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ASSESSING THE PRESIDENCY OF MA YING-JIU IN TAIWAN

HOPEFUL BEGINNING, HOPELESS END?

Edited by
André Beckershoff and Gunter Schubert



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Hopeful Beginning, Hopeless End?

Edited by
**André Beckershoff
and Gunter Schubert**

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Public opinion on the cross-Strait dilemma during the Ma Ying-jiu era

Chen Chih-Jou Jay

Introduction

This chapter explores the dilemma facing the Taiwanese people of how to balance their claim to national sovereignty and their economic interests in view of China's continuing commitment to using cross-Strait relations to incorporate Taiwan into its national territory. Although the eight years of the Ma Ying-jiu administration (2008–2016) saw the de-escalation of tensions in cross-Strait political relations, a sharp rise in economic and trade activities, and the warming of social interactions, the most decisive obstacle to negotiations on cross-Strait affairs was China's assertion of sole sovereignty over Taiwan. For Taiwan, finding a satisfactory balance between economic interests and national sovereignty in cross-Strait relations is a complex task. China is now Taiwan's most important trading partner – Taiwan's largest export destination and largest source of imports – and accounts for over 30 percent of Taiwan's total trade volume. During the talks on economic and social issues between the two sides, Taiwan has come under persistent pressure to compromise its national sovereignty.

On the international stage, for example, Taiwan cannot participate as a 'normal' country in its own right; Taiwan can only take part in international activities (for example, in APEC, the WHO, the Olympic Games and other international sporting events) as a specially designated region under the name of 'Chinese Taipei'. The Taiwanese people believe that Taiwan's institutionalized national sovereignty has been compromised by China because in order to participate in international affairs such as the WTO or the WHO, or to conduct economic and trade exchanges with China, Taiwan has no choice but to accept this arrangement. The Taiwanese people feel that this degrades Taiwan's national sovereignty, but they regard it as a sacrifice that they have to make in order to safeguard their economic survival and national development.

Essentially, the Taiwanese are concerned that Taiwan is trapped in a difficult situation in which the strengthening of cross-Strait economic relations could lead to stronger political ties between Taiwan and China and could even pave the way for Taiwan's political assimilation by China (Wu and Liao 2015). For the Taiwanese people, the dilemma of how to balance their economic interests and their

national sovereignty is not expected to be resolved in the foreseeable future, and Taiwanese attitudes towards this dilemma naturally influence the policies and strategies of the governments on both sides of the strait. This chapter will examine the attitudes of the Taiwanese people toward this dilemma as well as underlying factors that influence the formation of these attitudes.

When Ma Ying-jiu was elected president in 2008 and the KMT (Kuomintang) was once again at the helm of the government, the eight-year deadlock in cross-Strait talks that had endured during the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government era came to an end. From June 2008 up until the end of 2015, the two sides held 11 high-level talks and signed 23 agreements, including the Agreement Concerning Mainland Tourists Traveling to Taiwan, the cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), and the cross-Strait Investment Protection Agreement (Mainland Affairs Council 2016). Since cross-Strait agreements touch upon Taiwan's economic interests and national sovereignty, prior to each meeting the two sides held preparatory consultations, where complex discussions took place and the venues, issues to be discussed, and agenda of the meetings were confirmed. With regard to the setting and form of the consultations, the Taiwanese side attached great importance to equal status, autonomy, and subjectivity, noting that Taiwan would not be regarded as a province of China or be degraded, since this would cause 'symbolic damage' to Taiwan's national sovereignty.

How are cross-Strait dialogue and consultations related to issues of national sovereignty? From China's point of view, neither the idea of Taiwan sovereignty, nor the idea of the Republic of China's sovereignty is acceptable. Consequently, neither of the sides involved in cross-Strait affairs recognize the national sovereignty of the other. They have to engage via Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS). After Ma Ying-jiu took office in 2008, the two associations resumed negotiations for the two sides under the 1992 Consensus.¹ However, the two sides were only able to deal with routine issues, and were still unable to reach a consensus on more difficult political questions, such as regional economic cooperation and international diplomacy, since these questions touched upon the crucial issue of national sovereignty. With regard to the issue of sovereignty, great significance was attributed to even such an apparently minor issue as mutual appellation. For example, in October 2013, during the APEC summit held in Bali, Indonesia, the government officials in charge of cross-Strait affairs in Taiwan and China met in an informal setting for the first time. Wang Yu-chi, Minister of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, and Zhang Zhijun, Director of China's Taiwan Affairs Office, talked for six minutes, addressing each other as 'Minister', and 'Director'. Soon afterwards, President Ma Ying-jiu drew attention to the fact that Wang and Zhang had addressed each other by their official titles, describing their exchange as a tangible manifestation of the two sides' 'mutual non-denial of governmental power' (also 'mutual non-denial'), and as a good start for the normalization of official cross-Strait interactions. On 11 February 2014, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council and China's Taiwan Affairs Office held their first high-level, government-to-government meeting in Nanjing, addressing each other by their official titles of

Minister and Director in a formal setting. Both Taiwan's ruling and opposition parties expressed their approval; they believed that this display of cross-Strait interaction showed the equal status of the two official bodies and that this form of etiquette was indicative of respect for and recognition of Taiwan's national sovereignty. Quite clearly, in cross-Strait interactions, national sovereignty is a sensitive and important issue for the governments and people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

For a long time, the DDP as well as sections of the media and the public called into question whether the Ma government was trading national sovereignty for economic interests while failing to reap the economic benefits of cross-Strait exchanges. Since the rapprochement between the two sides, however, the people of Taiwan continued to experience China's hostility and acts of suppression directed towards Taiwan's national sovereignty, which constricted the essential space required for Taiwan's international development. On the other hand, the KMT government claimed in its defense that the two sides, through communication and consultative mechanisms, had effectively safeguarded the Taiwanese people's livelihood and well-being as well as their rights and interests, maintained peace in the Taiwan Strait, and enlarged the space for Taiwan's overall economic development.

The Sunflower Movement of March 2014 had its roots in the student protests and the general public opposition in Taiwan to the legislative process for the signing of the cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA). The students were demanding transparency from the government in the review of the CSSTA between Taiwan and China. In their view, the CSSTA would benefit only a minority—wealthy business owners—while hurting the majority of small domestic entrepreneurs and wage earners. They therefore issued demands to 'pass legislation first, and then examine', meaning that the legislature should first pass the Regulations on the Supervision of cross-Strait Agreements and then examine the CSSTA in the context of these regulations (Black Island National Youth Front 2014). This significant wave of public protest clearly resulted from the fears that the deepening of cross-Strait economic integration would turn out to be a 'red Trojan horse' sent in by Beijing to boost big business and, ultimately, compromise Taiwan's claim to sovereignty (see, for example, Jang 2013; Jang et al. 2014).

The historic meeting of Ma Ying-jiu and Xi Jinping in November 2015 also produced mixed responses in Taiwanese civil society and deepened the general apprehension over compromising Taiwan's sovereignty. While a majority of people basically supported the meeting between the leaders of the two sides, relatively fewer expressed approval of Ma's performance at the Ma-Xi summit. The approval rating of President Ma's performance there was low because the Taiwanese felt that he had not fulfilled his responsibility with regard to safeguarding Taiwan's national sovereignty. A variety of different polls showed that the number of people who agreed with the statement that Ma Ying-jiu had 'safeguarded Taiwan's sovereignty' (around 30–33 percent) was well below the number of people who disagreed with this statement (46–53 percent) (Lin 2015).

Obviously, economic interests and national sovereignty are the central issues in cross-Strait relations. This chapter uses data obtained from island-wide telephone

surveys to show how Taiwanese attitudes toward economic interests and national sovereignty changed during Ma Ying-jiu's presidency. The study also explores pertinent factors that affected these attitudes. In addition to personal characteristics (such as gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity), party identification and Taiwanese nationalist sentiments are important explanatory variables. Other factors include the Taiwanese people's evaluation of China's government and economy, their assessment of the impact of cross-Strait economic integration on Taiwan's economy and society, as well as their assessment of the impact of cross-Strait economic interaction on the Taiwanese people's personal economic situation. All these factors are likely to affect how the Taiwanese people choose between economic interests and national sovereignty in the course of cross-Strait interactions.

Cohort effect, self-interest, and nationalist sentiment

This section will look at three mechanisms – cohort effect, self-interest, and nationalist sentiment – in accounting for Taiwanese attitudes toward economic interests and national sovereignty in cross-Strait negotiations. The cohort effect implies the existence of a generational aspect in age differences in political participation and attitudes. Generations are the carriers of changing experiences and social conditions. The 2014 Sunflower Movement witnessed a new buzzword, 'natural independence', emerging in media coverage. The term recognized that the formation of national identity among Taiwanese youth differed from that of the older generation. In contrast to older generations who had formed their own ideas of Taiwan's independence, if they had any, after an intellectual struggle against the indoctrination of Chinese identity imposed by the KMT government, the younger generation had grown up in a society in which Taiwanese independence had become a mainstream value, which made them 'naturally independent'. They do not have any recollection of authoritarian rule, nor are they burdened with the older generations' memories of the Chinese civil war, nor do they have any sentimental nationalist feelings about China. Their experiences of growing up are based on the values of Taiwan's democratization and a belief in autonomy and self-determination. Their Taiwanese identity transcends ethnic group boundaries and party affiliations.

The generation of 'natural independence', particularly since the 2014 Sunflower Student Movement, exemplifies the cohort effect in the formation of political attitudes and political participation in which differences between generations can be attributed to the social and political circumstances experienced by the members of an age cohort. The older generations have had experiences that cannot be shared by subsequent generations. For example, today's younger generations have not experienced the Chinese Civil War or totalitarian rule in 1950–1960s Taiwan because they were born after these events. A historical moment such as the Sunflower Student Movement can therefore have a disproportionate influence on members of the younger generation. Understanding what drives generational differences will strengthen our understanding of how political attitudes are being shaped in Taiwan.

Cross-national studies on political attitudes have found that in comparison to older generations, the younger generation has stronger democratic values and greater environmental awareness; they also care more about social issues and the welfare of others (Dalton 2008a, Smith et al. 2009). Nowadays, people are aware of the increasing options that are available to them to influence the government. In addition to the traditional, institutionalized means of electoral participation, new avenues of political action have opened up that primarily take the form of direct action, such as contacting government officials and taking part in protests. Young people in Western democracies are more likely to choose direct action methods such as protest, political consumerism, voluntarism, and Internet activism (Dalton 2008b). These findings correspond with worldwide observations on the so-called Millennial generation that attended university after 2000. With regard to the political attitudes of young people, research surveys in Taiwan in recent years have all come to the consistent conclusion that in comparison with middle-aged and elderly people, young people tend to lean more toward independence.² On the one hand, these young people have been experiencing Taiwan's democratization since the 1990s; on the other hand, since 2008, they have been experiencing political hostility and economic pressure from China, which they have found difficult to accept. In 2014, the KMT's handling of the CSSTA and the subsequent Sunflower Movement (especially the violent dispersal of protesters gathering in front of and inside the Executive Yuan) caused this wave of dissatisfaction to reach a new high. Accordingly, the cohort effect is likely to be reflected in the way that people lean toward choosing economic interests or national sovereignty in cross-Strait relations.

There are two competing views on the decision-making that influences people's choices with regard to economic interests or national sovereignty in cross-Strait relations: the rational choice formulation based on self-interest, and the theory of symbolic politics based on the affective meaning of an object. In the rational choice formulation based on self-interest, the assumption is that human decision-making is rational, that people make reasonable calculations of the costs and benefits of alternatives and decide accordingly. The idea of self-interest also places materialistic motives in a superordinate role. Political attitudes are guided by material self-interest, rather than through a process of collective socialization in a particular historical context (Sears and Funk 1991; Sears 2001).

Viewed in the context of the theory of rational choice, the priority choice should be the economic interests governing cross-Strait relations. Furthermore, the benefits and profit gained from cross-Strait economic integration may vary among different classes and social groups. For example, people with a high income and with employment security are potential beneficiaries of cross-Strait economic exchanges, and are therefore presumably more likely to give priority to economic interests. On the other hand, people with a low income, whose employment might not be secure due to cross-Strait integration, are presumably more likely to oppose giving priority to economic interests and show a preference for choosing national sovereignty.

The assessment of China's government and economy and whether Taiwan is seen as a beneficiary of cross-Strait exchanges are also factors in rational choice formulation. If China's state capacity is considered to be strong, if the evaluation of the Chinese government's performance is high, if the prospects for economic development are optimistic, and if Taiwan is believed to be able to profit from cross-Strait economic exchanges, all these factors – in accordance with a rational calculation of economic interests – make the economic benefits of cross-Strait exchanges seem even more palpable. In contrast, if the evaluation of the Chinese government's performance is low, if the Chinese economy is not seen to be steadily growing, and Taiwan's economy is not believed to be able to profit from cross-Strait exchanges, all these factors can have a negative effect on people's expectations of economic benefits resulting from cross-Strait relations.

On the other hand, the theory of symbolic politics holds that people acquire stable affective responses to particular symbols through a process of long-term socialization. These learned 'symbolic dispositions' include party identification, political ideology, and national identity. Research has shown that symbolic elements are frequently more important than calculated self-interest considerations when people consider whether to support a particular policy. For example, the symbols salient in the public arena may evoke a set of predispositions – nationalism, ethnocentrism, selflessness, or communitarian spirit, which then affect the public agenda and people's attitudes (Sears 2001). With regard to their choices in cross-Strait relations, people with a strong inclination toward Taiwanese independence would normally be more supportive of policies that put national sovereignty first.

Data and measurement

This study draws on data obtained during six rounds of telephone surveys conducted between 2010 and 2015 in Taiwan. These surveys, Social Image Survey and China Impact Survey, formed part of a long-term institutional research project that was conducted by the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica. The interviewees were Taiwanese citizens over the age of eighteen currently resident in Taiwan. Approximately 1,200 respondents participated in each survey. The margin of sampling error was ± 2.74 percent with a 95 percent level of confidence.

The major dependent variable in this study was the attitude toward economic interests and national sovereignty in cross-Strait relations. The survey question asked: 'In cross-Strait negotiations, what do you think is most important, Taiwan's economic interests or Taiwan's national sovereignty?'

In order to explain the differences in the choice between economic interest and national sovereignty in cross-Strait negotiations, I assessed the effects of the following variables: individual social positions, socioeconomic status, party identification, economic return from cross-Strait economic relations, Taiwanese nationalist sentiment, evaluation of the Chinese government and China's

economy, and the overall assessment of the impact of cross-Strait economic interaction on Taiwan's society and economy. These variables are explained below.

1. Individual social positions included cohort, gender, marital status, and ethnicity. Cohort was recoded according to age into three groups: youth (30 years old and below), middle age (31–50 years old), and old (50 years old and above). Marital status was categorized as 'not married' or 'married'. Ethnicity was determined by the father's native place of birth and could be Taiwanese Minnan, Taiwanese Hakka, or mainlander (there were very few Aboriginal respondents and they did not, therefore, present themselves as a category).
2. Socioeconomic status was indicated by education and income. Education was divided into three categories: junior high and below, high school, vocational college and above. Individual income was divided into fourteen income categories, from no income to over NT\$200,000 per month.
3. Party identification was ascertained according to the answers given to the survey questions. The answers were divided into five categories: blue (KMT and PFP), green (DPP and TSU), and middle voters (including those who chose candidates and not parties, those who supported both, and those who did not support any).
4. Economic return from cross-Strait economic relations was measured according to the answers to a question about personal job security in the face of the increasing cross-Strait economic interactions. The original question was: 'Are you worried that cross-Strait economic development will lead to your unemployment?' Answers were grouped under either 'feeling of job security' (don't worry) or 'feeling job insecurity' (worry). This indicator was aimed at assessing whether considerations of individual economic interests would affect attitudes toward cross-Strait issues.
5. Taiwanese nationalist sentiment was measured according to the responses to the question, 'Do you agree that Taiwan should declare independence if there were no threat of military repercussions upon such a declaration?' Answers were coded into 'yes' or 'no'. This differs to some extent from the commonly used survey question on national identity, which asks about independence, reunification, and maintaining the *status quo*. This question is aimed at measuring people's affective responses to Taiwanese independence, without consideration of the fact that China may attack Taiwan if Taiwan declares independence.
6. Evaluation of the Chinese government. One straightforward question was asked: 'How do you evaluate the Chinese government: good or not good?' Answers were grouped under either 'good' or 'not good'.
7. Evaluation of the Chinese economy. The original question was: 'Do you agree that the economy in China will maintain its rapid growth?' Answers were grouped under either 'agree' or 'disagree'.
8. Impact of cross-Strait relations on Taiwan's economy. The original question was: 'Do you think that current cross-Strait relations will have good or bad effects on the long-term development of Taiwan's economy?' Answers were grouped under either 'good' or 'bad'.

9. Impact of cross-Strait economic interaction on Taiwan's society. The original question was: 'Do you think that intensifying cross-Strait economic relations will increase or decrease Taiwan's wealth disparities?' Answers were grouped under either 'increase' or 'decrease'.

Changing views towards cross-Strait issues

The descriptive statistics of people's attitudes towards choosing between economic interests and national sovereignty in the period from 2010 to 2015 revealed their state of mind (Table 4.1). Overall, support for economic interests outweighed support for national sovereignty. In the three years of 2010, 2012, 2013, the percentages of those who chose economic interests as a more important factor than national sovereignty were 54 percent, 51 percent, and 55 percent respectively, while the percentages of those who chose national sovereignty were 32 percent, 35 percent, and 39 percent respectively. It seemed for a while, from 2010 to 2013, that the majority of the Taiwanese people were maintaining the position of choosing economic interests in preference to national sovereignty. However, this changed in 2015, when the percentage of those regarding economic interests as a more important factor dropped, for the first time, to 49 percent. Meanwhile, despite being in a minority, those who regarded national sovereignty as more important than economic interests saw their ranks increasing in number year by year, accounting for 32 percent, 35 percent, 39 percent, and 42 percent respectively in four consecutive years from 2010 to 2015. The gap between economic interests and national sovereignty increased from 22 percent in 2010, to 16 percent in 2011, and to 16 percent in 2013, but fell sharply to 7 percent in 2015, when

Table 4.1 Public opinion on choices between economic interests and national sovereignty in cross-Strait relations, 2010–2015

Year	2010	2012	2013	2015
N	1242	1211	1243	1277
	%	%	%	%
Economic interests	54	51	55	49
National sovereignty	32	35	39	42
Both	11	10	5	7
Neither is important	0	1	0	0

Sources: The data from 2010–2011 was drawn from the Social Image Survey; the data from 2013 and 2015 was drawn from China Impact Survey. Both surveys were administrated by the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica.

Note:

The survey question asked was: In cross-Strait negotiations, what do you think is most important, Taiwan's economic interests or Taiwan's national sovereignty?

49 percent supported economic interests and 42 percent national sovereignty. The distributions of these attitudes show that deep divisions existed among Taiwanese people on the issue of choosing between economic interests and national sovereignty in cross-Strait negotiations. The lack of an absolute majority for either side indicates that there is no consensus on this issue in Taiwan.

Data obtained from various public opinion polls showed a downward trend in party support for the KMT that continued until 2015, after a peak in 2008, when Ma Ying-jiu took office. At the same time, support for the DPP increased slightly and the number of middle voters increased significantly from 2012 to 2015. Although cross-Strait economic and social exchanges increased significantly during the tenure of the Ma government, this apparently did not increase Taiwanese support for reunification. On the contrary, it led to a continuing increase in the proportion of those in support of Taiwan's independence (Wu and Liao 2015). The survey results presented in this study offer confirmation of the same trend. Between 2011 and 2013, the support for pan-blue (KMT dominated) parties was between 34 percent and 38 percent (Table 4.2), but in 2015, probably as a result of the Sunflower Movement in spring 2014, the support for pan-blue parties dropped down to as low as 27 percent, 11 percent lower than the previous year. At the same time, support for the pan-green parties did not see a significant increase either. The erosion of pan-blue support led to an increase in the number of middle voters, from 38 percent in 2013 to 48 percent in 2015.

This study uses the Taiwanese people's nationalist sentiments as an indicator for the factor of political expressive preferences, to examine whether this factor influences the choice in attitude toward cross-Strait issues. When people were asked, 'Do you agree that Taiwan should declare independence if there was no threat of military repercussions upon its declaration of independence?' the number of people who agreed generally outweighed the number of those who disagreed. In the four-year period from 2011 to 2015, those who agreed accounted for 47 percent, 54 percent, 51 percent, and 53 percent respectively; those who disagreed accounted for 40 percent, 40 percent, 47 percent, and 45 percent respectively. The gap between those who agreed and those who disagreed peaked at 8 percent in 2015. It appears that during the eight years of Ma Ying-jiu's government, Taiwanese nationalist sentiments were continuously on the rise.

This study uses the perception of job security in face of cross-Strait economic interactions as an indicator for people's consideration of self-interest with regard to cross-Strait relations. Three surveys conducted between 2012 and 2015 showed that in 2012, the number of respondents who were worried about unemployment (50 percent) was greater than the number of those who were not worried about unemployment (41 percent), when considering the impact of cross-Strait economic exchanges. But in 2013 and 2015, the situation changed, with the result that those who were not worried outnumbered those that were worried; in 2013, the rate was 56 percent to 37 percent; in 2015, 55 percent to 35 percent. In other words, since the rapprochement of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait had set in, we witnessed a changing trend from concern to relief with regard to people's perceptions of job security.

Table 4.2 Distribution of explanatory variables, 2011–2015

Year	2011	2012	2013	2015
N	1217	1202	1243	1277
	%	%	%	%
Party affiliation				
Blue (KMT, People First Party, New Party)	34	32	38	27
Green (DPP, Taiwan Solidarity Union)	24	20	22	23
Middle Voters	33	47	38	48
Job security (Are you worried that cross-Strait economic development will lead to your unemployment?)				
No (am not worried)		41	56	55
Yes (am worried)		50	37	35
Taiwanese nationalist sentiment (Would you agree that Taiwan should declare independence if there were no threat of military repercussions upon such a declaration?)				
Agree	47	54	51	53
Disagree	40	40	47	45
Evaluation of Chinese government				
Good			36	34
Not good			56	55
Evaluation of Chinese economy (Do you agree that the economy in China will maintain its rapid growth)				
Agree	33	57	61	54
Disagree	24	38	37	44
Impact of cross-Strait economic integration on Taiwan's economy (Do you think that current cross-Strait relations will have good or bad effects on the long-term development of Taiwan's economy)				
Good	57	60	58	57
Bad	24	31	36	38
Impact of cross-Strait economic integration on Taiwan's society (Do you think that intensifying cross-Strait economic relations will increase, or decrease Taiwan's wealth disparities?)				
Increase	68	68	77	77
Decrease	14	16	15	15

Sources: Surveys conducted by China Impact Studies, administrated by the Thematic Research Team of China Impact Studies at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica.

In terms of the assessment of China's political development, our survey shows that from 2013 to early 2015, the Taiwanese people continued to have an unfavorable impression of the Chinese government. The proportion of positive to negative evaluations of the Chinese government in 2013 and 2015 was 36 percent to 56 percent, and 34 percent to 55 percent respectively.

In comparison, the Taiwanese people's evaluation of China's economic development was more positive and optimistic than their evaluation of the Chinese government. Between 2011 and 2015, the number of people who agreed with the statement, 'the Chinese economy will maintain its rapid development' was greater than the number of those who disagreed. In 2013, when the gap between those who agreed and those who disagreed reached its peak, their numbers amounted to 61 percent against 37 percent, but in 2015, the proportion of those who agreed declined for the first time and reached only 54 percent while the percentage of those who disagreed increased to 44 percent. In general, however, the Taiwanese were still optimistic about the sustained and rapid development of the Chinese economy, but the gap between optimistic and pessimistic attitudes was gradually narrowing.

Opinions on the effects of cross-Strait economic integration on Taiwan's economy did not witness any significant changes between 2011 and 2015. In general, those who considered the impact to be positive far outnumbered those who considered it to be negative. In the four surveys conducted during this period, 57 percent were positive against 24 percent negative (2011), 60 percent positive against 31 percent negative (2012), 58 percent positive against 36 percent negative (2013), and 57 percent positive against 38 percent negative (2015). Essentially, the majority of the Taiwanese people agreed with the strengthening of cross-Strait economic relations, and believed that the long-term impacts of cross-Strait economic integration on Taiwan's economic development would be positive.

Nevertheless, most people in Taiwan also believed that cross-Strait economic integration was having a negative impact on social development in Taiwan. The four surveys conducted between 2011 and 2015 showed that the number of people who believed cross-Strait economic development would widen the gap between the rich and the poor in Taiwan reached 68 percent (2011, 2012) and 77 percent (2013, 2015), while only about 15 percent of the public believed that the gap would be narrowed.

Explaining attitudes towards economic interests and national sovereignty

In order to examine the effects of various factors on attitudes towards economic interests and national sovereignty, binary logistic regression models were used to analyze the survey data obtained in 2013 and 2015. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show the variables that may have influenced people's decisions to choose economic interests or national sovereignty. The dependent variable in Table 4.3 is the choice of economic interests as more important than national sovereignty; the dependent

variable in Table 4.4 is the choice of national sovereignty as more important than economic interests. They are recorded from the same survey question and can therefore mainly be seen as two sides of the same coin.

A comparison between Table 4.3 and Table 4.4 shows that the generational impact was not significant in 2013, but displayed positive effects in 2015. In 2015, given that all other conditions remained equal, the younger generation (30 years old and under), compared with the middle-aged generation (31–50 years old), regarded national sovereignty as more important than economic interests. This was most probably due to the 2014 Sunflower Movement's particular effect on the younger generation, in that, compared with other generations, they placed a greater emphasis on the importance of national sovereignty in cross-Strait negotiations.

Table 4.3 Logistic regressions of respondents who regard economic interests as more important than national sovereignty

	2013		2015	
	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	β	<i>Sig.</i>
Cohort (youth)				
Middle-aged	.024		.490	*
Elderly	-.366		.066	
Female (male)	.159		.301	*
Unmarried (married)	-.448	*	.011	
Average monthly income	.054		-.007	
Ethnicity (Minnan)				
Hakka	.030		.485	*
Mainlander	-.237		.001	
Education level (below junior high school)				
High school	.786	***	.526	*
Associate college and above	1.029	***	.493	*
Party identification (blue)				
Green	-.446	*	-1.011	***
Middle voters	.036		-.481	**
Job security	-.031		-.196	
Taiwanese nationalist sentiment	-.744	***	-.856	***
Views on Chinese government	.099		.512	***
Views on Chinese economy	.497	***	.449	***
Views on economic effects of cross-Strait economic relations	.572	***	.668	***
Views on inequality effect of cross-Strait economic relations	1.150	***	.225	
Intercept	-.914	*	-.611	
Chi-square	204.64	***	208.65	***
Df	17		17	
N	998		987	

Note: A variable in brackets refers to the reference group. *B*: Coefficients of binary logistic regressions. All data used was weighted.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.4 Logistic regressions of respondents who regard national sovereignty as highly important in cross-Strait relations

	2013		2015	
	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	β	<i>Sig.</i>
Cohort (youth)				
Middle-aged	.046		-.489	*
Elderly	.428		-.158	
Female (male)	-.241		-.269	
Unmarried (married)	.677	***	.032	
Average monthly income	-.034		-.003	
Ethnicity (Minnan)				
Hakka	-.044		-.383	
Mainlander	.264		.035	
Education level (below junior high school)				
High school	-.794	***	-.544	*
Associate college and above	-1.093	***	-.512	*
Party affiliation (blue)				
Green	.520	**	1.088	***
Middle voters	-.126		.478	**
Job security	-.106		.147	
Taiwanese nationalist sentiment	.674	***	.812	***
Views on Chinese government	-.042		-.364	*
Views on Chinese economy	-.458	***	-.329	*
Views on economic effects of cross-Strait economic relations	-.551	***	-.708	***
Views on inequality effect of cross-Strait economic relations	-1.096	***	-.193	
Intercept	.659		.380	
Chi-square	203.83	***	194.85	***
Df	17		17	
N	998		987	

Note: A variable in brackets refers to the reference group. *B*: Coefficients of binary logistic regressions. All data used was weighted.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.5 illustrates the cohort differences in public opinion on choices between economic interests and national sovereignty in 2013 and 2015. In 2013, the percentages of young people (30 years old and under), who considered either economic interests or national sovereignty to be more important in cross-Strait negotiations stood at 57 percent and 40 percent respectively, while by 2015, the proportion of those who considered economic interests to be more important than national sovereignty was 42 percent against 52 percent. In contrast, the choices of the middle-aged and elderly between 2013 and 2015 did not witness any reversal. During these two years, the proportion of middle-aged people who chose economic interests was continuously higher than the proportion of those

Table 4.5 Public opinion on choices between economic interests and national sovereignty in cross-Strait relations, 2013 and 2015

Year	2013				2015			
	Total	(1)	(2)	(3)	Total	(1)	(2)	(3)
	<i>N</i>	%	%	%	<i>N</i>	%	%	%
Cohort	1217	53	42	5	1243	49	45	6
Youth	263	57	40	3	230	42	52	6
Middle-aged	497	62	32	6	489	59	37	4
Elderly	457	41	53	6	524	42	48	9
Education level	1212	53	41	5	1240	49	44	7
Below junior high school	341	34	58	7	341	41	50	9
High school	358	56	39	4	359	53	42	5
Associate college and above	513	63	32	5	540	51	42	6
Party identification	1205	53	41	5	1224	49	45	6
Blue	444	61	34	5	310	67	28	6
Green	280	37	60	3	305	33	63	5
Middle voters	481	55	37	7	609	48	45	6

Sources: the data from 2013 and 2015 was drawn from the China Impact Survey, administrated by the Thematic Research Team of China Impact Studies at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica.

Note:

(1) Economic interests; (2) National sovereignty; (3) Both.

The survey question asked was: In cross-Strait negotiations what do you think is most important, Taiwan's economic interests or Taiwan's national sovereignty?

who chose national sovereignty, while the proportion of the elderly who chose national sovereignty had been continuously higher than the proportion of those who chose economic interests. It was noticeable, between 2013 and 2015, that only the attitudes of young people toward this issue changed, with the numbers of those who chose national sovereignty showing an increase. Education as a socio-economic status indicator had an effect on people's attitudes toward economic interests and national sovereignty; those with a higher level of education (high school and above) tended to choose economic interests over national sovereignty more than those with a low level of education (junior high school and below). However, personal income was found to bear no relation to Taiwanese people's attitudes toward these issues. Table 4.5 shows how different levels of education relate to the different choices for economic interest or national sovereignty. In 2013 and 2015, among people with a lower level of education (junior high school and below), the proportion of those who chose economic interests (34 percent in 2013 and 41 percent in 2015) was lower than the proportion of those who chose national sovereignty (58 percent in 2013 and 50 percent in 2015). In each of these two years, among people with a higher level of education

(senior high school education and above), the percentage of those who chose economic interests was higher than of those who chose national sovereignty. It should be noted that in 2015, in comparison to 2013, the gap between those who chose economic interests and those who chose national sovereignty, had already shrunk significantly. In 2013, among people with a higher level of education (with associate degrees and above), 63 percent chose economic interests and 32 percent national sovereignty; in 2015, the percentages stood at 51 percent and 42 percent respectively. The gap between the two shrank from 31 percent in 2013 to 9 percent in 2015. Although those with a higher level of education are more likely to choose economic interests over national sovereignty than those with a lower level of education, in the two years between 2013 and 2015, many people among the highly educated had in fact already changed their attitudes and cared more about national sovereignty. In terms of the influence of party identification, the blue and green supporters each followed their natural bent. Pan-blue supporters tended to support the incumbent government and chose economic interests; pan-green supporters disliked and distrusted the incumbent government and therefore chose national sovereignty. It is worth noting, however, that between 2013 and 2015, the middle voters' attitudes changed. In 2013, there were no significant differences between middle and pan-blue voters; but by 2015, the middle voters' attitudes had changed, to become more aligned with the pan-green voters, in thinking that national sovereignty was more important than economic interests.

Table 4.5 also shows the changes in middle voters' attitudes between 2013 and 2015. In 2013, the proportion of middle voters who chose economic interests over national sovereignty stood at 55 percent and 37 percent; in 2015, at 48 percent and 45 percent respectively. The gap between the two declined from 18 percent in 2013 to 3 percent in 2015. When we compare the changes in the attitudes of the pan-blue, pan-green, and middle voters in the years from 2013 to 2015, the increase in the proportion of pan-blue voters in support of economic interests becomes obvious; the proportion of pan-green voters who chose national sovereignty increased slightly, but the change in the middle voters is even more salient than the changes in the pan-blue and pan-green voters, with the proportion of those who supported national sovereignty showing a substantial increase.

Perceived job security was not related to people's attitudes towards economic interests and national sovereignty in 2013 and 2015. Nor was wealth a significant explanatory variable. Considerations of personal economic interests do not seem to have an impact on the choices that people make. Nationalist sentiment, however, did have a very significant impact. People with a high level of Taiwanese nationalist sentiment tend to have a significantly high regard for national sovereignty (Table 4.3; Table 4.4).

Evaluations of the Chinese government and the Chinese economy also had a significant impact. Both those who evaluated the Chinese government positively and those who believed that the Chinese economy would continue to maintain its rapid development tended to think that economic interests in cross-strait negotiations were more important than national sovereignty (Table 4.3; Table 4.4).

The individual assessment of the economic impact of cross-strait economic integration on Taiwan significantly affected the choices that people made in the case of economic interests and national sovereignty. Those who agreed that closer cross-strait economic development would have a positive influence on Taiwan's long-term economic development, in comparison to those who did not agree, tended to believe that Taiwan's economic interests were more important than national sovereignty in cross-strait negotiations. In terms of the assessment of the social impact, however, there were differences between the years 2013 and 2015. In 2013, in comparison to those who disagreed, those who agreed that cross-strait economic development would narrow Taiwan's wealth gap tended to stress the importance of Taiwan's economic interests, while in 2015, the variables were insignificant.

Discussion and conclusion

For Taiwan, the issue of national sovereignty is at the core of the dispute over cross-strait negotiations. China does not recognize Taiwan's national sovereignty, and is seeking to unify Taiwan with the mainland as soon as possible, or to at least advocate arrangements that degrade Taiwan's international status in order to restrict the development of Taiwan's national sovereignty. On the other hand, Taiwan claims to be a *de jure* sovereign state and makes every effort to defend its national sovereignty. Sovereignty disputes are zero-sum games; when one side makes a concession, the other side scores a hit. In addition, if one side appears unable to hold its ground, the other side might perceive this as weakness and take advantage. When dealing with Taiwan, China employs a 'carrot and stick' strategy – the stick being military coercion and the carrot, economic interests. Beijing's long-term strategy is to use political, diplomatic, economic, and social leverage to pursue unification with Taiwan, while building up a credible military threat to attack the island if things seem to be moving in what Beijing considers to be the wrong direction (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2010). In the more than ten years leading up to 2015, which were marked by China's impressive economic growth, the economic benefits that China was offering Taiwan proved to be very attractive to many Taiwanese, even when the DPP's Chen Shui-bian was in power (2000–2008). Confronted with cross-strait negotiations, a relative majority of Taiwanese people tended to consider economic interests as more important than national sovereignty. It was not until the later years of the Ma Ying-jiu presidency in 2015 and the aftermath of the Anti-CSSTA Sunflower Movement that the preferences of those people who chose economic interests against national sovereignty began to be more equally distributed.

The tension between economic interests and national sovereignty will continue to be the focus of internal disputes in Taiwanese society in the foreseeable future. This study attempts to explain the relevant factors that affected people's attitudes on this issue in the years between 2013 and 2015, particularly when an insignificant effect became significant, or vice versa. Between 2013 and 2015, a substantial proportion of the younger generation and the middle voters changed their

preferences and chose to place national sovereignty above economic interests in order of importance.

As far as personal characteristics are concerned, this study found that an individual's economic status and personal economic interests did not have a significant impact on this policy issue. In other words, people on a low income and people who lacked job security were not more inclined than people on a high income and people with job security to choose economic interests over national sovereignty. This confirms that self-interest has relatively little impact on political attitudes (Sears and Funk 1991). On the other hand, the party identification and nationalist sentiments of the Taiwanese had significant impacts on this issue; political symbols often evoke and mobilize emotions which lead people to choose national sovereignty over economic interests.

It is worth noting that other factors also influence the choices made by the Taiwanese people on this issue, including their assessments of the political and economic development of China, and the impact of cross-strait economic integration on Taiwan's economy. A high opinion of the Chinese government and the Chinese economy, and the idea that cross-strait economic development would promote Taiwan's economy, prompted people to choose economic interests over national sovereignty in cross-strait negotiations. In recent years, however, slight changes have been observed in the public's evaluation of the Chinese government; the earlier optimism about China's sustained and rapid economic development is slowly witnessing a reversal that could impact on cross-strait economic interests. These subjective assessments will clearly continue to be affected by changes in the objective situation, which in turn will affect the Taiwanese people's choices between economic interests and national sovereignty in cross-strait negotiations. In other words, if the Taiwanese cease to think of the Chinese government in glowing terms and China's soaring economic growth comes to an end (in fact, China's economy growth has lost momentum in recent years), and cross-strait trade does not seem to be benefiting Taiwan's economy as it did before (in fact, Taiwan's economy is stagnating), then the attitudes of the Taiwanese people will likely change accordingly toward emphasizing the importance of national sovereignty in cross-strait relations.

The analysis of the survey data obtained during the years from 2013 to 2015 has revealed a trend in public opinion in the later years of the Ma Ying-jiu presidency. The DPP's landslide victory in Taiwan's presidential and legislative elections in January 2016 showed that during the eight years of Ma's tenure, voters had started to feel that the Ma administration had grown too cozy with China, and had bound Taiwan's economic fate too tightly to that of China. As a result, the Taiwanese people have developed serious reservations toward the Chinese government and have also strengthened their belief that Taiwan's national sovereignty should not be sacrificed in order to gain more economic benefits.

Ma Ying-jiu's defeat of Tsai Ing-wen in the 2012 presidential election is generally believed to have been caused by the KMT's campaign strategy, which successfully turned the 1992 Consensus into the main election issue. Late in the campaign in 2012, several prominent Taiwanese business leaders – a group

that was once notably pluralistic in its political leanings but that had become increasingly dependent on the economic opportunities found in China – came out strongly in favor of the cross-strait policy of Ma and the KMT. Subsequently, it seemed that the '1992 consensus' had become the core foundation for sustainable economic development across the Taiwan Strait. This created the impression among the voters that only the KMT had the ability to handle cross-strait relations effectively (Wu and Liao 2015). After 2012, however, the expectations that had been nurtured in connection with the '1992 consensus' were not met and did not lead to a breakthrough in Taiwan's economic deadlock after all. Fears grew that some industries might be overwhelmed by competition from China and jobs might be threatened.

The 2014 Sunflower Student Movement was a collective reaction to the pro-China policy of the Ma Ying-jiu administration that had gradually left many people in Taiwan feeling uneasy. During Ma's presidency, the various cross-strait exchange programs that had been in place since 2010 – ranging in subject matter from trade and investment to flights and tourism – were still contested in Taiwanese society (Chen 2016). In 2014, when the Ma government was eagerly trying to push the CSSTA through the Legislative Yuan, some Taiwanese people felt that the Ma administration was trying to pull the two sides of the Strait closer, but in fact the actions of the Ma government in this respect produced the opposite effect of pushing Taiwan even farther away from China.

Since Tsai Ing-wen was elected president in 2016, her basic policy on cross-strait relations has been centered on 'maintaining the status quo', which is the option supported by the vast majority of the Taiwanese people. For the people of Taiwan, what has been coined as 'maintaining the status quo' simply means maintaining Taiwan as an autonomous and independent country. The new DPP-government's mainstream objective is to defend the national sovereignty of the 'Republic of China'. It remains to be seen whether Tsai's administration and the Chinese government in Beijing will be able to negotiate a peaceful cross-strait relationship in which the dilemma faced by the Taiwanese people of having to choose between national sovereignty and economic interests can be resolved.

Notes

- 1 The '1992 Consensus' is a political term referring to the outcome of a meeting in 1992 between China and Taiwan. Taiwan summarized the term as 'One China with respective interpretations' under which both sides agreed to disagree over how to define 'One China', whereas China claimed that both sides agreed to the One China principle, while ignoring the 'respective interpretations' part of the consensus. Despite the difference in emphasis, both sides agreed to 'One' China as a principle at the time. This ambiguous term allowed the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party to 'agree to disagree' and move on.
- 2 A survey report published by the United Daily News in March 2016 reported a significant increase in Taiwanese self-identification among Taiwanese citizens. The shift in identification was most evident in young people. Young people in Taiwan overwhelmingly do not identify as Chinese (UDN Survey Center 2016).

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5 The rise of civil society activism in the Ma Ying-jiu era

The genesis and outcomes of the Sunflower Movement

Ho Ming-sho

On 16 January 2016, the citizens of Taiwan spoke out, with a loud and unambiguous voice, when they elected the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, as the first female president of Taiwan. For the first time, her party obtained a majority in the legislature, winning 68 of the 113 seats. With the addition of the five seats gained by the DPP-friendly New Power Party (NPP), a surging political force was born of the Sunflower Movement; the incoming Tsai administration secured control of both the executive and legislative chambers, a political advantage that had been denied to the previous DPP administration under Chen Shui-bian (2000–2008).

The DPP's ascendancy constituted a decisive setback for the ruling Kuomintang (KMT), whose presidential candidate, Chu Li-lun, received only 38.5 percent of the vote, while the party's legislative representation was decimated, falling from 64 seats to 35. Reflecting on its worst-ever electoral performance, the KMT admitted to having lost the electorate's confidence because of a number of policy mistakes. Among the ten issues specifically mentioned in a KMT report published in February 2016, five were related to social protests, which included the Sunflower Movement, the Hung Chung-ch'iu Incident (explained below), the protest by freeway toll collectors, the protest by laid-off workers, and the movement for living justice.¹ In other words, the KMT was voted out of office amid public discontent and intensified protest. Clearly, the surge in civil society activism in recent years had produced visible political consequences which facilitated Taiwan's third peaceful change of power.

The Sunflower Movement stood out clearly as the most important episode of contention for several reasons. First, the 24-day occupation of the national legislature created an acute political crisis and garnered international attention. Second, the movement challenged the ratification of a free-trade agreement with China, which was a key component of the Ma Ying-jiu administration's core agenda of pursuing closer cross-Strait ties. Third, in terms of numbers, the protest was one of the largest instances of peaceful mobilization in the history of Taiwan. The rally on 30 March 2014, attracted half a million participants, according to the organizers' estimates, and stimulated solidarity rallies in 45 cities, globally. Lastly, the movement unleashed a wave of political participation among the young. The