

A Brief Comment on the Impact of Zhang Zhijun's Visit to Taiwan

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Formally speaking, Zhang Zhijun's visit to Taiwan marked the completion of an official, systematic cross-strait communication mechanism and the first time that a director of the Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) has set foot on the island. Aside from attending two meetings, including a chat over a cup of tea, with his counterpart the Director of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council Wang Yu-chi, Zhang went to Xizhi for his first private tour, where he told Xinhua News Agency "I feel like I have truly reached out to Taiwanese society and understand life in Taiwan." After he cancelled the itinerary for the last day of his visit, the TAO even stated, "Having met all the people he wanted to meet, he completed his scheduled itinerary."

Apparently, China believes that the groundbreaking visit of a TAO director as such is the greatest achievement.

In terms of substance, we need to look at the visit from four aspects: first, what are the outcomes of the two meetings between the two sides' top officials in charge of cross-strait affairs? Of course, here we can mention that the representative offices to be established on both sides of the Taiwan Strait gained the right to conduct humanitarian visits [to detainees held by the other side]. Moreover, TAO spokesman Ma Xiaoguang said the two sides agreed to duly study appropriate ways and feasible avenues for joining regional economic cooperation. While these must be regarded as "gifts" presented to Taiwan by China, the Chinese government did not want to make a big deal out of them. This leads us to speculate that the Chinese government originally had not planned to treat

Zhang's visit to Taiwan as a major breakthrough in official negotiations and that these two gifts should not be taken for granted. China does not want the outside world to closely scrutinize and carefully deliberate its words.

Second, what are the effects of Zhang's contacts with Taiwanese grassroots citizens? On the one hand, Zhang followed his itinerary as planned and scripted in advance. Aside from a conference with small and medium size enterprises that touched on real issues, the lion's share of his schedule served to build his image and generate emotional appeal [among the Taiwanese public]. On the other hand, Zhang ostensibly kept his composure in spite of protesters pursuing him like his own shadow. Nonetheless, the cancellation of scheduled visits on the last day of his trip was certainly a faux pas.

Third, how is the relationship between the DPP and Beijing developing in light of Zhang's visit? Here the focus is on the public meeting between Zhang and Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu, which was all but dramatic as both sides avoided provoking their respective counterpart with their statements. In fact, Zhang, [New Taipei Mayor] Eric Chu and Chen all three forged a "red-blue-green" consensus with their statements to seek "mutual understanding and mutual respect." Of course, red, blue and green camps all stick to certain positions. As far as the relationship between the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) is concerned, the sticking point was highlighted by [former DPP legislator] Julian Kuo who asked "Is it true that exchanges become possible if the [DDP's] Taiwan independence platform is frozen?" Zhang

responded: “When we look at the performance of a political party we do not only look at the party program, we also look whether its policies and actual deeds create positive momentum for cross-strait ties.” In other words, the DPP cannot have normal exchanges with Communist China even if it decides to freeze its pro-independence platform.

Fourth, will there be another breakthrough in cross-strait relations in the future? This point is difficult to foresee, but the possibility of a political breakthrough seems low. Even the prospects for resuming negotiations on cross-strait affairs are unclear. This includes the tenth round of talks between the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS), during which the following six issues are to be discussed:

Agreements on post-ECFA trade in goods and dispute settlement; avoidance of double taxation and enhanced taxation cooperation; mutual establishment of representative offices by SEF and ARATS; environmental cooperation; aviation safety and airworthiness standards as well as the convening of the Cross-strait Economic Cooperation Committee. Will negotiations of these issues stall or be put off? This depends on whether they get back on track after Zhang’s return.

On top of that, China is carrying out thorough economic reforms. Amid these, the “five social insurances and one housing fund” stipulated in China's Labor Contract Law led to a strike at the Yue Yuen shoe factory in Dongguan, Guangdong Province. The Regulation on Collective Bargaining and Collective Contracts, adopted by Guangdong Province in one reading, greatly affects the business situation of Taiwanese enterprises there. Taiwanese entrepreneurs hope that, following his visit to Taiwan, Zhang will be able to continue to assist the business development of Taiwanese enterprises in China. They hope to

see more preferential policies that help Taiwanese enterprises face industrial transformation and upgrading. However, this point remains uncertain too! **B**

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