

## In the Wake of Xi Jinping's "Earth Shaking" Comment

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When meeting with members of the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, the Taiwan Democratic Self-government League, and the All China Taiwanese Association who attended the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) held in early March of 2015, Xi Jinping stressed that the '92 Consensus was the common political basis for the two sides of the Strait. "If the foundation is not firm, the earth will shake." He pointed out that if that political foundation is undermined, mutual trust would cease to exist and relations between the two sides of the Strait would once again be characterized by turbulence. In light of Eric Chu taking over the chairmanship of the KMT in the wake of that KMT's loss during the 9-in-1 elections on 29 November 2014, the CCP's Working Conference on Taiwan Affairs held in late January 2015, and the fact that the DPP's presidential candidate will be announced on 15 April, Xi's words carry special significance. He chose to make this statement during a united front activity like the CPPCC and to direct it at all of Taiwan's political parties, so the main point of his statement is possibly not that "the earth will shake"; rather, that it is an all-out united front. That is why he followed it up by saying, "holding fast to the '92 Consensus as a foundation and condition for opening up intercourse with Taiwan, its authorities and its various political parties. The core issue is acknowledging that the mainland and Taiwan both belong to one China. If this point is adhered to, there will be no barriers to any Taiwanese political parties or groups dealing with the mainland."

The comment about "earth shaking," however, did nothing to help resolve the current situation other than triggering a great deal of discussion on either side of the Strait. If it were true that the '92 Consensus is the cornerstone of cross-Strait relations and if it were true that it would benefit Taiwan, we have to ask: "Why would the Sunflower Movement take place in Taiwan? Why has the implementation of the Cross-Strait Trade in Services Agreement reached an impasse? Following the Chang Hsien-yao incident, cross-Strait negotiations lost steam. Public officials in Taiwan involved in Chinese affairs are all focused on self-preservation and any political negotiations are way off in the distant future. Even if the earth under cross-Strait relations under the Ma Administration is not shaking outright, it is on shaky ground. In other words, the '92 Consensus is drifting about and rootless; it is anything but a firm foundation.

The people of Taiwan need to ask why cross-Strait relations are still unstable even though the Ma Administration recognizes the '92 Consensus. Both sides of the Strait need to think about whether the '92 Consensus can serve as the cornerstone for cross-Strait relations. From a legal perspective, the '92 Consensus is only a policy consensus reached by the parties in power on either side of the Strait. Frankly, it is little more than a *modus vivendi*. At least phrases like "one country, two systems" and "both sides of the Strait are part of one China" mentioned by Xi Jinping conform better to the PRC constitution. They do, however, also raise hackles among the Taiwanese.

From a policy perspective, both the KMT and CCP continue to try to coerce the DPP to accept the '92 Consensus. The DPP declared long before the 2012 presidential election that there was no '92 Consensus. Controversy like this has resulted in the '92 Consensus being equated with upheaval. So how did the two sides of the Strait make it this far before former Minister of the Mainland Affairs Council Su Chi coined the phrase "'92 Consensus?" Was there really any upheaval? Did former-President Lee Teng-hui's or former-President Chen Shui-bian's cross-Strait policies result in any earth shaking? Put another way, the '92 Consensus is a term that has long been considered in Taiwan a tool used to manipulate elections. It is bereft of any rational content and provides no ground for reasoned policy debate.

After the Sunflower Movement, parties that accepted the '92 Consensus did not get many votes in Taiwan. Even though both the KMT and CCP dismiss out of hand any connection between the results of the 9-in-1 elections and cross-Strait relations, in reality, various polls after the elections indicated that the Sunflower Movement had an impact on the 9-in-1 elections. A poll carried out by the Taiwan Brain Trust in March of 2015 indicated that 58.4% of the public agrees that the KMT was defeated at the hands of young people and civil society. Given the obvious link between the Sunflower Movement and the Cross-Strait Trade in Services Agreement, saying that the election results and cross-Strait factors are unrelated is nothing less than a boldfaced lie.

Today, the KMT and CCP's '92 Consensus is facing numerous obstacles. The crux of the issue is that China is unable to accept the actual content of the '92 Consensus, i.e., one

China, respective interpretations. It dreads the idea of "two Chinas," but it also would like to see Taiwan's various parties accept the '92 Consensus. However, since the '92 Consensus is not law, the parties are not bound by it. The process of trying to validate the '92 Consensus as a policy has continued to be a primary reason for the turbulence that has characterized cross-Strait relations. The DPP has made it clear that it would not accept the '92 Consensus, while the CCP insists to make it its bottom line. The continual pressure the CCP has exerted on the DPP to accept it will prove counter-productive. It would be better to approach the issue from a different perspective: seek the greatest common denominator acceptable by both the DPP and CCP and form a new consensus. After all, the '92 Consensus is not law; it is the cross-Strait policy of the KMT and CCP. It had its purpose in the short term, but now it is confronted with public backlash in Taiwan and unable to diffuse the controversy. The '92 Consensus should be allowed to topple over of its own accord into the ash heap of history as cross-Strait relations forge ahead in search of a new consensus that is in line with the interests of people on either side of the Strait and which the majority in Taiwan can accept. Only in this way can cross-Strait relations remain stable over the long term; otherwise, the '92 Consensus will be the primary cause of any "earth shaking" experienced in those relations. **BT**

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