

# Research on Mainland China's Taiwan Policy and the Change of Taiwan People's Social Mentality

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## Abstract

**Social mentality is an internal reflection and thinking of the public on the changes in the national and social situation. In fact, since the beginning of the 21st century, the mainland's Taiwan policy has been in change; and sometimes it is mild while sometimes it is tense. This reality determines the characteristics of Taiwan's people's social mentality, which demonstrates the rise of "subject consciousness" and the spread of the concept of "maintaining the status quo". Therefore, there appears fear and anxiety about the unity among the public.**

## Keywords

**Mainland China, Taiwan policy, Taiwan people, social mentality, research on change.**

## 1. Introduction

As a kind of social consciousness, social mentality exerts an initiative reaction on social existence. While active and healthy social mentality plays a role in promoting social development, negative and backward social mentality hinders social progress. With the rapid development of cross-strait relations in recent years, some negative factors have emerged due to the changes in mainland's Taiwan policy and the mentality of the Taiwan people. Some people are uneasy, anxious about and even afraid of cross-strait relations and the development of mainland's Taiwan policy, which has affected and restricted the healthy development of cross-strait relations. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the study of Taiwan people's social mentality in policy making.

## 2. Social Mentality and Its Composition

Social mentality is an ideological trend or tendency that reflects a certain interest or requirement of people in a particular environment, which reveals the psychological state of people in a particular society and has a wide-ranging impact on social life. For example, the state of social psychology demonstrated by international and domestic political trends, economic trends, and major events in a period reflects some unusual emotions, attitudes, and social atmospheres [1].

Besides, social mentality is the common psychological state of the people towards themselves and social realities, including social attitudes, emotions and experiences and intentions. Therefore, it can be said that social mentality is an ideological trend or tendency that reflects a certain interest or requirement of people in a particular environment, which has a wide-ranging impact on social life and reveals the psychological state of people in a particular society.

### **3. Changes in Mainland's Policy toward Taiwan Strait**

#### **3.1. Chen Shui-bian Administration (2000-2008)**

During Chen Shui-bian administration, since the "Taiwan independence" activities were rampant, the mainland government strengthened its efforts to restrain separation, enacting the Anti-Secession Law and beginning to safeguard the unity of the country through legal means. Comrade Hu Jintao put forward four points of opinion. First, the one-China principle should never be wavered; second, efforts to achieve peaceful reunification should never be given up; third, the policy that makes unification rely on Taiwan people should never be changed; fourth, opposition to "Taiwan independence" activities should never be compromised.

#### **3.2. Ma Ying-jeou Administration (2008-2016)**

Due to his membership of Chinese Nationalist Party and personal experience, Ma Ying-jeou is relatively more conservative on the Taiwan issue. So the relationship between Taiwan and the mainland began to be relatively moderate during his administration.

Based on this change, President Xi Jinping met with Lien Chan, honorary chairman of Chinese Nationalist Party, in February 2014. President Xi proposed some opinions on Taiwan issue. For example, he proposed that "compatriots on both sides of the strait are bound by kinship and cannot be separated; that "the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait share a common destiny and can solve all misunderstandings"; that "the compatriots on both sides of the strait should work together to promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations"; and that "the compatriots on both sides of the strait must join hands to achieve the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation.

#### **3.3. The Early Days of Tsai Ing-wen Administration (2016-2018)**

Since Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016, cross-strait relations have showed a trend of "the people being concerned about unification but the officials being not". Although many Taiwan People support unification, Tsai Ing-wen goes her own way to further promote "Taiwan independence". Therefore, the mainland has strengthened its efforts to deal with separation activities. The purpose is to uphold the one-China principle and stabilize the situation in the Taiwan Strait [2].

#### **3.4. After the "Nine in One" Elections in 2018**

The "Nine in One" elections held in Taiwan at the end of 2018 have also exerted a certain impact on cross-strait relations. On July 13th, 2018, when meeting with the delegation of Taiwan people from all walks of life led by Lien Chan (former chairman of the Chinese Nationalist Party) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, General Secretary Xi Jinping cited a poem to fully express his confidence in mainland's Taiwan policies and strategies, as well as the determination and faith that the mainland will continue to maintain the stability and continuity of its Taiwan policies and promote cross-strait relations in the direction of peaceful development.

### **4. The Change of Taiwan People's Social Mentality**

The author analyses the changes in Taiwan people's social mentality mainly from three aspects, namely, social cognition, social sentiment and social values.

#### **4.1. Social Cognition**

In terms of social cognition, the changes in Taiwan people's social mentality are mainly reflected in two aspects, namely, the evident rise of "subjective consciousness" in Taiwan, and the "social consensus" of "maintaining the status quo".

#### **4.1.1. The Evident Rise of “Taiwan Subjective Consciousness”**

“Taiwan subjective consciousness” is a kind of new “Taiwanese consciousness” carefully crafted during the 12 years of Lee Teng-hui administration, the core of which is to downplay and even eliminate the provincial role of Taiwan, and actively create the image of Taiwan as a main country. This consciousness was further enhanced during Chen Shui-bian administration, and gradually formed a “national view” of Taiwan. This kind of consciousness basically conveys the idea that all people living in Taiwan and agreeing to Taiwan are new Taiwanese, that the new Taiwanese are the masters of Taiwan, that Taiwan is a factual “independent state”, and that Taiwan’s interests and destiny should be determined by 23 million new Taiwanese [3].

It can be said that this awareness has produced a certain influence in Taiwan, and an increasing number of Taiwan people accept or support it. Many Taiwan people have resisted the “one country, two systems” policy because they believe that its implementation will make a president become a common person and make a country become a province. Therefore, the “Taiwan subjective consciousness” has distanced Taiwan people from the mainland to a certain extent.

#### **4.1.2. The “Social Consensus” of “Maintaining the Status Quo”**

Although Taiwan is distancing from the mainland, it has never officially announced its efforts to build a nation. On the one hand, Taiwan’s successive leaders dare not take such risks. On the other hand, there is no such social foundation in Taiwan. Although many Taiwan people want to maintain a certain distance from the mainland, they more hope to “maintain the status quo”. Such an idea has basically become a “social consensus” because the long-standing reality has prompted the idea among the Taiwan people that the ambiguity of the nature of Taiwan’s regime can guarantee the stability of people’s lives for a long time. However, stepping forward or backward will cause the turmoil of society. While such an idea obviously hinders reunification, it can ease “Taiwan independence” activities in some way. Therefore, this “social consensus” demonstrates both a backward side and a progressive side.

### **4.2. Social Sentiment**

The long-term confrontation between the mainland and Taiwan has exerted a profound impact on Taiwan’s social sentiment. This impact is manifested in two aspects, namely, the accumulated feeling of “relative deprivation” as well as the spread of the “fear of mainland” and the “anxiety of being unified” [4].

#### **4.2.1. The Accumulated Feeling of “Relative Deprivation”**

It is known to us all that the mainland and Taiwan have confronted each other since 1949. Before 1971, Taiwan people basically did not have much hatred for and dissatisfaction with the mainland. After Taiwan was expelled from the United Nations, however, the nationality of the Republic of China gradually lost its legitimacy around the world. Besides, with the gradual expansion of the mainland government’s diplomatic achievements, the normal activities of the Taiwan people overseas were gradually suppressed and crowded out. Most importantly, the role representing China no longer belonged to Taiwan and Taiwan people.

During their long-term hard times, the Taiwan people have gradually developed a sense of “relative deprivation”. The people of Taiwan are increasingly feeling that what they originally possessed has been taken away by the mainland government. This kind of consciousness is accumulated over time.

#### **4.2.2. The Spread of “Fear of Mainland” and “Anxiety about Being Unified”**

After 1949, political movements took place again and again in mainland China, and many intellectuals and ordinary people in these political movements couldn’t be guaranteed safety and personal dignity. In addition, although the mainland China abandoned the “class struggle” route after 1978, there are still a large number of extreme leftists in the Chinese mainland and

the ideology has become more and more prominent. Against such a backdrop, Taiwan people living in a place with certain democratic freedom are naturally afraid of the concept of one China and thus anxious about the unified social form. More importantly, this idea is further spread because an increasing number of people in Taiwan uphold it.

### 4.3. Social Values

The social values in Taiwan are continuously affected by the confrontation between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and the constant changes in the mainland's Taiwan policy. Generally speaking, Taiwan's social values are mainly embodied in two aspects, namely, the prevalent value of "being small but fortunate" and the "pluralism" values becoming the mainstream.

#### 4.3.1. The Prevalent Value of "Being Small But Fortunate"

Although Taiwan experienced a fairly long period of being under "martial law" after 1949, Taiwan's economy witnessed some development. After the 1980s, Taiwan opened its party ban and achieved freedom in all aspects. By the end of the 20th century, Taiwan had become a developed region in the world, with its living standards being close to those of Western Europe and the United States.

Taiwan people can feel the sense of happiness when seeing their own living conditions and comparing theirs with the mainland people's, so they basically uphold the value of "being small but fortunate". They feel that they not only lead happy lives but also are very fortunate. At least, they are free from the misfortune falling on the mainland.

#### 4.3.2. The "Pluralism" Value Becoming the Mainstream

Taiwan actually represents one of the most special periods of China because this region has not been impacted by successive revolutions since modern times. Therefore, there has never been a unified political ideology in Taiwan. Taiwan's ideological field is basically close to that of the Western Europe and the United States. It can be said that various values exist there, presenting a form of "pluralism". The "pluralism" value in Taiwan reflects the freedom of thought and culture in this region to a certain extent, which naturally determines the yearning for democracy and freedom among Taiwan people.

## 5. Suggestions on Taiwan Policy Based on the Changes in Taiwan People's Social Mentality

It is important for us to take changes in Taiwan people's social mentality seriously, because these social and cultural backgrounds are, to a certain extent, a solid basis for us to adjust or formulate policies toward Taiwan. According to the social psychology of the Taiwan people, the author thinks that adjustments to Taiwan policy should be made in the following three aspects. To begin with, it is necessary to adhere to the basic policy direction of "one country, two systems, and Taiwan program". This basic policy is a core principle, which is the bottom line that can never be broken through. Otherwise, any Taiwan policy will become meaningless. No matter how the international situation and the mentality of the people inside Taiwan change, the one-China principle should never be wavered. This is because the one-China principle is in line with the interests of both the people in mainland and the people in Taiwan. Although people on both sides of the strait may have some differences on the cognition of certain issues, the one China principle will gradually be recognized by Taiwan people with the implementation of relevant policies over time.

Second, it is worthwhile to follow the criterion of "basing on the state policy and taking all aspects into account" when making policies. It is known to us all that the mainland government has always adhered to the principles of "one China" and "taking economic construction as the centre" in formulating its policy toward Taiwan. It has never changed the basis of "peaceful

reunification of Taiwan and overall considerations". The author believes that this point can never be changed. After all, resorting to force is not suitable for the contemporary Taiwan issue. We know that in the contemporary mainland, there exists an extreme leftist radical thinking in some policymakers and common people, which advocates the use of force to unify Taiwan. However, we should still calmly think about it and take into all aspects into account. Currently, stability is the most important, and many problems should be resolved patiently and carefully. Third, it is advisable to pay attention to deconstructing, including, and assimilating Taiwan's diverse values when making policies. It is known to us all that the values of the mainland are very different from those of Taiwan and that the people in Taiwan have some worries over and fears for the values of the mainland. Therefore, the mainland should keep an inclusive attitude toward Taiwan's diverse values and be able to truly "seek common ground while reserving differences".

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