

China's political goals show that all that Beijing wants is using ECFA to thoroughly lock up the Ma government to ensure a continued pro-China course, to make Taiwan economically dependent and to narrow the future development options for the Taiwanese economy. These are also the Taiwan people's deepest concerns regarding ECFA and the biggest source of public distrust in the Ma government. As a result of hasty cross-strait exchanges, Taiwan will be forced to trade in its political status for continued economic interests in the not too distant future. Beijing and the Ma government are singing the same tune, using the mention of concessions to woo public support. Yet considering the goals of China's united front tactics toward Taiwan this is not more than a skillfully packaged political ruse.

## ECFA and Taiwan's footnote in history

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Last year, President Ma Ying-jeou promised to explain the economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) to the public. Unfortunately, he has failed to change his top-down approach to policy explanation, and even used public funds in combination with lottery prizes to promote the policy in pan-blue strongholds.

Premier Wu Den-yih and Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairwoman Lai Shin-yuan have guaranteed that an ECFA will not contain any political references, most notably to unification, and the leadership in Beijing has launched its own charm offensive by offering benefits to Taiwanese farmers. It goes without saying that the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will not be so naive as to make any political references in an ECFA. The thing that is most likely to hurt Taiwan is how Beijing uses the agreement in its international manipulations

once it has been signed.

For example, look at how China used the joint statement signed by US President Barack Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao during Obama's visit last year. The statements about respecting the integrity of Chinese sovereignty and territory have been used by Beijing to score political points over the past few months as Obama announced US arms sales to Taiwan and met with the Dalai Lama. Although US has repeatedly said that the statement in the joint declaration only applies to Tibet and Xinjiang, not Taiwan, Beijing frequently mentions the joint declaration together with the three Sino-US joint communiqués, effectively treating it as a de facto fourth communiqué.

Beijing first said it would break off military exchanges with US to protest the US sale of arms to Taiwan, but then agreed to a visit earlier this month by US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and Jeffrey Bader, senior director for Asian affairs at the US National Security Council. US wanted to discuss Iran, North Korea and the second meeting of the US-China Strategic Economic Dialogue, but in the six meetings held, 90 percent of the time was spent discussing US arms sales to Taiwan. Chinese foreign affairs officials from Dai Bingguo, a state councilor with responsibility for foreign affairs, to Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi accused US of violating the joint statement by selling arms to Taiwan, while US officials kept their silence in order to win Beijing's cooperation on other issues.

Beijing is well aware that Ma's approval ratings are plummeting and that he must use an ECFA to divert attention from his policy failures. Indeed, they are using this to their advantage as with US eagerness to gain Chinese cooperation in the resolution of sticky foreign affairs issues. This is precisely why China is now giving Ma a helping hand by offering benefits to Taiwanese farmers.

Even if the ECFA does not include any politically sensitive

wording, it will be easy for Beijing to use the agreement in its international propaganda regarding the “one China” principle and “unification.” Not only will the ECFA transform Taiwan into an economic appendix to China, it will also promote the international view that Taiwan is part of China. Even if the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) wins the 2012 presidential election, it will be no easy task to correct this view. The party could even be characterized as “troublemakers” for not implementing an agreement signed by the KMT and the CCP.

This is Beijing’s intention in signing an ECFA, and it is something Taiwan’s government and opposition parties must pay more attention to as they continue to clash over it.

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## The Problem of Implementing Absentee Voting

### Background

On February 3 Taiwan Interior Minister Jiang Yi-huah said that the government will amend the law to allow absentee voting in order to safeguard citizens' right to political participation. The ministry's amendment would allow people who are not able to return to their place of household registration on voting day because of work or studies to apply for permission to vote in their current place of residence. On March 10 he further elaborated saying that the government plans to implement the absentee voting system from the presidential election in 2012. He added that while the government rules out postal voting for the time being, it is its ultimate goal and that it is hoped that one day voting by mail can be

*China's entire postal system is closely monitored by its government so that there is no impartiality or confidentiality in postal voting system*

implemented in Taiwan like in the United States, Japan and South Korea.

### Analysis

More comprehensive safeguards for citizens' voting rights are definitely a goal worth to be pursued, but any guarantees of basic rights should not remain a mere formality. This means that in order to guarantee voting rights the following four most important factors must also be considered: Full disclosure of information on candidates and their political platforms, freedom of choice, non-partisan election administration as well as a fair (non-discriminatory voting rights and one vote one value) and secret voting. Therefore the author definitely agrees that the fair, secret, and direct voting rights of all Taiwanese citizens be guaranteed. After further consideration of Taiwan's particular national situation and political environment, Taiwan Brain Trust provides the following conclusions and suggestions for further reference:

#### 1. Yes to Domestic Transfer of Voter Registration

Due to Taiwan's distinct household registration system it is quite common that a voter's place of household registration is not identical with his place of residence. In order to safeguard basic voting rights, allowing the transfer of voter registration within Taiwan could therefore be considered, so that citizens who do not live at the place of household registration could exercise their voting rights in their place of residence. As a number of opinion polls on absentee voting shows domestic consensus is the highest regarding this point. Therefore this proposal deserves to be endorsed.

As for the technical side, the complexity of electoral affairs is comparatively low in presidential elections,

because there is only one nationwide electoral district and