

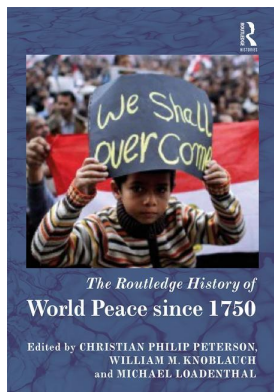
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A FAREWELL TO ARMS?

Evolving peace in the Taiwan Strait

Tony Tai-Ting Liu

Introduction

Since the separation of China and Taiwan in 1949, the Taiwan Strait has become a geopolitical hotspot characterized by complicated historical, political, economic, and ethnic tensions. Following the election of Tsai Ing-wen as President of the Republic of China (Taiwan or ROC) in 2016 and the new government's staunch position on searching for a new model for interacting with China, Beijing grew increasingly impatient on the issue of Taiwan and pushed the Taiwan Strait towards instability again. However, noting current tensions in Cross-strait relations as an extension of the unresolved civil war between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the ROC, the love-hate relationship between China and Taiwan is ironic and somewhat baffling as not a single life has been lost in this ongoing conflict since the second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958. Despite the uniqueness of the "long peace" in the Taiwan Strait, especially considering the imbalanced power relationship between China and Taiwan in the post-Cold War period, observers have devoted little effort in explaining why Cross-strait relations remain in a chronic state of peace or the absence of direct military conflict.

Adopting the concepts of "negative peace" and "positive peace" proposed by Johan Galtung, this chapter will explain why the relationship between China and Taiwan since 1949 has been marked by more calm than conflict. According to Galtung, negative peace is "the absence of organized collective violence . . . violence between major human groups, [including] nations, classes and racial and ethnic groups" while positive peace refers to "cooperation and integration between human groups."¹ On the other hand, besides positive and negative peace, this chapter also refers to peace as being both active and passive. Active peace refers to the performance of actions towards the creation of peace while passive peace refers to the natural generation of a non-violent situation due to no particular actions.

In spite of China's military demonstration in 1995–1996 that pushed the Taiwan Strait to the brink of war, as well as Beijing's strained relationship with the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government from the turn of the millennium to 2008, peace rather than war has been the dominant phenomenon in the Taiwan Strait since the end of the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958. While the PRC and ROC have continued to compete in the realm of international relations, such competition has not sparked a major violent conflict between the two governments. This development has not come about because

the two sides have ironed out all of their disagreements; in reality, they have yet to agree on a formal ceasefire and China continues to regard Taiwan as an indivisible and indispensable part of Chinese territory.

This chapter will advance the following arguments. First, it will demonstrate why 1979 marked a critical year for the establishment of negative peace in the Taiwan Strait, paying particular attention to how strategic calculations pushed Cross-strait relations towards restraint and promoted economic development. Second, it will demonstrate how the relationship between China and Taiwan took a proactive turn in 1987 when Taipei lifted marshal law and relaxed its travel ban against China. Afterwards, Cross-strait relations improved incrementally because of developments such as the establishment of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) and the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) in the early 1990s, as well as the conclusion of various economic and functional cooperation through the ARATS–SEF mechanism from 2008 to 2016. For all of these successes, the growth of a separate Taiwanese identity during the 1990s has raised the question of whether peace is merely a convenient rhetoric in Cross-strait relations.

The shift towards negative peace in the Taiwan Strait

Traces of a developing negative peace in the Taiwan Strait, to some extent, might have emerged as early as the 1970s. Starting with the establishment of diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing and the termination of official relations between Washington and Taipei on January 1, 1979, the balance of power in the Taiwan Strait suddenly seemed to turn in the overwhelming favor of Beijing. Losing its most important ally— notwithstanding its exit from the United Nations in 1971—Taiwan’s status in the world had seemed isolated and precarious. Many believed that it was simply a matter of time before Taiwan, the orphan of Asia, would reunite with China.

Yet after almost four decades since Taiwan’s complete political isolation from the world, the island nation remains largely independent from China even if it does really possess the international status of an independent nation. Interestingly, in contrast with three decades of strained relations that were characterized by China’s frequent shelling of Quemoy (Kinmen)—Taiwan’s frontline of defense that lay just off the coast of China—China’s goal of reuniting with Taiwan by force gradually subsided. On January 1, 1979, the same day that the US and China established official relations, Beijing issued *A Message to Compatriots in Taiwan* that called for an end to military confrontation, an increase in bilateral cooperation, and the eventual reunification of China and Taiwan.² Meanwhile, Xu Xiangqian, China’s Defense Minister, announced the termination of bombardment against Quemoy.³ Such dramatic turn in Beijing’s stance towards Taiwan begs answers, particularly in terms of its implications for the development of peace in the Taiwan Strait.

Applying the theories of peace studies to China–Taiwan relations since the establishments of the PRC and ROC in 1949, one can reasonably argue that negative peace characterized Cross-strait relations over the past seven decades. Despite intense bombardment against Quemoy from 1949 to 1979 and a short episode of missile tests in the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995–1996, no direct conflict between China and Taiwan has occurred since August 1958, when the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) launched a month-long round of artillery bombardment against Quemoy. The second Taiwan Strait Crisis, or the “823 artillery bombardment,” was the final time that gunfire broke out across the Taiwan Strait and resulted in significant damages and casualties. While the third Taiwan Strait crisis in

1995–1996 involved the firing of missiles by the PLA across the Taiwan Strait, the crisis incurred no casualties in both China and Taiwan.

Alternatively, despite 68 years of political division between China and Taiwan since 1949, direct fighting between the two governments broke out only in the first ten years (1949–1958) since the division. For almost six decades since 1958, not a single man died in the civil war between China and Taiwan, which technically continues until this day, as both Beijing and Taipei have yet to conclude a formal armistice or ceasefire agreement. A review of the passive peace between China and Taiwan reveals that major shifts in international relations and the US commitment to the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) played key roles in upholding the peace in the Taiwan Strait. More specifically, the TRA—a law adopted by the US to continue to maintain commercial and cultural relations and exchange with Taiwan after its normalization with China in 1979—provided the US with legitimacy to preserve a role in the Taiwan Strait. US presence in the region served as an effective check against an ever strengthening China that increasingly tilted international relations in its favor.

While 1979 seemed to be a decisive year concerning the future of Taiwan, counter-intuitively, developments leading up to the normalization of relations between the US and China might have pushed Cross-strait relations towards an unexpected direction. After the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, noting the continued threat posed by the Soviet Union, Washington played the “China card” with the aim of keeping Moscow in check.⁴ For Beijing, with Taipei’s most important ally (the US) switching its support, the future of Taiwan was all but decided. In this case, Moscow remained Beijing’s top strategic concern, so Taiwan could be neglected temporarily. China’s concern for the regional balance of power in effect contributed to the development of peace in the Taiwan Strait. Washington’s strategic turn towards Beijing played into Taiwan’s hands.

On the other hand, the TRA also played a role in generating the negative peace between China and Taiwan. Noting the fact that China has never openly rejected the use of force in solving the issue of Taiwan, the TRA keeps any potential aggression by China effectively at bay. As article two of the TRA stipulates, “peace and stability in the area are in the political, security, and economic interests of the United States” and “any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means [are] of grave concern to the United States.”⁵ This language in effect forces China to think twice before resorting to the use of military force against Taiwan.

Finally, against the backdrop of strategic calculations and maneuvers by the US and China, it is also important to highlight China’s domestic turn in the late 1970s as a critical factor in the creation of peace in the Taiwan Strait. Following the succession of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, Beijing was desperately eager to move away from the madness of the Cultural Revolution—a decade long movement (1966–1976) that witnessed Mao Zedong’s brutal oppression of intellectuals and dissidents—and chronic economic stagnation in the country. Hence at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in December 1978, Deng Xiaoping introduced the policy of “reform and opening up,” a policy that eventually led to China’s economic recovery and rise in the post-Cold War period.⁶ While Taiwan remained a vital interest that could not be abandoned, changes to the power relationship between China and Taiwan following US–China rapprochement suggested that Beijing could prioritize economic development without being threatened by the Taiwan issue in the near future. Beijing was confident that time stood in favor of China, a position that Deng captured in his statement that “as long

as peaceful unification happens across the Strait, China can wait for fifty or one hundred years.⁷⁷ In this sense, the goal of economic development served as a catalyst for passive peace in the Taiwan Strait.

Confidence building measures and positive peace in the Taiwan Strait

Even if they did not fight each other, competition between China and Taiwan continued. Perhaps with the belief that the US had not fully abandoned Taiwan and that the language of the TRA would help protect it in a time of crisis, Taiwan stood defiantly against China and invested considerable efforts towards economic development. Coinciding with China's decision to relax its military pressure against Taiwan in the 1980s, Taiwan had a golden opportunity to grow and become a global economic powerhouse. Meanwhile, China also enacted economic reform and development. China and Taiwan's simultaneous turn towards economic development brought about an unexpected peace in the Taiwan Strait following the impact of 1979.

Surprisingly, the passive peace between China and Taiwan stretched into the 1980s and influenced Beijing and Taipei to adopt measures to normalize relations. While the *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan* suggested the softening of China's position towards Taiwan, in retrospect, the statement remained a largely passive gesture by Beijing to resolve its tensions with Taipei, as Beijing's active efforts towards improving its relationship with Taiwan in the aftermath of the statement ultimately failed. Rather, the first actions towards the resolution of tensions across the Strait did not come until 1987 or nearly a decade after the proposal of *A Message to Compatriots in Taiwan*, when Chiang Ching-kuo proclaimed an end to martial law in Taiwan and allowed Taiwanese citizens to travel to China for tourist and family reunion purposes. Following Taiwan's relaxation of travels to China in October 1987, within two months, more than 100,000 Taiwanese citizens applied to visit China.⁸

In terms of the development of peace in the Taiwan Strait, the negative peace that characterized Cross-strait relations since 1958 began to change after China and Taiwan's first contact in thirty-eight years. Rapprochement gained momentum and the negative peace between China and Taiwan quickly became active. Noting the difficult sovereign question between these two powers, Beijing and Taipei compromised in 1990 to communicate across the Strait through the non-official channel of ARATS and SEF. In 1990, Taiwan first established SEF as the main channel for communication with Beijing; China echoed Taiwan's move with the establishment of ARATS in 1991. The ARATS–SEF channel was a breakthrough in Cross-strait relations, as for the first time since the division of China and Taiwan, the two governments possessed a means for potential dialogue.

The ARATS–SEF channel is significant for inter-Strait relations in two ways. First, at the 1992 working meeting in preparation for the first official meeting between ARATS and SEF in the following year, representatives from China and Taiwan settled on the political basis for dialogue across the Taiwan Strait. The 1992 consensus, a verbal agreement between China and Taiwan, confirmed that both Beijing and Taipei acknowledged that there is only one China in the world but its definition may be different across the Strait. The consensus served as the corner stone for future discussions between China and Taiwan. Second, despite setbacks from 1995 to 2008 due to Taipei's pro-independent turn under the Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian governments, Ma Ying-jeou and the Kuomintang's (KMT aka Chinese

Nationalist Party) return to power in 2008 revitalized Cross-strait relations and recommenced dialogue across the Strait through the ARATS–SEF mechanism. In the Ma presidency from 2008 to 2016, the ARATS–SEF channel was important in bringing about a host of functional cooperation between China and Taiwan that greatly repaired and advanced the development of peace in the Taiwan Strait.

Specifically, since 2008, the ARATS–SEF dialogue has brought about more than twenty economic, cultural, and other cooperation agreements between China and Taiwan. Among the agreements, three areas of cooperation are particularly worth noting. In June 2008, after the first round of ARATS–SEF talks held in Beijing, China and Taiwan agreed on the implementation of direct flights across the Strait and the opening up of Taiwan to Chinese tourists.⁹ Initial progress in June continued into the second round of ARATS–SEF talks in

Table 26.1 Achievements of cross-strait high level talks (2008–2015)

<i>Round</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Agreements reached</i>
1	June 2008	Beijing	Minutes of Talks on Cross-strait Charter Flights; Cross-strait Agreement concerning Mainland Tourists Traveling to Taiwan
2	November 2008	Taipei	Cross-strait Food Safety Agreement; Cross-strait Air Transport Agreement; Cross-strait Sea Transport Agreement; Cross-strait Postal Service Agreement
3	April 2009	Nanjing	Cross-strait Agreement on Joint Crime-Fighting and Judicial Mutual Assistance; Cross-strait Financial Cooperation Agreement; Supplementary Agreement on Cross-strait Air Transport
4	December 2009	Taichung	Cross-strait Agreement on Cooperation of Agricultural Product Quarantine and Inspection; Cross-strait Agreement on Cooperation in respect of Standards, Metrology, Inspection and Accreditation; Cross-strait Agreement on Cooperation in respect of Fishing Crew Affairs
5	June 2010	Chongqing	Cross-strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement; Cross-strait Agreement on Intellectual Property Rights Protection and Cooperation
6	December 2010	Taipei	Cross-strait Agreement on Medical and Health Cooperation
7	October 2011	Tianjin	Cross-strait Nuclear Power Safety Cooperation Agreement
8	August 2012	Taipei	Cross-strait Investment Protection and Promotion Agreement; Cross-strait Customs Cooperation Agreement
9	March 2013	Taipei	Cross-strait Agreement on Trade in Services
10	February 2014	Nanjing	Cross-strait Cooperation Agreement on Meteorology; Cross-strait Agreement on Seismological Monitoring
11	August 2015	Fuzhou	Cross-strait Collaboration Agreement on Flight Safety and Airworthiness; Cross-strait Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Enhancement of Tax Cooperation

Source: Mainland Affairs Council (Taiwan), “liangan xieyi,” (Cross-strait Agreements), www.mac.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=67145&CtNode=5710&m

Taipei in November 2008, through which China and Taiwan agreed on direct transport and shipping and exchange of mail across the Strait, completing the so-called “three links” of trade, transport, and mail.¹⁰ Finally, in the fifth round of ARATS–SEF talks held in Chongqing in June 2010, China and Taiwan agreed on the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) that sought to increase bilateral trade across the Strait through the reduction or elimination of tariffs and barriers.¹¹ The ECFA later served as the stepping stone for related cooperation between China and Taiwan in custom regulation and trade and investment. Table 26.1 lists the twenty-three agreements completed through the ARATS–SEF mechanism or the Cross-strait high level talks since its re-initiation in 2008.

Even if China had not renounced the use of force against Taiwan, the increased exchange and cooperation in the Taiwan Strait from 2008 to 2016 probably reduced the chances of military confrontation taking place. Reversing the deterioration of Cross-strait relations under the previous governments by signing bilateral agreements, China and Taiwan essentially put in place confidence building measures (CBMs) that not only dispelled concerns for conflict in the Taiwan Strait but also strengthened the trust between Beijing and Taipei. By focusing on functional cooperation and postponing political negotiations, China and Taiwan effectively established a cordial atmosphere for future talks founded on the basis that neither government would unilaterally alter relations across the Strait by resorting to the use of force or making political statements that change the status quo.

Beyond active efforts to push for cooperation across the Strait, CBMs represented by the reopened ARATS–SEF channel and its outcome spilled over to the reduction of tensions and creation of peace between China and Taiwan in other areas. For example, in 2011, after fifteen years of tedious discussions, Taiwan finally opened the doors of colleges and universities on the island to Mainland Chinese students, which in turn made both Chinese students and tourists a common sight in Taiwan today.¹² In 2013, Taiwan was invited by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to attend the thirty-eighth assembly in Montreal. On the other hand, from 2009 to 2016, Taiwan was invited by the World Health Assembly (WHA) to attend the annual conference under observer status. Besides obvious gains for Taiwan’s international outlook, in terms of the development of peace in the Taiwan Strait, the participation of Taiwan in both the ICAO and WHA demonstrates that China and Taiwan can coexist and jointly participate in a particular international organization regardless of its political implications. Such development is a major step towards the creation of peace in the Taiwan Strait as both China and Taiwan will be able to communicate and interact directly in the same institution, an act that is critical for continued progress in reducing tensions in the region.

China rising and the rhetoric of peace

Unfortunately, despite both passive and active efforts by China and Taiwan to establish peace across the Taiwan Strait, China’s rise and the development of an independent identity in Taiwan in the post-Cold War period poses immense challenges for the progress towards peace and threatens to re-establish conflict as the norm in Cross-strait relations again. On the one hand, the economic growth that took place in China after 1978 turned it into a regional power well positioned to contend for global leadership in the new century. During the early 1990s, China entered another period of high economic growth, a phase concisely captured by *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof as “the rise of China.”¹³ This rise brought forth curiosities and suspicions on how China intended to use its new influence.

Concurrently, the end of marshal rule in Taiwan set in motion the wheels of democratization on the island and the emergence of a new Taiwanese identity that sought to distance itself from China. Under the leadership of the DPP, Taiwan's move towards independence unnerved Beijing and encouraged the latter to retain the use of force as an option for solving the Taiwan issue.¹⁴

The 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait missile crisis (or the third Taiwan Strait crisis) demonstrated a clash between Taiwan's emerging identity and China's growing global power. Deeply concerned over Taiwan's first democratic presidential election in March 1996 and the implications of the event for domestic political stability, Beijing attacked presidential candidate Lee Teng-hui and threatened to adopt the military option and forcefully unify Taiwan should the latter carry out its election. Lee Teng-hui's visit to the United States before the election to deliver a speech at his alma mater, Cornell University, infuriated Beijing and provoked the latter to test fire missiles on targets just off the coast of Taiwan, bringing China and Taiwan to the closest point to conflict since 1958.¹⁵ While open conflict did not break out in the aftermath of the missile test fire, the growing peace in the Taiwan Strait abruptly ground to a halt. The sudden deterioration of Cross-strait relations cut short preparations for the third ARATS–SEF dialogue that occurred concurrently with Taiwan's preparation for its presidential election and postponed communication across the Strait indefinitely.

Besides severely damaging the developing peace in the Taiwan Strait, the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis generated widespread concern and distrust across the world on the rise of China and its future ambitions. Since the missile crisis, the “China threat” became a common refrain in the international community; China had little to do with peace. Ironically, the China threat theory—or the argument that as its economic power grows, China will become more assertive and revisionist in the world—challenges China's assertion of its peaceful image following the turn towards economic reform and development in 1978. The contrast between the two images of China has since become the crux of the debate over the future of China.¹⁶

In terms of peace, China is only as peaceful or violent as its observers are willing to believe. In Taiwan, the 1995–1996 crisis became a watershed for more than a decade-long turn towards estrangement and intense competition with China. While China and Taiwan agreed to resume dialogue through the ARATS–SEF channel in 1998, communication across the Strait was once again cut short following Lee Teng Hui's radio interview with Deutsche Welle in July 1999 in which he called Taiwan and China two separate nations. The election of pro-independence presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian in the following year initiated a period of eight years when China and Taiwan abandoned direct communication and retreated to a situation that resembled the Cold War. While China and Taiwan did not engage in any open confrontation and negative peace ensued in the Taiwan Strait during the new century, Cross-strait relations seemed destined to remain in deadlock so long as Beijing continued to distrust and refuse dealing with pro-independence figures in Taiwan.

In terms of the development of peace across the Strait, notwithstanding the warming of bilateral relations from 2008 to 2016, active efforts by either China or Taiwan remained limited. Even if the Taiwan Strait remained free of violence and conflict in the new century, Cross-strait relations often appeared stagnant as the political atmosphere deteriorated. In other words, a state of negative peace characterized the Taiwan Strait while positive peace seemed scarce. Nonetheless, a closer examination of the discourse of Beijing and

Taipei over the years reveals that rather than refraining from the difficult question of Chinese sovereignty out of the consideration for peace, leaders from both sides of the Strait have repeatedly framed their political stance in terms of peace. For example, regarding the issue of Taiwan, Deng Xiaoping was not shy to proclaim his patience for peaceful unification. In an official statement to Taiwan, Deng claimed that “at the heart of the Taiwan issue is unification, and ‘peaceful unification’ has become the common language between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the KMT.”¹⁷ Since then, peaceful unification became the official position of China against Taiwan, repeatedly reiterated by Jiang Zemin and other Chinese leaders.

Correspondingly, in Taiwan, regardless of stance, political leaders since the end of the Cold War have all made connections to peace in various statements. In response to China’s call for peaceful unification, Lee Teng-hui once proclaimed that “unification should be pursued under the reality of separate governments . . . and both China and Taiwan should adhere to peaceful ways of solving all disputes.”¹⁸ Still, Chen Shui-bian emphasized peace by proposing the establishment of a state committee to develop guidelines for peaceful development between China and Taiwan while making claims in public that he had reached out to Beijing numerous times with an “olive branch of peace.”¹⁹ In 2008, in his inauguration address, incoming president Ma Ying-jeou suggested “the possibility for peace and co-prosperity between China and Taiwan.”²⁰ Ma’s ideal for peace later transformed into the East China Sea and the South China Sea Peace Initiatives, official statements aimed at settling Taiwan’s maritime disputes with China and other nations.²¹ In short, the vision for peace was never absent across the Taiwan Strait, yet peace nonetheless remains difficult to come by in the region.

Compared with the negative peace in the Taiwan Strait that has endured for almost seven decades, efforts towards the establishment of a positive peace between China and Taiwan seem fleeting and disproportional. Such an imbalance calls into question whether China and Taiwan are genuinely interested in the search for peace, or more interested in using peace as rhetoric to consolidate their respective interests. The fact that peace seems to refer to different imaginations for China and Taiwan—peaceful unification versus peaceful coexistence—puts Beijing and Taipei at odds. In turn, short of a consensus on the definition of peace and its meaning for the future of Cross-strait relations, China and Taiwan continue to view each other suspiciously; any reference to peace becomes rhetorical in the sense that progress towards political negotiations remains unapparent while China and Taiwan refrain from compromising on either the issue of unification or separation. From this angle, China’s rising becomes a phenomenon that warrants anxiety. While economic development generates peace by discouraging violence,²² without reciprocal efforts to further improve and consolidate bilateral relations, peace in the Taiwan Strait remains delicate and subject to the whim of decision makers.

Conclusion: Will the dove return?

With the election of Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, the DPP once again returned to power in Taiwan. Meanwhile, under Xi Jinping, China seeks to fulfill the China Dream, an ideal that the Chinese nation should rise and stand among the ranks of great nations in the world.²³ Regarding the future of Cross-strait relations, China and Taiwan seem to hold different visions, a situation that is not uncommon since the separation of China in 1949. Corresponding to the negative peace that has characterized Cross-strait relations at large,

the potential for China and Taiwan to maintain a peaceful stalemate remains. However, peace between China and Taiwan was the product of changes in international relations and economic development and was destabilized after China's show of force in the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. Hence whether peace can be reconsolidated in the Taiwan Strait in the near future remains to be seen.

Noting China's economic rise in the new century and the implication of economic development for peace, in many ways echoing the long-term debate surrounding the rise of China since the 1990s, peace in the Taiwan Strait also hinges on the prospects of China's continued growth and future intentions. In terms of the establishment of peaceful reunification as Beijing's formal position on Taiwan, two possible scenarios demand attention. If the Chinese economy continues to grow, the potential for peaceful development across the Strait may increase as well as China may continue to bide its time with Taiwan—a position once advocated by Deng Xiaoping—and expect the latter to eventually return to the negotiating table. Even without active engagement between China and Taiwan, negative peace may follow in the Taiwan Strait. The more challenging scenario is when the Chinese economy slows, Beijing may look to the resolution of the Taiwan issue as a way to turn attention away from its economic performance or even as a solution to such a downturn. Should that happen, peace across the Strait could turn into a distant goal.

Since the change of government in Taiwan in 2016, the relationship between China and Taiwan has stagnated and returned to a state of stalemate. Disagreeing on whether the 1992 consensus should continue to serve as the basis for interactions across the Strait, Beijing and Taipei broke off direct communication through the ARATS–SEF channel and retreated to a condition that strikingly resembles the Cold War or the decade following the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis. Noting the China Dream, Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasized the “two one hundred years” as the dates when China will realize its grand development goal. By 2021, or one hundred years since the founding of the CCP, China will become a moderately prosperous society, and by 2049, or one hundred years from the establishment of the PRC, the Chinese nation will realize its great revival.²⁴ Since the downturn of Cross-strait relations in 2016, several observers have suggested 2021 and 2049 as the dates when China will seek an end to the Taiwan issue and potentially by force if necessary.²⁵ In this sense, peace has an expiration date and the passive peace between China and Taiwan may not be enough to save the Taiwan Strait from falling into conflict again.

Nonetheless, while the future of peace seems precarious, a survey of nearly seven decades of division between China and Taiwan suggests that peace, rather than war or conflict, is the dominant phenomenon in the Taiwan Strait. Despite Taiwan's turn towards maintaining its distance from China after the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, the gap in China–Taiwan relations was quickly closed following the overturn of government in Taiwan in 2008. In other words, both conflict and peace are temporal phenomena that can be changed in a short period of time depending on the whim of decision makers. Given this reality, perhaps a more important issue is whether conflicted parties take the initiative to resolve their dispute and make peace. In terms of Cross-strait relations, the ARATS–SEF mechanism offers many insights for positive peace. By negotiating through the private channel of ARATS and SEF, China and Taiwan were able to communicate directly and maneuver around the sensitive fact that both parties hold different interpretations of China, which in turn led to the realization of various functional cooperation and spillovers. Success of the ARATS–SEF model perhaps suggests a potential method for resolving tensions and generating peace in other regions around the world stricken with civil strife.

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