

## Social Forces in the Re-Making of Cross-Strait Relations: Hegemony and Social Movements in Taiwan

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The geopolitical interactions between Taiwan and China, commonly known as cross-Strait relations, have once again come into focus due to their potential to ignite a global conflict. Most international reports concerning Taiwan have been filtered through this prism, often neglecting to look into the internal dynamics of the island itself. Many observers have tacitly assumed that Taiwan, as the weaker participant in the game, has largely reacted to China's initiatives: with its flourishing economic opportunities, Taiwan's capital was inevitably drawn to the mainland, whereas Beijing's increasing intrusions in the island's democracy incurred a blowback by sparking a series of acts of resistance by civil society.

Against this conventional perspective and its associated biases, Beckershoff's book has broken fresh ground, reinstating Taiwan's agency by investigating how the island's political contestation has shaped cross-Strait relations. He focuses on the Taiwanese bourgeoisie, who played an active role in advocating for cross-Strait economic normalization in the 1990s in order to address their accumulation crisis, triggered by rising labour costs and more stringent environmental regulations. Anchored in Antonio Gramsci's neo-Marxism, the book examines such attempts as a multilayered "hegemonic project," involving the construction of "hegemonic apparatuses" (National Policy Foundation, Cross-Strait Common Market Foundation, and Third Wednesday Club), the ideological articulation of the 1992 consensus and the "economics first, politics later" principle, and finally the inclusion of subalterns, such as China's preferential import of Taiwan's agricultural products. This hegemonic project apparently reached its peak when Ma Ying-jeou's Kuomintang scored a landslide victory in the 2008 election with an avowed agenda of cross-Strait rapprochement. At that time, Taiwan's embracing of a deeper economic relationship with China indeed appeared "natural" and "consensual."

The subsequent chapters delve into the escalating challenges to this hegemonic project, focusing notably on three significant incidents: the Wild Strawberry Movement in 2008, the Anti-Media Monopoly Movement in 2012 and the Sunflower Movement in 2014. Using the Gramscian perspective, Beckershoff meticulously examines the diverse tendencies within the opposition movement. For instance, during the early days of the Sunflower Movement, a multitude of demands surfaced, including opposition to free trade, calls for national independence and the safeguarding of democracy. Unexpected events, like the crackdown on the Executive Yuan protest on 23 March 2014, prompted the movement's leadership to consolidate and adopt a procedure-centred approach, prioritizing the enactment of new legislation governing cross-Strait negotiations. The concluding chapter surveys the post-2016 landscape, suggesting that Tsai Ing-wen's New Southbound Policy could be construed as another hegemonic project.

One of the prominent features of this book is its conceptual sophistication and theoretical orientation. While many studies in the same vein tend to focus solely on either power elites or grassroots campaigners, this book distinguishes itself with a balanced approach that integrates both types of actors within a common analytical framework. A significant portion of Beckershoff's insights stem from in-depth interviews. Reflecting the researcher's own positionality, 19 out of the 45



interviewees consist of experts, officials and politicians, while the majority represent the protesters' side. In certain areas, this book uncovers previously overlooked details and lucidly lays out their processes. These include the engagement of Taiwanese conglomerates in cross-Strait meetings during the Chen Shui-bian era, the involvement of Taiwan's education, media and religious leaders in the early years of Ma's presidency, and the increasingly complex ecology of student "dissident societies" following the Wild Strawberry Movement. All these are the critical episodes that restructured the cross-Strait relations. The author deserves kudos for bringing these historical processes back to the forefront.

To this reviewer's knowledge, this study marks the first endeavour to employ the Gramscian perspective in examining cross-Strait relations. The notion of hegemony is crucial in emphasizing that closely intertwined economic interactions are intended, constructed and biased. It underscores the painstaking efforts that aimed to convince the Taiwanese that economic liberalization with China was mutually beneficial, an appropriate response to globalization, a necessary measure to enhance economic competitiveness, and above all a non-political solution. The same theoretical insight is also applicable to the construction of a counterhegemony that culminated in the Sunflower Movement. Immediately after the Kuomintang returned to power in 2008, Taiwan's China sceptics suffered from their association with Chen Shui-bian. They experimented with various discursive strategies until the "China factor" narrative emerged, proving to be highly resonant and successful.

Ultimately, the Gramscian approach is rooted in Marxism, essentially prioritizing class actors and their economic interests over non-class actors driven by identity politics. This book overlooks situations where class interests may diverge from political preferences. For instance, Shi Wen-long, the founder of Chi Mei Group with significant investments in China, had long supported the Democratic Progressive Party until his forced resignation in 2005. Conversely, the minuscule Labor Party (established in 1989) maintained a pro-unification stance even as China became no longer socialist. Although the rise of Taiwanese identity after 2008 is mentioned, it is swiftly dismissed as insignificant. The book could have addressed the fact many 2008–2014 campaigners were ardently pro-independence in their outlook, but strategically chose to adopt different framing approaches.

Economic interests alone are insufficient for building hegemony, neither are Taiwanese capitalists its sole architect. Beckershoff highlights the role of Kuomintang politicians such as Vincent Siew and Chiang Pin-kung in promoting economic ties. Apparently, these opposition politicians chose to collaborate with Chinese communists for non-economic reasons (to regain national power or for their belief in Chinese nationalism). This book starts with a critique of overemphasis "on the authorship of the CCP" (p. 4), but it ends up with minimal presence of the CCP in the analysis, as if the latter were a compliant junior partner to a Taiwan-originated hegemony. As such, to fully understand the Gramscian "historical bloc" in question, we need to bring back communist officials and Kuomintang politicians and acknowledge their influences that are stronger than those of the Taiwanese bourgeoisie. Formulated in this fashion, this triple alliance appears not dissimilar to the so-called "cross-Strait political and economic bloc" advanced by Wu Jieh-min and other scholars.

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