

Mainland China's Taiwan Policy: From Peaceful Development to Selective Engagement

Xin Qiang. London and New York: Routledge, 2022. 138 pp. £35.99 (pbk). ISBN 9780367756307

Nien-chung Chang-Liao

Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan
Email: clnc@gate.sinica.edu.tw

Xin Qiang's timely new book fills a niche in academic writing about China's policy toward Taiwan from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping. He argues that since Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016, China's Taiwan policy has shifted from "peaceful development" to "selective engagement" – a combination of "conflictual measures in security, political and diplomatic fields" on the one hand, and "coordinative approaches on economic, social and cultural affairs" on the other (p. 35). Such a dual-track approach explains a puzzle raised by Xin in his introductory chapter: despite a political impasse and military tension across the Taiwan Strait, economic exchanges between the two sides remain booming, even during the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 5).

In chapter two, Xin reviews China's policy toward Taiwan after former Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou took office in 2008. He argues that Beijing's "peaceful development" policy – the pursuit of economic interdependence and social integration across the Strait – failed to achieve China's goal of "the attainment of peaceful reunification" with Taiwan (p. 30), and instead resulted in the election of pro-independence President Tsai in 2016 (p. 31). In chapter three, Xin evaluates current China's "selective engagement" policy and contends that it "will be employed as a regular and routine framework ... if only the DPP is in power" (p. 68). Chapter four examines changes and continuity in China's Taiwan policy; Xin argues that Beijing has become more concerned about Taiwan's *de facto* rather than *de jure* independence and has placed more hope on "the mainland itself" rather than on the Taiwanese people. In the concluding chapter, Xin claims that "peaceful development and selective engagement will be the two regular and routine policy alternatives," depending on whether the ruling party in Taiwan will accept the one-China principle (p. 115).

According to Xin, Taipei's resistance to the "1992 Consensus" has led China to implicitly abandon its "peaceful development" policy toward Taiwan. For some Chinese pundits, even the use of force against the island is not unfeasible: the only way that things could get back on the right track would be if Taipei were to accept the "1992 Consensus" again. For such thinkers, the answer to any cross-Strait problem is thus always simply resorting to Beijing's "one China" principle. According to other scholars, however, the consensus on "one China" remains a "myth" and even in fact a "dissensus" (see articles by Adam P. Liff and Dalton Lin, and by Yu-Jie Chen in *The China Quarterly* 252, special section on "The 'One China' Framework and International Politics"). Perhaps the author should have more engagement with the scholarly debates on "one China" and the "1992 Consensus."

Moreover, Xin's analysis of China's Taiwan policy can also provide additional insights into the escalating tensions associated with China's policy toward Hong Kong – a subject that Xin does not address – given Beijing's assumption that the "one China, two systems" model employed in Hong Kong and Macau can also be applied to Taiwan. In particular, Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law in Hong Kong in 2020, which eroded the autonomy that the former British colony was promised under the model, contributed to the overwhelming victory of President Tsai's re-election at Taiwan's 2020 presidential campaign. As the Taiwanese public is becoming more suspicious of Beijing's credibility, Taipei's continuing rejection of "1992 Consensus" seems to be a consequence rather than a cause of China's shifting policy.

Although it is a shame that there are still gaps in the book that remain to be filled, it is also a pleasure to see an able scholar reflecting thoughtfully on the shift of China's Taiwan policy to one of selective engagement. As Xin Qiang laments,

Beijing's engagement effort was offset by security tension and the political impasse...the mainland's confrontational approaches in security, political, and diplomatic frontiers would undermine the credibility and sincerity of Beijing's conciliatory gestures in economic, social, and cultural areas. The strained cross-Strait relations will inevitably exacerbate the hostility and drive common Taiwanese to turn their backs on mainland China, which will consequently make it harder ... to charm the public into favoring Beijing's ultimate goal of peacefully unifying the two sides (p. 67).

Given the escalation of cross-Strait tensions, readers of Xin's book will wonder: can the "1992 Consensus" still be a panacea for the cross-Strait deadlock? Can a more assertive China under Xi Jinping restore the "peaceful development" policy toward Taiwan? What can Beijing do if the majority of the Taiwanese people continue to refuse the "1992 Consensus"? Perhaps no one can be sure. However, more important than rehashing the decades-old "1992 Consensus" is to focus on how Beijing's "one China" principle should be adapted to meet the new and pressing challenges presented by the vastly changing geopolitical environment. Simply assuming that China's Taiwan policy of "peaceful development" would resume, should Taipei follow Beijing's demands, rings hollow to the Taiwanese public as well as to any honest observer of cross-Strait relations.

doi:10.1017/S0305741023000462

Ugandan Agency within China–Africa Relations: President Museveni and China's Foreign Policy in East Africa

Barney Walsh. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 205 pp. £21.99 (pbk). ISBN 9781350255470

Hang (Ayo) Zhou

Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, Norway
Email: hang.zhou@cmi.no

In recent years, the notion of African agency has become a productive avenue for analysis within the China–Africa field. A growing body of scholarly literature reveals that a wide range of African actors – from presidents and political factions to bureaucrats, local governments and local entrepreneurs – are not merely passive agents to be acted upon but active players. Their various calculated actions, as much as those of their Chinese counterparts, co-constitute and co-shape the often-uncertain China–Africa realities on the ground.

Barney Walsh's *Ugandan Agency within China–Africa Relations* represents another welcome addition to this line of inquiry. By resorting to a "case within a case study" (p. 146) approach – that is, centring on two security issues, terrorism and oil investment, in East Africa's Uganda, Walsh unpacks how the Ugandan President has strategically exploited the Chinese presence in Uganda and the broader East African region to skilfully consolidate his domestic power position and deliberately drive a more militarized regional security and integration agenda that also