

The Impact of Taiwan's Sunflower Student Movement on the KMT-CCP Cooperative Framework

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Taiwan's Sunflower Student Movement in March 2014 and the assorted protests against the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) were triggered by the KMT-CCP cooperation and the negative consequences of globalization. Developments prior to and since the emergence of these movements evince a strong internal economic logic: economic factors impact life in society, and eventually contribute to the formation of an emerging political force to change the existing political structure and the course of cross-Strait relations.

In April of 2005 then-Kuomintang (KMT) Chairman Lien Chan accepted the invitation of then-General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee Hu Jintao to visit China, marking the start of today's cooperation between the former enemies. Against the backdrop of China's rise and combined with the influence of Taiwan's "economic voters," the KMT-CCP cop contributed to two successive electoral victories for the pro-China KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou. Since 2008 Ma and China have created tighter cross-Strait economic integration, but the "peace dividend" widely touted to Taiwanese has not materialized.

The Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) was signed under the auspices of the KMT-CCP cooperative framework. However since ECFA's entry into force in early 2011, the market share of the early harvest list covering Taiwan's exports to China has not increased but decreased, exposing as hollow all talk of "yielding benefits."

Moreover, ECFA has exacerbated real estate speculation by the glut of funds flowing in from Taiwanese and Chinese businessmen in China. In a few short years, housing costs and mortgages in Greater Taipei has reached Hong Kong level, making citizens in both cities shouldering some of the heaviest housing-related loads in the world. Meanwhile, Taiwan's national average real wage has shrunk as compared to the late 1990s. The Ma administration's economic policy – closer cross-Strait economic integration, the introduction of greater numbers of foreign laborers, and prioritization of the interests of capitalists – have been especially detrimental to the advancement of industry. Ma seemed not to glean any lessons from ECFA's failure and hastily joined Beijing in undertaking the Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services, inciting fervent protests from students and civic groups; overnight, students climbed over the walls and occupied the Main Chamber of the Legislative Yuan, launching the Sunflower Student Movement. The occupation of parliament lasted a total of twenty-three days, during which time an Anti-CSSTA demonstration with an estimated half million participants took place.

The Sunflower Movement marks a historical watershed. It put an end to the path for cross-Strait progression laid out under KMT-CCP cooperation. The Sunflower Student Movement and the Anti-Service Agreement Movement have clearly revealed the undercurrent against the "China factor" and the anti-democratic nature of KMT-CCP cooperation. These movements have received wide support among society. One of the

implications of this societal support is that the majority of the citizenry have plainly arrived at the realization that the economic benefits promised by “tighter cross-Strait economic integration” will not be realized. Now that this social consciousness has taken concrete shape, Beijing’s overt plan of “promoting unification through economy, leveraging businessmen to apply political pressure,” will certainly encounter difficulty. This will especially be the case as Taiwan has recently experienced a series of tainted cooking oil scandals that have uncovered the despicable practices of Taiwanese corporation Ting Hsin Group. Ting Hsin Group achieved success in the Chinese market before returning to Taiwan to engage in any number of abhorrent business practices. With the largest round of local elections in Taiwan’s history approaching, the Ma administration was forced to swiftly take action to sever all ties with the corporation. In addition, due to Mr. Ma’s “poor performance,” Beijing has begun its search for a more ideal partner with which to cooperate. These circumstances have completely disrupted the original model for KMT-CCP cooperation and plans for the course of cross-Strait ties.

The Ma administration’s failure has led, in Taiwan, to the gradual loss of credibility of trade policies with appeals based on China’s market and free trade. For the generation of youth who were the main force behind the Sunflower Student movement, in the time since the start of the new millennium, their formative years, they had already witnessed Taiwan’s entry into the World Trade Organization and establishment of the cross-Strait production networks, and these trade and economic forces had created serious social stratification and impoverishment of those in employment. Most people found themselves victimized, especially the youth just entering the

workplace on pitiful entry level wages. They found themselves not only unable to afford housing and start families, but also shouldering the ever-increasing burden of the future placed on them by the pension system. All of this engendered in them a strong sense of relative deprivation.

This generation of youth had come of an age in an era of Taiwanese democratization. Among those twenty to thirty-nine years of age, over 90% identify themselves as Taiwanese, demonstrating that this generation has already undergone a high degree of Taiwanization. To the youth, binding their future to a corrupt, authoritarian China is a ridiculous proposition, especially given that their economic reality has clearly already suffered the effects of China and Taiwanese businessmen. As this generation gradually enters the voting ranks, the government will not be able to sustain its wanted pro-China trade policies.

Following this investigation we arrive at the conclusions and make the appeals:

1. **Democratic mechanism is critical** to give Taiwan’s polity a certain level of dynamic adjustment capacity, as reflected in the results of the 29 November 2014 local elections.
2. **Cross-Strait relations have strayed from the path laid out under KMT-CCP cooperation** and are rebooting in a safe mode more comfortable to Taiwanese majority. Chinese market is no longer regarded as a panacea for Taiwan’s economic ails.
3. With a more mature civil society capable of taking charge of political development, **Taiwan’s economy will have a greater chance to progress into a value-oriented innovation-driven stage.**

4. **China's state capitalism under an authoritarian regime has no sustainability** to speak of. Just as has transpired in Hong Kong, where society evolved from political apathy to enthusiastic pursuit of democratic rights, the Chinese people will eventually stand up to demand an end to one-party rule. In today's international community, Taiwan alone has the capability to undertake the work of inducing China's democratization.

5. Japan and South Korea need to raise their risk awareness. They should join Taiwan in **forming a Taiwan-Japan-Korea triangle of close cooperation capable of strengthening the democracy camp** in order to maintain East Asian stability.

6. The United States also needs to immediately reduce its economic dependence on China. **The U.S. should facilitate Taiwan's entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership** and strengthen bilateral cooperation to achieve mutual benefits. **BT**

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