The Gloomy Survival: Taiwan’s Strategic Desperation

Among the global southern states, Taiwan was seen as successful on the basis of its economic development and democratisation (Booth 2007, 75-80), and yet in recent years its basic survival as a de facto sovereign state seems to be under increasing challenge from internal and external sectors in the face of the rise of China. Since the trend to decolonisation after the Second World War, a large number of new states have emerged; they have generally faced a situation of strategic desperation involving three types of challenges to their survival, as proposed by Burry Buzan: ideas of state, the institutional expression of the state, and the physical base of the state (Buzan 2007, 70-71). Taiwan is no exception to these three types of challenges, and its latest inability to respond to them could set off alarms for southern states. This article will review the case of the three types of security challenges as they affect Taiwan.

Historical Backgrounds

Taiwan, also known as Formosa, became a de facto state or an independent polity in 1949. Unlike other areas in East Asia significantly influenced by Chinese culture, Formosa was an isolated island inhabited by indigenous tribes until marked by Portuguese on maps in the late 15th Century. The island became a base for pirates and then fell under the control of the Dutch United East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC) in 1624. The VOC colonisation of the island lasted until 1661 when Koxinga, a Chinese military commander of the Ming Empire, conquered Fort Zeelandia and expelled the Dutch troops. However, after the Ming Empire had been completely demolished by the Ching (Qing) Empire of Manchuria in the Asian Continent, the latter, after considerable planning and preparation, eventually took over the Koxinga’s regime in Taiwan in 1683. After two hundred years of negligent governance, the Ching Empire established Taiwan Province in 1885, in order to improve its own defence as a result of a previous invasion by France. The loss of the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895, however, forced it to cede the islands to Japan (Tsai 2009, 3-7, 12). After the end of the Second World War, Formosa was taken over by the Republic of China (ROC), the regime of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT). In the following four years, the Nationalists’ overwhelming defeat by the Communists in the Chinese Civil War forced the ROC regime to withdraw to Taiwan in 1949. Thereafter, the ROC regime, compromising most of China’s landmass, was reduced to a group of small islands composed of Formosa, the Pescadores, and a few offshore ones, such as Quemoy and Matsu (Lumley 1976).

This beginning to Taiwan’s de facto independence was indeed a highly artificial one. There was no mental or material preparation for such de facto independence. The population was made up of six million native Formosan sharing Japanese as their common language, and more than a million newly arrived Chinese officials, soldiers and their families making up the
ROC regime, commonly sharing Mandarin as their main means of communication. The conflicts between the Formosans and the ROC regime, their opposing views on Japan and their different educational backgrounds all contributed to considerable incompatibility between the two groups. Governing two such diverse communities under the ROC regime indicated a strong necessity for nation building. Unsurprisingly, the ROC regime adopted sinicisation as the main guideline of nation building (Hughes 1997, 22-30).

The complicated ties between the ROC and the PRC, extending from the Chinese Civil War in the late 1940s, have dominated Taiwan’s survival and security. Unlike other southern states, Taiwan has inherited a nearly permanent threat to its survival from the Chinese Communist regime, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), due to the unsettled outcome of the Chinese Civil War. As the ROC regime itself is a key factor in this lasting hostility, Beijing sees the solution to be the capture of the island. Moreover, from the PRC’s perspective, Taiwan is one of a few pieces of Chinese territory that remains beyond its governance, and to merge or unify it would be seen as a great achievement for Chinese nationalism (Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council PRC 2011). During the Cold War, the leaders of the ROC regime were Chiang Kai-shek followed by his son, Chiang Ching-kuo. Their rigid obsession with the ROC as the exclusive legitimate regime representing China caused a fierce diplomatic war between the ROC and the PRC. From the 1970s on, the former however fell into a significantly inferior position, leaving Taiwan isolated internationally and with little hope to recovery (Clough 1978, 148-149) (Tucker 2009, 31, 35-36).

Militarily, the PRC’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has claimed military invasion as the ultimate option to “unify” Taiwan, undertaking a range of armed conflicts in the 1950s and 1960s, with more substantial threats from the PLA in operation since the 1990s due to such factors as modernisation, new tactics using ballistic missiles and opportunities arising from Taiwan’s democratisation process (Clough 1978, 96-99) (Kagan 2007, 126). Beijing is always alert to any endeavours Taiwan may make to move from de facto to de jure independence by means of democratic processes, and can mobilise the PLA as their final resort to annex the islands, if needed (Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council PRC 2011). As opposed to the military tension, the economic ties across the Taiwan Strait quickly expanded in the post-Cold War era. The lower costs, similarity of language, Mandarin, and special governmental incentives attracted Taiwanese business people to invest in China. The bilateral economic ties would appear on the surface to be ones of interdependence, but China’s huge capacity would eventually have more influence on Taiwan than Taiwan would on China. In the early 2000s, such economic ties made China Taiwan’s largest trade partner, and have gradually became a means for Beijing to have considerable leverage over Taipei (Sun 2011, 52-59) (Bureau of Foreign Trade 2014).

The late 1980s saw the start of a slow democratisation process in Taiwan. After Chiang Ching-Kuo cancelled martial law status in 1987, one year before his death, his successor, Lee Teng-hui, a man without a strong political background, surprisingly secured power in a whirl
of political turbulence and began to democratise Taiwan through a series of direct elections for various high positions, which were not previously voted on by the people. The first popular Presidential election in 1996 was a milestone from which time most political positions were decided by popular election (Chuang 2013, 25-26, 30-35). Four years later, Chen Shui-bian, the candidate of the Democracy Progress Party (DPP), won the next Presidential election, thus ending a half century of governance by the KMT, and signifying another step in the power shift towards democratisation. Despite this, the Chen administration was a minority government which in fact never achieved a majority of seats in the congress during its term. This predicament resulted in a political deadlock between the inaugurate DPP and the previous ruling party, the KMT in coalition with other opposing parties, on various issues, including those of national defence and foreign affairs (Fell 2011, 75-76). And yet, unlike a normal opposition party, the KMT, a massive political machine built during the authoritarian era, had significant resources and capability, including its majority seats in the congress, to go up against the DPP administration (Matsumoto 2002, 359-364) (Copper 2009, 133).

The political deadlock was terminated by the KMT’s return to power. With the influence of China and the KMT’s superior political resources, Ma Ying-jeou scored a victory in the Presidential election in 2008 and the KMT’s majority seats in the congress (Copper 2013, 22, 77-88). Since the inauguration, the Ma administration has displayed an unprecedented friendly attitude toward Beijing, offering broad access for Chinese tourists, business people, students and investment in Taiwan. His major achievement so far is the Enhance Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) of 2010, between Taipei and Beijing, serving a strongly supportive function for subsequent agreements for bilateral integration on economic, cultural and social issues (Wang, et al. 2012, 139-141) (Yeh 2014). Ma’s success in the 2012 election appeared to confirm the general acceptance of such trends in Taiwan, despite some objection, but the KMT’s landslide loss in the 2014 local government elections revealed considerable opposition in public opinion (Copper 2013, 203) (Tiezzi 2014).

Taiwan’s Three Elements of National Survival: Ideas of State

Among Taiwan’s three components of state security, ideas of state, physical base of the state and, institutional expression of the state, the former two are more decisive than the latter.

Ideas of state represent the most vulnerable element in matters of security for Taiwan. Commonly shared ideas of state of any national group are fundamental to survival and security. These ideas can provide powerful reinforcement of a state or deeply undermine it, as well as shaping individual perceptions and actions. Furthermore, the acceptance of these ideas by neighbouring countries and relevant powers determines the international environment within which a state can operate (Buzan 2007, 70-80). Ideas of state can be
divided into two categories, nation and organising ideology; both categories are useful in the case of Taiwan.

Owing to the artificial nature of its statehood, its split population and the threat to its survival from China, nation building was essential for the ROC regime in Taiwan in the 1950s, but historical and political factors contributed to a diverse nationalism or national identity. Due to the high level of Chinese influence over the course of history, the nation of Taiwan has not developed a strong and independent nationalism. From 1683 to 1895, large waves of Chinese or Han immigration occurred under the governance of the Ching Empire, and yet the concept of nation first emerged in 1895 due to the sovereign shift to Japan. During the Japanese period between 1895 and 1945, despite significant Japanese influence, particularly after 1937, (Roy 2003, 40-43), Chinese culture was somewhat retained and became part of a cultural mixture, rather than representative of an individual nation. As a result, unlike Southeast Asian nations struggling for independence at the time, a hearty welcome was given to the ROC troops taking over the island in 1945 (Hao 2010, 28-39). Subsequently, a series of conflicts between the native peoples and ROC officials, for example the slaughter in March 1947, provoked Formosans into considering whether their nation was Chinese or not (Ravenholt 1952, 616) (Wakabayashi 2006, 10-11). However, there was not enough time for Formosans to consolidate a general idea of their nation because the ROC regime withdrew fully from China to take up power the island in 1949. In order to secure the chaos that ensued and eradicate domestic threats, Chiang Ching-kuo reorganised the existing intelligence and internal security systems into a tight, merciless network, which undertook massive arrests and executed all kinds of political suspects, including Communist spies and people for Taiwanese independence (Taylor 2000, 191-192, 211-212).

In addition to suppression, the ROC regime in Taiwan also began nation building. Since Taipei claimed itself as the exclusive representative of the whole of China, its Constitution, regulations and governmental institutes continued to display a clear Chinese orientation (The National Assembly 2004). In addition, a number of governmental companies newly formed in Taiwan were still named after “China”, such as China Airlines (Chen 2002). In practice, considering the mixture of both loyalty and hatred toward the Japanese legacy in Formosa, the ROC regime’s political elites focused on native children with a series of policies designed to establish their Chinese identity, from public education, mass media, military service to various means of socialisation (Clough 1978, 49-50, 57-59) (Mendel 1970, 47, 52-54) (Bullard 1997, 39-41, 66, 77). In terms of execution, more than one million Chinese as part of the ROC regime took on the most important positions to ensure the sinicisation process would be carried out by means of these policies and thus cause a steady and consistent change in the demography of the island (Jacobs 2008, 45-46). As a result, before democratisation, the ROC regime’s plan for nation building was to establish Chinese

1 Other examples are including China Post, Chinese Ship Building, and China Petroleum and so on.
nationalism, which was a flaw as an overall tactic as the PRC also highlighted Chinese nationalism. The ROC regime thus countered with its own ideology, the “Three Principles of the People” and combined this with tight internal security systems to prevent its personnel from defecting (Bullard 1997, 5).

The process of the democratisation that has occurred since the early 1990s, has allowed for the opportunity of a Taiwanese nationalism to emerge. When freedom of speech was allowed during democratisation, the independence movements, previously suppressed during the authoritarian period, emerged from underground. Some politicians and parties, such as the DPP, as well as their expanding groups of supporters, began to argue publicly that people in Taiwan should be a nation of people called Taiwanese, rather than Chinese (C. R. Hughes 2011, 53, 56-57). The KMT under Lee Ting-hui also moved gradually toward separatism in a moderate manner, which insisted on de facto independence rather than highlighting de jure independence (Bush 2005, 75-89). The pro-independence political force achieved some changes, such as adjustments to public education to focus on the reality of Taiwan, and replace curriculum content about China (Hughes 1997, 70-73). A further substantial example of a more independent attitude was that since 2002 passports issued by the ROC regime had the name “Taiwan” on them (Lin 2002). Their ultimate goal is certainly a de jure independent Taiwan, but this goal is difficult due to the counterforce, that of the pro-China political force.

The pro-China political force is composed of at least two different elements: Chinese nationalism and interests in China. Firstly, whether due to family backgrounds or nation building efforts, a certain but decreasing portion of people in Taiwan hold strong Chinese nationalist ideas. Within the international community, as the ROC regime’s function as the representative of China has gradually replaced by the PRC, the former continues to lose its legitimacy in the matter of Chinese nationalism (Hughes 1997, 30-32). In addition, the PRC’s rising power naturally provides the greatest hope for people with Chinese nationalism. Furthermore, since the pro-independent politicians, whether from the KMT under President Lee Teng-hui or the DPP, were in charge of the ROC regime throughout the elections, their loyalty has gradually shifted from the ROC to the PRC, and the annexing of the former by the latter may be positive for Chinese nationalism due to ideas of a unified territory. Despite the decrease in their number, people with Chinese nationalism are more strongly mobilised than others (Hao 2010, 49, 64-65). Secondly, the KMT’s establishment of links with China since 2005 has restrengthened the pro-China political force. After losing the presidential election in 2004, the chairman of the KMT, Lien Chan, abandoned their previously separatist approach and openly established channels with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in forms of forums and visits based on their common anti-independence position and increased cross-Strait economic ties (Hu, Wang and Wu 2012, 30-31) (Xinhua News Agency 2005). When the most organised party in Taiwan, the KMT (Mattlin 2011, 122-123), chose to cooperate with China, the space for any further development of Taiwanese nationalism became limited, especially after the KMT’s return to power in 2008. Thirdly, economic
interests, such as free trade with China, gradually replaced Chinese nationalism as the main purpose of pro-China policies, as evidenced in the debate over the ECFA (S. S. Lin 2013, 36).

Facing two such mutually exclusive nationalisms, people with weak or non-preferences usually choose to stay with the status quo, or to care only about issues such as the economy and integrity, due to concerns about potential negative outcomes from both sides. For Taiwanese nationalism, Beijing’s threat of force or other economic sanctions signifies a direct threat on their lives and wealth. As far as Chinese nationalism is concerned, the outcome of Taiwan becoming a province of the PRC is tantamount to losing the freedom and liberty obtained during democratisation. For both the pro-Taiwan and the pro-China political forces, therefore, maintaining the status quo is a convenient approach that attracts more support, especially during elections (Shen and Wu 2008, 120-121). Through his skillful promotion of the concept of the status quo and the setting for attractive economic goals, Ma won the election in 2008 (Copper 2013, 67-69). Afterwards, the KMT administration resumed its comprehensive sinicisation program, using both internal and external policies. For example, the use of rhetoric for foreign guests changed from “coming to Taiwan” to “coming to China.” Taipei also accepted Beijing’s “1992 Consensus” recognising the “one China principle,” whereby it put more Chinese elements into public education curricula and into cultural policies. After Ma’s victory for a further term in 2012, the pro-China momentum that had built up pushed the DPP to move its position further toward China by removing its pro-independence stance (C. R. Hughes 2014, 122-131) (Wu, Taiwan: Another Step Towards Integration? 2014). In other words, Taiwanese Nationalism has become somewhat marginalised in the political arena. Although the polls continuously show an increasing proportion of Taiwanese identity in the population (Hsu 2014, 97-99), the KMT and its pro-China policies have continued to win elections until one local government elections in 2014.

The main battlefield for the contest of the two national identities is the mass media, which can have a large effect on elections and government institutes. During the authoritarian period, both printed and electronic mass media were highly regulated by the ROC regime. The removal of bans on newspapers and television channels in the 1990s presented platforms for both national identities to attract and consolidate supporters. As a result of newspaper readership in the 1990s and 2000s, the Chinese nationalism diminished, leaving Taiwanese nationalism and more neutral ones to take the lead in the market. Regarding electronic media, as both the KMT and the DPP attempted to influence television stations, two new camps emerged, the pro-KMT and the pro-DPP. Since the late 2000s, Beijing, with its superior financial resources and business opportunities, has exerted direct and indirect influences on certain printed and electronic media in Taiwan (Hsu 2014, 100, 110, 140-142, 154-155). In 2014, a Chinese official envoy met the chief editors of almost all mass media outlets in Taiwan and requested that they promote positive images of China to people in Taiwan (A. Hsiao 2014). Cyber space, on the other hand, with less interest in profit, is not as
influenced by China’s economic efforts and in fact displays a considerable preference for Taiwanese nationalism (Hsu 2014, 224).

Ideology could present alternative ideas of state for Taiwan but several available ideological styles do not appear to work well for a variety of reasons. Based on socialism and other political philosophies, the philosophy of the “Three Principles of the People” created by the founder of the KMT, Sun Yat-Sen, are composed of three parts: nationalism, democracy and welfare (Hao 2010, 87-89). This ideology, along with sinicisation, was highly promoted by the ROC regime in order to counter the PRC’s communist ideology. As both the ROC and the PRC promoted Chinese nationalism, Chinese identity could be a “backdoor” for the latter to gain influence over the former. Thus, the “Three Principles of the People” was applied to counter the PRC’s Communism, and the philosophy was also somehow in evidence as an idea of state during the authoritarian period (Bullard 1997, 45-54, 77). However, the “Three Principles of the People” philosophy was unsuitable for variety of reasons in Taiwan and failed to be executed sufficiently to have any great impact. It was developed to counteract China’s modernisation in the early 20th Century, thus aimed at to some degree at Chinese nationalism, but without providing solutions to the problem of Taiwan. On an economic level, the socialist oriented framework in the “Three Principles of the People” was not fulfilled in Taiwan either. Although the ROC regime developed state capitalism from the 1950s on, according to Sun’s guidelines, the actual economic growth from the beginning of the 1960s was dependent on private companies and the global market. Additionally, as the philosophy was conceived before industrialisation, it failed to fit Taiwan as a new industrial economy (Y.-S. Sun 1981, 99-136) (Bergere 1998, 388-389) (Root 1996, 33-34) (Howe 2001, 50, 53) (Kuo and Myers 2012, 96-97).

On a political level, the democratic system is the most salient difference between the philosophy and the Communism. However, from 1948 to 1991, the ROC constitution was subject to major modifications to the emergency provisions, legalising the governance of martial law and consequently, placing restrictions on the practice of certain aspects of democracy and liberty (Jacobs 2005, 34-36) (Chiang and Hwang 2008, 61). Furthermore, the philosophy was heavily promoted by the KMT administrations, thus forming a strong party “line” (Y. S. Wang 1990, 198-199) that was unlikely to be politically accepted to other parties or non-KMT voters.

Democracy, a loose concept, containing a variety of perspectives, may present a solution for Taiwan to develop an idea of state, but it does not fully serve the role of idea of state either. Gradually established through the 1990s, the democratic system provided a new form of legitimacy for the ROC regime as well as a moral high ground for Taiwan, from which to counter threats from authoritarian China (Tan, Walker and Yu 2002, 46). Popular and vocal participation in political campaigns and other activities present democracy as having the potential to be an idea of state (Chuang 2013, 71-87), but difficulties arise from the splits that exist in national identities. For the mutually exclusive ideas of state, Taiwan versus
China, democracy merely provides a platform for both sides to compete for popular acceptance, rather than providing a solution to consolidate them. Undeniably, the democratic mechanism may lower the intensity of competition between opposing forces from armed conflicts or a civil war to election campaigns and debates, but such confrontation in a democratic forum can be endless (Mattlin 2011, 241-242). Before a decisive settlement might occur, it is not democracy alone that would serve as a firm idea of state.

Generally, without the existence of a robust idea of state, Taiwan’s vulnerability to China’s influence endows the latter with ample opportunity to move forward with unification or annexation in a peaceful manner. That will be elaborated on the later paragraphs.

Physical Bases

The physical base of Taiwan is comprised of territory and population, the former consisting of two facets, location and terrain. Taiwan’s location makes it unable to escape from the balance of power between the US, China, and possibly Japan. Located between Okinawa and Luzon, Taiwan served, at least in the initial decades of the Cold War, as an important part of the First Island Chain that contained China (Iriye 1963, 51-52). Furthermore, the Taiwan Strait forms a choke point in the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) between northern and southern China, as well as between northeast and southeast Asia. Moreover, the deep Pacific Ocean off Taiwan’s eastern coast presents relatively safe access for Chinese nuclear ballistic submarines (SSBNs) and provides less chance of being intercepted (Howarth 2006, 38-40). The width of the Taiwan Strait makes it a difficult barrier for the PLA to invade amphibiously, but it is not wide enough for Taiwan to escape the sphere of influence of China’s anti-access and area denial (A2AD) strategy. As a result, Beijing would like to control this island, in particular on the basis such strategic concerns. Its rising A2AD capability could provide a considerable means of blocking and isolating the island, in the case that it were not able to take the island quickly (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2014, 30-32). It may be possible for Taiwan to fend off a Chinese invasion, but severe damage and suffering from such warfare would be unavoidable. Considering the US military redeployment in Guam, Australia and other locations where are farer from China (Pearlman 2011), Taiwan’s resolve to defend independently would be critical for its survival in front of China because the US would be more hesitated to intervene.

Taiwan’s terrain gives some hope for defending itself from a Chinese attack. Although its small area of 36,000 square kilometres is very mountainous and forces the majority of its 23 million inhabitants to live in crowded environments, the weather, agricultural infrastructure and technology mean that the island has long-term self-sustainability for food and water (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010). This of course means that a blockade of the basic needs may not work in a short-term. In addition, the large mountainous areas and urbanised plains
provide their defence forces with plenty of well-hidden locations to counter enemy’s strikes. They also mean risky landing operations for an invader and potential guerrilla warfare. Some natural resources, however, are lacking, such as energy and metal, thus leaving Taiwan still vulnerable to blockade (Bureau of Energy, Ministry of Economic Affairs 2014). In addition, an invader could gain the advantage by dividing the island into several parts by cutting the fragile transportation lines through the country’s rugged terrain (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010).

The population in Taiwan provides both strength and weakness for its survival. The 23 million people allow the ROC regime to impose compulsory military service on the male citizens and maintain a considerable troop reserve (IISS 2014, 280). However, the cultural and values splits between the native Formosans and the Chinese newcomers of 1949, cause its own problems in the population. Such semi-ethnic divisions were suppressed during the authoritarian period, but remerged as issues, especially during election campaigns (Shen and Wu 2008, 118-119). In addition, the decreasing birth rate and extended life expectancy resulted in an aging population. In the long-term, a lack of labour force, including that needed for military manpower, along with the increasing financial burden of medical and nursing costs for the elderly would pose a multilateral challenge to Taiwan’s security concerns (Jennings 2011).

The Institutions of the state

As for as the general performance of the ROC regime goes, it has had success in displaying sufficient coercive power, carrying out modernisation, and maintaining considerable capability of the armed forces, but Taiwan has been held back by the lack of ideas of state emanating from the ROC regime and flowing on to governmental institutes, which have failed to develop these adequately to assure Taiwan’s survival.

Since 1945, overall, the ROC regime has displayed sufficient coercive power. Although some conflicts occurred between the ROC regime and native Formosans in its initial phase of governance, the strong internal security network established in the early 1950s under martial law eradicated any possible resistance, and ensured limited resistance to governmental policies. Despite facing some challenges, such resistance has not been serious enough to undermine the government’s coercive power. From the late 1970s to the 1990s, various protests for democratisation and liberty were aimed at reform rather than revolution (Hsiao 2012, 43-48). After 2008, several large-scale protests, such as the

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2 According to the official regulation: “Oil refinery operators and importers are required to maintain an oil security stockpile of no less than sixty days of supply. The supply amount will be based on the average domestic sales and private consumption of the past twelve months. The security stockpile of LPG must amount to no less than twenty-five days of supply. The supply amount will be based on the average domestic sales and private consumption of the past twelve months. The aforesaid security stockpile, oil refinery’s total storage quantity must be no less than 50,000 kiloliters, and no less than 10,000 kiloliters for oil importers.”
Sunflower Movement, occurred, but they too had goals of governmental reform, and did not overly disrupt, or threaten the ROC regime’s governance (Ho 2014, 104-108).

In addition to maintaining control, the ROC regime has also developed certain capabilities for modernisation. It inherited a set of comprehensive infrastructure during the period of the Japanese government, was supported by US aid from 1951 to 1965, and then obtained foreign loans (Ravenholt 1952, 615-616) (Lumley 1976, 89-91), all contributing to the fact that the Taipei authority has enjoyed better conditions to promote modernisation than other southern states. Simultaneously, American advisors and the increasing education level of its people provided the ROC regime with a good knowledge base and the facility to develop further skills during the Cold War era (Kuo and Myers 2012, 115-117). Despite some errors, Taipei was further able to display its capability to take initiatives to launch major new policies, such as its ten major construction projects of the 1970s and subsequent major projects (Taylor 2000, 313-314). Since the democratisation in the early 1990s, all administrations, even the DPP minority, are able to maintain both governance and efficiency at an acceptable level (The IMD World Competitiveness Center 2014, 12).

Besides the civil sector, the ROC regime has also built up fair-sized armed forces with a capability that certainly exceeds many southern states. In the first two decades of the Cold War, Chiang Kai-shek had hopes of retaking the “mainland” in order to overcome the shame of losing the civil war. In this situation, along with the assistance of US aid, the ROC regime undertook a rapid and massive modernisation of its armed forces. Although they did not really launch any substantial offence toward the PRC, due to Washington’s constraints on action and supply, their capability was relatively advanced and strong (Clough 1978, 103-105). For example, the first air-to-air missile combat record in the world was created by the ROC Air Force (ROCAF) pilots during the Quemoy Crisis of 1958 (Zhang 2003, 281). Influenced by the Nixon Doctrine in the late 1960s and the international isolation it had experienced since the 1970s, the ROC regime began to develop an indigenous defence industry in order to increase self-reliance (Nolan 1986, 22-23). In its heydays of the 1980s, Taiwan was able to design and manufacture jet fighters, build frigates and produce main battle tanks under foreign authorisation (Tucker 2009, 150, 152). Taiwan was also able to gain access to foreign arms supplies in the 1990s during the post-Cold War era, when many Western countries placed a military boycott on China due to the Tiananmen Massacre (Archick, Grimmett and Kan 2005, 1). In response to Beijing’s military modernisation, Taipei became one of the top arms recipients in the world in the late 1990s (SIPRI 2014). During the DPP administration, due to political concerns, the opposition parties, mainly the KMT, rejected or delayed several major projects of arms procurement, for example for submarines in the late 2000s (Chase 2008, 703-704, 710-721). When the KMT regained the power in 2008, other issues, particularly cross-Strait integration, meant that defence was passed over, and only a few new projects were adopted. Furthermore, the failure to move from conscription to all voluntary forces resulted in further downsizing of the armed forces. In addition, continuous cases of Chinese espionage revealed poor internal management and
a decreasing level of loyalty. Compared with the rapid build-ups of the PLA, Taiwan has fallen into an inferior position to China (A. T. Tan 2014, 51-53).

In addition to weakening armed forces, the ROC regime suffers from the obvious flaw that its organisation based on Chinese structures insists on displaying Chinese authenticity. In order to remain the legitimacy of representing China, both President Chiangs generally maintained original structures for the ROC regime, which they brought over from China, where a central government retained control over provincial levels of government despite the much-decreased size of the territory (Clough 1978, 35-36). This was significantly modified during the 1990s in order to increase administrative efficiency and to provide a more suitable structure for a small state, but the official titles, main parts of the constitution and many other Chinese features, which might have provoked the PRC and domestic pro-China political forces, remained untouched (Rigger 2011, 37-38, 43-44, 48). This lack of clarity means that the relations between the ROC and the PRC are not fully international, legally speaking, and it leaves political leaders a lot of room for interpretation. For example, in 1999 President Lee Teng-hui claimed that the cross-Strait situation was a “special state to state” relationship (Roy 2003, 221-222), but President Ma Ying-jeou redefined it in 2008 as a “special non state to state” relationship (Ko 2008). Since Taiwan has not clarified its relationship with China, the latter treats the relations with the former as domestic issues to deny the legitimacy of external intervention by other powers.

Finally, the democratic system in Taiwan is somewhat destructive of its own survival and vulnerable to the multiple challenges China presents. As one major domestic political force has expressed their pro-China leanings, whether for ethnic or economic purposes, China is keen to promote such an “ally” and uses a variety of direct and indirect means to do so. Firstly, strong commercial ties allow Beijing to broadcast the economic benefits of cross-Strait integration at the cost of sacrificing the statehood of the ROC regime and its de facto independence. The original targeted groups were Taiwanese business and other professional people working in China, but Chinese influence has extend to other sectors in Taiwan to meets expectations of Chinese investment and visitors. For instance, the tourism industry in Taiwan expected Chinese tourists to provide a boost to their business, with similar hopes from many local universities who see the increase in numbers of arriving Chinese students as a means of making up for decreasing local enrolments caused by the low birth rate (Chu 2014, 167-168). Secondly, the common language and cultural context of the two cross-Strait countries provides further leverage for China to deliver simple and concise propaganda on economic interest on the majority of voters in Taiwan who predominantly use Mandarin as their first language.

The KMT’s return to power from 2008 can be viewed as a successful case that illustrates China’s exploitation of Taiwan’s elections to pursue its own goals. Although the KMT/CCP channel, between a domestic group and the external threat, could be indeed dangerous for Taiwan for facilitating back-channel negotiations (Buzan 2007, 87), the links set up
proceeded smoothly without any substantial disruption from the DPP administration. Through a series of inter-party forums on trade and economy, both sides developed further cooperative and corporate links (Hu, Wang and Wu 2012, 30-31). Subsequently, in both campaigns for the congressional and presidential elections in 2008, the KMT emphasised how promising economic objectives could be condensed into the simple number of 633, standing for 6% GDP growth rate, 3% unemployment rate, and 30000 US dollars as the average annual income, but only if policies open up to China are realised (Copper 2013, 43-44, 67-68). Following the overall victories of the KMT, there has been a series of open policies implemented open up further channels for Chinese to visit and reside in Taiwan and to provide further scope for Chinese investment in various sectors. Additionally, in order to pacify any cross-Strait tensions, the scale of military modernisation was reduced, as was the size of the armed forces, whilst at the same time an increase in the number of cases of Chinese espionage. By means of their comprehensive approach, Beijing has acquired a variety of additional advantages and means of leverages over Taipei. For example, it was expected that the DPP would resist such a trend opposes independence, but its leaders demonstrated a major shift in their attitude (Gang 2013, 75-76). Although almost none of Ma’s economic goals were achieved between 2008 and 2012, the KMT retained power in the major elections in 2012 on a platform of fear which promoted as their one hope for economic benefits, and thus Taiwan would need to appease China in this regard or suffer further economic setbacks (Copper 2013, 160-175). The KMT’s loss in the latest 2014 local government elections may suggest that this approach has been rejected by the people in Taiwan. However, since China was careful not to make any threats during the campaign, a platform combining economic interests with those of Chinese nationalist voters may still work in the future, especially if China continues to gain in economic influence in Taiwan through the cross-Strait integration process as it has in the past six years (Wu 2014). Moreover, China can now approach other parties, such as the DPP, rather than the KMT, as the former demonstrates a shifting attitude away from independence thus implying further potential for cooperation with China.

The Synthetic View of Taiwan’s Three Elements of Security

The ROC regime in Taiwan has indeed continued to survive predominantly based on the efforts of its government institutions and physical base, but conflicting ideas of state have created a serious element of vulnerability in the era of democratisation, a period in which a reduction in the role of the institutes is occurring. A historical look at the role of the institutes will elucidate the matter further. The ROC regime was fortunate in the early days to move across the Taiwan Strait, as the PLA was forced to delay until the summer of 1950. This delay provided additional breathing space until US reintervention occurred, after the outbreak of the Korean War (Taylor 2000, 196, 200-202). If the ROC regime had moved to Hainan Island, the narrower and shallower Hainan Strait might not have served the same
function as a barrier (Clough 1978, 96-97) (Hainan Tourism Development Commission 2013). During the periods of Presidents Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo, government institutes and the KMT created a strong and forceful establishment by setting up elaborate networks of systems aimed at controlling and mobilising the people and all of the private sectors (Root 1996, 35-36). In addition, the continuous and stable growth of the economy and population during the period supplied the ROC armed forces with adequate funding and manpower (Cole 2006, 24). The ROC regime’s nation building efforts in Taiwan, based on the Chinese nationalism might not have been useful as a means of countering the PRC’s threats, but their emphasis on a strong intertwined system of institutes made up to a large degree for their lack of ideas of state. In addition, the KMT’s promotion of the “Three Principles of the People”, including its insistence on its difference from Communism, somehow supplemented the role of ideas of state at that time. However, in the 1970s the ROC regime’s narrow outlook based on rigid obsession with China led to a situation of international isolation which constrains Taiwan to this day and threatens its survival.

During the democratisation in the 1990s, when governmental institutes and physical bases were not as effective as they had been previously, problems concerning weak ideas of state gradually emerged. During President Lee Teng-hui’s term, in which he exerted substantial control over both the ROC regime and the KMT, government institutes were still able to compensate for inadequate ideas of state and support national defence during the missile crisis of 1995 and 1996 (Roy 2003, 185-188, 196-202). However, this crisis proved that the Strait is not sufficient defence to prevent modern military threats from the PLA. Ideologically, the emerging conflict and confrontation between the two mutually exclusive national identities in Taiwan preclude the consolidation of a common nation which is able to counter the challengers China presents. It is evident that neither the “Three Principles of the People” nor democracy itself can build a robust idea of state. In addition, from the late 1980s on, Taiwan’s increasing investment in China further exposed the lack of ideas of state. On the one hand, business people did not deem it improper to increase commercial ties with the country that has demonstrated clear intentions of annexation (Kagan 2007, 128-130); on the other hand, despite regulations constraining investment in China and the provision of alternatives for investment, such as the “Southward Policy,” the weakening role of the institutes was unable to repeat the strict controls it had implemented in the authoritarian period (Root 1996, 38-40) (Cheng 2005, 97, 103). In other words, as governmental institutes can be observed to lack a broad area of influence in the democratic era, no idea of state has been able to supplement the vacuum created.

The minority DPP administration further weakened the role of the institutes and exposed more of the problems emanating from weak ideas of state. From 2000 to 2008, the government institutes and the powerful KMT were controlled by opposing political forces. Although the administration attempted to promote the Taiwanese nation and democracy as

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3 The strait is on average 30 km (19 mi) wide with a maximum water depth of approximately 120 m (390 ft). The narrowest part of the Taiwan Strait is 120 km and the depth is about 180 to 200 m.
ideas of state, it would have been unlikely, in the time-frame of a few years, to have had sufficient effect to form a firm consensus, particularly in the highly confrontational environment of the time (Hao 2010, 62-66) (Chase 2009, 275). Moreover, the KMT-CCP channel emerging since 2005 might said to have exacerbated conflict between the two ideas of state. As a result, China was able to use this vulnerability in Taiwan through the democratic mechanism. In terms of government institutions, the minority government in place meant that passing the defence budget would require a consensus on national defence between the ruling and opposition parties. Instead it became a major target for domestic political struggles.

By the same token, Taipei could not stop the strengthening of cross-Strait economic ties. As a result of increasing trade, investment and other commercial ties across the Strait, Taiwan eventually came to depend unilaterally on China (Lai 2012, 43). The economic ties across the Strait became so strong that a Chinese economist openly likened Taiwan’s economic dependence on China to “diabetes” (Chase 2009, 272) (The Liberty Times Editorial 2006). It is evidenced by the fact that by 2003 China had become Taiwan’s largest trading partner and export market (Bureau of Foreign Trade 2014). Following its economic influence, China’s next sphere of influence is in the cultural domain. As with the economy, China’s huge population of Mandarin speakers presents a lure for lucrative employment Taiwanese entertainers. Shaping such huge audience for the entertainers also give Beijing leverage to control their access to the market, and thus their behaviour. For instance, singer Chang Hui-Mei was banned from China for singing the national anthem of the ROC regime at the inauguration of President Chen Shui-Bian (Nickson 2000).

Since 2008, the KMT regained control over the administrative and legislative systems of the ROC regime, thus signifying a marked lull of the competition between the pro-Taiwan and pro-China political forces, and the respective nationalisms behind them. Taiwanese Nationalism has gradually been marginalised in government policies, and the DPP has also been at pains to hide its independent leanings. Government institutes have undergone a shift towards serving integration into China, rather than maintaining Taiwan’s de facto independence or the ROC regime’s statehood. Assisted by the opening up of policy, economic and cultural ties across the Strait have been expanding and becoming institutionalised. Beijing and Taipei signed agreements to open markets in Taiwan to accommodate Chinese investment and visitors, including a raft of matters, such as infrastructure, communication and other sectors with strategic values (Associated Press 2012). According to the official statistics, Chinese investment has not reached dominance in Taiwan, but a focus on transportation has been demonstrated (Department of Statistics, Ministry of Economic Affairs 2014). Furthermore, in 2014, China became Taiwan’s largest import source (Bureau of Foreign Trade 2014).

With such a major change in place, the strategic value of the Taiwan Strait has been reduced from a defence perspective, along with the shrinking capacity and capability of the ROC
armed forces. The influx of more than three million Chinese tourists, professionals and business people, however, in 2014, provide plenty of opportunities for Chinese spies and even troops to move in (National Immigration Agency 2014). The upcoming Free Economic Pilot Zone (FEPZ) will broaden the access to Taiwan for Chinese people and goods (Engbarth 2014). Through marriage, at least 321,000 Chinese spouses and the increasing number of their children living in Taiwan will have an effect on the politics as well as the local demographic structure (National Immigration Agency 2014) (Chen and Luo 2014, 201-203).

In the cultural sphere, as with the economy, a growing influx of Chinese films and television programs into Taiwan is facilitated by the common language and the existing familiarity with Chinese culture which was consolidated by the previously adopted nation building of sinicisation. By the 2010s, several television channels in Taiwan are showing many Chinese dramas (Dou 2013), and the only cinema festival, the Golden Horse Award, has been deluged with Chinese films (Coonan 2014). China’s many cheap translation services have quickly surpassed their Taiwanese counterparts and thus have potential to dominate the interpretation of foreign culture in Taiwan. Since most Taiwanese are not fluent in non-Mandarin languages, their life could be thus gradually dominated by information from Chinese sources (Chen and Hsu 2013).

Despite its physical base and government institutes providing some advantages for Taiwan’s survival, a form of Chinese nationalism and the resulting cross-Strait economic ties can be seen to have favoured China’s launching of what might be called a “non-violent offensive” aimed at securing a “cooperative” administration in Taipei. Despite the KMT’s considerable defeat in the 2014 local elections, the central institutes of the ROC regime are still headed by pro-China politicians, and the pursuit of further efforts for cross-Strait integration, such as the FEPZ and other political or peace agreements, might provide a final settlement on the issue of annexation or unification. Such policies could either ensure an irreversible situation in which Beijing gains access to a comprehensive policy tool box to dominate Taiwan, in case of a non-KMT administration, or could settle the legal status of Taiwan once and for all, from de facto independence to autonomy or to the status of a province of China. In summary, despite considerable achievements with its economy and democracy, Taiwan has not escaped from its strategic desperation but has taken a turn for the worse for lack of a powerful idea of state and considerable decay in the institutional expression and the physical bases.

Conclusion

The case of Taiwan presents lessons for southern states, especially the ones with complicated historical and ethnic links with their neighbouring countries. Firstly, a clear and popularly accepted idea of state is a premise for a state’s survival. Although global competition makes various areas of development important for most southern states,
especially in regard to economic performance, the lessons from Taiwan clearly demonstrate that achievements in these areas may be undermined when ideas of state are lacking or weak. As a liberal economic approach is tantamount to having an open market, a variety of challenges arise for such states in the areas in economy, culture and politics, challenges which may be prove too much if firm ideas of state are lacking. If an enemy, whether it is a state or a non-state actor, exploits conflicting or lacking idea of state, the situation can be aggravated further. Although the frequency of conventional warfare between states has been diminished worldwide, the situation in Taiwan demonstrates that peaceful offensive means can be equally or even more dangerous.

Secondly, when choosing such ideas of state, it is important to develop nation building strategies that are in accord with prevailing realities and geostrategic circumstances. Despite comprehensive arrangements and efforts to the contrary, the ROC regime’s nation building policy of sinicisation left it unnecessarily open and vulnerable to the PRC from the very start. If Taipei had chosen a more distinct approach from Beijing’s for its nation building, the latter would not find it so easy to conduct non-violent offensives. For example, Singapore has demonstrated that a multilingual society, which includes Mandarin, English and others, can coexist with Chinese culture. The mastering of other languages, beyond Mandarin alone, provides advantages for its people of a broader approach to commerce, education and entertainment. For other states, the decisions made in the process of selecting appropriate approaches or guidelines for nation building are critical and can prevent subsequent trouble in the form of domestic disputes or exploitation by external forces.

Thirdly, a southern state should always be alert to foreign influences. Unlike Taiwan’s situation with its abnormal or incomplete statehood and inadequate nation building, most southern countries, as fully sovereign states, are able to prepare better for threats of foreign intervention. Undeniably, it is unlikely that southern states would shut down their borders as they may have done prior to globalisation, but they still have at their disposal various countermeasures such as administrative measures or the broadening of foreign investment sources, in order to “dilute” the influence of any one specific country.

It may be premature to conclude that Taiwan has completely lost its all ability to survive as a sovereign state. However, its experience of deterioration in the three elements of security examined here, ideas of state, the institutional expression of the state, and the physical base of the state, present a reminder for the other southern states that their survival should not be taken for granted, despite the prevailing relatively peaceful international environment, and that strong ideas of state, in particular, form a key means to retaining sovereignty.
Bibliography


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