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# Interpreting Xi Jinping's “Two Systems’ Taiwan Plan”

## An Analysis of a Debate Among Chinese Experts

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General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered his first and only major speech on the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s policy toward Taiwan on January 2, 2019, just over six years after assuming the position as head of the country's communist party. Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the issuance of the "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan", Xi called for exploring a "Two Systems' Taiwan Plan" ("两制" 台湾方案).<sup>1</sup> His exhortation was an implicit acknowledgment that the implementation of "One Country, Two Systems" (1C2S) in Hong Kong and Macao was an ill-suited model for unifying Taiwan with mainland China. PRC researchers heeded Xi's call, conducting research on the design and implementation of a new version of 1C2S for Taiwan.<sup>2</sup> Xi's instruction appeared again in an August 2022 white paper, "The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era", issued by the PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office and The State Council Information Office.<sup>3</sup> Beijing, however, has yet to announce the adoption of a "Two Systems' Taiwan Plan."

A careful examination of analyses and recommendations put forward by PRC scholars provides valuable insight into ongoing domestic discussions about the Taiwan Plan and, should Xi decide to adopt it, a foreshadowing of some of its content. This paper examines "A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan" (一国两制台湾方案初论), a compilation of 40 academic articles published in *China Review* (中國評論) between 2019 and early 2023.<sup>4</sup> The authors, most of whom work for prominent PRC think tanks and universities, provide their views on three distinct aspects of the Taiwan Plan: its characteristics and principles, the pathways toward unification, and possible post-unification institutional arrangements. Perhaps Beijing has decided to shelve the plan until a more propitious time; and if a Taiwan Plan eventually emerges, it could be substantially different from scholars' proposals presented in the book and analyzed in this paper. Furthermore, it cannot be excluded that the "Two Systems' Taiwan Plan" may never materialize.

## XI JINPING'S THOUGHTS ON THE TAIWAN PLAN

Xi set out several general propositions regarding the Taiwan Plan in his January 2019 speech. He maintained that relying on 1C2S to achieve the goal of peaceful reunification remains "the best approach to realizing national reunification". Difference in political systems "is not an obstacle to reunification", he added, since 1C2S was proposed "precisely to accommodate Taiwan's actual conditions". Provided that "China's sovereignty, security, and development interests are ensured", he continued, "after peaceful reunification, Taiwan's social system and its way of life will be fully respected", and the rights and interests of the people in Taiwan "will be fully protected".<sup>5</sup>

Reaffirming a long-standing PRC position, Xi declared that the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one family and that peaceful reunification should be achieved "through consultation and discussion as equals". Based on the "One China" principle, he proposed that both sides should elect representatives to "engage in extensive and in-depth democratic consultations on cross-strait relations and the future of the nation".<sup>6</sup>

The 2022 white paper largely reiterated Xi's statements. It stressed the imperative to explore the Taiwan Plan with the people in Taiwan, a process which would help them "develop a better understanding" of both 1C2S and the plan.<sup>7</sup> Yet, unlike the two previous white papers on Taiwan issued in 1993 and 2000, specific promises of a high degree of autonomy for Taiwan after unification, such as keeping its own military, are conspicuously missing in the 2022 iteration.<sup>8</sup> The new white paper states only: "Provided that China's sovereignty, security and development interests are guaranteed, Taiwan could enjoy a high degree of autonomy as a special administrative region."<sup>9</sup>

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The vagueness of the language and the excised promises are subject to multiple, contradictory interpretations by PRC scholars. In the book this paper examines, one expert argues that the white paper indicates that Beijing has rescinded its offer because it has been increasingly regarded as soft and impractical.<sup>10</sup> Another author contends that the lack of detailed commitments leaves room for various options to emerge from democratic consultation with Taiwan, which is an integral part of the Taiwan Plan itself.<sup>11</sup> A third expert postulates that specific arrangements are absent from the latest white paper simply because the Taiwan Plan has yet to be formulated.<sup>12</sup>

## CHARACTERISTICS AND PRINCIPLES: DEFINING THE TAIWAN PLAN

### *The Taiwan Plan should differ from the “Hong Kong model”.*

One point of agreement among PRC scholars is that the Taiwan Plan should be distinct from the 1C2S arrangement that was implemented in Hong Kong and Macao (the Hong Kong model) since the issues tied to unification with Taiwan are fundamentally different from those related to the handover of those former British and Portuguese territories.<sup>13</sup> One key difference they highlight is that the Hong Kong model was well received since it granted the people residing in those territories unprecedented rights to self-govern as special administrative regions (SARs) whereas Taiwan already has elaborate institutions and the ability to govern the area under its control based on the Republic of China (ROC) constitution. In their published articles, PRC scholars maintain that Taiwan should enjoy more rights and freedoms than Hong Kong and Macao after unification, although the breadth of the rights and freedoms is subject to intense debate.

One school of thought argues that, in the wake of protests in Hong Kong and increased cross-strait tensions, it is no longer feasible to realize the vision of former Chinese Communist Party (CCP) head Deng Xiaoping, who proposed in 1979 that “so long as Taiwan returns to the embrace of the motherland, we will respect the realities and the existing system there.”<sup>14</sup> Another school of thought favors more creative, if unspecified, arrangements, recognizing that even a more permissive version of the Hong Kong model would lack appeal in Taiwan since its government and people are unlikely to accept a future status as a mere local authority under PRC rule.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Taiwan Plan would likely be peaceful.*

A large majority of the book’s authors maintain that a “Two Systems’ Taiwan Plan” is premised on the peaceful reunification of Taiwan and mainland China. The arguments of the few experts who disagree center not on whether the PRC should consider military options but on whether it is necessary to prepare for various scenarios, including reunification through force.<sup>16</sup> “If the two sides, unfortunately, achieve reunification through non-peaceful means”, PRC National Society of Taiwan Studies council member Zheng Jian explains, Xi’s proposal for democratic consultation “would not be the pathway toward relevant institutional arrangements. ... [But] we will still listen to the voices of the people of Taiwan.”<sup>17</sup> Zheng urges PRC scholars not to focus solely on a plan based on peaceful reunification and argues that the degree of autonomy Taiwan could enjoy should be entirely dependent

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on how reunification occurs.<sup>18</sup> Zhu Lei of Minnan Normal University insists that the PRC should never commit to peaceful reunification as one of the Taiwan Plan's key principles since doing so would be equivalent to "tying one's own hands and feet".<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the mainstream argument is that peaceful reunification through 1C2S has always been the PRC's preference, and many scholars reiterate the sentence in the 2022 white paper: "Use of force would be the last resort taken under compelling circumstances."<sup>20</sup> Yet, none of the authors, implicitly or explicitly, advocates renouncing the use of force because they believe that retaining the military option is a necessary part of peaceful reunification, not its antithesis.<sup>21</sup> This logic dates to a 1995 speech by former PRC leader Jiang Zemin in which he stated that pledging not to use force "would only make it impossible to achieve peaceful reunification and would only lead to the eventual use of force to resolve the question".<sup>22</sup>

None of the book's authors propose a timeline or a hard deadline for unification. One scholar advises the PRC to develop a "roadmap" with clear goals and paths" but notes that there is "no need to come up with any 'timetable' immediately."<sup>23</sup> Another expert describes peaceful reunification as a process in which both sides engage in consultations and negotiations on equal terms while the timing of completing political unification is left open.<sup>24</sup> A third expert states that at present there is no specific timetable for reunification but also hints that 2049, the centenary of the founding of the PRC, could be a deadline since it is frequently associated with the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation for which unification is a "natural requirement", according to Xi.<sup>25</sup>

### *The meaning of "China" in the context of 1C2S is disputed.*

PRC scholars who examine the potential characteristics and principles of the Taiwan Plan uniformly emphasize the importance of the "One China" principle, which holds that "there is only one China in the world, Taiwan is a part of China, and the government of the PRC is the sole legal government representing the whole of China."<sup>26</sup> However, they disagree on the meaning, and implication, of "China" in the context of the Taiwan Plan. There are two distinct understandings. The conventional, and more conservative, interpretation postulates that the phrase "one country" in 1C2S refers to the PRC. After unification, Taiwan would become an SAR under the central government of the People's Republic as stipulated by its constitution. The more progressive view holds that the central government, constitution, and national symbols of a unified China could and should be decided through democratic consultations between representatives from both sides of the Taiwan Strait and, therefore, remain undetermined.<sup>27</sup>

Both schools of thought base their arguments on official PRC documents. The conservatives often invoke Deng, the architect of 1C2S, whose ideas many scholars regard as the most authoritative. Deng maintained that Taiwan, after unification, would enjoy a high degree of autonomy as an SAR within the PRC.<sup>28</sup> Conservatives also cite the official stance espoused during Jiang Zemin's presidency, which asserted that unifying as the People's Republic with the central government in Beijing.<sup>29</sup> In addition, scholars in this camp reference the current PRC constitution, which was written in 1982 to align with Deng's vision of achieving peaceful reunification by enabling the creation of SARs.<sup>30</sup>



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The progressives contest this long-held conservative interpretation of 1C2S. Wuhan University's Duan Lei and Xu Ying point out that the PRC constitution stipulates the SAR as only one possible institutional arrangement for 1C2S. The document never equates the establishment of SARs with the policy of 1C2S itself. Noting that Xi called for cross-strait discussion of the Taiwan Plan that will “fully consider Taiwan's reality” as opposed to simply imposing SAR status on the island, the two authors maintain that there are more options for an institutional arrangement of the Taiwan Plan.<sup>31</sup> Central Party School Professor Zhao Liqing further argues that the CCP has gradually shown more flexibility, openness, and inclusiveness in its attitude toward 1C2S since Deng's era. Zhao observes that, beginning in the 1990s, the CCP adopted a different formulation of the “One China” principle that, while still insisting that both sides of the Taiwan Strait are subject to Chinese sovereignty, deliberately dissociates the PRC with this “One China” and subsequently blurs the nature of the political system of a unified China.<sup>32</sup> Given the lack of appeal of the PRC's political system and ideology in Taiwan, Zhao maintains that the CCP would not compel Taiwan to be ruled by the PRC's current institutions. Just as the CCP exhibited ideological flexibility when introducing reform and opening in the late 1970s, Zhao asserts that the party would find innovative ways to jointly recreate state institutions with the people of Taiwan.<sup>33</sup>

### *There are different interpretations of the Taiwan Plan.*

Scholars from the conservative and progressive schools of thought are acutely aware that there is little receptivity to 1C2S in Taiwan. They attribute the policy's low popularity to the way it has been presented to the public by Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which, they contend, has generated “misinterpretations” and “prejudices” toward 1C2S.<sup>34</sup>

From the conservatives' standpoint, the DPP's assertion that 1C2S degrades or annexes Taiwan is nothing more than an attempt to “defame, distort, and stigmatize ‘One Country, Two Systems’ with the purpose of resisting reunification or promoting ‘Taiwan independence’”.<sup>35</sup> Conservative scholars also claim that the DPP capitalized on the unrest in Hong Kong to “deliberately sow fear among the Taiwanese people” and “boost [the party's] popularity for the election”.<sup>36</sup> As Taiwan would be allowed to preserve its social system, the conservatives maintain that the 1C2S arrangement is the best option for Taiwan as it is already a significant concession from the PRC's “One Country, One System”, under which Taiwan would become another PRC province with no special status or degree of autonomy.<sup>37</sup>

The progressives, while mostly concurring with the aforementioned rationale, further lament how the people of Taiwan have failed to appreciate the potential flexibility of 1C2S because the DPP has misled them into equating the as-yet-undetermined 1C2S arrangement in the Taiwan Plan to the compact implemented in Hong Kong.<sup>38</sup> Progressive scholars depict the Taiwan Plan as a significant departure from the PRC's past approach to unification. Unlike policies of the Deng and Jiang eras that hinged on Taiwan's acceptance of Beijing's 1C2S scheme, Xi maintains that the Taiwan Plan should be jointly developed by representatives from both sides of the Taiwan Strait through democratic consultation, a term rarely invoked in the PRC's political lexicon.<sup>39</sup> According to Chou Changgen of the East China Normal University and Xie Yu of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, Xi's insistence on Taiwan's participation in devising the Taiwan Plan indicates that it is not a predesigned model to be imposed.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the progressives argue, every dimension of the Taiwan Plan, other than the nonnegotiable precondition that Taiwan and mainland China unify, is open to discussion.<sup>41</sup>

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Although the progressives and some conservatives emphasize that the Taiwan Plan would be a negotiated compromise between the PRC and the people of Taiwan, they differ greatly on the scope of the negotiation. Conservative scholars have not elaborated on the democratic consultation aspect of the Taiwan Plan. Their attitudes toward the bargaining power Taipei should have in negotiations are, therefore, unclear. Yet, based on their writings, which will be discussed below, it is likely that the people of Taiwan would have little to no say on several key issues.

The progressives, on the other hand, believe that the Taiwan Plan comes with a “high level of inclusiveness and openness” that offers substantial room for mutual exploration and cooperation.<sup>42</sup> The handover of Hong Kong and Macao, they point out, involved negotiations solely between the PRC and foreign powers. People in Hong Kong and Macao never had the right to engage in negotiations with the central government regarding the political status of these former colonies when their Basic Laws were drafted.<sup>43</sup> Consultations with local representatives before the handovers were limited primarily to the scope and level of power bestowed upon the SAR governments by the central government, and also limited to specific social and political institutions based on the power granted.<sup>44</sup> While the conservatives more or less equate the Taiwan Plan’s democratic consultation process with that of the Hong Kong model, the progressives believe the plan would allow for reaching an agreement on power-sharing through negotiation.<sup>45</sup> They also argue that Xi’s call for equal participation in democratic consultations indicates neither side could impose its will on the other, meaning the Taiwan Plan would be a negotiated outcome involving compromises by both sides.<sup>46</sup> The Hong Kong model, by contrast, is only a concept derived from, and a descriptive term for, the PRC’s governance over the Hong Kong and Macao SARs. It is, therefore, neither equivalent to 1C2S itself nor necessarily applicable to the Taiwan Plan.<sup>47</sup>

The progressives additionally assert that the Taiwan Plan must address the intractable cleavage of “one country” — who should represent China, and whether Taiwan and mainland China are one country. This issue was absent from the handover of Hong Kong and Macao.<sup>48</sup> The progressives maintain that this should be a key subject for discussion during the democratic consultation between PRC and Taiwan representatives. As Beijing University Institute of Taiwan Studies President Li Yihu writes, the Taiwan Plan, unlike the Hong Kong model, which concentrated on managing the “two systems”, should tackle first the contention over “one country”.<sup>49</sup> Reaching an agreement on the meaning of “China” in the Taiwan Plan should not be a prerequisite for negotiation but an issue to be discussed during the negotiation process.<sup>50</sup>

On the far end of the spectrum of views held by the book’s authors, two progressive scholars from Macao and Taiwan advance the concept of a “China federation”. Unlike a unitary state, a federation would allow the PRC and the ROC to coexist within a single state, each exercising self-governance in accordance with their own constitutions under one federal government. This arrangement, the authors argue, aligns with the spirit of 1C2S and the existing constitutions of both sides. It is, therefore, theoretically a possibility.<sup>51</sup>

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## THE PATH TO PEACEFUL REUNIFICATION

Some of the book's authors focus on potential institutional arrangements after reunification, but others address ways to advance peaceful reunification. Experts who focus on this question interpret Xi's use of the term "Taiwan Plan" instead of "Taiwan Model" in his 2019 speech, combined with his instruction to "enrich practical efforts" toward unification, as an indication that the initiative should be more than an institutional arrangement for Taiwan after unification occurs.<sup>52</sup> These experts assert that Xi also seeks ideas for realizing peaceful reunification.<sup>53</sup>

Several authors view integrated development (融合发展), a concept Xi first unveiled in 2014 and later elaborated on in his January 2019 speech, as a key policy to advance peaceful reunification.<sup>54</sup> China Review News Agency chief Guo Weifeng characterizes integrated development as the new stage of the PRC's peaceful development policy toward Taiwan, one that Xi inherited from his predecessor Hu Jintao. Whereas "peaceful development" generates benefits through economic and social interaction, "integrated development" focuses on sharing these benefits.<sup>55</sup> In essence, deepening integrated development means attracting the people of Taiwan by offering them greater economic opportunities. Specific policies include implementing measures that benefit people from Taiwan who reside and work in the PRC, integrating cross-strait infrastructure and industrial standards, and promoting cooperation and resource-sharing in cultural education, healthcare, and social security.<sup>56</sup> While peaceful development largely relies on cooperation from the government of Taiwan, Guo and others maintain that integrated development will enable the PRC to circumvent the political impasse created by the DPP's refusal to accept the existence of "One China" and promote peaceful reunification by proactively including the people of Taiwan in the PRC's economic and social development agenda.<sup>57</sup>

The advantages of integrated development are seen as twofold. First, by delivering tangible benefits to the people of Taiwan, the PRC can demonstrate the benefits of reunification and 1C2S, and advance the quest to win over their hearts and minds.<sup>58</sup> Integrated development would also facilitate nongovernmental exchanges between civil society in Taiwan and the PRC, thereby enhancing trust and mutual understanding.<sup>59</sup> Several authors argue that greater economic integration (e.g., forming a common market), cultural exchanges (e.g., promoting Chinese culture), and academic dialogue could help overcome the aforementioned "misinterpretations" and "prejudices" regarding 1C2S among the people of Taiwan, paving the way for a potential cross-strait peace agreement and eventual peaceful reunification.<sup>60</sup>

A few of the book's authors cast doubt on the success of Beijing's policy of promoting cross-strait integrated development due to obstacles imposed by Taiwan's DPP government. Hu Lingwei from the Shanghai Institute for International Studies observes, for example, that the DPP administration has denied local governments the right to enter into agreements with the PRC, making it difficult to make progress on integrated development.<sup>61</sup>

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## INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AFTER PEACEFUL REUNIFICATION

Unlike the progressive scholars who emphasize the democratic consultations process in the Taiwan Plan, conservative scholars prefer to focus on the form of governance in Taiwan that would best serve the PRC's national interests. The conservatives agree that Taiwan as an SAR would retain its economic independence as a separate customs territory under 1C2S, but they contest Deng's 1983 proposal to allow Taiwan to keep its social and political institutions, independent judicial power, and its own military.<sup>62</sup> As Li Yihu observes, the changing cross-strait balance of power, the growing push for Taiwan independence on the island, the increasing animosity in the PRC toward Taiwan, and the turmoil in Hong Kong, have all contributed to the rise of hardline PRC experts who advocate an arrangement that would provide significantly less autonomy to Taiwan than Deng's offer more than four decades ago.<sup>63</sup>

### *Social, political, and judicial institutions*

Learning the lessons from Hong Kong, conservative scholars stress the importance of the central government's comprehensive jurisdiction over an eventual Taiwan SAR. Taiwan's high degree of autonomy, they insist, should be authorized and supervised by Beijing, and should always be subordinate to state sovereignty and national interests.<sup>64</sup> First and foremost, Taiwan would have to undergo a process of complete "de-sovereignization". This would entail the elimination of all symbols, titles, laws, and institutions associated with the ROC. Its government would then be restructured and transformed into an SAR authority.<sup>65</sup>

Postulating that secessionists and their foreign patrons would seek to sustain the independence movement, Chen Xiancai and Guo Yali of Xiamen University encourage adopting "a zero-tolerance attitude" that would assail the movement politically, economically, culturally, and societally until "'Taiwan independence' forces do not dare to 'go independent' and even actively 'abandon independence'".<sup>66</sup> Tsinghua University's Yin Cunyi and Wu Weixu propose enacting a Basic Law for Taiwan which, while preserving the majority of Taiwan's existing laws and regulations, removes or modifies anti-unification, de-sinicization, and pro-independence contents within Taiwan's legal system.<sup>67</sup> Liu Lingbin of the Fujian Academy of Social Sciences proposes that the central government require the Taiwan SAR to implement its own national security legislation within a predetermined period following reunification. Should Taiwan fail to complete this legislative process (as Hong Kong failed in 2003 due to overwhelming public opposition), the PRC's Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) should enact a national security law on its behalf. In addition, Liu proposes reforming Taiwan's national security apparatus, which would be placed under the dual leadership of the central and the SAR governments.<sup>68</sup> Wang Yingjin, a prestigious expert from Renmin University, goes even further, suggesting that besides supervising Taiwan's own enactment of a national security law, the central government could consider directly passing a security law at the national level for the Taiwan SAR and subsequently incorporate it under Annex III of Taiwan's Basic Law.<sup>69</sup> This is the approach the PRC used to introduce the Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020.



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Conservatives also caution against granting Taiwan independent judicial power and power of final adjudication. Looking at Hong Kong, Liu Lingbin notes how the judiciary controlled by “anti-China forces and their agents” intervened in key judicial decisions related to national security. He worries that Taiwan’s judicial system could be used to threaten the PRC’s national interests and challenge the authority of its central government, and suggests that Taiwan’s Basic Law should either exclude functions related to sovereignty (e.g., defense, diplomacy, national security) from the jurisdiction of Taiwanese courts or reject Taiwan’s power of final adjudication in these areas. He also suggests the NPCSC take the initiative to interpret and amend Taiwan’s Basic Law to guard against judicial practices that might endanger the PRC’s national security and sovereignty.<sup>70</sup> Hong Kong-based researcher Li Feng and Taiwan’s scholar Yang Mingxun disagree, arguing that Taiwan could enjoy the power of final adjudication, but the central government should oversee personnel management of the prosecutorial system and appoint its own official as its head.<sup>71</sup>

In terms of elections and political parties, conservatives unequivocally endorse the principle of “patriots administer Taiwan”, which Wang Yingjin and Li Peng of Xiamen University define as requiring future government officials of the Taiwan SAR to embrace Chinese culture, adhere to the “One China” principle, abide by the SAR’s Basic Law, and champion national reunification and 1C2S.<sup>72</sup> Liu Lingbin agrees to keep Taiwan’s election and selection systems for public officials but calls for a candidate eligibility review mechanism to weed out individuals who “still covertly support ‘Taiwan independence’ or are in collusion with external forces”. He also believes that the central government should retain the ultimate power to appoint the chief executive and other key administrative officials of the SAR government elected by Taiwan’s voters.<sup>73</sup> Yin Cunyi and Wu Weixu contend that although party politics in Taiwan might present an endogenous risk to PRC national sovereignty and security, imposing laws that ban pro-independence and anti-China discourse could mitigate it. Parties could continue to exist only if they do not pose a threat to sovereignty and national security.<sup>74</sup> Li Feng and Yang Mingxun take an even tougher stance. Citing a perceived growing trend of populism and a decline in democracy in Taiwan, they advise against the conduct of a democratic election for the Taiwan SAR’s chief executive altogether.<sup>75</sup>

Lastly, conservative scholars believe the PRC central government should assume control of education and propaganda.<sup>76</sup> Liu Lingbin lays out a detailed roadmap:

“After the future cross-strait reunification, [we] should comprehensively transform the cultural and educational system. ... [We] should incorporate patriotic education ceremonies such as flag raising and singing the national anthem into important anniversaries and daily routines. [We should] revise textbooks for schools at all levels ... [and] include patriotic education contents. ... [We should] reorganize Taiwan’s museums, cultural centers, art galleries, monuments, memorial halls, memorial parks and other educational public spaces ... [and] intensify the promotion of Chinese culture. ... [We] should ensure the predominance of patriotic forces in the field of public opinion and propaganda. ... [We should] inspect various religious sites ... [and] abolish religious groups that advocate ‘Taiwan independence’ and separatism in accordance with the law.”<sup>77</sup>

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### *Foreign affairs and the military*

Taiwan's ability to conduct foreign affairs independently in any way from Beijing and preserve its own military capability are topics primarily discussed in the book by conservative scholars. They propose that the Taiwan SAR would cede its right to conduct diplomacy to the PRC central government. Yet, like Hong Kong and Macao, the Taiwan SAR would retain the ability to maintain and develop relations with foreign states and participate in certain international organizations under a name approved by Beijing (e.g., Taiwan, China).<sup>78</sup> The Taiwan SAR could maintain cultural and economic ties with countries that previously had diplomatic ties with Taipei or simply transfer the ROC's former overseas diplomatic missions to the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>79</sup> Concerning foreign government-owned assets in Taiwan, Li Feng and Yang Mingxun maintain that the PRC should use legal means to reclaim those assets owned by states that "have obstructed reunification."<sup>80</sup>

The fate of Taiwan's military after peaceful reunification continues to be hotly debated among conservative scholars. The primary concern revolves around the potential threat of separatism, which was left unaddressed by Deng since it did not exist during his rule.<sup>81</sup> If Taiwan were to keep its military after unification, secessionists could manipulate it for their own ends, possibly in collusion with external actors, and even launch an armed revolt against the PRC central government.<sup>82</sup> Li Feng and Yang Mingxun consequently call for a total disbandment of Taiwan's military, with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) establishing a garrison headquarters in its stead. Once this is done, people from Taiwan could voluntarily join the PLA.<sup>83</sup>

Hong Kong-based senior researcher Liu Lanchang also calls for disbanding the ROC armed forces. He maintains that having two militaries within a unitary state is unprecedented and would raise a question of whether Taipei or Beijing would exercise ultimate command of Taiwan's forces. Moreover, the two militaries would be highly incompatible since the ROC military has been nationalized and is, therefore, fundamentally different from the PLA, which is under the direct command of the CCP.<sup>84</sup> Zheng Jian has similar concerns, worrying that the continued existence of the ROC military might raise a series of thorny challenges. It would mean that the Taiwan Plan would have to explore a range of issues concerning the revamped military's new mission, purpose, defense strategy, tactics, and size. The plan would also have to determine defense funding, Taiwan's degree of control over its military's personnel, military cooperation and communication with the PLA, civil-military relations, and Taiwan's defense relations with foreign states.<sup>85</sup>

Liu Lingbin proposes an alternative to disbanding Taiwan's military, suggesting that it could be reorganized and relegated to a secondary role resembling that of the People's Armed Police or the National Guard. It would be primarily responsible for Taiwan's internal security, while the PLA would absorb its air and naval assets, and assume responsibility for national defense. This arrangement, he argues, would deter the pro-independence movement and its foreign patrons. It would also reinforce support, among Taiwan's youth, for the "One China" principle and IC2S through their participation in Taiwan's defense alongside the PLA.<sup>86</sup>

From the perspective of great power competition, Liu Lanchang argues that Taiwan, as part of the first island chain, would be crucial to PRC interests in the South China Sea and beyond. Since Taiwan would be a stronghold on the front line against the US regional presence, he stresses the necessity of a robust PLA garrison in Taiwan.<sup>87</sup> Zheng Jian, on the other hand, reflects a minority view of allowing Taiwan to keep its military to help facilitate the PRC's goal of peaceful reunification.<sup>88</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS

PRC experts have discussed and debated the “Two Systems’ Taiwan Plan” for more than five years since Xi proposed it in January 2019. To date, however, the plan has not been officially announced, and it is uncertain if it has even been fleshed out. In November 2021, the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th CCP Central Committee introduced the party’s “overall strategy for resolving the Taiwan issue in the new era.”<sup>89</sup> The contents of that strategy remain amorphous and are likely still under development, but its two pillars are manifest: peaceful reunification and some form of 1C2S solution.

For Xi and the rest of the CCP leadership, the logic of their Taiwan policy is based on several assumptions. First, the PRC’s comprehensive national power will continue to grow and the absolute and relative power gap between Taiwan and the PRC will continue to expand. Concomitantly, the PRC’s governance system will provide greater prosperity for its people than Taiwan’s will be able to deliver. The PRC’s advances in science and technology, public health, education, clean energy, and other areas will inspire and attract Taiwan’s people and eventually lead to popular support for unification.

Second, the PRC leadership believes that their nation is on the rise while the United States is in an inexorable decline. US influence in the Indo-Pacific will diminish over time, its alliances will fray, and its military presence will weaken. They expect that Washington’s credibility as a regional security guarantor and reliable partner will be met with increasing skepticism and apprehension by most, if not all, countries in the region, and by Taiwan’s people.

Third, achieving national reunification is an existential matter for the CCP that the party judges to be a historical inevitability that can never be foresworn. Beijing is convinced that its stakes in reunifying the country are far greater than US stakes in its relationship with Taiwan. Should peaceful means fail to bring about unification, the PRC is willing to pay a higher price to take back Taiwan than the United States is willing to pay to prevent it.

Fourth, PRC strategy rests on the assumption that a combination of coercion, punishment, and positive inducements are essential to persuade Taiwan to agree to political talks with Beijing. Although the balance of these measures needs to be adjusted based on circumstances, none of the three tactics will succeed in isolation.

Fifth, Beijing believes that the current overwhelming preference among the people of Taiwan for preserving the cross-strait status quo and opposing unification now or in the future is not set in stone. Public attitudes in Taiwan are malleable. Beijing’s policies, narratives, and the changing realities of Taiwan’s situation can help win over hearts and minds over time.

None of the essays published in “A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan” challenge these assumptions. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that, within certain parameters, there is space in the PRC to debate its policy toward Taiwan. Writing the book’s foreword, China Review News Agency chief Guo Weifeng maintained that the essays reveal a new level of understanding of 1C2S among scholars, which, he hopes, will inspire novel ideas for and further cross-strait dialogue on the Taiwan Plan. Only with greater participation

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by Taiwan, he asserts, can a consensus be reached on the Taiwan Plan.<sup>90</sup> If Guo's statements hold true, then Xi's proposed Taiwan Plan is a long-term project without a clear sense of urgency.

The implications of the debates among PRC scholars about the Taiwan Plan are twofold. First, since many of the authors in the book advise the government and the party on cross-strait affairs, the publication of diverging views and proposals suggests that the PRC leadership has not yet finalized the Taiwan Plan. Xi likely recognizes that Taiwan will never accept "Two Systems' Taiwan Plan" as implemented in Hong Kong. Unwilling to abandon the 1C2S framework, however, he has instructed the party and state apparatus to discuss a potential new plan for Taiwan. Whether a One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan is eventually developed and adopted remains to be seen. Second, the mere inclusion in the book of more creative, flexible, and progressive views suggests that Beijing may be receptive to and even encouraging a range of ideas as part of its overall policy of promoting reunification.

This study comes with a few caveats. While it contains a significant amount of research by leading PRC scholars, the book that this study examines does not represent the totality of PRC discourse on the Taiwan Plan. Numerous articles have been published in PRC journals, and some papers were undoubtedly submitted through internal party and government channels that are not publicly available. Additionally, following Xi's centralization of decision-making power, it is increasingly unclear how much influence PRC experts from research institutes have on the formulation of cross-strait policies.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that the "Two Systems' Taiwan Plan" is still under discussion. There is no consensus on its content, and a new policy based on the Taiwan Plan is unlikely to be announced any time soon. Perhaps Beijing has decided to shelve the plan until a more propitious time. If a Taiwan Plan eventually emerges, it could be substantially different from scholars' proposals presented in the book and analyzed in this paper. Another possibility is that the "Two Systems' Taiwan Plan" never materializes.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping [习近平], “Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan” [在《告台湾同胞书》发表40周年纪念会上的讲话], Xinhua [新华网], January 2, 2019. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/tw/2019-01/02/c\\_1210028622.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/tw/2019-01/02/c_1210028622.htm) The official English translation of Xi’s 2019 speech is available at [http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201904/t20190412\\_12155687.htm](http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/wyly/201904/t20190412_12155687.htm). Non-PRC sources in English typically translate “Two Systems’ Taiwan Plan” (两制”台湾方案) as the “One Country, Two Systems’ Taiwan model”, the “One Country, Two Systems’ Taiwan formula”, or, simply, “Xi’s ‘One Country, Two Systems’ promise for Taiwan”. The PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office’s official English translations of Xi’s 2019 speech and the 2022 white paper use “two systems’ solution to the Taiwan question”.
- <sup>2</sup> Huang Jichao and Jin Huanyu, “A Review of Current Research in Mainland Academia on the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ Formula for Taiwan”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 1, 2021. <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/a-review-of-current-research-in-mainland-academia-on-the-one-country-two-systems-formula-for-taiwan/>.
- <sup>3</sup> The official English translation of the 2022 white paper is available at: [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202208/10/content\\_WS62f34f46c6d02e533532f0ac.html](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202208/10/content_WS62f34f46c6d02e533532f0ac.html).
- <sup>4</sup> Weifeng Guo, Jianmin Zhou, Ping Wang, and Weimin Guo, eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan [一国两制台湾方案初论], China Review Academic Publishers Limited [中国评论学术出版社], 2023.
- <sup>5</sup> Xi Jinping, “Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan”.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and State Council Information Office, The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era [台湾问题与新时代中国统一事业], 2022. [http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/zt/zylszl/baipishu/202208/t20220810\\_12459866.htm](http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/zt/zylszl/baipishu/202208/t20220810_12459866.htm).
- <sup>8</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and State Council Information Office, The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China [台湾问题与中国统一], 1993. [http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/28/content\\_213349.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/28/content_213349.htm); Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and State Council Information Office, The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue [一个中国的原则与台湾问题], 2000. [http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/28/content\\_213366.htm](http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/28/content_213366.htm).
- <sup>9</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and State Council Information Office, The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era.
- <sup>10</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, pp. 441-442.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 78.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 372-373.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 23, 108, 157, 166, 235, 283, 366-367, 453.
- <sup>14</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “A policy of ‘one country, two systems’ on Taiwan”. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/ziliao\\_665539/3602\\_665543/3604\\_665547/200011/t20001117\\_697847.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/200011/t20001117_697847.html).
- <sup>15</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, pp. 24-25, 454.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 236-237.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 347.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 98-99, 231. For Zheng, the plan Xi introduced in his 2019 speech is the one based on the premise of peaceful reunification. There should be, however, several Taiwan plans. See Ibid., p. 347.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 238.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 50, 186-187; Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and State Council Information Office, The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era.
- <sup>21</sup> Guo et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, pp. 16, 227.
- <sup>22</sup> Jiang Zemin [江泽民], “Continuing to Strive Toward the Reunification of China” [为促进祖国统一大业的完成而继续奋斗 (1995.01.30)], China Taiwan Net [中国台湾网], September 27, 2005. [http://www.taiwan.cn/wxzl/zhyyj/jzm/200509/t20050927\\_202720.htm](http://www.taiwan.cn/wxzl/zhyyj/jzm/200509/t20050927_202720.htm).
- <sup>23</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, p. 30.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 175.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 8. Xi Jinping [习近平], “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects -- Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China” [高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜 为全面建设社会主义现代化国家而团结奋斗——在中国共产党第二十次全国代表大会上的报告], Xinhua [新华网], October 25, 2022. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2022-10/25/c\\_1129079429.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2022-10/25/c_1129079429.htm).
- <sup>26</sup> Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and State Council Information Office, The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue.
- <sup>27</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, pp. 163-164.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 56, 185.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 223-224.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 136.
- <sup>31</sup> Xi, “Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan”; Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, p. 156.



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<sup>32</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, pp. 166-167, 172-173. Zhao notes how the CCP has changed its three-sentence formulation of the “One China” principle from: “There is only one China in the world. Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s territory. The government of the People’s Republic of China is the only legal government representing all of China.” to “There is only one China in the world. Both the mainland and Taiwan belong to one China. China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity brook no division.” This new formulation, he believes, emphasizes that territory on both sides of the Taiwan Strait belongs to the same China in terms of sovereignty, yet it avoids the question of whether they both belong to the PRC.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 167, 171.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 201, 225-226.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 54, 201, 225. For the PRC, the Republic of China has lost “its right to exercise state sovereignty on behalf of China and, in reality, has always remained only a local authority on Chinese territory” since 1949. See Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and State Council Information Office, The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 140, 226.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29, 187.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 129, 157, 178, 194.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 51, 138.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 195-196, 208.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 195-196.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 227. In the case of Hong Kong and Macao, the PRC maintains that the central government has comprehensive jurisdiction over the SARs, whose authority to exercise a high degree of autonomy is exclusively delegated by the former. The relationship between the central government and the SAR governments is inherently hierarchical under this arrangement.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 195, 283-284.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 227, 284, 367. Since Taiwan is not a sovereign entity, PRC scholars believe cross-strait relations are not characterized by a division of sovereignty but rather by a separation of administrative power (治权). That is, while there is only one Chinese sovereignty covering both sides of the strait, each side exercises administrative power in accordance with their respective laws. See Ibid., pp. 24, 52, 56, 177.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 100, 175.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 26, 157.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 24, 166, 235.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 166. The progressives primarily refer to the question of who represents China when discussing the disagreement over “one country”. Since Xi said the democratic consultation is based on the “One China” principle, individuals and political parties (i.e., DPP) that reject that Taiwan and mainland China belong to one country would be excluded from the negotiation.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 423-426, 455-456.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22, 156; Xi, “Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan”.

<sup>53</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, pp. 30-31, 136, 337.

<sup>54</sup> Ni Yongjie [倪永杰], “Integrated development: the latest achievement of Xi Jinping thought on Taiwan work” [融合发展: 习近平对台工作思想最新成果], Taiwan.cn [中国台湾网], August 15, 2017. [http://www.taiwan.cn/m/pl\\_54904/lazk\\_54907/201708/t20170815\\_11830963.htm](http://www.taiwan.cn/m/pl_54904/lazk_54907/201708/t20170815_11830963.htm).

<sup>55</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 270, 314-315; Xi, “Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan”.

<sup>57</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, pp. 8, 210.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41, 314-315.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 31, 40, 98, 309.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 212-213.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 293, 303, 338.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 249, 288-289, 339, 415.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 250, 413.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 44, 103, 250, 416.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 289-290. Their reasoning is that Taiwan’s party politics dictates that assailing the ruling party is politically correct for the opposition party. Two problems could emerge: 1. The ruling party might be pressured to deviate from or violate the principles of 1C2S.; and 2. The opposition party might use certain social contingencies to influence public opinion and mobilize anti-China sentiment.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 42, 416.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 253-254.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 224, 338.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>81</sup> The cross-strait dispute back then revolved around the issue of who represented China, while today the question is whether Taiwan is a part of China.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 230, 251, 347, 444.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 340-341.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 442-443.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp. 348-351.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 443-444.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>89</sup> Xinhua [新华网], “(Authorized for publication) Resolution of the CPC Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century” [（受权发布）中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议], November 16, 2021. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-11/16/c\\_1128069706.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-11/16/c_1128069706.htm).

<sup>90</sup> Guo, et al., eds., A Preliminary Discussion on the One Country, Two Systems Taiwan Plan, pp. 1-2.