



# Chen Shui-Bian and Taiwan-China (Cross-Strait) Relations: An Initial Assessment

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## Introduction

In 2000, a major development took place in Taiwan. Chen Shui-bian and Lu Hsiu-lien, the candidates of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), were elected President and Vice President respectively. Their victory ended the rule of the Kuomintang Party (KMT)—the political party that dominated Taiwan politics since 1949—and fueled speculations that the already tense China-Taiwan relations will further worsen because of China's perception of the new Taiwan President and of the new ruling party (DPP) as strong advocates of Taiwan independence.

This article looks at Taiwan-China relations during the First Term of President Chen (2000-2004) and up to his reelection in 2004.<sup>1</sup> It examines the policy pronouncements of the new Taiwan President, the initiatives taken by his administration vis-à-vis mainland China and the responses of the Chinese authorities to his pronouncements and initiatives. It also presents the results of public opinion surveys in Taiwan with respect to cross-strait issues.

The cross-strait issue is closely monitored in Southeast Asia and in other parts of the world because the involved parties are not only China and Taiwan but also the United States. In particular, the ASEAN countries

do not want any further worsening in China-Taiwan relations since they know that should this happen, they will end up experiencing untold collateral damages. The actualization of the ASEAN's strategic vision for Southeast Asia (i.e., the establishment of a security, economic and socio-cultural community to attain peace and prosperity) is partly anchored on the existence of peaceful relations between the US and China and on the peaceful resolution of the cross-strait issue.

How did the election of President Chen in 2000, and his reelection in 2004, affect Taiwan-China relations (which at that time was already tense due to the pro-independence pronouncements of Lee Teng-hui, the immediate past President of Taiwan who belonged to the KMT)? This is the principal question addressed by this study.

### The 2000 and 2004 Presidential Elections in Taiwan

There were five candidates in the 2000 Taiwan presidential election, namely: (a) Incumbent Vice President Lien Chan (Kuomintang Party or KMT); (b) Former Taipei Mayor Chen Shui-bian (Democratic Progressive Party or DPP); (c) Li Ao (New Party); (d) Former KMT Provincial Governor James Soong (Independent—he eventually formed the People First Party or PFP after the election); and (e) Hsu Hsin-liang (Independent).

The major candidates were Lien Chan, Chen Shui-bian and James Soong. The three espoused different views but were “unanimous in saying that Taiwan-China relations should be based on parity” (Dagdag, 2000 p. 41). Specifically

*“ . . . Chen of DPP called for respect for cross-strait parity and a referendum on Taiwan independence; Lien of KMT reiterated Lee Teng-hui's previous position that the Republic of China is a sovereign country; and Soong pledged to initiate peace talks with the mainland on the basis of a special relationship, one not involving subordination of either side.”* (Dagdag, 2004 p. 164).

China was not pleased with the views articulated by the major candidates. It reacted by releasing a paper entitled *The One-China Principle and Taiwan*. The paper reiterated the long-held Chinese view that

*“. . . Taiwan is an inalienable part of China . . . and the PRC will be forced to adopt all drastic measures possible if the ‘three ifs’ happen: if Taiwan is separated from China in any name; if Taiwan is invaded or occupied by foreign countries; or if the Taiwan authorities refuse sine die the peaceful settlement of cross-strait unification through negotiations”* (Dagdag, 2004 p. 164).

The mainland authorities mainly directed their criticism on Chen, a popular human rights lawyer and former Taipei Mayor who belong to the DPP—the first political opposition party in Taiwan that has been openly espousing the view that Taiwan is a sovereign and independent country. The Chinese authorities denounced Chen’s plan to conduct a referendum on the future political status of Taiwan. According to them, “Taiwan’s legal status as a part of Chinese territory is unequivocal and there can be no premise for using referendum to decide any matter of self-determination” (Dagdag, 2004 p. 164).

In a veiled warning to Taiwanese voters, Chinese authorities said that supporting Chen “might push the two sides towards war.”<sup>2</sup> It may be recalled that in the 1996 presidential election, China also tried to influence the outcome of the election by staging “several live-fire missile exercises off the coast of Taiwan—its way of conveying the message to voters not to support candidates who favor independence and thereby avoid provoking an armed response from the mainland.” (*Taiwan Yearbook* 2003 p. 83) China was referring to two presidential candidates at that time: Lee Teng-hui, the incumbent President and Peng Ming-min, the DPP candidate. Lee was reelected and Peng received the second highest votes. Lee eventually confirmed China’s assessment that he is indeed a supporter of Taiwan independence when he declared in 1999 (about three years after his reelection) that

*“ . . . The 1991 constitutional amendments have placed cross-strait relations as a state-to-state relationship or at least a special state-to-state relationship, rather than an external relationship between a legitimate government and a renegade group, or between a central government and a local government. Thus, the Beijing’s authorities’ characterization of ROC as a renegade province is historically and legally untrue ” (ROC Policy Documents 1999, pp. 2-3).*

Despite the warning from China, Chen won the 2000 presidential election and ended the more than 50-year rule of the KMT in Taiwan. Chen garnered 39.3 percent of the total votes cast. His closest rival was James Soong—he received 36.84 percent of the votes. Lien Chan, the KMT candidate was a distant third (*Taiwan Yearbook* 2003).

In 2004, Chen ran for reelection and his very close opponent was Lien Chan, the KMT candidate whom he defeated in the 2000 election. There were only two presidential candidates that year. James Soong, the presidential candidate who received the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest vote in 2000, opted to become the running mate of Lien Chan. Because the KMT was more united in 2004 and there were no independent candidates that could divide the anti-Chen votes, there were no forecasts that made Chen the clear front-runner at that time.

Working against Chen in 2004 was his decision to conduct a referendum that coincided with the date of the presidential election. Taiwanese voters were asked two questions: (a) Should Taiwan acquire more advanced anti-missile weapons to strengthen the nation’s defensive capabilities? and (b) Should Taiwan seek talks with China on the establishment of a peace and stability framework for cross-strait interaction?

Chen conducted the referendum so that the results will enable him to improve the capability of the Taiwan military to successfully address the threat of a possible Chinese military attack and to impress on the Taiwanese people that the Chinese threat is real and therefore requires an urgent response. He also wanted the Taiwanese people to endorse the

peace and stability framework that he will use in dealing with China. This framework consisted of

*"...the 'one principle' and 'four major issues.' The 'one principle' refers to the establishment of peace. The 'four major issues' refer to the formation of a mechanism for negotiation, cross-strait exchanges based on equality and reciprocity, the establishment of a political relationship and prevention of armed conflict" (Taiwan Journal, 9 April 2004 p. 1).*

The reaction to Chen's plan to conduct a referendum was generally not favorable. As expected, China condemned it and called it "a move by stealth to split the two territories (China and Taiwan) permanently."<sup>3</sup> Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao echoed this view, saying that the referendum "undermined the universally recognized principle of 'one China' and threatened stability in the Taiwan Strait."<sup>4</sup>

Even the US, the closest ally of Taiwan, was critical of the referendum. It said that it "will be provocative to China and might upset the delicate status quo between China and Taiwan."<sup>5</sup> Similar criticisms were also raised by other countries like France, Japan and South Korea.

The criticisms of the US and other countries prompted Lien Chan, the KMT presidential candidate, to accuse Chen of mismanaging the foreign relations of Taiwan. The KMT candidate asked his supporters to boycott the referendum and just focus on the election.

Reports say that China appeared to favor Lien since he was perceived to be more conciliatory to Beijing than Chen.<sup>6</sup> Chen, as the incumbent Taiwan President, has continued to elicit the ire and distrust of the Chinese leadership as he was about to end his first term because of "fears that he would attempt to guide his nation towards independence if he won."<sup>7</sup>

The results of the 2004 presidential election and referendum created problems for Chen. While he won, it was only by a very narrow margin—by only 29,518 votes or 0.22 percent (*Taiwan Journal*, 26 March 2004).

His reelection became controversial for at least two reasons: (a) the large number of spoiled ballots (337,297)—more than ten times higher than his winning margin; and (b) the failure of many soldiers and policemen from casting their votes (they are perceived as traditional KMT supporters) after he ordered a national security alert following a shooting incident that wounded him and his running mate on the eve of the election. His critics say that the KMT candidate could have won if the soldiers and policemen were allowed to vote, despite the national security alert, and if there were no sympathy votes for Chen and his running mate following the shooting incident.<sup>8</sup> It may be said that Chen's presidential victory in 2004 was not a decisive one.

The referendum ended in a defeat for Chen despite the large number of "Yes" votes (91.8 percent for Question No. 1 and 92.04 percent for Question No. 2). Under Taiwan law, the referendum results are void if the total turnout did not exceed 50 percent of the total number of voters eligible to vote. Since only 42.99 percent and 41.61 percent of the voters eligible to vote gave their answers to Referendum Question No. 1 and Referendum Question No. 2 respectively, the results were declared void. (*Taiwan Journal*, 26 March 2004) The low referendum turnout may be due to any or all of the following: (a) the KMT supporters heeded the appeal of the KMT presidential candidate to boycott the referendum; and (b) other voters boycotted the referendum because they did not want to offend or provoke China—another proof that indeed, many Taiwanese espouse the so-called "status quo" view with respect to China-Taiwan relations.

Despite the nullification of the referendum results, Chen declared that the results still represent the "desire of the majority of the Taiwanese people" and that "his administration would put their wishes into practice by beefing up Taiwan's defenses and pushing for peace negotiations with China" (*Taiwan Journal*, 26 March 2004 p. 2). This declaration of Chen prompted China to release a statement on his inauguration day accusing him as "the biggest threat to regional stability" (*Taiwan Journal*, 28 May 2004 p. 6).

### Policy Pronouncements of President Chen

Since his election in 2000 as the Tenth-term President of Taiwan, Chen issued a number of policy pronouncements that reflected his stand on Taiwan-China relations. In his 2000 inaugural speech, Chen said:

*“. . . as the popularly elected 10<sup>th</sup> term president of the Republic of China, I must abide by the Constitution, maintain the sovereignty, dignity and security of our country and ensure the well-being of all citizens. Therefore, as long as the CCP regime has no intention to use military force against Taiwan, I pledge that during my term in office, I will not declare independence, I will not change the national title, I will not push forth the inclusion of the so-called 'state-to-state' description in the Constitution, and I will not promote a referendum to change the status quo in regards to the question of independence or unification. Furthermore, the abolition of the National Unification Council or the Guidelines for National Unification will not be an issue” (Taiwan Yearbook 2003 p. 94).*

This 2000 inaugural pledge gave rise to what is now known as the “Five No’s policy” of Chen. One year after (on 28 May 2001), during his state visit to Guatemala, the Taiwan President reiterated his reconciliatory posture towards China saying

*“Taiwan will not provoke the Chinese mainland; misjudge the cross-strait situation; give up its sincerity and goodwill to improve cross-strait relations; nor would it be a pawn of any country and consider cross-strait relations as a zero-sum game” (Taiwan Yearbook 2003 p. 94).*

But Chen subsequently made statements that seemed to contradict his desire for reconciliation. In an interview with *Newsweek* in 2001, he stressed that:

*“If one-China is defined as Taiwan being a province or local government of the People’s Republic of China, this is not acceptable to the vast majority of people in Taiwan. How can they (the Chinese) expect me,*

*as President of this country, to accept Taiwan's demotion to a province? If the mainland insists that acceptance of one-China is a precondition, it will be hard to resume dialogue" (Newsweek 2001).*

Then on 21 July 2002, in his inaugural speech as DPP Chairman, Chen issued a veiled warning to China saying

*"If Taiwan's goodwill does not receive China's positive response in return, we should seriously consider the possibility of going our own way, walking Taiwan's own road, and choosing our own path for Taiwan's future" (Taiwan Yearbook 2003 p. 94).*

Nine days after (on 30 July 2002), Chen clarified what he meant by "walking Taiwan's own road." In a speech before the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the World Federation of Taiwanese Associations, he categorically said that:

*"Taiwan's own road is Taiwan's road to democracy, Taiwan's road to freedom, Taiwan's road to human rights, and Taiwan's road to peace. Taiwan is not part of any other country, nor is it a local government or province of another country. Taiwan can never be another Hong Kong or Macau, because Taiwan has always been a sovereign state. In short, Taiwan and China stand on opposite sides of the Strait, and there is one country on each side. This should be clear. . . Only the 23 million people of Taiwan have the right to decide the future, fate and status of Taiwan. I sincerely call upon and encourage everyone to give thought about the importance and urgency of initiating a referendum legislation" (Taiwan Yearbook 2003 p. 94).*

Because this 2002 speech of Chen has once again asserted that Taiwan is a sovereign state and has categorically rejected the one-China policy, China's response was predictably critical and condemnatory.

But the views articulated by Chen are not new. They are simply reiteration of the 1999 resolution adopted by the National Party Congress

of the DPP which forms part of the party platform. The resolution, entitled *Resolution Regarding Taiwan's Future*, states, among others, that (*Taiwan Yearbook* 2003 p. 95):

“Taiwan is a sovereign and independent country. Any change in the independent status quo must be decided by all residents of Taiwan by means of plebiscite.

“Taiwan is not part of the People’s Republic of China. China’s unilateral advocacy of the ‘one-China principle’ and ‘one country, two systems formula’ are fundamentally inappropriate for Taiwan.

“Taiwan should renounce the ‘one-China’ position to avoid international confusion and prevent China’s use of this position as a pretext for forceful annexation.

“Taiwan and China should engage in comprehensive dialogue to seek mutual understanding and economic cooperation. Both sides should build a framework for long-term stability and peace.”

In 2003, Chen again reiterated his desire to have peaceful and cooperative relations with China. But he laid down some preconditions, saying

*“The ‘door to cooperation can open only if the ‘one-China’ and ‘one country, two systems’ formulas are put aside. The ‘door to peace’ can open only when China renounces its threat of force and halts its strategic attempts to isolate Taiwan internationally”* (*Taiwan Yearbook* 2004 p. 90).

Chen did not say anything new in his 2004 inaugural address. In addition to reiterating the ‘Five No’s policy that he announced in his 2000 inaugural speech, he merely echoed what he said in his previous speeches: that Taiwan is completely a free society and it can establish relations with China in any form provided the consent of the Taiwanese people is gained.<sup>9</sup>

### Cross-Strait Relations and the US

During the first term of Chen, China appeared to have taken the 'wait-and-see' attitude against Chen and his DPP-led administration. Since its non-stop verbal attacks appeared to have no effect on Chen, China tried another approach—improve its bilateral relations with the US and ask the US to ensure that Taiwan under Chen will not declare its independence.

It is a well-known fact in the international community that the US is Taiwan's "big brother" and if not for the former's containment efforts against China during the Cold War period, the latter (Taiwan) could have been reunited with the mainland long time ago. Using the US to moderate Chen's 'separatist tendency' is one indication that China's foreign policy has become pragmatic in content in recent years.

Thus, when US Vice President Dick Cheney visited Beijing immediately after the March 2004 presidential election in Taiwan, he was told by Chinese President Hu Jintao that

*"Washington must oppose Taiwan independence and any wording or action by the Taiwan leaders attempting to change Taiwan's status quo and . . . should not send wrong signals to the Taiwan authorities. Sino-US ties will have more room for development if the Taiwan issue is well handled"*<sup>10</sup>

Similar views were expressed by the Chinese President to Ms. Condoleeza Rice, the US National Security Adviser, when she went to China in May 2004. She was told that China wanted the US "not to send wrong signals to Taiwan...and avoid damaging the peace and stability across the Taiwan straits."<sup>11</sup> China was particularly unhappy with the US decision to sell advanced weapons to Taiwan since this could only embolden Chen to pursue his separatist inclinations (Dagdag, 2004).

But the US response was predictably ambivalent. According to US Vice President Cheney, while "the US will stick to its one-China policy

which does not favor Taiwan,”<sup>12</sup> the Bush administration has decided “to increase its sale of defensive weapons to Taiwan as a response to China’s deployment of missiles against the islands” (*Taiwan Journal*, 25 April 2004 p. 1). The US does not want both China and Taiwan “to take unilateral steps that would alter the unique status of the islands.”<sup>13</sup> This means that while the US was opposed to any move that will result in Taiwan independence, it is also against any Chinese military action aimed at bringing about the forcible unification of the island with the mainland.

It appears that both China and Taiwan are not happy with what the US has been doing with respect to the Taiwan straits issue.

*“China feels that the US is not exerting enough effort to stop the separatist inclination of Chen and his party. On the other hand, Taiwan is worried that it may be ultimately and gradually sacrificed by the US as it improves its economic and security relationship with China especially in the post-9/11 period”* (Dagdag, 2004 p. 169).

Chen Ming-tong, Chairman of Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), expressed Taiwan’s concern, saying that while “we are happy to see improving relations between China and the United States, it should not come at Taiwan’s expense.”<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman stated (in reaction to the US decision to sell sophisticated weapons to Taiwan) that “the US\$18 billion arms package sends wrong signals to Taiwan. This is not in line with the commitments made by many administrations of the United States to not support Taiwan independence.”<sup>15</sup>

The US is invariably involved in cross-strait relations because of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) enacted by the US Congress in 1979—eight years after Taiwan lost its membership in the United Nations, as well as its permanent seat in the UN Security Council, in favor of China. This law directs the US government to (a) uphold the one-China policy; and (b) provide Taiwan with the capacity to defend itself from Chinese attack.

The US has implemented this law through initiatives that deter both China and Taiwan from unilaterally changing the existing status of Taiwan.

It is apparent that the US wants to maintain the status quo regarding the political status of Taiwan because this enhances its leverage in dealing with both China and Taiwan. On this matter, the US has no problem because most Taiwanese also favor the maintenance of the status quo.<sup>16</sup> However, it is a different case with respect to China. In fact, some Chinese leaders are starting to explore all possible options that will deter Chen and other Taiwanese officials from interfering with China's reunification through their "separatist" or "splittist" orientation.

### Cross-Strait Initiatives of Chen

Despite China's hostile response to his policy pronouncements, Chen pursued a number of initiatives to improve Taiwan-China relations and to promote private and economic exchanges between the two sides. The initiatives of Chen included

*"...opening the mini-three links of direct transportation, postal services and trade between China and the offshore islands of Kinmen, Matsu and Penghu; expanding the functions and scope of the offshore shipping centers; and opening Taiwan to tourism by PRC citizens" (Taiwan Yearbook 2004 p. 92).*

Moreover, Taiwan under Chen also

*"...allowed its financial institutions to open offices in China; liberalized significantly the import of mainland products into Taiwan; permitted mainland tourists to come to Taiwan; and improved the status of the mainland spouses of Taiwan residents" (Taiwan Yearbook 2004 p. 92).*

These initiatives, as well as those taken by the past Taiwanese leaders following the lifting of the 1987 Emergency Decree and the gradual

adoption of a more open policy towards China, resulted in the steady increase in the number of private and economic exchanges between the two economies.

Reports say that in 2002 alone, over 3 million Taiwanese (businessmen, tourists, students and professors, family members, etc.) visited China. However, there were only about 11,000 mainland Chinese who visited Taiwan during the period January to September 2003 (*Taiwan Yearbook* 2004 p. 95). The disparity in numbers suggests that Taiwan's cross-strait travel policies are more liberal compared to those of China. In fact, it is not easy for mainland Chinese to visit Taiwan because of security restrictions imposed by the governments of both sides. One reason why many Taiwanese, particularly those belonging to the Han group (the largest ethnic group in Taiwan), have visited the mainland (particularly the Fujian and Guangdong provinces in Southern China) is because of cultural affinity—their ancestors came from these places and they wanted to trace their cultural roots and interact with their mainland relatives.

The most visible manifestation of cross strait relations is the increased number of economic exchanges between Taiwanese and Chinese businessmen, investors and traders. Progress in this area can be seen from the following facts and figures:

*“According to statistics compiled by the Investment Commission of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwanese investments in China up to 2002 totaled US\$26.61 billion, which accounted for 43.39 percent of Taiwan’s total foreign investment. Trade volume between the two sides also increased, from US\$8 billion in 1991 to US\$41.01 billion in 2002. Of this figure, exports to China amounted to US\$33.06 billion, comprising 25.3 percent of Taiwan’s total exports, and imports from China amounted to US\$7.95 billion or 7.1 percent of Taiwan’s total imports. Taiwan thus enjoyed a bilateral trade surplus of US\$25.11 billion. Currently, China is Taiwan’s third largest trading partner, top export destination and the leading source of Taiwan’s trade surplus”* (*Taiwan Yearbook* 2004 p. 140).

### Public Opinion Polls on Cross-Strait Relations

The Taiwan government, through the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), conducted a series of public opinion surveys to determine how the Taiwan people view cross-state issues. These surveys were conducted for the MAC by reputable survey groups like the (a) Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, Taipei (ESC); (b) Burke Marketing Research, Ltd., Taipei (BMR); (c) China Credit Information Service, Ltd., Taipei (CCIS); (d) Center for Public Opinion and Election Studies, National Sun Yat-Sen University, Kaohsiung (CPOES); (e) Survey and Opinion Research Group, Department of Political Science, National Chung-cheng University (SORG); and (f) e-Society Research Group, Taipei (e.SRG).

The results of these cross-strait related surveys are shown in Tables 1 to 7. The following can be deduced from the results of the surveys from 1999 to 2004:

1. More than 58 percent of the respondents favored maintaining the status quo position. This means that they do not want Taiwan to declare its independence or be unified with mainland China—now or later (see Table 1). Only 7.66 percent and 2.65 percent favored immediate independence and immediate unification with China respectively. Relatedly, only 13.31 percent and 14.13 percent preferred independence and unification respectively, with China at a later time.
2. Majority of the respondents (average of 64.6 percent from October 1999 to December 2004) agreed that Taiwan should develop ties with other countries even if these will lead to rising tension on cross-strait relations (see Table 2). This means that Taiwan should endeavor to establish ties with other countries despite the efforts of China to isolate it diplomatically.
3. Only a minority of the respondents (average of 24 percent from October 1999 to December 2004) believed that developing cross-strait relations was more important than

developing relations with other countries (see Table 3). More respondents felt that developing foreign relations was more important (average of 31.42 percent) or that foreign relations and cross-strait relations were equally important (average of 27.18 percent).

4. There are more respondents (an average of 33.38 percent from July 2001 to December 2004) who felt that the pace of cross-strait relations from 2001 to 2004 was just right (see Table 5). However, about 21 percent said that the pace was too slow while about 17 percent said that the pace was too fast. This table shows that the pacing of cross-strait relations until 2004 failed to win the support of the majority of the respondents.
5. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (an average of about 74 percent from October 1999 to December 2004) said that the "one country, two systems" formula espoused by China was not applicable to solving the problems across the straits (see Table 5). Only an average of 10 percent said otherwise.
6. More than 50 percent of the respondents (average of 57 percent from July 2002 to July 2004) felt that the Taiwanese government should handle Taiwanese investments on mainland China by increasing restrictions and regulations (see Table 6). Only an average of 22 percent said that restrictions on these China-bound Taiwanese investments should be reduced. There was an overwhelming lack of support to the current policy since only an average of 2.4 percent of the respondents opted to maintain it.
7. An average of 76 percent of the respondents (from July 2001 to July 2004) believed that the Taiwanese government should establish direct transportation links with mainland China subject to certain conditions (see Table 7). Only an average of 8.57 percent supported the view that the opening of the direct transportation links should be unconditional.

From the survey results, it can be said that the Taiwanese were against the idea of defining cross-strait relations according to standards and policies set by China. This explains why they were against unification with China and the use of the 'one country, two systems formula' (which has been the position of China since 1949) in addressing cross-strait issues. But they were also against the idea of provoking China to take military action against Taiwan. This is the reason why they preferred the maintenance of status quo and opposed the idea of independence—whether now or later.

The survey results appeared to show that the Taiwanese preferred to have cross-strait relations evolve gradually—not at a slow or fast pace. This could be the reason why they wanted the Taiwanese government to increase its regulations for Taiwanese investments bound for China and to establish direct transportation links with the mainland subject to certain conditions.

Chen Shui-bian took his oath as the tenth-term President of Taiwan on 20 May 2000. Since his assumption to office, the following may be said insofar as the perceptions of the Taiwanese on cross-strait relations issues based on the survey results:

1. With Chen as President, support for immediate independence has weakened (from 13.8 percent in August 1999, it became only 6.4 percent in July 2001, 5.9 percent in December 2002, 7.2 percent in August 2003 and 6.9 percent in September 2004);
2. Because support for immediate independence has weakened, support for indefinite status quo has increased (from only 12.2 percent in August 1999, it became 21.5 percent in July 2001 and December 2002, 17.2 percent in August 2003, and 18.8 percent in September 2004);
3. Support for immediate unification, which has been insignificant even before Chen became President, remained as such during his term (from only 2.4 percent in August 1999, this became 3.3 percent in July 2001, 4.2 percent in December 2002, 2 percent in August 2003 and 1.6 percent in September 2004);

4. The number of those opposed to the one-country, two system formula espoused by China have remained more or less the same during the Chen presidency—above 70 percent of the respondents; and
5. Under Chen, there were more respondents who wanted their government to increase its regulations on China-bound Taiwanese investments.

All of the above lead to one conclusion: that the Taiwanese preferred to maintain the status quo with respect to Taiwan-China relations. Candidates during elections saw to it that their pronouncements and platforms do not deviate from this status quo view—to ensure their chances of winning. Their open support for unification with China or independence could result in their defeat in the polls.

**TABLE 1**  
**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON CROSS-STRAIT ISSUES**  
**Question: Do you favor unification or independence?**  
**(in percent)**

Response	Aug 99	Feb 00	July 01	Dec 02	Aug 03	Sept 04
Status quo now, decision later	39.6	35.3	32.1	33.3	34.3	40.7
Status quo indefinitely	12.2	19.3	21.5	21.5	17.2	18.8
Status quo now, independence later	13.8	12.5	10.2	10.3	14.4	18.7
Status quo now, unification later	14.9	19.0	16.7	10.0	13.2	11.0
Independence as soon as possible	13.8	5.8	6.4	5.9	7.2	6.9
Unification as soon as possible	2.4	2.4	3.3	4.2	2.0	1.6
Conducted by	CCIS	BMR	SORG	e-SRG	ESC	BMR

Source: Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan, Republic of China

**TABLE 2**  
**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON CROSS-STRAIT ISSUES**  
**Question: If developing foreign ties led to rising tension on**  
**cross-strait relations, would you agree with such an effort?**  
**(in percent)**

Response	Oct 99	Feb 00	July 01	Dec 02	Nov 03	Dec 04
Yes	64.2	68.4	63.3	61.9	63.1	66.8
No	15.0	16.2	21.0	21.2	18.6	23.4
No opinion/no answer	20.8	15.4	15.7	16.8	18.2	9.8
Conducted by	CCIS	BMR	SORG	e-SRG	ESC	BMR

Source: Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan, Republic of China

**TABLE 3**  
**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON CROSS-STRAIT ISSUES**  
**Question: Which is more important - - developing foreign relations**  
**or developing cross-strait relations?**  
**(in percent)**

Response	Oct 99	Feb 00	July 01	Dec 02	Nov 03	Dec 04
Developing foreign relations is more important	31.7	30.5	30.7	34.7	39.0	21.9
Developing cross-strait relations is more important	24.2	22.3	31.0	25.0	24.1	17.7
Both are equally important	23.8	37.4	22.8	20.3	16.7	42.1
Don't know	20.3	9.8	15.5	20.0	20.2	8.3
Conducted by	SORG	BMR	SORG	e-SRG	ESC	BMR

Source: Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan, Republic of China

**TABLE 4**  
**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON CROSS STRAIT ISSUES**  
**Question: Is the pace of cross-strait exchanges too fast or too slow?**  
 (in percent)

Response	July 01	Dec 02	May 03	Nov 03	July 04	Dec 04
Too slow	20.3	19.6	20.2	17.5	20.8	25.2
Just right	35.5	29.6	30.7	32.1	36.6	35.8
Too fast	17.3	15.4	23.4	17.0	14.2	19.1
Don't know	26.9	35.5	25.7	33.4	28.4	19.9
Conducted by	SORG	BMR	SORG	e-SRG	ESC	BMR

Source: Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan, Republic of China

**TABLE 5**  
**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON CROSS-STRAIT ISSUES**  
**Question: Is the "one country, two systems" formula**  
**applicable to solving the problems across the straits?**  
 (in percent)

Response	Oct 99	Feb 00	July 01	Dec 02	Nov 03	Dec 04
Yes	8.5	9.8	13.3	9.1	7.4	12.9
No	75.0	78.8	70.4	72.5	71.4	75.4
No answer	16.5	11.4	16.3	18.4	21.2	11.7
Conducted by	SORG	BMR	SORG	E-SRG	ESC	BMR

Source: Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan, Republic of China

**TABLE 6**  
**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON CROSS-STRAIT ISSUES**  
**Question: How should our government handle Taiwanese**  
**investments on mainland China?**  
 (in percent)

Response	July 02	Dec 02	May 03	Nov 03	April 04	July 04
Increase restrictions/ regulations	50.6	57.2	64.5	61.5	51.5	58.4
Reduce restrictions	24.4	20.1	19.9	18.1	27.0	24.3
Maintain current policy	1.2	4.6	1.1	1.7	4.0	1.9
No comment	23.8	18.1	14.4	18.7	17.4	15.4
Conducted by:	ESCE	SRG	ESC	ESC	ESC	ESC

Source: Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan, Republic of China

**TABLE 7**  
**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY ON CROSS-STRAIT ISSUES**  
**Question: Should Taiwan open up direct transportation**  
**links with Mainland China?**  
 (in percent)

Response	July 01	July 02	Aug 03	Nov 03	Apr 04	July 04
Should conditionally open up direct transportation links	79.8	72.4	74.4	76.4	74.0	77.4
Should unconditionally open up direct transportation links	8.9	9.6	6.2	7.8	9.7	9.2
Conducted by:	SORG	WSC	ESRG	ESC	ESC	ESC

Source: Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan, Republic of China

### Concluding Observations

This article looks at how cross-strait relations evolved under Chen Shui-bian as President of Taiwan.

Since he became a presidential candidate and until he won the Presidency in 2000 and 2004, Chen has been the target of continuing criticism by mainland authorities. This is because of the perception that he is an advocate of Taiwan independence.

Unfortunately, this Chinese perception has been reinforced by Chen's policy pronouncements and initiatives since 2000. Despite his Five Nos policy which he first announced during his 2000 inaugural address and other reconciliatory speeches, the Chinese authorities continued to regard Chen as separatist, or splittist and the "biggest threat to regional stability." A major reason for this Chinese perception is the consistent assertion of Chen that "Taiwan has always been a sovereign state." Thus, while the Chinese authorities pursued a "wait and see" policy with respect to Chen and his political party (the Democratic Progressive Party) until the end of his first term, there were already some indications that they will take a more decisive stand against him during his second term.

The US is invariably involved in cross-state relations. But its ambivalent posturing has elicited criticisms from both China and Taiwan. The US has consistently supported the maintenance of status quo regarding the political status of Taiwan—not supporting Taiwan independence nor supporting any Chinese military action that will result in the forcible unification of Taiwan with the mainland. Its status quo position has increased its leverage in dealing with both China and Taiwan.

Public opinion surveys in Taiwan show that there is a strong support among Taiwanese for maintaining the status quo. Only an insignificant number endorsed the idea of Taiwan independence or the idea of unifying Taiwan with China, now or later. Moreover, more and more Taiwanese want their government under Chen to have cross-strait relations evolve gradually and subject to conditions.

Survey results showed that with Chen as President, support for immediate independence has weakened while support for indefinite status quo has increased. However, there has been no dramatic change in the number of those opposed to the one-country, two systems formula espoused by China (before and under Chen, above 70 percent of the respondents were against the one-China principle).

Perhaps, it is this strong support for the status quo among the Taiwanese (and weak support for independence) that influenced China to allow more personal and economic exchanges to take place between the two economies. This could be also the reason why it merely opted for a wait-and-see attitude during the first term of Chen.

### Notes

- 1 This article made use of the information contained in the Conference Paper entitled "The China Factor in Taiwan Politics." This paper was presented at the 2004 International Conference of the Philippine Political Science Association held at College of St. Benilde, De La Salle University, Manila, 22-23 October 2004. See *Papers and Proceedings of the Conference*, pp. 160-173.
- 2 *Philippine Star*, 10 March 2004.
- 3 *Philippine Star*, 22 February 2004.
- 4 *Philippine Star*, 20 March 2004.
- 5 *Philippine Star*, 4 February 2004.
- 6 *Philippine Star*, 20 March 2004.
- 7 *Philippine Star*, 22 February 2004.
- 8 *Philippine Star*, 6 April 2004
- 9 The full text of the 2004 inaugural speech of President Chen can be found in *Taiwan Journal*, 28 May 2004, pp. 2 and 7.
- 10 *Philippine Star*, 15 April 2004.
- 11 *Philippine Star*, 10 July 2004.
- 12 *Philippine Star*, 15 April 2004.
- 13 *Philippine Star*, 28 March 2004.
- 14 *Philippine Star*, 15 April 2004.
- 15 *Taipei Times*, 24 September 2004.
- 16 See Table 1 of this article. Data came from the Mainland Affairs Council, Executive Yuan, Republic of China.

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