# Taiwan's Aim-Inhibited Quest for Identity and the China Factor

Lowell Dittmer

*University of California at Berkeley, USA*

## ABSTRACT

*The realization of a positive and well-integrated national identity is difficult even under the most favorable circumstances. Korea, Chechen, and the Palestinians are notorious recent examples of national identities destined, due to a combination of circumstances, to remain frustrated to some extent. Taiwan has, since relinquishing its claim to be sole international representative of 'China' as hopelessly unrealistic in the early 1990s, faced formidable practical problems in its quest for national identity. This article attempts to comprehend Taiwan's aim-inhibited quest for ethnic and national identity in the context of Taiwan's complex and delicate international environment and the cross-Strait dilemma in particular.*

**Keywords:** ethnic identity; future of nation preference; identity crisis of divided nation; national identity

### Taiwan's quest for identity and the China factor

There are at least two different ways of conceptualizing Taiwan's emerging national identity. The first is exclusive, referring only to the inhabitants of Taiwan and the smaller offshore islands and their identification with the central government in Taipei, altogether constituting an autonomous and sovereign nation-state. The second is inclusive, conceiving Taiwan still to be in some sense a part of the greater Chinese nation in some, as yet to be determined, institutional form. My own preference in this article is for an inclusive conceptualization. The reason is not an expression of political preference, because the only preferences that should 'count' on such an issue are of those directly affected. It is rather because a Taiwanese national identity in an exclusive sense is not yet an empirical reality at this point in time, but still only an emerging public opinion preference and partisan project. Domestically, a growing proportion of the electorate does identify itself as exclusively 'Taiwanese' (i.e. Taiwanese and not Chinese), and there is also a growing proportion of the electorate whose 'future of nation preference' (FNP) is for independence rather the reunification with the mainland. But these opinion groups do not yet constitute a majority on either scale, and even if they did that does not necessarily mean that they would push Taiwan toward a declaration of independence or some other decisive

Copyright © 2005 SAGE Publications www.sagepublications.com
(London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi)
Vol 40(1/2): 71–90. DOI: 10.1177/0021909605052945

break with the mainland. The reason is of course that in terms of foreign policy, there is also an outspoken external claimant to Taiwan's national identity, namely the People's Republic of China (PRC), which has threatened to resort to violence in the event of any such action. Meanwhile, any claim to national identity in the world arena, under almost any appellation, has been quashed by Beijing's subsumption of that identity, in hopes of forcing the island to resume its long interrupted identification with the Chinese nation. Thus, the case of Taiwan is one in which the quest for an exclusive national identity is inhibited domestically by split subethnic identifications and internationally by a supervening claim to an overarching national identity.

At this point identity formation in Taiwan, though still unstable, can be most accurately be conceptualized inclusively. Taiwan's emergent identity is part of a 'divided nation syndrome' shared with the PRC, meaning that despite their distinct developmental trajectories, both 'sides' of the Strait, competing for the same sovereignty, have been shaped by some of the same watershed events. There are only four nation-states in this status of protracted division (viz., Germany, Vietnam, Korea, and China). It has been argued that the China–Taiwan division is unique in the sense that, whereas the other three divisions were all superimposed by outside powers, the China–Taiwan split is the consequence of an unresolved civil war between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang (KMT) or Nationalist Party; it has also been pointed out that Taiwan's alienation from China antedates the Cold War by half a century. Notwithstanding these important distinguishing characteristics, all four divided nations were kept separated by the Cold War ideological cleavage and alliance structure, so it was reasonable to assume that the remission of the Cold War and the rise of nationalism would facilitate their reunification. This occurred quite promptly in the German case (the Vietnam case had meanwhile been forcibly resolved during the Cold War). But unresolved national identity splits in the other two cases, North–South Korea and China–Taiwan, have remained a source of tension and volatility both to themselves and to the regional and international environment.

The PRC–Taiwan split is the most lopsided of the four, and the balance of power has shifted to Taiwan's disadvantage during the last three decades of their split. Since 1972, when the United Nations rejected Taiwan's claim to represent 'China' and bestowed that right on Beijing, after which a growing number of countries also shifted diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, Taiwan's national (and international) identity has been problematic. On the one hand, its claim to represent the Republic of China was undermined by the increasingly successful Beijing campaign to claim sole representation of China for the PRC; on the other hand, any notion of dropping the claim to recognition as 'China' and adopting the identity of a 'Republic of Taiwan' was forbidden by the PRC, which announced that this would precipitate immediate resumption of their unresolved civil war. Thus, the question of Taiwan's national identity

has remained in abeyance, in distinction to the other three divided nation cases, which permitted provisional international formalization of distinct national identities pending eventual reunification.

This article consists of three parts. We begin with a reconsideration of the concept of 'national identity,' in order to determine whether we might better understand Taiwan's national identity dilemma in the context of the more general theory. Second, based largely on secondary analysis of the findings of the Taiwan Election and Democratization Study of 2001 (hereinafter TEDS, 2002), we assay a periodization of Taiwan's national identity construction that links the principal findings of that survey research to significant developments in Taiwan–China relations since the advent of China's new Taiwan policy in 1979. We conclude by discussing the cumulative experience of the Taiwan case in the light of the more general theory of national identity construction (Dittmer and Kim, 1995: 1–3).

## The concept of national identity

The concept of 'national identity' was first imported from philosophy into the social sciences to deal with the problem of 'psycho-social' identity (Erikson, 1963). Erik H. Erikson, a post-Freudian political psychologist, first advanced the term to explore the growth of a sense of identity in the course of the human life cycle, and the possible distortions this development may undergo (e.g., a negative identity, identity diffusion) in response to various environmental disturbances. In subsequent works, Erikson found evidence of an identity crisis in the lives of nascent political leaders, with formative consequences for their subsequent careers (Erikson, 1958, 1963). Such a crisis appears most likely to occur at specific stage in the life cycle (namely, early adulthood), when a congeries of pivotal questions tend to converge (concerning one's choice of occupation, marital status and spouse, life style, etc.). Thus Erikson introduced inter alia the notion that identity is not fixed, but undergoes a process of selective development, which can in some cases be pathological.

A 'collective' identity is linked to personal identity not only by analogy, but in the sense that the latter is defined (at least in part) in terms of membership in various groups, either ascriptively (i.e., ethnic or racial categorization, or residents of the same zip code) or voluntarily (e.g., Falungong membership, a political party, an email list serve). A 'national' identity is the largest and most inclusive form of collective identity that is practically relevant for most people. As such, it is essentially an ascriptive identity (i.e., one cannot 'exit' without penalty, and in some cases has very limited 'voice'), with which one may however voluntarily identify to a variable degree. The ascriptive dimension of national identity defines membership essentially in terms of boundaries, namely, of arbitrary lines drawn on a map. Identification is in the last analysis political as well as physical, however. Thus there might be tourists, guest workers, even

whole ethnic categories (e.g., 'counterrevolutionaries' in Mao's China, slaves in the antebellum south, Jews or homosexuals in the Third Reich) who are excluded even though they reside within the nation's physical boundaries.

As one of the most influential and widely adopted conceptualizations of the term, the definition articulated by Lucian Pye and others in the authoritative Social Science Research Council (SSRC) series on comparative politics warrants careful scrutiny. According to this definition, the answer to the national identity riddle has to do essentially with criteria for national boundary delineation, and there are hence four 'fundamental forms' of national identity crisis, based on conflicts concerning territory, class, ethnicity/nationality, and historical/cultural inclusion criteria (Pye, 1971: 101–35). This definition offers a number of methodological advantages: it is relatively coherent, easy to operationalize, and applicable to a wide variety of interesting cases. The problem of discrepant criteria for national inclusion (e.g., territorial versus ethnic) is, indeed, a frequent cause of identity confusion or conflict (China, for one, which has boundaries with more states than any other Asian country, has had territorial disputes with nearly every one of them). The issue of national identity qua how to delineate boundaries typically arises early in the process of national development, inasmuch as identifying membership in the national domain is preliminary to persuading a citizenry to pay taxes, serve in the armed forces, and otherwise contribute to nation-building. Certainly it is applicable to the divided nations, in which case the arbitrary omission of a sizable portion of the territorial domain and population remains a highly visible symbol of national identity crisis.

Yet there are problems with defining national identity purely in terms of boundaries. If boundary criteria discrepancies are what generate identity crises, then those nations with few or no such inconsistencies might be supposed to have relatively 'secure' national identities. But in the contemporary international system, such a consistently defined nation-state is a *rara avis*. Walker Connor found in a survey of 132 countries extant in 1971 that only 12 (9.1%) had mutually consistent criteria of inclusion, whereas a majority (53%) had very large national or ethnic minority populations.[1] In most parts of the world, linguistic communities are either too small (as in Tropical Africa) or too large (as in Latin America and the Middle East) to coincide with national boundaries; in only two dozen or so countries do linguistic and national boundaries coincide. In half the countries of the world less than 70 percent speak the same language (Gellner, 1983). If boundary definitions were necessary and sufficient criteria of national identity, we would have to conclude that Switzerland, Belgium, India, and Canada are afflicted by insuperable identity crises, which has however not been the case (though nearly all have experienced cleavages along these lines). Taken as a category, the divided nations were divided not by any of the four SSRC boundary definitions but rather by political diktat, yet not all of them have chosen to reunite since the remission of the Cold War that had kept them apart. Nevertheless, other nations previously held together by Cold War

imperatives – Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union – have since opted to split, largely along ethno-linguistic lines.

One problem with the SSRC conceptualization is that it is an *analytical* definition, which defines the whole in terms of its constituent parts. But in ordinary language, if asked 'Who are you?' people do not usually respond with an anatomical breakdown of their body parts. People identify themselves as Swiss, or Belgians, or Indonesians, not because they all speak the same language (for they do not), nor because they have the same ethnic background (for they do not, as ethnicity can overlap or underlap boundaries). For 'national identity' is not a fixed attribute, but the result of a process of *identification*, the substantive target of which varies over time. 'Identification' is a transitive verb that posits something to identify with. To break down the polity into fixed categories who identify themselves in different ways begs the question of why some identify themselves this way and some that way. Even if we find a statistically significant correlation between those who identify themselves as 'I am Taiwanese' and members of the subethnic group referred to as 'native Taiwanese' (*benshengren*), and a corresponding correlation between those who identify themselves as 'I am Chinese' and *waishengren*, this does not altogether solve our problem (Marsh, 2000). For although *benshengren* and *waishengren* are categories that appear to be pri-mordial or rooted in origins, self-identification as 'Chinese', 'Taiwanese', or 'both' is to some extent constructivist or instrumental based on socio-political context. This is illustrated by the 'Chinese' identity that was politically superimposed on all island residents regardless of their backgrounds during the 'Chiang dynasty', and more recently by the 'New Taiwanese' category coined in 1998. Although further research is needed on the degree to which ethnic categories may be politically 'reconstructed', there seem to be limits, insofar as there is a significant correlation between *benshengren* and self-identification as 'Taiwanese' and an even higher correlation between *waishengren* and self-identification as 'Chinese'.

In short, an analytical definition is not wrong but insufficient, mainly because it does not take into account why the citizenry identifies with a particular object of identification (identificand). There are two main plausible identificands in the transitive process of national identity formation. One is the national historical legacy, including consensual interpretations of certain problematic phases in a nation's development when the basic issues of national purpose were raised and decisively resolved in some way. This legacy is normally incorporated into a set of symbols (referred to in Japan as the *kokutai*, or national essence, translated into Chinese as the *guocui*) representing the principles and values on which the group was founded (including flag, anthem, canonical documents, etc.) and on the basis of which its citizens have contracted to live together (Gold, 2003; Lynch, 2004). Children learn to define themselves through identification with these symbols, while at the same time projecting their own aspirations and fantasies into them. Once firmly established, a

national identity could be expected to provide the state with a sense of legitimacy and security, hence making its behavior more predictable. But if the historical legacy and *guocui* appear to become relatively fixed early in a nation's development, that is in fact not the case – the essence is never fixed but subject to recurrent reinterpretation. Such reinterpretations are typically inspired by the second principal identifcand: the state's foreign policy performance, including major wars, alliances, bloc membership, membership in international organizations (IGOs and INGOs), proclamations, and other ways of defining a particular national mission in the world.

The identity of a divided nation comprises elements of both the irredenta and the civil war. An irredenta involves a discrepancy between boundary criteria in which a segment of the population that would normally have been included on ethno-national grounds is located outside the territorial boundaries. In a civil war, the excluded group is deemed central rather than peripheral to the nation's identity, and the exclusion is violently contested. The reason for the long-standing irresolution of this incongruent situation is that the division, if not created by, nonetheless coincided with and was reinforced by the Cold War cleavage between two ideologically defined international blocs. Thus, the collapse of the communist bloc and the end of the Cold War undermined the rationale for the split and revitalized a sense of nationalism, resulting in both separatist impulses and a drive for reunification. At the same time, due to the arbitrary, externally superimposed nature of its division, a divided nation is typically haunted by a sense of having a truncated and incomplete national identity (a national 'castration complex'). In Taiwan's case the other, alienated 'half' of the nation (i.e., the PRC) has played two opposite roles: on the one hand, as desired object of national fulfillment via reunification (e.g., during the Chiang era); on the other hand, as nemesis and principal national security threat.

## Taiwan's quest for identity

The dominant methodological approach to the analysis of Taiwan's national identity construction implicitly relies upon a definition of identity in analytical terms. That is to say, the essential choice in the formation of Taiwan's national identity, whether to become a separate and fully independent nation-state or whether to reunify with the Chinese mainland (either under the ROC, the PRC, or under some reformulated federal government) is assumed to be an extrapolation of how one defines oneself, as an individual citizen, in terms of ethnic categories (i.e., 'I am Taiwanese', 'I am Chinese', or 'I am both'). This subjective self-definition tends in turn to be closely associated with one's objective family background: those whose families have been resident in Taiwan for generations (i.e., since the Ming) are termed *bendiren* or *benshengren* (native to the province), whereas those who migrated to the island with the retreating Nationalist forces in 1949 are termed *waishengren* (i.e., people from outside the

province). This 'subethnic' distinction (all but about 340 000 Taiwanese, 1.6 % of the population, are ethnically Han Chinese) was recorded on one's internal passport until the early 1990s, and became politically relevant with the democratization of the polity and the rise of a multiparty electoral system in the early 1990s, when the various parties found these distinctions useful to define themselves and mobilize electoral support.

The research based on the TEDS findings presented above has confirmed, elaborated, and refined these assumptions. First, the correlation between 'ethnic identity ('I am a Taiwanese/Chinese') and 'national identity' or FNP (i.e., support for unification/independence) has been shown to be statistically significant and relatively constant over time, at least since 1995, although at the same time membership in the underlying objective categories (i.e., *benshengren, waishengren*) has declined in salience. That is to say, as the objective categorization becomes blurred through intermarriage and lifelong residence on the island and is in any case no longer officially recorded, one's ethnic identity becomes increasingly subjective (Corcoff, 2002). Second, there has been since 1995 a marked increase in (subjectively defined) subethnic identification as 'Taiwanese', as well as a corresponding increase in electoral preference for a more assertively autonomous cross-Strait and foreign policy, although the large majority still prefers a compromise position on both scales (i.e., 'I am both Chinese and Taiwanese', and 'I prefer the status quo over either independence or reunification') (Wang and Liu, 2004).[2] This preference for the center of the scale, according to Emerson Niou's more refined measurement of plausible alternatives, could be the electorate's way of taking political consequences into account to hedge their choices. Thus Niou makes the important point that national identity is based not solely on ethnicity and other primordial variables but is to some extent rationally constructed (Niou, 2004). Third, the generational analysis of Wang and Liu has demonstrated that these shifts of ethnic identification and policy preference represent not merely a cognitive shift within the mass electorate (though that too has perhaps occurred) so much as the rise of new, younger generations more inclined to identify with the island's salient issues and policy priorities and less rooted in primordial ethnic loyalties (Wang and Liu, 2004).

The political upshot of this analysis seems to be that with regard to electoral preferences on the island, time is on the side of Taiwan Independence – if not in the form of a forthright declaration, due to security considerations, then via 'policy creep'. Because of a combination of demographic variables and political cultural reconstruction by Taiwanese elites, Taiwan's politics have undergone a major transition, as native Taiwanese (now largely self-defined) have come to occupy a growing majority, from which vantage point they have steered the island away from political contact with the mainland. This has taken place despite an ongoing cross-Strait economic integration (trade, investment, tourism) – resoundingly successful to date – and likely only to accelerate in the

light of the mainland's continuing rapid economic growth, the relative economic slowdown in Taiwan, the mainland's need for foreign capital and technology and Taiwan manufacturers' need to remain internationally competitive. Economic integration has been followed by a growing 'brain drain' from Taiwan to the mainland. Yet neither of these trends has had any perceptible impact on 'creeping independence' on the island. From the perspective of classic political economy, the implication is counter-intuitive: where one lives is more determinative of political preferences than the functional logic of one's economic interests (of course, it is also true that China has not yet been able to exert political leverage over the enormous Taiwanese economic investment on the mainland). The concept of political identity that emerges from this analysis is one that is on the one hand rooted in the past, in primordial data such as patrilinial ancestry and local history, and on the other hand projects a commitment into the future, toward national independence or reunification with the cultural motherland. And, finally, that these two Janus-faced variables are mutually implicative, in that just as one's roots affect one's future preferences, future preferences can affect one's definition of one's roots.

There are perhaps two shortcomings of this model of national identity. First, it cannot adequately account for political change. Taiwan has, since the death of Chiang Ching-kuo, undergone a rather tumultuous political transformation, both under Lee Teng-hui and after the KMT's historic defeat in the March 2000 presidential sweepstakes. Although the broad thrust of this political evolution is perhaps consistent with the evolution of political identity outlined above, the specific direction, timing, and frequency of political change is not indicated. Thus, it seems puzzling, for example, that the DPP's electoral victory in 2000 was so close, even though the 'pro-mainland' opposition bloc split its vote, and that the outcome of the 2004 election was even closer. Based solely on boundary definition, in terms of the (relatively recent) informal acknowledgment of territorial boundaries limited to Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Mazu, and the ethnic definition of Minnan, Hakka, Waisheng, and aboriginal, the 'pan-green' alliance should be in a commanding position. Second, this model does not really tell us very much about the substantive content of Taiwan national identity, beyond the single dimension of FNP.

The reason for these two shortcomings is that the implicit conception of national identity in the prevailing model is an analytical rather than a synthetic one, which defines collective identity essentially in terms of an aggregation of the identifications of its individual members without asking why they so identify. And the question of why they identify more or less with the nation-state and more with this vision of the national future than with that has to do not only with their own family ancestry and individual group memberships, but also with how the nation-state defines itself. As indicated in the preceding section, the nation-state defines itself not only passively, in terms of reflecting the interests of its constituencies, but also actively, by its own concerted actions. Two political

stages are particularly suitable for such collective self-definition: domestically, the national leadership might seek to redefine the collective identity by manipulating the national symbol system – the set of myths, rituals and metanarratives known in Chinese as the 'national essence' (*guocui*) – the state's discretion in the selection of history textbooks for the school system is one apt example. On the international stage, the nation-state might define itself through its interaction with other states, confabulating an interstate drama that could attract the national identification of constituents. Inasmuch as the effort to create a 'subjective consciousness' of a Taiwanese identity has already been capably analyzed (Wachman, 1994; Corcuff, 2002; Lynch, 2004), the focus here will be on Taiwan's role as an object of identification in the international arena. In this capacity the relationship with the PRC looms exceedingly large, as the latter acts both as a rival claimant to Taiwan's identity and as an impediment to Taiwan's normal diplomatic intercourse with other states. What is ironic is that China's overweening presence in Taiwan's quest for national identity has had largely counterproductive political consequences.

## The China factor

Despite its inherent limitations as an actor on the world stage, Taiwan has made full use of this venue to dramatize its national identity crisis since losing international recognition as 'China' in the 1970s. The main external actor in this drama has been the PRC, with the USA also playing a vital but preferably 'backstage' role. As the chief advocate of a change of the status quo, Beijing has undertaken the major cross-Strait initiatives; although in the 1990s the initiative seemed to pass to Taipei as Beijing's position rigidified in defence of past initiatives, Taipei's moves were not really positive but blocking initiatives. Beijing first sought to win assent through blandishments and concessions, to which Taipei responded with expressions of interest but then spurned Beijing's plight to play the field as free agent, to which Beijing reacted with expressions of rage and threats of violence. But to Beijing's intense frustration and chagrin, the Taiwanese who profited most politically from these disputes were not those in favor of propitiating the mainland, but rather those who advocated greater cross-Strait estrangement.

Beijing's major initiatives redefining the relationship in more open-ended and, hence, dramatically interesting terms, offering 'carrots' as well as 'sticks', all blossomed forth within a five-year time-span, following the American shift of formal diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing on 1 January 1979. On the same day, the National People's Congress sent a message to compatriots in Taiwan calling for resumption of direct links and exchanges between the two sides. Beijing also abandoned its earlier policy of 'liberation' of Taiwan in favor of 'peaceful reunification' and suspended its routine bombardment of the offshore islands (though it has maintained a position 'in

principle' of refusing to rule out the use of force). Deng Xiaoping then offered the 'one country two systems' formula to both Taiwan and Hong Kong, promising a 'relatively high degree of autonomy' throughout a long transition period. Although the ROC leadership in Taipei initially spurned these proposals, Beijing did not react with outrage or bluster but maintained its conciliatory stance, and by the mid-1980s Taiwanese business people began to trade with the mainland through Hong Kong. Investments and tourism soon followed. In 1987, Taiwan ended martial law (in place since 1948) and eased slightly its ban on direct contacts.

Though Taipei's initial official response to these new initiatives was strictly negative (the 'three nos' to the 'three direct links'), with the transition to the new Lee Teng-hui administration Taipei became far more flexible and creative. The high tide of 'mainland fever' (*dalure*) and cross-Strait detente was reached between 1991 and 1994. In the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown there was a temporary lull in western interest in China, and Taiwanese business rushed into the breach, as trade and investment (still indirect) swelled substantially. With Beijing's blessing, Taiwan joined Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1991, the same time as China itself. The same year, Taipei formally abandoned its state of military hostilities with the mainland, as the dispute seemed to become largely demilitarized. Taipei established a National Unification Council (NUC) in 1990 to formulate guidelines for reunification, and in January 1991 it established a cabinet-level Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) to coordinate government agencies in managing cross-Strait issues. In February it established the Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF) as an 'unofficial' organization expressly designed to conduct negotiations with the mainland without compromising Taiwan's sovereignty, and Beijing reciprocated with its own unofficial Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS). In February 1991, the NUC adopted the Guidelines for National Unification (GNU), which recognized the 'one China' concept and used the phrase 'both the mainland and Taiwan are parts of Chinese territory.' In the following year, the first political meetings were conducted between the SEF and the ARATS, and, although a great deal of time and energy was expended at the outset (at Beijing's insistence) trying to parse the 'one China' issue, the two sides eventually reached a consensus to proceed based on mutual oral acceptance of this principle while not challenging the other side's interpretation of what that meant. This '1992 consensus' cleared the way for the April 1993 summit meeting in Singapore between the two 'unofficial' organization chairs, Koo Chen-fu and Wang Daohan, who cosigned four (relatively technical) agreements. These agreements foreshadowed work through the rest of the year on other important (though still technical) issues, including repatriation of illegal immigrants, suppression of maritime smuggling and piracy, fishery disputes, intellectual property right protection, and judicial assistance. In the course of 1994, the two sides make further progress on these issues, though nothing was signed at the first session in 1995 because of

disagreement over the delicate phrasing needed to address jurisdiction over respective fishing zones. Based on the visible progress these contacts represented, Jiang Zemin tabled in January 1995 a new eight-point proposal that he and the Beijing leadership presumed would encourage further progress. In an important concession to Taipei's demand to be treated as an equal, Jiang's package offered, for the first time, to shift from party-to-party to state-to-state talks, also implying further support for Taiwan's participation in international organizations. Jiang declared that 'Chinese should not fight fellow Chinese', a propagandistic formulation that nonetheless suggested that Beijing was putting military options beyond normal policy consideration.

Yet this was not to be the case. By mid-1995 the atmosphere had completely changed, with China abandoning its policy of peaceful resolution and adopting a much more coercive strategy in the lead-up to Taiwan's parliamentary elections in December 1995 and presidential elections in March 1996, which included military exercises and the launch of unarmed M-9 ballistic missiles that splashed down at sea not far from the island's main seaports. The immediate reasons for this reversal had to do with Lee Teng-hui's frosty reaction to the eight points, and with his almost simultaneous acceptance of an unprecedented invitation, facilitated by skillful public relations efforts, to speak as a distinguished alumnus at the Cornell University graduation exercises. This was part of an 'informal diplomacy' campaign that began in Southeast Asia the previous year to raise Taiwan's international profile, and although it did not depart radically from previous efforts, to Beijing it was all part of a 'jointed incrementalist' plot to move the island gradually away from the 'one China' principle and toward independence.

The origins of this movement away from 'one China' can ironically be traced back to concessions made at the outset of the Lee Teng-hui administration, when in May 1991 the National Assembly took formal steps to remove from the Constitution the 'Temporary Provisions, Effective during the Communist Rebellion' that had first been promulgated in 1948. This revision (in the form of Additional Articles) was the first step in divesting Taiwan's democratizing regime of the need to hold elections for the mainland provinces over which the government no longer exercised de facto control. In 1992, the Statute Governing the Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area was passed, which recognized that while the ROC still claimed *de jure* sovereignty over all of China, it currently exercised effective jurisdiction only over Taiwan and the offshore islands, and in other legislation the same year the franchise was limited to citizens in the 'free area of the Republic of China' (i.e., Taiwan and the offshore islands). Whereas reunification with the mainland in accord with the GNU remained Taiwan's official policy through the end of the Lee Teng-hui regime, Taiwan began acting increasingly as an independent state, stealing a plank from the 1988 DPP platform to launch a bid for membership in the UN (as the ROC) in late 1993. At an APEC press meeting in Seattle

on 20 November 1993, Taiwan's Economy Minister, P.K. Chiang, admitted that the ROC was now pursuing a 'transitional "Two Chinas Policy" and asserted that there were now two sovereign nations across the Taiwan Strait' (*China Times*, 1993: 1). Taiwan's July 1993 White Paper reiterated earlier terminology of 'one China, two separate entities,' but asserted that 'the ROC has been an independent sovereign state since its establishment in 1912 is an incontrovertible historical fact' (PRC Taiwan Affairs Office, 1993). Implicit in this document was the vision of 'one China' as essentially an historical entity that no longer applied to current circumstances: Taiwan no longer claimed to represent the whole of China, and Beijing should relinquish its claim to represent Taiwan. A telling insight into President Lee's personal thinking – which particularly infuriated China – came in a May 1994 interview with a Japanese correspondent in which he said that the KMT rule superimposed in 1945 was that of a 'foreign power'(Shiba, 1994).

In sum, Beijing's fateful decision to return to a policy of threat and intimidation for the first time since 1979 was motivated not merely by Lee's 'alumnal diplomacy', but by Beijing's framework of interpretation: Taipei was perceived to have categorically rejected Beijing's bid for reunification on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation and had shifted to 'creeping independence'. But the coercive diplomacy option Beijing selected to terminate that policy drift was according to most electoral analyses ineffective in damaging the reelection prospects of Lee Teng-hui (though the DPP's vote total was driven down). The attempt at intimidation certainly had a temporary economic chilling effect, prompting capital flight, a decline of trade into the beleaguered ports, a steep drop in the stock market and other signs of disquiet, and may have succeeded had it not been for the American intervention, which abruptly terminated the war games and missile tests. If the episode was designed to teach a 'lesson' to the people of Taiwan, it wound up teaching a different lesson than originally intended. Both Sino-American and cross-Strait relations were adversely affected, but the electoral fortunes of Lee Teng-hui were probably enhanced.

More importantly, the episode was unsuccessful at arresting the island's drift away from 'one China'. At the popular level, the ongoing shift of ethnic identity from Chinese to Taiwanese proceeded apace. Although Lee offered some conciliatory gestures to the mainland in the wake of his successful reelection, and in 1998 Koo Chen-fu undertook a conciliatory unofficial 'visit' to Shanghai and Beijing, eliciting a pledge for a return visit by his counterpart Wang Daohan, the quest for Taiwan's national identity as an independent sovereign state was then resumed with a vengeance. In 1997, Taipei announced the 'freezing' of Taiwan province, a symbol of the island's provincial status vis-a-vis Beijing (and coincidentally the political base of one of Lee's most powerful rivals). And in July 1999, when President Lee was asked by a Deutsche Welle radio interviewer to comment on Beijing's depiction of Taiwan as a 'renegade province', he repudiated this characterization and defined the cross-Strait relationship as 'at least a special state-to-state relationship', under which there

was 'no longer any need to declare independence' (Lee Teng-hui, 1999). Taipei then proceeded to introduce new official terminology redefining its relations to the mainland as 'one nation, two states', in place of the previous formulation of 'one China, two political entities' – an attempt to emulate the German pattern except that, whereas both Germanys had agreed on the formulation, Beijing denounced it. Thus by the end of his term in 2000, Lee Teng-hui had led his country on an odyssey from seeking modalities for the realization of 'one China' to a position affirming the existence of two distinct sovereign states.

Beijing's reaction to Lee's de facto two Chinas policy was one of outrage, absent the resort to the coercive diplomacy that had proved politically counterproductive in 1995–1996. As Lee Teng-hui intended (he subsequently acknowledged), the scheduled Wang Daohan return visit to Taiwan was postponed indefinitely. In its February 2000 White Paper on Taiwan, Beijing did not talk about use of force if Taiwan declared independence (which it had, in effect, already done) but rather if Taiwan indefinitely ('*sine die*') delayed 'peaceful settlement of cross-Straits reunification through negotiations' on the basis of the 'one China principle'. This rather clear expression of Beijing's impatience with Lee's manoeuvres represented an attempt to escalate the pressure on Taipei without setting a specific deadline for resolution of the impasse. Yet partly because of the split in the ranks of the 'pan-blue' between KMT and PFP, partly because of the adverse electoral impact of Beijing's threats, Beijing saw its worst nightmare come true with the election of Chen Shui-bian as President of Taiwan in March 2000 at the head of a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) that had its origins in the Taiwn Independence movement.[3] Indeed, the DPP platform going into the March 2000 elections committed the party to the drawing up a new constitution for a Republic of Taiwan, ending the 'KMT's legal fiction' that Taiwan is part of China and holding a national referendum on the necessary steps to legally establishing 'a sovereign Taiwan Republic'(DPP Platform, 1999). Although the impact of the partisan turnover was somewhat mitigated by Lee Teng-hui's prior formulation that Taiwan was already an independent and sovereign nation-state with no need to declare independence, and the business community had accelerated the pace and technological level of its investment into China in the wake of the global downturn in high-tech markets (including a 40 percent drop in Taiwan's stock exchange), nonetheless there was considerable pressure on Chen to moderate his position.[4] Thus, in his inaugural address he introduced his 'one if and five nos'. If the PRC 'has no intention to use military force against Taiwan' then Taiwan will retain the status quo: no declaration of independence, no change in national title (Republic of China on Taiwan), no change of constitution, no referendum on independence, no abolition of the Guidelines for National Unification. Having thus seemingly abandoned the DPP platform and Lee Teng-hui's two-state approach, Chen then articulated his own formulation: one China, but not yet: '. . . we believe that the leaders on both sides possess enough wisdom and creativity to jointly

deal with the question of a future 'one China'. Such a formulation was intended to signal that the DPP did not intend to declare an immediate end to all links to the mainland and declare independence.

Since his inauguration President Chen also proffered other olive branches to Beijing: in January 2001 he offered a 'theory of integration' across the Strait (encompassing economic and cultural integration only), and inaugurated 'three small links' between the mainland and the offshore islands Kinmen and Matsu. But his refusal to accept the 'one China principle', even under the '1992 consensus' (the existence of which the KMT and eventually the PRC accepted, but the DPP denied) belied his willingness to revive informal talks with the mainland, which meant that he was unable to deliver the promised 'three direct links' to the business community. And seeing his poll ratings sag, he soon began backing away from the implications of his inaugural 'five nos'. In August 2002, in a videoconference to the World Federation of Taiwanese Associations, President Chen said that China and Taiwan are two sovereign countries on either side of the Strait (*yibian yiguo*), that the Chinese Communists are threatening Taiwan and suppressing its international role, and that only the Taiwanese people 'have the right to decide on Taiwan's future, destiny and status quo' – and that the appropriate mechanism for deciding these issues would be a national referendum. And he has endeavored to construct a Taiwanese national identity as much as possible distinct from Chinese cultural influence by emphasizing its separate history, openness to the West, and multiethnic demographic mix; this he has proceeded to do, for example, by issuing new currency, adding the word 'Taiwan' to the cover of passports, renaming parks and streets, promoting Taiwan-centered textbooks, and declaring new holidays (Wachman, 1994; Corcuff, 2002; Gold, 2003). To shift the presidential campaign from questions of economic management where the DPP record was vulnerable to the ethno-national identity issue, he reverted to Lee Teng-hui's pattern of cross-Strait provocations, using the 'defensive referendum' to make China's missile emplacements an electoral issue coinciding with the presidential election. Although this was a question over which the Taiwanese electorate had no practical leverage, this had the effect of antagonizing the PRC, which objected both to the resort to a referendum (suspecting it would eventually be used as a vehicle for national self-determination) and to making Chinese missile deployments an issue in a Taiwan election. Beijing's ire placed the KMT–PFP coalition at a relative disadvantage, both because these parties have larger 'Chinese' ethnic constituencies and because they had been somewhat more supportive of some sort of reconciliation with the mainland. The referendum also had intrinsic popular appeal, as a further extension of democratization in Taiwan and a realization of Sun Yat-sen's original concept of democracy.[5] Having thus massaged the campaign to pivot around national identity in a threatening cross-Strait context, Chen was able to eke out a very narrow victory. Thus, national identity has become not only a target for

reconstruction but a useful (and, in the proper symbolic setting, decisive) political resource.

## Conclusions

Based on a redefinition of national identity that places greater emphasis on its synthetic dimension and less on mere boundary definitions, we have attempted in this article to examine the impact of Taiwan's participation in the international arena, particularly in the dramatic cross-Strait contest for national sovereignty, on Taiwan's construction of a national identity. Our underlying assumption is that Taiwan's identity is that of an alienated component of a divided nation, sharing an underlying cultural legacy with the mainland. This shared name and cultural legacy, affirmed by both sides for some three decades after the establishment of distinct rival regimes, has since become embodied in the cleavage that has long divided them, previously on ideological grounds. Since Beijing's entry into the UN and subsequent recognition by the USA and a growing majority of other world powers, the PRC seems to have won the war to be recognized as 'China', and Taiwan has found it difficult to claim that identity without subordinating itself to the PRC. Thus, there is now a powerful political movement in Taiwan that would like to relinquish its claim to represent China and search for its own multiethnic political roots and distinct national identity on the island, while the PRC, after some 36 years of attempting to extirpate all traces of traditional Chinese culture in favor of a more revolutionary outlook consistent with the communist revolution, has become a champion of Chinese values. To some extent it could be said that both nations have been swept up in the nationalist fervor that accompanied the collapse of the communist bloc and the spread of post-Cold War globalism, and that, whereas China's nationalism remains insistently inclusive while Taiwan's nationalism has become exclusive, these twin nationalisms have tended to drive the two nations apart.

In the last analysis, one might say that since the 1970s, Taiwan has no clear national identity but rather an unresolved national identity dilemma. The two antipodes of that dilemma's continuum are national independence on the one end and reunification with the Chinese mainland on the other. Yet to resolve the dilemma by embracing either 'solution' would entail dangerous political risks: possible invasion on the one hand, subordination to dictatorship on the other. Thus, in a kind of national approach-avoidance complex, the polity has veered inconclusively between two final solutions, attracted but also frightened by the prospect of either resolution of the suspended national identity crisis. This is by no means to say there has been no discernible movement toward a consensual solution along this continuum. Yet it is important to remember that this movement has not been politically finalized: diplomatically speaking, the island remains in about the same position it was when Lee Teng-hui began his

presidency, with formal diplomatic recognition limited to a couple dozen small states, but efficient 'quasi-diplomatic' working relations with well over 150 large- and medium-sized ones. If a final solution is finally embraced, however, that could have serious long-term political consequences, not only for the political identity of the island but also for the prospect of war or peace and the future balance of power in the region.

The overall pattern of political movement, it seems clear from either public opinion polling data such as TEDS or from macropolitical narratives, such as the evolution of party platforms or the official statements of the central leadership, is from 'one China' to a 'two sovereign states' position. The conventional way of explaining this evolution has been in terms of boundary definitions. On the hand, the official end of hostilities across the Strait and the attendant delimination of operational control over only the islands of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu constituted a de facto redefinition of territorial boundaries more realistically consistent with Taiwan identity than with Chinese identity. On the other hand, the end of martial law and the introduction of freedom of speech and electoral democracy eliminated political constraints on expressions of Taiwanese nationalism and released the majority of *benshengren* to mobilize politically on behalf of a FNP more consistent with their stakes in a narrative of mainlander oppression and emancipation. From this perspective it seems almost demographically inevitable that Taiwan's democratization coincided with a drift toward independence. To be sure, this is not the whole story, as Taiwan natives have been in the electoral majority throughout the democratization period, whereas a DPP majority has been only recent and still quite tenuous.

In contrast to this bottom-up perspective according to which ethnic and demographic variables are decisive, the synthetic approach we have taken is more inclusive: ethnicity is instrumental as well as primordial, rooted in the past but flexibly interpreted to move toward a politically preselected future. The macropolitical variables we have added to the ethnic and demographic variables conventionally examined are foreign policy (specifically cross-Strait policy) and political leadership. It is conceivable that in more mature political systems the process of identity change can be abandoned by elites and allowed to devolve to ethno-demographic, bottom-up forces, but in Taiwan's case the identity issue has been at the heart of political controversy since the democratic transformation, with two large partisan coalitions polarizing the electorate on this issue. In the political contest to define that future, the green camp was able to transcend its failures of economic management to define a more attractive future as a defiantly autonomous state than the blue camp was in rationalizing tacit subordination to Beijing. Winning this symbolic contest enabled the DPP to win reelection by a slim majority. Political elites in Taiwan competitively redefine political reality, including the reality of the China factor, to make one option more appealing and the other less. Lee Teng-hui was tactically masterful in this

project, on the one hand employing 'creeping independence' to move from one step to another in seemingly calm and logical fashion. On the other, he has also at key points engaged in provocative brinksmanship, intervening boldly to redefine the direction and purpose of change. Chen Shui-bian has since adopted the same tactics. There have been at least three such redefining leadership interventions. The first was in the early 1990s, when the first in a series of constitutional revisions in effect ceded political control of the mainland to the PRC and redefined ROC jurisdiction to the islands it actually controlled, tacitly conceding that Taiwan was in effect not China. The second was on the eve of the 1995–6 missile crisis, when Taiwan's sovereign independence began to be asserted without 'declaring independence' via 'grandfathering it in', namely, tracing the ROC's sovereignty back to the 1911 Xinhai Revolution. The third followed the victory of Chen Shui-bien in 2000, when the 'one China principle' formula was explicitly and publicly repudiated along with 'one country two systems'. Despite howls of outrage, Beijing has been powerless to forestall this political identity sea change, in several cases even inadvertently contributing to it. From this perspective, the changes in public opinion and ethnic or national identity reflected in the TEDS data represent realistic adaptation to changes in political reality being driven from the top.

Still, one does not need to be a Marxist to be puzzled why, despite an overwhelmingly successful cross-Strait economic integration, the pattern of political identity formation should be in the reverse direction – after all, the business class is an important constituency in any capitalist democracy, whose interests are not usually cavalierly ignored in determining crucial national policy choices. How could the PRC have been so ineffective at mobilizing their support? The contrast between Taiwan and Hong Kong, where Beijing so skillfully mobilized the bourgeoisie on behalf of the same 'one country two systems' formula in 1982–4, is quite striking. Chinese efforts to negotiate a settlement with the political leadership in Taiwan seem to have been inexplicably maladroit, even counterproductive. When facing quite different and in many ways far more formidable obstacles in the 1982–9 Sino-Soviet normalization talks, Chinese diplomats displayed far more skill in negotiating a relatively advantageous settlement.

At least three factors might help to account for this paradox. First, investment and trade patterns: though perhaps successful in favorably influencing those Taiwanese directly engaged in them (nearly a million Taiwanese now live more or less permanently on the mainland in pursuit of their livelihoods there) the patterns have not become politically determinative because the segment of Taiwan's citizenry directly dependent on this lucrative economic intercourse remains a minority of the electorate. Another aspect might be because Beijing has not yet found a way to influence this minority's electoral choice without incurring damage to its own economic interests – to which Taiwanese business has after all made significant contributions.[6] Second,

although Beijing's courtship of Taipei, after meeting an initial wall of hostility, was able to wear down political resistance through patiently proffered concessions in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, since the death of Deng Xiaoping, while business elites still find the climate inviting, the mainland has not been able sufficiently to sweeten its incentives to the political class to win their favor and close the deal. The pattern has rather been that when those Taiwanese politicians most sympathetic to some form of reunification tried to negotiate a compromise, Beijing typically reacted with hostility and suspicion, rigidifying around its original 'one country two systems' and 'one China principle' and refusing to entertain the slightest deviation. Beijing's increasing diplomatic rigidity left its natural allies on the island in a politically untenable position. Third, when policy entrepreneurs on the island veered in the opposite direction, flirting with independence and engaging in UN diplomacy, vacation diplomacy and other such diplomatic innovations in the perhaps ultimately Quixotic quest for an anchor in the free world, this proved to be a high wire act in which the US 7th fleet supplied the safety net. If Beijing reacted with warnings or threats, that just played into the hands of Taiwan's sovereignty-seeking political adventurers, as they displayed the charismatic bravado to defy the leviathan. Yet if Beijing should fail to react, 'creeping independence' would creep still further. In this sense Taiwan's political identity has moved toward Taiwanization because Taiwanese elites were able and willing to lead it there, while those preferring to resolve the national identity crisis in another direction have not yet been able to coordinate an attractive alternative with a partner still exclusively preoccupied with its own nationalist agenda.

## NOTES

I wish to thank Gang Lin and Roulan Chen, as well as the anonymous outside reviewer, for helpful comments on this article; and I am indebted to the Center for Chinese Studies of the University of California at Berkeley for research support.

1. Another 50 (37.9%) did, however, have a majority ethnic group comprising more than 75 percent of the population. Of the remaining 70 states, 31 (23.5%) had a majority ethnic group accounting for 50–75 percent of the population, whereas in 39 (29.5%), the largest single ethnic community formed less than half the total population (Connor, 1978).

2. Thus, poll data for 1991 indicate that only 19 percent identified themselves as 'Taiwanese', whereas 22 percent identified themselves as 'Chinese', and 50 percent identified themselves as 'both'; by 2000, the figures were 50 percent: 'Taiwanese', 9 percent 'Chinese', and 39 percent 'both'; two years later the corresponding figures were 52 percent, 21 percent, and 19 percent. Poll data

for 1991 and 2000 are from the TEDS data; data for 2002 are from a survey taken by the DPP and reported in *Taipei Times*, 22 August 2002.

3. For example, Peng Ming-min, the DPP's candidate against President Lee in 1996, had circulated a draft declaration of independence as early as 1964, and the proposition to declare an independent, sovereign 'Republic of Taiwan' was incorporated in the first party platform adopted in 1986.

4. The sector that best illustrates the scale and speed of these developments is information technology (IT). For well over a decade, Taiwan supported the rapid growth of US IT brands by serving as their Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) partner, making Taiwan third in global IT production behind the USA and Japan. But on the heels of the Nasdaq's fall in March 2000 and the global downturn in technology markets, Taiwan manufacturers felt pressed to take advantage of the availability of cheaper land, facilities and labor in the mainland. The upshot has been that while China overtook Taiwan for the number three spot in global IT production in 2001, Taiwan investors have become equity owners of some three-quarters of China's IT export production, while retaining control of their own fourth-ranked US$23.5 billion of IT production in Taiwan.

5. And although the referendum ultimately failed, this was because of the unusually high threshold – more people voted favorably on the referendum than voted for the president – suggesting that it did succeed in mobilizing the electorate.

6. Moreover, in purely practical terms, Taiwan has no provision for absentee ballots, and it is perhaps a bit inconvenient to travel back to the island to cast a ballot.

## REFERENCES


*China Times*, 22 November 1993: 1.

Connor, Walker (1978) 'A Nation Is a Nation, Is a State, Is an Ethnic Group, Is a. . . .', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* I: 377–400.

Corcuff, Stephane (2002) 'The Symbolic Dimension of Democratization and the Transition of National Identity under Lee Teng-hui', in Stephane Corcuff (ed.) *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan*, pp. 73–101. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Dittmer, Lowell and Samuel S. Kim (1995) 'In Search of a Theory of National Identity', in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim (eds) *China's Quest for National Identity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Erikson, Erik H. (1963) *Childhood and Society*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Erikson, Erik H. (1958) *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Gellner, Ernest (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Gold, Thomas (2003) 'Identity and Symbolic Power in Taiwan', in Gang Lin (ed.) *The Evolution of a Taiwanese National Identity*. Asia Program Special Report, no. 114 (August): 11–17.

Lee Teng-hui (1999) President Lee's Deutsche Welle Interview, July 9. Available at: www.taiwansecurity.org/TS/SS-990709-Deutsche-Welle-Interview.htm

Lynch, Daniel (2004) 'Taiwan's Self-Conscious Nation-Building Project', *Asian Survey* XLIV: 4 (July–August): 513–33.

Marsh, Robert M. (2000) 'Taiwan's Future National Identity: Attitudes and Geopolitical Constraints', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* August–November: 299 ff.

Niou, Emerson (2004) 'Understanding Taiwan Independence and Its Policy Implications', *Asian Survey* XLIV: 4 (July–August): 555–67.

Political Platform of the DPP (1999) English translation available at: http://203.73.100.105/english/pub/LIT_1.asp?ctyp=LITERATURE&pcatid=1975&catid=2121

PRC Taiwan Affairs Office, State Council (1993) 'The Taiwan Question and the Reunification of China', New China News Agency. Beijing, August.

PRC Taiwan Affairs Office, State Council (2000) 'The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue', New China News Agency. Beijing, February.

Pye, Lucian (1971) 'Identity and the Political Culture', in Leonard Binder et al. (eds) *Crises and Sequences of Political Development*, pp. 101–35. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Shiba, Ryotaro (1994) 'Interview with Lee Teng-hui', *Asahi Weekly* 6–13 May. English text available at: www.fas.org/news/taiwan/1994/s940721-taiwan2.htm

*Taipei Times*, 22 August 2002.

Taiwan Electoral and Democratization Survey (2002) *Post-Legislative Yuan Election Survey*, conducted by an inter-university electoral consortium, Taipei.

Wachman, Alan (1994) *Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Wang, T.Y. and I-chou Liu (2004) 'Contending Identities in Taiwan: Implications for Cross-Strait Relations', *Asian Survey* XLIV: 4 (July–August): 568–90.

**Lowell Dittmer** is Professor of Political Science at the University of California at Berkeley and editor of *Asian Survey*, has written or edited *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its International Implications* (1992), *China's Quest for National Identity* (with Samuel Kim, 1993), *China Under Reform* (1994), *Liu Shaoqi and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (revised edn, 1997), and many other analyses of Chinese domestic and foreign policy. His most recent book (with Haruhiro Fukui and Peter N.S. Lee) is *Informal Politics in East Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

**Address:** Department of Political Science, University of California, 210 Barrows Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720-1950, USA. (dittmer@socrates.Berkeley.edu)