

Interpreting the One-China principle: Cross-Strait relations and the development of confidence-building measures

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ABSTRACT

Cross-Strait relations have remained contentious for six decades. The Republic of China (ROC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) both claim to be the official China. The tension between these two distinct political entities has drawn attention not only from scholars and security analysts but also policy-makers. Scholars suggest confidence-building measures (CBMs) serve to facilitate peaceful developments in the Taiwan Strait as CBMs enable two rival political actors to reduce political and military tensions. With an increase of Cross-Strait exchanges in economic, cultural and academic spheres, scholars also suggest the development of Cross-Strait cooperation in political and military issues. However, these suggestions fail to consider the differing identities of these two rivals. This influences how the one China principle is interpreted respectively. Historical accounts also suggest a contradiction in China's claims of one China. This is evident historically, geographically, politically, militarily, and economically. In addition, Taiwanese people view themselves differently from Chinese, not only in terms of ethnicity but also in terms of their government system. This demonstrates how Taiwanese identity plays a vital role in shaping Cross-Strait policy and the interpretation of the one China principle. The absence of an examination as to how identity is constructed by both sides in terms of their respective definition of CBMs may promote a misleading account of current and future Cross-Strait CBMs.

Social constructivist theory is adopted to explore understandings and perceptions of shared meanings and identity as they are shaped and mutually constructed. The study inquires to what extent perceptions of national identity shape perceptions of a one China principle, and to what extent interpretation and meanings of CBMs effect their success contribute to the feasibility and sustainability of Cross-Strait CBMs.

Research is proposed in four sections: (1) an analysis of how both sides view the Cross-Strait issue and what suggestions they may have to alleviate the tensions. (2) with an investigation of existing discourse on Cross-Strait CBMs, the study aims to identify patterns of similarity and difference in Cross-Strait interpretations and definitions of CBMs. (3) an exploration of official documents and strategic narratives regarding CBMs from both sides in order to see to what extent these narratives influence CBM policy-making, and (4) how perceptions of national identity contribute to Taiwan's strategic CBM narratives and to what extent these narratives shape Taiwan perspectives of a one China principle. In addition to contributing to academic discourse, a study of this nature may also inform future discourse pertaining to interpretations of the one China principle.