

# Taiwan's Relations with China Improve

by Leni Rubinstein

After great tension immediately following the election of Chen Shui-bian as President of Taiwan in March, the cross-strait situation has since improved considerably.

The election of Chen Shui-bian, the former leader of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), increased the danger of conflict across the Taiwan Strait. Immediately following the elections, China's President Jiang Zemin made it clear in discussions with leading visitors from Taiwan, including former Speaker of Parliament Liang Surung and legislator Fung Hu-hsiang, that the new government in Taiwan had to publicly, and unambiguously, state its support for the principle of "one China." Failing to do so would mean war.

## 'Like a Great Poem'

However, the combination of the successful meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China, South Korea, and Japan in May, a heightened awareness of the danger of a new speculative assault on Asia, and an intense schedule of meetings and seminars across the Taiwan Strait, began to change the course of developments. Further, the historic meeting between the Presidents of North and South Korea, on June 13-14, helped pave the way for a decisive change. As a leading individual from Taiwan explained: "The meeting between the leaders of the two Koreas is like a great poem. The most important effect is in the overall idea and is not visible."

At a press conference a few days later, on June 20, President Chen Shui-bian took a cue from the preceding week's historic Inter-Korean Summit. He said that the photograph of President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea and Kim Jong-il of North Korea stepping forward to shake each other's hands, is hanging in his study, and that the picture has been an inspiration to him. "If the two Koreans can, why can't we?" he asked, adding that leaders across the Taiwan Strait possess similar wisdom and creativity, and could also rewrite history. Chen Shui-bian further said that he believes that as long as both sides display good will and sincerity in their talks, they can formulate a definition of "one China" that would be acceptable to both, and he is "confident that we can jointly deal with the question of a future 'one China' based on the existing foundation"—meaning the conclusions and agreements reached in past negotiations between the two officially authorized intermediary bodies.

## Cross-Strait Visits Increase

On June 25, a 36-member delegation from Taiwan's Chinese National Federation of Industries travelled to China for an eight-day visit, designed to inspect the mainland's economic and trade situation, and to see the areas in which Taiwan businessmen can render their assistance. Their itinerary included Beijing, Shanghai, and the special economic development zones in Pudong, Wuxi, and Kunshan, and meetings with several mainland Chinese officials in charge of trade and economic affairs. While in Beijing, the group met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, who expressed his hope that Taiwan's industrial sector will be able to play a more important role in the development of cross-strait relations. He also expressed his hope, that Taiwanese investors will show interest in the development of western China. Later the same day, Beijing's State Council hosted a dinner in honor of the Taiwan visitors at the Great Hall of the People.

At the same time, more than 2,000 businessmen from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau, as well as more than 1,000 businessmen from Taiwan, participated in a Guangdong-Taiwan trade fair. The mainland's number-two negotiator with Taiwan, Tang Shu-bei, delivered a speech at the opening of the fair, in which he reiterated that Taiwan and mainland China can discuss any issue, as long as the discussions take place under the "one China" principle.

In early July, a delegation of legislators from Taiwan's pro-unification New Party, led by Fung Hu-hsiang, made a six-day "cross-strait reconciliation promotion" visit, to meet with officials in Beijing, as well as with China's top Taiwan negotiator, Wang Daohan, in Shanghai. The delegation was invited by the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait, and marked the first party-to-party engagement between the two sides in 50 years. The New Party delegation's visit was front-page news in the English-language newspaper *China Daily* for several days. The delegation met with China's top Taiwan policymaker, Vice Premier Qian Qichen, followed by a press conference for media executives from Taiwan, in which Qian threw out a couple of bombshell formulations that could lead to a breakthrough in negotiations.

First, Qian Qichen said that "one China" should not be interpreted from the viewpoint of "it must be either me or you," and added that the Republic of China or the People's Republic of China "means almost the same thing . . . that is, one China." He further elaborated that the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, signed between mainland China and the United States, mentions that both sides of the Taiwan Strait acknowledge that there is only one China, while it falls short of detailing the actual definition of "one China." "This is a very good foundation for improved cross-strait ties," Qian stated. Ever since former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's provocative statement last year, that mainland China and Taiwan have a special "state-to-state" relationship, official spokesmen from mainland China have repeatedly said, that "one China" means the People's Republic of China. Vice

Premier Qian Qichen's statements open the door for resuming official discussions between mainland China and Taiwan, discussions that were suspended by Beijing after Lee Teng-hui described the Taiwan-China relationship as "state to state."

Second, Qian Qichen said that Beijing would welcome visits to the mainland by officials of the Kuomintang party, and any other parties that do not support the splitting of Taiwan and China. As to a visit by the pro-independence DPP, Qian said that it must voice its support for the "one China" principle, before it can send a delegation.

The response was immediate. Taiwan Prime Minister Tang Fei, the very next day, stated that Beijing's good will, demonstrated by mainland China's Vice Premier Qian Qichen's remarks, are signs indicating that there is the possibility for a resumption of talks between the two sides. And, the Vice Chairman for the Mainland Affairs Office, Lin Chong-pin, also welcomed the recent good will that has been displayed by mainland Chinese authorities, saying that it creates a silver lining to the cross-strait deadlock.

Two days after mainland China's Vice Premier had stated that officials from Taiwan were welcome, a delegation of elected representatives arrived in Beijing for a four-day visit aimed at pushing for resumption of dialogue and peaceful exchange. The delegation was composed of 19 Kuomintang legislators, one People First legislator, and four county coun-

cilors. The delegation met with President Jiang Zemin and Vice Premier Qian Qichen, and visited mainland China's State Council.

### 'Mainland China Fever'

Since the Presidential election in March, 52 political party officials have travelled to the mainland, some elected officials making several trips, resulting in Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian expressing concern about the "mainland China fever" affecting opposition legislators in Taiwan.

Related to these developments are the instructions by Vice Premier Qian Qichen to the State Council's Central Office for Taiwan Affairs at the end of July, to invite agricultural specialists from Taiwan to Gansu, a major province in western China, for talks on joint development of agriculture in China's "Great West." The State Council is planning a cross-strait investment workshop on joint development of the western part of China, to which 100 agricultural specialists, as well as business leaders and related representatives from Taiwan, will be invited.

Currently, preparatory seminars are taking place in China to prepare several conferences to be held in the United States and Europe in the autumn, with the focus being cultural and economic collaboration, to educate and mobilize overseas Chinese toward a future reunification.

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