


## CHAPTER 28

## A New Method for Reunifying China

*Encouraged by a crisis to travel to Taiwan, a novel scheme is invented for reunifying China in a way that would achieve Taiwan's goals in cooperation with the People's Republic of China rather than over its resistance. Elements in the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry encourage the idea, which is deemed original by them and by a leading U.S. expert. China is briefed on it, but Taiwan, after some study, seems to discourage it.*


On a Saturday evening, February 10, 1966, at a cabin on the Chesapeake, I received an unexpected call from Taiwan via call-forwarding from my home. It was Hsieh Shu-yuan, an American citizen of Taiwanese extraction who functioned as a defense-policy adviser to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of Taiwan, the insurgent minority party that wanted independence from China. Because of her American citizenship, she was able, at a very early stage in Taiwan's relations with the mainland, to work in China. And in that capacity she befriended some very interesting Chinese scientists and introduced them to FAS. These scientists were, by 1996, the highest-ranking administrators of the Chinese equivalent of Los Alamos!

Shu-yuan appeared nervous about the threats then emanating from Beijing to engage in military maneuvers in the Taiwan Straits in the month before the March 23 election. "Did I think," she asked, "that America would come to the aid of Taiwan, if it were attacked? The people of Taiwan need reassurance!" 

I had been giving very little thought to Taiwan's problem, but I knew enough not to answer this question directly and sponta-

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neously. The DPP might simply be seeking a quotation that permitted them a release entitled “Scientists Assure Taiwanese That U.S. Will Defend Taiwan.” And this, in the context of an election campaign, would help them argue that a vote for independence could be made in the secure assumption that China would not be permitted to invade Taiwan.

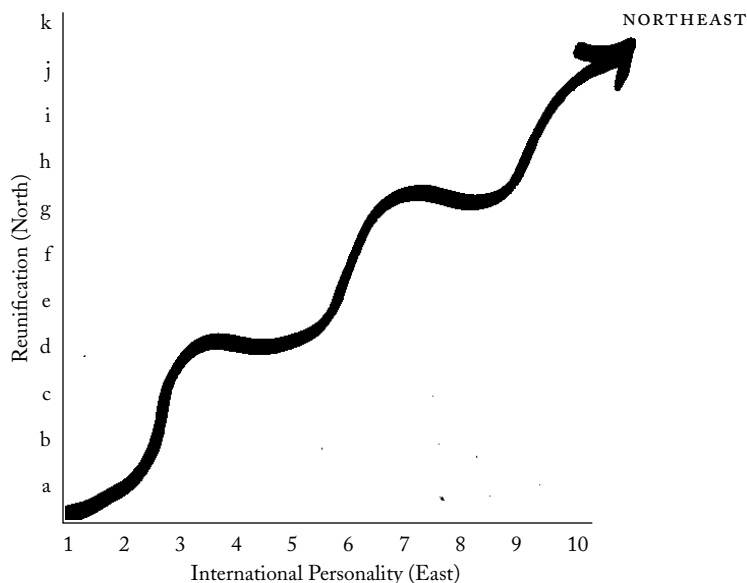
Saying I would call back, I decided to visit Taiwan as soon as possible to see what FAS might be able to do. It was, I advised our executive committee, the most dangerous hot spot of the moment; we owed it to ourselves to have a familiarization visit. 

I began reading everything I could find and talking to or visiting some experts. It seemed all but impossible to find a compromise between the avowed goals of the two political movements competing in Taiwan’s upcoming presidential election: The ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party said it wanted eventual reunification with China, while the opposition DPP said it wanted eventual independence.

On the plane to Taiwan, I reflected that this was how it appeared in one dimension. But what if one viewed the goal of independence simply as a drive for “more space”? This was, after all, how Taipei’s representative in Washington, Benjamin Lu (a KMT member), had described it to me a few days before. In this case, the two drives might not be inconsistent. What if one viewed the two goals as orthogonal in a plane rather than as opposed goals along a line? One might then imagine a strategy of trading off the reunification Beijing wanted for the more space Taiwan desired, with the resolute of the two forces moving along some approximation of a 45-degree line in a kind of “northeast direction.” (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1: *Northeast Strategy: A Failsafe Negotiating Process for Achieving Reunification of China Combined With An International Personality for Taiwan.* The points on both axes of this graph are purely illustrative. In reality, there would be many more points in both directions, and some of the current points would be subdivided. Each side might well put the points in a somewhat different order and, perhaps, have quite different points. All this would be subject to negotiation. The entire graph would not be agreed at the outset, but would develop over time. The purpose of the diagram is simply to illustrate how Taipei could stop trying to achieve international status over Beijing’s opposition but try, instead, to do so in cooperation with Beijing in return for negotiated progress toward reunification.

## Northeast Strategy: A Failsafe Negotiating Process for Achieving Reunification of China Combined With An International Personality for Taiwan



### STEPS TOWARD REUNIFICATION

ROC negotiates:

- k. Bilateral Ratification of Reunification Constitution
- j. Taiwan Plebiscite Approves Constitution Principles
- i. Agreement on Principles of Reunification
- h. Agreement on the Non-Use of Force
- g. Direct Political Negotiations begin
- f. Summit Meeting
- e. Bidirectional Exchanges of Officials
- d. Bidirectional Exchange of Citizens
- c. Relaxation of ROC Limits on Investment
- b. Relaxation of ROC Limits on Imports
- a. Direct Trade, Shipping, Mail, Air and Phone

### STEPS TOWARD INTERNATIONAL PERSONALITY

PRC withdraws opposition to:

- 1. Taiwan's officials visiting foreign countries in private capacity
- 2. Taiwan joining WTO
- 3. Taiwan joining IAEA
- 4. Taiwan having offices in various countries where they do not now exist
- 5. Taiwan joining World Bank
- 6. Taiwan joining IMF
- 7. Taiwan joining other subordinate U.N. bodies
- 8. Taiwan officials visiting foreign countries in an agreed official capacity
- 9. Taiwan joining U.N. as Observer
- 10. Taiwan joining U.N. General Assembly

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Thus was born the notion of a “northeast strategy.” One immediate corollary of it was that even the Taiwanese drive for membership in the UN—normally considered the quintessence of a two-China policy—could be accommodated by Beijing. Why? Because the UN membership could come at a time after reunification was achieved (i.e., at the top-right corner of the graph). In sum, there could even be *two* Chinese seats in the context of a *one*-China policy—if the timing was right; the USSR, after all, controlled three seats.

Hsieh Shu-yuan met my plane, and we discussed the election and its background. As the Communists were completing their successful overthrow of the Chinese government in 1949, the nationalist government of General Chiang Kai-shek—the Republic of China (ROC)—fled to the island security of Taiwan and awaited an invasion from the new mainland government, the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

When the Korean War broke out in 1950 and the U.S. decided to intervene, President Truman used the U.S. fleet to bar an invasion from the mainland, thus saving the ROC remnants on Taiwan from being overwhelmed by the PRC.

General Chiang Kai-shek ruled Taiwan for decades—behind the shield of American might—still claiming to be the head of the government of China when he died in 1975. The mainlanders who came with him repressed the native Taiwanese and controlled the government and society. His son, Chiang Ching-kuo, replaced him and began to bring in some Taiwanese—without whom the government could not function, since the ethnic mainlanders were dying out. In particular, Chiang Ching-kuo had made a Taiwanese agricultural expert, Dr. Lee Teng-hui, vice president. A straight arrow who played the violin, Lee Teng-hui earned a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from Cornell; his dissertation won the annual award of the American Agricultural Economics Association. He was also a Christian who spoke Japanese fluently, having graduated from Kyoto Imperial University in 1946 at the age of twenty-three.

Lee Teng-hui turned out to be the Gorbachev of Taiwan. A

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sleeper who had never challenged the ruling party, he could not be prevented from assuming power when Chiang Ching-kuo died. He began to outmaneuver the mainlanders, cleaning house in the manner of Gorbachev. In the words of Tien Hung-mao, the president of the Institute for National Policy Research in Taiwan, "In three rounds of power struggles and leadership reshuffling, Lee consolidated his power over the military, the party, and the government. In the process he has transformed the KMT from an authoritarian party with a revolutionary heritage to a democratic-type party with a strong indigenous character."

Now he was running in Taiwan's first popular election of a president, and as I arrived, the newspapers were reporting that he had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his political leadership.

At the DPP headquarters, I met Shih Ming-te, then DPP chairman, who had spent twenty-five years in KMT jails and was called the Nelson Mandela of Taiwan. He and his colleagues had sought Taiwanese independence at a time when General Chiang Kai-shek was claiming—as some still claim—that the Taiwanese-based forces were the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. Accordingly, they were imprisoned. From their point of view, mainland China had imposed only minimal control over Taiwan in the centuries before 1945. Major Chinese settlement in Taiwan occurred only after 1650, and Taiwan became a province of China only in 1886. In 1895, only nine years later, China ceded Taiwan to Japan. It was only following World War II, when the Allies ceded Taiwan to China, that Taiwan really became part of China. And what interaction they had with the mainland was not, from their point of view, favorable. Repressed by an invading mainland army for decades, they were now facing missile threats from Beijing. They considered themselves Taiwanese, not Chinese. And, as far as the Nobel Prize was concerned, they considered that it was they, not Lee Teng-hui, who had forced the democratization issue in Taiwan.

I began showing my sketch to various KMT public officials. To my amazement, one key analyst in the Foreign Ministry said, "You

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have opened our eyes to a new approach" and that the "past way of a parallel approach may not be so good and that, perhaps, the same goal could be achieved by cooperation rather than by conflict." This was exactly my view. Taiwan should stop trying to get "more space" over the dead body of the mainland and see how much it could get with the mainland's agreement. If its movement in the eastern direction came with PRC agreement, this movement could, by definition of the PRC, be part of a one-China policy and completely kosher. And the mainland would agree because it would get some kind of quid pro quo of movement in the northern direction.

Would the mainland buy such a policy? In a white paper, it had already declared that in a reunification agreement Taiwan would be permitted not only economic and cultural autonomy but also "certain rights in foreign affairs"—this was the open door to "more space." The mainland claimed it was prepared to discuss "all matters."<sup>[488]</sup>

Another key government official, of scientific inclinations, said immediately that this Northeast Strategy was "not only a way but the only way" to solve Taiwan's problems in view of the need to maintain a domestic consensus. And a key think-tank observer in Taiwan said it was "an ideal scenario for peaceful evolution."

This was unusual acceptance of a brand new idea. But was it just Chinese politeness? Upon returning home, I consulted with Ralph Clough, whom I considered to be America's greatest expert on Taiwan. I was then preparing a memorandum, at the request of the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry, on my idea. Clough said he could be quoted to them as saying that he "saw no major difficulties and thought the idea very interesting and clever and worth exploring." Of special interest to me was his inability to find more than the most minor and tacit precedents for the ROC and the PRC to trade off points in the two directions. (On reflection I thought this was because serious discussions of reunification were only just emerging as the Taiwanese completed the consolidation of their democratic process.)

I refrained from writing an article about this before the inaugural speech of President Lee Teng-hui on May 20. In case his govern-

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ment wanted to adopt such an approach, it seemed more discreet not to publish it in the Chinese press. However, a Chinese syndicate in Taipei got hold of the FAS newsletter and wrote a review of it that appeared in three related Chinese newspapers. It was surprisingly favorable: "None of these experts in Washington seems to know how to proceed to avoid conflicts and create a more favorable negotiation environment for Taiwan. One American scientist who is not known to the Taiwanese media proposed a bold strategy, the Northeast Strategy. . . . Compared to the impractical 'win-win situation' logo, the Northeast Strategy provides a new way of thinking for both sides who are willing to start peace talks."<sup>489</sup>

Needless to say, a "new way of thinking" was a very gratifying comment, and it seemed to confirm Clough's assessment of its originality. No less surprising was the reaction of the DPP. I had assumed that the DPP would reject this approach out of hand, so I had not sounded out their officials on the idea while I was in Taiwan. They, after all, did not want reunification. But I underestimated two factors. My Northeast Strategy graph had included, on the north axis, a rung labeled "plebiscite." The notion of a plebiscite was a key notion in DPP thinking. Their principled approach set great store in having the island vote on its future course. Also, the DPP was in favor of improving relations with the mainland—as all Taiwanese were. Hence the northern direction, to many of them, just represented "improvement in relations" capped by a plebiscite. As a consequence, the DPP was translating the newsletter and showing it to legislators.

On July 15, 1996, the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry sent me an unexpected letter saying that the theory had been "carefully reviewed by former minister Fredrick Chien and concerned heads of departments in the ministry with much admiration for your foresight." It asked me to work with a former ambassador and senior adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in developing the idea.

Meanwhile, I prepared to go to China to discuss it with the mainland. In the fall of 1996, I attended an arms control meeting in

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the area of the atomic weapons laboratory of the Chinese in Chengdu, Sichuan, near the base of the Tibetan mountains. It was here that the Chinese moved their atomic weapons program after a scare in the seventies during which the Soviets were rumored to have asked the United States whether we would mind if they bombed the Chinese nuclear facility, then in Manchuria. On returning to Beijing, I seized the occasion to discuss the Northeast Strategy at five places—all seemed receptive.

At the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), the Northeast Strategy was deemed, by one key participant, as "discussable" and "very constructive." At a dinner with the head of the Beijing Institute of Strategic Studies, the idea of "step-by-step" negotiations was called the "only way," and no objection was heard to the Northeast Strategy. At the Foundation for International and Strategic Studies, the idea was called "very constructive" and an official said it was surprising that a "new idea could be achieved by a mathematical insight." The Institute for Taiwan Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was sufficiently interested in the idea that it secured for me an appointment with the very high-placed Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council.

There I was taken to an elegant lunch in a beautiful guest house where, ordinarily, Taiwanese guests are wined and dined but where, I was told, theretofore, no American had been received. The idea was again deemed constructive, and study was promised.

The former Taiwanese ambassador with whom I was encouraged to stay in contact was Bernard T. K. Joei, now retired from diplomacy but still influential as a columnist for *The China Post* (Taipei). On returning to the United States, I wrote to him to encourage him to devote a column to this idea. Two months later he did so.<sup>490</sup> The good news in the column, entitled "The 'Northeast' Reunification Plan," was in the first paragraph: "Recently there has been a great deal of talk among local scholars and officials about the 'Northeast Strategy,' a method devised by the head of a group of American scholars for Taipei to work out its differences with Beijing."



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Apparently, it had been studied! On the other hand, the bad news was that Ambassador Joei felt free to attack it roundly. He concluded that the “core of the issue” was that the people of Taiwan were seeking “primarily security and prosperity, not merely decent status in the international community.” I took the whole incident as a sign that the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry had decided—or been instructed by the president—to dump cold water on the scheme.<sup>491</sup>

But ideas like this one do not die, because they embody an underlying logic that cannot be fully ignored. These are ideas that exist in nature, so to speak, “discovered” ideas rather than “invented” ideas and others rediscover them independently later, if not earlier also.<sup>492</sup> When the time is right, the two sides will certainly negotiate “northeast” tradeoffs. The thorough implementation of the Northeast Strategy probably hinges on the attainment of sufficient prosperity and freedom in the PRC to assure the Taiwanese that they would not be joined to a poorer and less democratic country.

How was it possible that a person who was not an “area” expert could come up with an untried plan for reunifying China—one sufficiently new to generate a “great deal of discussion” in Taiwan? In retrospect, it all turned on the timing. Under the first two presidents of Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek and his son, no one was considering ways of reunifying China through cooperation; on the contrary, the fashion then was to daydream of recapturing the mainland.

In recent years, the emphasis had changed to competing with the mainland in other ways, first economically and then through developing a free society. But the accent has remained on competition and internal political development. My visit came on the eve of the consolidation of democracy in Taiwan, the first election of a president.

This consolidation provided the Taiwanese authorities with the opportunity to consider new approaches to their relations with the mainland. My arrival, through the happenstance of Hsieh Shu-yuan’s call, had come at exactly the right time to have this idea seriously, if temporarily, considered.