

## *The China Policy Discourse in the DPP*

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Political icons in the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) keep announcing new takes on cross-strait relations. These include the “1996 Consensus” raised by former Vice President Annette Lu, which is a cross-strait discourse that builds on the “1996 Consensus” and implies that “each side has its own interpretation of what constitutes China.” (Former Premier) Su Tseng-chang has proposed a “Taiwan Consensus,” which follows the spirit of the “Resolution on Taiwan’s Future” adopted by DPP in 1999. Su advocates “survival is the foremost principle, democracy is the cornerstone” as his two major principles. Frank Hsieh’s “Constitutional Consensus” suggests that both sides of the Taiwan Strait put aside differences and seek common grounds under the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of China. (DPP Chairwoman) Tsai Ing-wen has coined the phrases “peaceful but recognizing differences” and “peaceful and seeking commonality.” Her statement means that Taiwan identity is the starting point. Although Taiwan and China are different in their histories and memories, beliefs and values, political systems and social identities, they share common responsibilities and interests, which are to pursue peaceful and stable relations and seize the opportunity for prosperity and development.

It is generally believed that these ideas have been proposed to pave the way for the presidential election in 2012. While this may be the case, these discourses will definitely exert major influence on the future development of the DPP, the competitive scenario between the blue (Kuomintang) and green (DPP) political camps, as well as the way cross-

strait relations will develop in the future. Generally speaking, the four standpoints from within the DPP clearly convey a message to the outside world and China, namely that the DPP strongly wants cross-strait détente and communication with China and that this has already become the majority view within the party. While the approaches and starting points (of the four contenders for the DPP presidential ticket) may seem different, they share the same goal. All four argumentations are cautiously worded. They are the result of careful considerations and repeated deliberation and all leave leeway and hints for future development.

China’s stance is based on the one China principle, the 1992 Consensus, and the opposition to Taiwan’s independence. The DPP, however, holds two core values, first, Taiwan is a “sovereign, independent country,” and second, Taiwan’s future must be decided by its 23 million citizens. Presently, the two standpoints do not have any common ground. Both sides are in the first stage (of interaction) with each side voicing its point of view. So far Chinese officials maintain an ambivalent attitude, having neither accepted nor rejected (the DPP stance). Only when a Taiwanese reporter demanded a comment on Tsai’s statements during a press conference by the Chinese cabinet’s Taiwan Affairs Office, spokesman Yang Yi gave a simple response: The DPP needs to accept the 1992 Consensus and oppose Taiwan’s independence. Chinese governmental think tanks have been more concrete in their reactions. Liu Guoshen, director of the Taiwan Research Institute at Xiamen University, has “affirmed” Tsai’s course. Yu Keli,

director of the Institute of Taiwan Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, believes it is “not enough.”

Beijing realized very early after the change of the ruling party in March 2008 that the KMT one-party monopoly, predicted by the media and scholars, did not materialize. Consequently, Beijing reexamined the implications from the 2008 presidential election for the DPP, and drew the following conclusions: The DPP was still able to win 42 percent of the vote amid worst conditions such as the corruption scandals involving former President Chen Shui-bian, tense cross-strait relations and worsening bilateral relationships with the United States and Japan. Moreover, the changes since 2008 have only reconsolidated the DPP's basic voter support without leading to any political realignment. Confrontation between the ruling and opposition parties continues unabated, while the political landscape with a blue north and green south remains unchanged. Putting it simply, as the blue and green camps gear up for competition in 2012, the factors that are detrimental to the DPP still exist, but in a weaker form. How will this fact affect China's policy toward Taiwan?

Faced with the political trend in Taiwan of “waning blue camp, waxing green camp” as well as “the KMT on the decline, the DPP on the rise,” China will step up its efforts to approach the DPP for four reasons: First, since the DPP enjoys voter support of at least 42 percent, China “will not be able to avoid the DPP when it tries to solve the Taiwan problem.” Therefore, voices have been

growing louder among Taiwan policymakers in China which hold that the motto “shelving differences, first the easy steps, then the difficult ones” can be equally applied to the DPP. Second, given that the DPP has displayed a rational pragmatic tendency, China should seize the opportunity to “transform” the DPP's advocacy of Taiwan independence. Now that a host of new approaches on cross-strait ties are being proposed within the DPP, China has a golden opportunity for transforming the DPP. Third, the KMT uses the DPP to “threaten” and “blackmail” the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Therefore, China should try to directly deal with the DPP to reduce the KMT's opportunities to deceive (the CCP). Fourth, since a high-level communication channel has been established between the KMT and the CCP through the “KMT-CCP Forum,” agencies that normally implement policy toward Taiwan and scholars in Taiwan-related think tanks have become less important, whereas “DPP studies” and communication with the DPP are becoming increasingly popular.

Although China and the KMT claim that both sides adhere to the so-called 1992 Consensus, their respective versions are different. China's 1992 Consensus is “the one China principle, opposition to Taiwan independence and no pledge to renounce the use of force.” But the KMT version is “one China with each side having its own interpretation, no unification, no independence, no use of force.” Both the KMT and the CCP say that they have a consensus, but in fact, each party has its own way of putting things. Should the DPP regain

government power later on, it could use the same model in talks with China. If the KMT and the CCP can “set aside differences to seek common grounds,” then why shouldn’t this work be applied between the DPP and the CCP?

The DPP has already expressed its strong desire to ease cross-strait tension. When it comes to concrete action instead of a single approach that effectively defuses tense cross-strait relations cannot be excluded. The first step toward that aim is the establishment of a think tank for cross-strait exchanges that will gradually build mutual trust. But as Tsai has said, Taiwan and China have shared responsibilities and interests, should be seeking peaceful and stable relations and grasping the opportunity for prosperity and development. Beijing does not only have responsibilities and interests, nor does it lack voices of reason. Probably this is the beginning of the DPP and the CCP transforming each other. 