiang and his Prime Minister Li Peng expressed their “welcome” to Lee’s stance. This was the background for Jiang’s Eight Points. A decade later, when Chen Shui-bian sent a similar signal to the Mainland through announcing “Five no’s,” recognizing the “1992 Spirit,” and endorsing “Integration” across the
Taiwan Strait, Jiang delivered the New Three Sentences of One China, virtually shifting unification from a characterization of the status quo to an ultimate goal to be realized in the future. The New Three Sentences also equalized Taiwan’s status with the Mainland in the formula, treating them as both “parts” of China. That was the most important change in the CCP’s Taiwan policy during Jiang’s era.

We observe that when Taiwan authority sent similar positive signals, Jiang in the consolidation period responded more actively than in the transitional period, for he dared to be more innovative in his Taiwan policy when he was more in control and less worried about intraparty criticism. We further notice that when Jiang was innovating his Taiwan policy, the general secretary was also remolding the party’s ideological line. The “Three Represents” was first aired by Jiang in 2000, and enshrined as a guiding thought of the CCP the next year. Setting the ideological line is a signature of the general secretary’s full control of the party, and an indicator that the country has moved into the consolidation period. It raised the top leader’s status, and enabled him to innovate on crucial national policies, such as the Taiwan policy. None of this is possible when the leader is still in the transitional period.

Jiang’s Eight Points advocated historic engagement, thus receiving 3 points. The more innovative Three New Sentences for One China implied recognition of the status quo as divided governance, hence garnering 5 points. In this case, we have $H_{j1} < H_{j2}$.

### 4.2 Comparison between two nadirs in Jiang’s era

There are two striking similarities between the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996 and the Two-State Theory of 1999. Despite these similarities, Beijing’s responses to Taipei’s provocative maneuvers were wide apart. The first similarity is the utterly amicable pre-crisis atmosphere. Before Lee’s visit to the U.S. in 1995 that provoked Beijing’s hostile reaction, cross-Strait relation was so harmonious that ARATS Chairman Wang Daohan was preparing to visit Taiwan. A similar situation can be found in 1999, when the unexpected issuance of the Two-State Theory by Lee thwarted Wang’s second plan to visit Taiwan. Lee was fully aware of the possible ramifications of his actions, but he was deliberately provocative on both occasions. The second similarity can be found in Lee’s message conveyed through his actions/speeches in the two crises. When Lee gave his famous speech at his alma mater, the Cornell University, he emphasized the “Republic of China on Taiwan,” a transitional term between “the Republic of China” that the KMT loyalists had treasured and “Taiwan” in which lied Lee’s ultimate allegiance. In the Two-State Theory, which Lee unveiled in an interview he gave to Deutsche Welle in 1999, the ROC Constitution was said to have been amended in 1991 to make cross-Strait relations of a “state-to-state” nature, or at least a “special state-to-state relationship.” This was the first time a ROC president characterized cross-Strait relation as an interstate relationship, implying the breaking of legal ties between Taiwan and China. In both 1995–1996 and 1999, Lee was redefining the national status of Taiwan.

Despite the similar gravity of the issue involved, Jiang responded to the two challenges quite differently. In the 1995–1996 missile scare, Jiang resorted to military exercises that directly targeted Taiwan and touched off a confrontation with the U.S. that could lead to armed conflict between the two countries in the Taiwan Strait. In
1999, he simply suspended communications between the ARATS and SEF, and postponed Wang’s visit to Taiwan. During the 1995–1996 crisis, the PLA was extremely anxious about Lee’s diplomatic breakthrough and Jiang was hard pressed by the generals to be tough. The military exercises were thus approved. Jiang’s power position was such that he could not opt for milder responses. In 1999, Jiang was less pressured from within the party and could come up with appropriate responses that matched China’s strategic interests. The measured response to Taiwan through Washington was a deliberate act to contain Lee, force Taipei to backtrack, and minimize the risk of confrontation with the U.S. Such move was only possible with the general secretary in full control of the military, namely when the country is in the consolidation period.

Taiwan Strait Crisis is a military maneuver with intent to change the status quo, hence −5. The Two-State Theory resulted in freezing or abrogation of cross-Strait cooperation or agreement, graded at −3. In this comparison, we find $L_{j1}<L_{j2}$.

### 4.3 Comparison between two peaks in Hu’s era

Beijing’s response to Taipei’s request for chartered flights during Chinese New Year was quite limited, ensuing only contact with Taiwan’s airline companies and bypassing Chen’s officials altogether. The reasoning behind this lukewarm response was Beijing’s steadfast refusal to let Chen gain political credit for opening a cross-Strait channel that was popular in Taiwan. During this period of time, Jiang remained Chairman of the Central Military Commission, and Hu’s control of the CCP’s Taiwan policy was dubious at best. Small wonder that Beijing showed limited interest in responding to Taipei’s overture.

In contrast to the Chinese New Year chartered flights, Hu’s response to Ma Ying-jeou’s goodwill gesture was overwhelming. Besides coordinating with the KMT government in implementing direct cross-Strait transport, Hu geared up his charm offensive by making Six Proposals that shifted the focus of Beijing’s Taiwan policy from “peaceful unification” to “peaceful development.” This shift redefined Beijing’s priority, synchronizing it with the KMT’s status quo preference. The daring attitude by Hu was the result of his strengthened power position in the party, reflecting not just the change of guard in Taipei.

In this comparison, Lunar New Year Chartered Flights received endorsement by full ministry-level officials, scoring 1, while Hu’s Six Proposals is a declaration that recognizes the status quo as divided governance, graded at 5. So we have $H_{h1}<H_{h2}$.

### 4.4 Comparison between two nadirs in Hu’s Era

During the presidential campaign of 2003–2004, Chen made pledges such as rewriting the constitution and instituting referendum, which were on the brink of declaring Taiwan independence and proved highly provocative to the ears of Communist leaders, particularly those in the military, in Beijing. Chen’s reelection heightened their anxiety. This was the background of the enacting of the Anti-Secession Law, passed in early 2005. China was clearly in the power transition period during that time, as Jiang did not give up his control over the military until 2004, and after that still managed to put his protégés in the Central Military Commission, reducing Hu’s power in that body. Under
those circumstances, Hu was not in a position to resist the hard-liners' demand to threaten Chen with “non-peaceful means” if he further tilted toward independence, and that demand formed the core clause of the Anti-Secession Law. This was the first time when the Mainland put its military threat against Taiwan independence on a legal footing. Very much like Jiang in the missile crisis a decade ago, Hu in transition found he must take a tough policy stance.

If a pledge to rewrite the ROC constitution crosses Beijing’s redline, then so must Chen’s decision to terminate the function of the National Unification Council and abrogate the Guidelines for National Unification. Although pressure from Washington softened the terms used by Chen, and the NUC simply “ceases to function,” and the GNU “ceases to apply,” it was clear that Taiwan officially abandoned the goal of unification with the Mainland, a gesture that was as disruptive to cross-Strait relations, if not more so, than the pledge to rewrite the constitution. However, Hu in consolidation was more capable to resist the pressure from the hard-liners, and the Mainland’s response to Chen’s moves was limited to verbal rebuttal by high party leaders, including Hu and Wen, but not much beyond that. This was in sharp contrast with the passage of the Anti-Secession Law. Hu in consolidation proved much more capable of controlling the situation and coming up with measured response to Taiwan’s provocation.

Because Anti-Secession Law is a major declaration with military implications, so it gets −4. The scrapping of the National Unification Guidelines caused rebuttal by full state-level leaders, hence receiving −2. In this comparison, we have \( L_{h1} < L_{h2} \).

5. Conclusion

There is a rich literature on decision-making by Washington and Taipei in the US-PRC-ROC strategic triangle, but Beijing’s Taiwan policy has been scantily researched. What is blatantly missing is the linkage between China’s domestic politics and its Taiwan policy. This paper hypothesizes on the power position of the CCP’s top leader, i.e., its general secretary, and the way Beijing responds to stimuli from Taipei. The top leader goes through two stages in his career: power transition (Stage 1) and power consolidation (Stage 2). He has greater power during the second stage and is thus less vulnerable to attacks on his Taiwan policy. This means that compared to the transition period, the top leader with consolidated power can respond to Taipei’s positive stimuli with greater reciprocity and to Taipei’s negative stimuli with less hostility. We measure all significant stimuli from Taiwan and Beijing’s response to them between 1989 and 2012, i.e., during the reign of Jiang and Hu, using the CSII scale (+6 to −6). We compare a host of variables (CSII Overall Mean, CSII Positive Mean, CSII Negative Mean, peak, and nadir) for transition and consolidation, and find the latter always outperforms the former by registering a higher CSII score. We further focus on four pairs of qualitative comparison for the peaks and nadirs. The comparisons are between \( H_{j1} \) (Jiang’s Eight Points) and \( H_{j2} \) (New “Three-Sentences for One China”), \( L_{j1} \) (Taiwan Strait Crisis) and \( L_{j2} \) (Two-State Theory), \( H_{h1} \) (Lunar New Year Chartered Flights) and \( H_{h2} \) (Hu’s Six Proposals), and \( L_{h1} \) (Anti-Secession Law) and \( L_{h2} \) (National Unification Guidelines Ceases to Apply). The findings bear out our hypothesis that \( H_{j1} < H_{j2} \), \( H_{h1} < H_{h2} \), \( L_{j1} < L_{j2} \), and \( L_{h1} < L_{h2} \).
Although our study does not go beyond the Jiang-Hu era, its insight is also borne out by the history of the PRC’s external behaviors under Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. The greatest armed conflicts beyond China’s borders under Mao and Deng were the Korean War of 1950–1953 and the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979. Both happened when the Chinese leaders of the time were clearly in their transitional periods. Whether the pattern is extendable to the Xi era remains to be seen.

This paper is a first cut into the highly important, and yet understudied area of the relation between China’s domestic politics and its Taiwan policy. As cross-Strait relation is rapidly evolving, with ever greater implications for the peace and security of the region and the world, scholars in the field can ill afford neglecting the great academic and policy potential of developing schemes of explanation in this critical area. It is hoped that this type of theoretical inquiry of cross-Strait relations can add to the depth of case analysis in the future, and generate practical advice for policymakers in the related countries.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributor

Kuan-Wu Chen received his Master’s Degree from the Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University. He has written on cross-Strait relations, transitional justice, factional politics, and political economy in Taiwan. Yu-Shan Wu is Distinguished Research Fellow and founding director of the Institute of Political Science, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He is also professor of Political Science at National Taiwan University. He has authored and edited 20 books and published 140 journal articles and book chapters on political and economic transitions in former socialist countries, constitutional engineering in nascent democracies, and theories of international relations and cross-Strait relations.

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| Event | TAIWAN’S stimulus | CHINA’S response | CSII score |
|-------|-------------------|------------------|------------|
| 1. KINMEN ACCORD (September 12 1990) | There were two tragic incidents in which mainland stowaways died when repatriated by Taiwan government in 1990. Taipei thus sought the possibility of negotiating with mainland China through Red Cross Society. | China agreed that the Red Cross Societies from the two sides stood for the two authorities to negotiate the procedure of sending stowaways back. Finally, two Red Cross Societies signed up the accord in Kinmen. | (+3) Reaching important administrative agreement, or advocacy of historic engagement |
| 2. GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL UNIFICATION (February 23 1991) | President Lee Teng-hui directed National Unification Council to draw up "Guidelines for National Unification," which advocated that the two sides on Taiwan Straits should build a new China of freedom, democracy, and equal prosperity. | China praised Taiwan President Lee for confirming one China principle and unification, but was discontent with Lee’s conditions of unification. General Secretary Jiang Zemin and Premier Li Peng welcomed the Guidelines for National Unification, and urged two sides on Taiwan Straits to start political negotiation as soon as possible. | (+2) Reciprocation by full state-level (zhengguoji) leader(s) |
| 3. ONE-CHINA, RESPECTIVE INTERPRETATIONS (August 1 1992) | Before SEF and ARATS began to negotiate, ARATS demanded that every negotiation must take “One-China” principle as precondition. Then Taiwan government proposed “One-China with respective interpretations” to ARATS. | ARATS expressed respect and acceptance to Taiwan’s proposal after two associations met in Hong Kong | (+1) Reciprocation by full ministry-level official(s) |
| 4. THE KOO-WANG TALKS (April 27 1993) | After several rounds of negotiation, SEF Chairman Koo Chen-fu and ARATS Chairman Wang Daohan signed four agreements. This was the first time Taiwan and Mainland China’s delegates met in public. | Although the CCP considered the Koo-Wang talk as an unofficial, routine, economic, and functional talk, it nevertheless emphasized the talk as a historical step on Cross-Strait relationships. | (+3) Reaching important administrative agreement, or advocacy of historic engagement |
| 5. JIANG’S EIGHT-POINT PROPOSAL (January 30 1995) | After President Lee’s power position was consolidated, Lee began to push localization policy. Also, the Taiwan independence forces got stronger than before. Nevertheless, Taiwan stayed within the framework built in the early 1990s. | CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin made public Eight-Point proposal in a Lunar New Year tea party. Jiang’s proposal included insisting on One-China principle, starting political negotiation as soon as possible, exchanging visits between the leader of two sides, etc. It was the first time CCP leader spoke to Taiwan leader directly. | (+3) Reaching important administrative agreement, or advocacy of historic engagement |

(Continued)
| Event                                                                 | TAIWAN’S stimulus                                                                 | CHINA’S response                                                                 | CSLI score |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 6. PRESIDENT LEE’S PRIVATE VISIT TO U.S. (TAIWAN STRAIT CRISIS) (May 22 1995–March 25 1996) | On 22 May 1995, US Department of State announced that US government would allow President Lee to visit US privately. President Lee started his private visit to the United States on June 7, and he gave a public speech in his alma mater, Cornell University, during his trip. | In the beginning, China criticized U.S. Department of State for giving President Lee visa, but ARATS still kept in touch with SEF. When President Lee finished the visit on June 13, China changed its Taiwan policy radically, such as recalled the ambassador, broke the ARATS-SEF channel, and held a series of military exercises. Moreover, PLA tested missiles in Taiwan Strait until Taiwan presidential election was completed. | (−5) Military maneuver with intent to change the status quo (drill, etc.) |
| 7. THE SECOND MEETING BETWEEN KOO AND WANG (October 14–18 1998)       | November 1997, ARATS invited SEF Secretary-general Chiao Jen-ho to attend the seminar held in the mainland, but SEF rejected the invitation and demanded ARATS to restore second Koo-Wang talk. | The CCP consented to SEF Chairman Koo’s visit to the mainland; however, the CCP took the visit as a “meeting,” not a talk. Therefore, they did not sign any agreements. Koo just met chairman Wang and Jiang Zemin. It was the first time SEF delegates met the CCP General Secretary. | (+2) Reciprocation by full state-level (zhengguoji) leader(s) |
| 8. TWO-STATE THEORY (July 9 1999)                                     | President Lee Teng-hui gave an interview to Deutsche Welle in the Presidential Office. President Lee said that since 1991, when the ROC Constitution was amended, cross-strait relations have been defined as “state-to-state,” or at least “a special state-to-state relationship.” This talk, named “Two State Theory,” was the first time Taiwan President positioned Cross-Strait Relations as “state to state,” not two equal political entities. | China described the Two-State Theory as “playing fire,” broke SEF-ARATS channel, postponed Wong’s visit to Taiwan, and mobilized all propaganda units to attack President Lee’s “Two-State Theory.” | (−3) Freezing or abrogation of cross-Strait cooperation or agreement |
| 9. THREE MINI-LINKS (January 1 2001)                                 | The Chen Shui-bian administration planned to open three-mini-links as the prelude to direct transport links across Taiwan Strait. Taiwan government announced the direct routes between Kinmen-Xiamen and Matsu-Mawei on January 1 2001 without mainland consent. | Although displeased with three-mini-links as the DPP’s ploy to thwart direct Cross-Strait links, Beijing endorsed three-mini-links reluctantly as a gesture of goodwill to Taipei’s overture. | (+3) Reaching important administrative agreement, or advocacy of historic engagement |
| 10. NEW “THREE-SENTENCES FOR ONE CHINA” (March 5 2002)                | After taking office, Chen Shui-bian delivered his good will to China such as the promise of “Five noes” and recognition of “1992 spirit.” Moreover, Chen expressed hope for the dialog with China without any precondition. | In his government report, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji reinterpreted the One China principle from “There is only one China in the world. Taiwan is part of China. PRC is the only legitimate government of China” to “There is only one China in the world. Both the Mainland and Taiwan belong to one China. China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity brook no division.” CCP gave a flexible one China principle with the New “Three Sentences for One-China.” | (+5) A Declaration that recognizes the status quo as divided governance |

(Continued)
| Event | TAIWAN’S stimulus | CHINA’S response | CSII score |
|-------|------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 11. ONE COUNTRY ON EACH SIDE (August 2 2002) | President Chen declared “Taiwan and China, one country on each side” in his opening address of the 29th annual meeting of the World Federation of Taiwanese Associations on August 2, 2002. Chen thus redirected his China policy. | China commented that “One country on each side” was a dangerous provocation. Taiwan Affairs Office and ARATS released the statement that they considered “One Country on Each Side” an extension of “Two-State Theory”, warned Chen Shui-bian to stop provoking the Mainland. | (−1) Rebuttal by full ministry-level official(s) |
| 12. CROSS-STRAIT LUNAR NEW YEAR CHARTED FLIGHTS (January 26 2003) | In 2003, many KMT legislators urged Taiwan government to allow Cross-Strait Lunar New Year charted flights, and the DPP government answered the legislators that it was planning Cross-Strait Lunar New Year charted flights. | China claimed that the negotiation about Cross-Strait Lunar New Year charted flights was unofficial, thus Taiwan Affairs Office completed the negotiation with Taiwanese air companies, not officials. | (+1) Reciprocation by full ministry-level official(s) |
| 13. DEFENSIVE REFERENDUM (March 20 2004) | After “Referendum Law” was enacted, President Chen claimed he would launch the defensive referendum. Chen made two proposals on “Enhance National Defense” and “Equal Negotiations” to be voted in the presidential election of 2004. | China considered the referenda a serious provocation. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao criticized Chen Shui-bian for provoking the mainland with the referendum when Wen visited United States. As a result, China stopped the Cross-Strait Lunar New Year charted flights in 2004. | (−3) Freezing or abrogation of cross-Strait cooperation or agreement |
| 14. ANTI-SECESSION LAW (March 14 2005) | President Chen advocated that he would formulate a new constitution after reelection when he ran for the president. On March 20 2004, Chen won the reelection, suggesting that he would start to formulate a new constitution in his second term. Chen’s intention to change status quo on Cross-Strait relations got much stronger than before. | Chinese People’s Congress enacted “Anti-Secession Law” on March 14 2005. The law provides the Mainland government shall use non-peaceful means against Taiwan independence. | (−4) Major declaration with military implications |
| 15. THE NATIONAL UNIFICATION GUIDELINES CEASES TO APPLY (February 27 2006) | President Chen said that he considered to abolish the National Unification Council and The National Unification Guidelines during Chinese New Year. United States opposed to such move that would change the status quo in the Taiwan Straits. Due to the pressure from US, Chen finally declared the National Unification Council cease to function, and the National Unification Guidelines cease to apply on February 27. | China considered Chen’s move a serious provocative action on Cross-Strait relations no matter he used “abolish” or “cease”. Hu and Wen criticized Chen’s action on diplomatic occasions. However, Beijing did not freeze any routine negotiations between the two sides. | (−2) Rebuttal by full state-level leader(s) |

(Continued)
### Table A1. (Continued).

| Event | TAIWAN’S stimulus | CHINA’S response | CSII score |
|-------|-------------------|------------------|------------|
| **16. FOUR IMPERATIVES AND ONE NON-ISSUE** (March 4 2007) | President Chen declared Taiwan ought to be independent, rectify the official name of the nation, have a new constitution at FAPA’s 25th anniversary party. He also announced that “In Taiwan, there is no left or right line issue, only unification or independence issue.” President Chen’s “Four imperatives and one non-issue” is the first time Taiwan President clearly declares Taiwan should seek independence in public. | Taiwan Affairs Office commented that Chen Shui-bian used “four imperatives and one non-issue” to replace “five noes.” Beside Taiwan Affairs Office’s statement, only the Minister of Foreign Affairs Li Zhaoxing and a PLA general made informal comments in CCP officials. | (-1) Rebuttal by full ministry-level official(s) |
| **17. DIRECT CROSS-STRAIT TRANSPORT LINKS** (November 4 2008) | After Ma Ying-jeou took office, SEF and ARATS restarted to negotiate about direct cross-Strait transportation. SEF and ARATS signed four agreements that include direct cross-Strait air transportation, direct cross-Strait sea transportation, and postal cooperation on November 4. | CCP had advocated direct cross-Strait transport since 1979, but Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian opposed it. With Ma Ying-jeou in office, the two sides started to negotiate on direct cross-Strait transport, rapidly reached an agreement, and carried it out. | (+3) Reaching important administrative agreement, or advocacy of historic engagement |
| **18. HU’S SIX PROPOSALS ON TAIWAN** (December 31 2008–January 1 2009) | President Ma took “1992 consensus” as his main stance on cross-Strait relations, showing he attempted to cooperate with Mainland China positively. | General Secretary Hu offered six proposals on Taiwan during a symposium in Beijing marking the 30th anniversary of the publication of the “Message to Compatriots in Taiwan.” Hu emphasized “peaceful development” on cross-Strait relations, suggesting he turned the main key of CCP Taiwan policy from “peaceful unification” to “peaceful development.” The statement was made on December 31 2008 and released by the official media on January 1 2009. | (+5) A declaration that recognizes the status quo as divided governance |
| **19. ECFA** (June 29 2010) | After Ma Ying-jeou was elected Taiwan President, he began to negotiate about signing economic cooperation agreement with Mainland Chinese administration. At last, SEF and ARATS signed up the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) on June 29 2010. | CCP responded to President Ma positively for negotiating economic cooperation agreement. CCP not only compromised on the title of economic cooperation, but also conceded a lot of benefits in ECFA’s early harvest list. | (+4) Signing of significant non-political agreement |