

Taiwan's commonsense consensus

The Economist

2011.2.24

15 cross-strait agreements

- Since Ma Ying-jeou was elected Taiwan's president in 2008, these have led to 15 cross-strait agreements, including last year's "ECFA"
- The day before [Chen Yunlin's visit to Taiwan on Feb. 23], an Economic Co-operation Committee (ECC), a joint China-Taiwan body to oversee implementation of the ECFA, met for the first time

- China and Hong Kong take more than 40% of Taiwan's exports; its businesses have at least \$90 billion invested in the mainland, where some 800,000 Taiwanese live
- Last year 1.6m Chinese tourists visited Taiwan
- the KMT hopes to show voters the benefits of better ties with China

Hearts and minds

- China hopes economic interdependence will win hearts and minds.
- This cunning plan does not seem to be working.
- In local elections in November, the DPP won more votes than the KMT.

Polls on Taiwan's future

From government's Mainland Affairs Council

- support for unification "as soon as possible" is 1.2%
- "status quo now/unification later": 17.6%
- support for independence, now or later, has climbed from 30.5% to 35.5%.

Not surprising?

- Taiwan has long behaved as a normal country in almost everything except its dealings with its large neighbour.
- And increased contact highlights points of difference as much as a shared ethnic and cultural heritage.
- Knowing China better makes Taiwanese even more aware of how lucky they are to be prosperous and free.

Policy and decision

- Mr Ma has to balance his economic romance with China with political aloofness.
- DPP too faces a dilemma.

1992 consensus

- The KMT has negotiated them under a weird formula known as the “1992 consensus”, in which China and Taiwan sit down together agreeing there is only “one China”, while keeping silent about what that means.
- DPP rejects this.
- DPP knows that they have to be able to deal with China.

Status quo

- The two parties are having a more sophisticated argument: not about independence or unification, but about how best to preserve a status quo most people in Taiwan cherish.

The danger is ...

- how China might react as it becomes clear that present policies are bringing unification no closer.
- The hope is that its leaders will enjoy the smoother relations and not ask where they are leading