

Mapping the Many Displacements of the China-Taiwan Border

Françoise Mengin

Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, Sciences Po, FRANCE

Abstract

My past research has revolved around three main topics. Firstly, some of my work has assessed the scope of the Republic of China's de-recognition in the 1970s by scrutinizing the devices that have been resorted to by Taipei's non diplomatic partners in order to foster exchanges with Taiwan without jeopardizing their commitment vis-à-vis Beijing. In short, relations with Taiwan have been *formally* confined to the private sphere thanks to legal fictions: para-diplomatic representative offices are considered as mere private associations, visas are issued under the seal of third country consulate, etc. Secondly, another part of my work has dealt with Taiwan's democratization. I have mainly analyzed this process in the terms of an unfinished decolonization. The effective implementation of the principle of representation through free election implied ipso facto that the sovereignty claimed should fall within the bounds of the territory occupied by the population represented. In order not to call into question the one China principle, democratization operated via a process of constitutional amendment: the official borders of the Republic of China remain those of 1947, including the Chinese mainland and even Mongolia. Moreover, multiparty system in Taiwan is linked to the protracted conflict that has historically structured society: the conflict between de jure unification and de jure independence in the long term. Thirdly, my research on cross-Straits relations per se – from the very early relocation tide of Taiwan's industry to the negotiation process undertaken under Ma Ying-jeou's presidency – has pointed to the part played by an un-recognized border. For instance, the lack of direct air and sea routes, up to 2008, has not put a curb on the relocation tide, quite de contrary: third countries or territories through which funds, property and people were forced to pass allowed manufacturers to free themselves from the limiting regulations imposed by Taipei, while the postponement of direct flights forced a growing number of *Taishang* (台商), and even their families, to reside permanently on the mainland. Likewise, the in-between status of the *Taishang* in the PRC – neither completely Chinese nor completely foreign – is part and parcel of their strategy to fuel economic, social, cultural and educational capital. Last example: the SEF-ARATS negotiations which resumed in 2008 have resulted in the signing of agreements that address so-called technical issues, leaving unresolved the status of the China-Taiwan border, even its very location: in the text of the agreements, any topological reference comes down to the word 'Strait' (haixia 海峽) and phrases derived from it, such as 'the two sides' (liang'an 兩岸).

Panel 8 Cross-Strait Relations

The paper focuses on the common theme linking my past works, namely the status of the China-Taiwan border in its very historicity. It reviews the many displacements of the border, at legal and symbolic levels, in order to meet antagonistic requirements: a democratic regime, cross-Strait economic integration, the PRC military threat.