

The Multidimensional Implications of the Chang Hsien-yao Case

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Some time has passed since former Mainland Affairs Council deputy minister Chang Hsien-yao, who was also vice chairman and secretary-general of the Straits Exchange Foundation and Taiwan's leading negotiator with China, was accused of leaking state secrets to China. The truth remains clouded, but the complex impacts triggered by Chang's case have continued to beleaguer cross-strait relations since the story broke.

First of all, Taiwanese people were astonished to see Ma Ying-jeou's administration order the Investigation Bureau to take on one of its officials without clear evidence of Chang's alleged crime. The steps taken by the administration has not only undermined Taiwan's principles of democracy and the rule of law, but also dealt a severe blow to the solidarity and unity within the administration. The smear campaign against Chang and the brutal investigative process to which he was subjected have produced chilling effects that have altered government and party officials' cooperative and friendly attitude toward cross-strait relations, while also reawakened Taiwanese people's long-faded perception of China as an enemy.

Second, Chang's case immediately affected the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Taiwan policy, pulverizing the "two sides are one family" appeal in Chinese President Xi Jinping's united front propaganda campaign against Taiwan. Since the Ma administration came to power and broadly liberalized cross-strait relations, the CCP has

seized the opportunity to beef up its united front tactics by using economic policies to "concede profits" to Taiwan. Its slogans—from former Chinese President Hu Jintao's "two sides are one family" to Xi's "three middles and the youth" (referring to residents of central and southern Taiwan; middle and low-income families; small and medium-sized enterprises; and young people)—all aimed to penetrate Taiwanese people's psychological defence, so that China may achieve the objective of peaceful unification with Taiwan. Obviously, one effect of the Chang case is that the CCP was once again cast as "Communist spies." The Ma administration's nabbing of "Communist spies" and investigation of Chang's alleged leaking of state secrets have at least proven that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are neither one family nor close, and consequently the CCP's united front tactics have suffered a setback.

Third, Chang's case has utterly exposed the Ma administration's weaknesses to the CCP, confirming Beijing in its view that Ma has lost control of the situation, is powerless to impose his will, and cannot implement his policies. Therefore, Beijing will be more cautious and careful when considering the so-called "Ma-Xi meeting." One of Beijing's concerns is that if it hastily signs a monumental political treaty with Ma now, the treaty may set off unexpected changes and after-effects beyond the CCP's control.

In fact, Chinese advisers have assessed the challenges facing the present cross-strait relations. I would summarize their assessments in five points: 1. the model of propelling cross-strait development through treaties has basically stalled; 2. the scheduled cross-strait political talks and private forums have been affected; 3. the Democratic Progressive Party has lost momentum to adjust its China policy; 4. the U.S. has signaled its reservation about over-hasty progression of cross-strait relations; 5. the blue and green camps are increasingly moving toward a “de facto two-China” stance, i.e., speak “one China” for show while importing “two Chinas”, so both camps have been adjusting their policies to conform to the “de facto two-country” stance. I should add that the above assessments are consistent with objective realities.

The CCP’s Taiwan policy adheres to the core principle: the progress of cross-strait relations must not be hindered by Taiwan’s internal politics, that is, the implementation of China’s Taiwan policy should not be influenced by Taiwan’s election results, political fights, or unexpected turns of events. Of course, Taiwan’s elections, political fights and events would impact cross-strait relations, but the CCP has striven to make sure that cross-strait relations irreversibly trend toward peaceful unification. This explains why the CCP has defined Chang’s case as an “individual incident,” for Beijing would never allow this case to obliterate the hard-earned fruits it has secured over the past six years. 

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