

Linked Without Linking: The Role of Mainland China's Taiwanese Students in Cross-Strait Unification

Lincoln Edward Davidson

Abstract: The renewal of economic and social relations between Taiwan and Mainland China, and the economic and social integration of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait resulting from it, has led to an advanced state of interdependence. Scholars have argued that economic integration has the potential to catalyze political unification. However, as this consolidation has failed to appear, scholars have sought alternative frameworks for understanding the conditions necessary to facilitate unification. Drawing on the “linkage community” integration framework, which outlines a group of people with ties to both sides of the Taiwan Strait and the ability to influence policymakers as a primary variable for understanding the potential for unification, this paper examines the political activity of organizations for *Taisheng*, Taiwanese students at Mainland Chinese universities. Based on data collected through informal interviews with Taiwanese students and officials conducted between October 2012 and August 2013, this paper presents information on the situation of Taiwanese students in Mainland China and argues that they have little potential to drive unification. It concludes that better understanding of the intersection of identity and interests in the cross-Strait context is essential to comprehending the relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China and the unification of divided nations more generally.

Keywords *Taisheng*; cross-strait relations; unification; integration theory; student organizations; student activism; Taiwan; China

I. INTRODUCTION²

After decades of separation and warfare, both ideological and actual, between Taiwan and Mainland China, Republic of China President Chiang Ching-kuo's 1987 decision to lift the ban on travel to the Mainland initiated a rapid expansion of interaction across the Taiwan Strait. Investors from Taiwan poured into China, jumping at the chance to do business in the opening economy. Between 1987 and 1995, the total value of trade between Taiwan and Mainland China grew more than ten times, from \$1.7 billion to more than \$20 billion; by 2013, it had grown to nearly \$200 billion. The volume of Taiwanese visiting the Mainland tells a similar story: in 2013, more than 5 million Taiwanese visited the Mainland for tourism (Taiwan Affairs Office). Given that both Beijing and Taipei profess to have national unification as their goal, scholars have sought to understand the role that might be played in potential political unification by the complex economic and social linkages that have developed between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in the years since Chiang Ching-kuo's decision.

Starting with a review of the literature on interdependence and political integration, this paper will examine the conditions necessary to precipitate political unification across the Taiwan Strait. Using the linkage community framework developed by Yung Wei and refined by Keng Shu, this paper examines the argument that a “linkage community”—a group of

Lincoln Edward Davidson is a Research Associate in Asia Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations¹ and a graduate of Davidson College. His research interests include rural China, cross-Strait relations and Chinese cyberpolicy.

people with significant economic, social, and cultural ties to the opposite side of the Strait who have the ability to influence policymakers—is a prerequisite to realizing political unification. Section three provides background information on *Taisheng* (Taiwanese students at Mainland Chinese universities), while section four outlines the methodology used. Section five presents research findings and analysis demonstrating that while *Taisheng* do constitute a linkage community, their specific concerns are primarily immediate interests, and they have minimal ability to facilitate increased political integration or unification. The paper ends with brief concluding remarks.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern liberal theories of international relations are founded upon the works of classical thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, who argued in his 1795 treatise *Perpetual Peace* that three separate but complementary factors were the cause of peace between democratic nations (Oneal et al. 1996). Kant argued that *republican constitutions* limit the power of autocratic leaders, eliminating their ability to wage war on a whim; that democracy fosters a *moral foundation* for the establishment of international institutions; and that *economic interdependence* creates “transnational ties that encourage accommodation rather than conflict [such that] material incentives add their force to law and morality” (Oneal et al. 1996, 12).

These three pillars form the basis of modern liberal theory. The importance and attraction of Kant’s final thesis, that rising interdependence leads to a decrease in conflict, has increased in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as net global interdependence has risen. The escalation and deepening of interdependence has stimulated a lively debate among scholars of international relations, who have sought to understand the relationship between economics, power, and conflict.

Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye see interdependence as more than simple interconnectedness of nations. Transactions between nations must have “reciprocal costs” and make both nations dependent on their counterpart to be considered interdependence (Keohane and Nye 2011, 8). Keohane and Nye argue that interdependence restricts nations’ autonomy by creating a situation of mutual dependence. Rosencrance et al. posit that interdependence is the “direct and positive linkage of the interests of states such that when the position of one state changes, the position of others is affected, *and in the same direction*” (Rosencrance et al. 1977, 427, emphasis in original). David A. Baldwin, reviewing a broad cross-disciplinary swath of earlier works, refines the definition of interdependence to mutual opportunity costs, or “international relationships that would be costly to break” (Baldwin 1980, 484).

Expanding on these definitions, Mark J. Gasiorowski argues that interdependence involves interactions that can be both costly and beneficial to nations (Gasiorowski 1986, 24). If there was not some benefit to interdependence, Gasiorowski argues, “countries would simply forgo these interactions to avoid paying the costs they entail” (24), a point implied but understated in earlier literature (Baldwin 1980, 482). Benefits of interdependence include the greater efficiency that results from trade as nations specialize, while costs are related to the dependency that arises from such trade, making nations vulnerable to economic policy decisions in counterpart nations (Gasiorowski 1986, 24; Hirschman 1945).

Keohane and Nye, responding to the realist worldview—in which the state is preeminent, force is the primary instrument of foreign policy, and states’ primary objective is maximizing security—propose a radical alternative for the international system in which none of these conditions exist. This ideal situation, which they term “complex interdependence,” is typified by an absence of issue hierarchy (in which military security is not neces-

sarily favored over economic and social issues), non-use of military force as a policy tool, and sub-state transnational relations between countries (Keohane and Nye 2011, 19-31). Because of the extreme differences between the realist worldview and complex interdependence, the political processes that the latter engenders are also unique. Decline in the utility of force and equalization of military and nonmilitary issues makes maintaining a diverse power base important while simultaneously driving countries to set agendas based on their relative strengths.

Keohane and Nye's third condition of complex interdependence, multiple substate channels of contact between societies, is, perhaps, the most radically different from the conditions of the realist ideal world. Where realists envision billiard ball states ricocheting off each other as they roll across a smooth, flat world, Keohane and Nye see a complex web of linkages between actors of different societies, state actors, and actors in the international space between states. Domestic groups, multinational corporations, and governmental bureaucracies are increasingly connected to their counterparts in other societies. Transnational relations have the potential to drastically alter rational actors' perceptions of self-interest. "The nearer a situation is to complex interdependence, the more we expect the outcomes of political bargaining to be affected by transnational relations" (Keohane and Nye 2011, 28).

An alternative response to the appearance of international interdependence is proposed by the "integration theories" of Karl W. Deutsch and Ernst B. Haas (Deutsch et al. 1957; Haas 1958; Haas 1970; O'Neill 1996; Rosamond 2000). In the wake of the Second World War, many academics and policymakers in Europe began to question the efficacy of the nation state for preventing conflict and solving international problems in an increasingly globalized world (O'Neill 1996). Haas, whose work represents the neofunctionalist model of integration theory, claims integration can explain "how and why [states] voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbours so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflict themselves" (Haas 1970, 610).

To answer these questions, Deutsch and his colleagues examine historical cases of political integration and disintegration in the North Atlantic region. Deutsch et al. define integration as the realization within a region of a "sense of community" that fosters an expectation of nonviolent resolution of social problems (Deutsch et al. 1957, 5). Deutsch et al. argue that the conditions necessary to facilitate integration are the development of government capabilities; increase in the "range and volume" of transnational interaction and social communication; "strengthening of the social groups, institutions, and organizations that function as unbroken links of social communication" between societies; expansion of the "influence and popularity" of these actors within each society; and escalation of "the mobility of persons throughout the area" (Deutsch et al. 1957, 5). Substate actors are central to this "communications theory"; the optimal method for achieving political integration, Deutsch et al. argue, is through "more and better communication," e.g. increasing the flow of goods, people, and information between countries.³

Haas's neofunctionalist approach to political integration is based on premises similar to those of Deutsch's communications theory, but is somewhat more state-centric in emphasizing the role of technocratic elites in driving integration.⁴ Neofunctionalists envision nations establishing a supranational bureaucracy to promote integration between them of a given economic sector, a process sought by self-interested societal actors who see economic benefits in integration of the sector (Rosamond 2000, 50-73). Integration in one sector would "spillover" into benefits in other sectors, creating incentives for integration of those sectors, and that integration would in turn reinforce and deepen integration in the origi-

nal economic sector. Increased economic integration would necessitate some power being redirected from the member states to supranational regulatory bodies. As the authority of the state gradually shifted up, society would increasingly look to the organs above the state, eventually resulting in political integration, with a new government centered above the pre-existing nation states.⁵

Assumptions about the impact of economic interdependence and societal interactions rooted in integration theory are implicit in examinations of the impact of renewed cross-Strait contacts (Chan and Clark 1995; Wang 2000; Dent 2001; Clark 2002; Chao 2003; Clark 2003). In an early review of “the people-to-people form of track-two diplomacy” between Taiwan and the Mainland, Ralph Clough asserts that societal interactions are “the most important factor promoting a peaceful climate between the two sides of the Strait” (Clough 1993, 169). Clough suggests that PRC policies promoting cross-Strait interaction are based on a belief that close contact will put popular pressure on the ROC government for further opening to the Mainland, although he argues that there is little evidence for the belief that interaction is affecting Taiwanese support for unification (Clough 1993, 168-69).

Steve Chan and Cal Clark argue that research on the Mainland China–Taiwan relationship has overemphasized high political (e.g. ideology, diplomatic maneuvering) and structural (e.g. military capability, population, and territory size) factors at the cost of ignoring the “unfolding processes” of informal interaction, such as trade, investment, and tourism (Chan and Clark 1995). The rapid growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s of “nonofficial” economic and cultural interaction alongside increasing “quasi-official” inter-regime bargaining suggests, according to Chan and Clark, that interdependence now ties the two sides of the Taiwan Strait to one another, and that interdependence is the cause of the shift in Taiwan’s Mainland policy from the Three Nos in the 1980s to “pragmatic diplomacy” in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Using Albert O. Hirschman’s theory of international bargaining, Chan and Clark argue that reunification can be considered a good that Beijing has a high demand for and Taipei controls absolutely. Beijing’s demand for reunification is inelastic because of the importance the issue carries for regime legitimacy. Taipei’s control has become monopolistic as alternative potential suppliers of reunification (Hong Kong and Macau) have been sucked dry. Taipei’s monopoly position improves its bargaining position significantly. Simultaneously, reunification is a good which native Taiwanese political leaders also require for political legitimacy and to separate themselves from the pro-independence faction. This creates a situation of interdependence highlighted by a “growing parallel between the positions on reunification by the old enemies at the top of the CCP and the KMT” (Chan and Clark 1995, 53). Interdependence has leveled the playing field, eliminating asymmetries in the Taiwan–Mainland China relationship. This shift from confrontation to interdependence changes the relationship from a zero-sum to a non-zero-sum game.

Chan and Clark conclude that non-official interactions across the Taiwan Strait could form the foundation for official contact, but that time “can expand as well as constrict the menu of policy choices” (Chan and Clark 1995, 59). Finally, the example of German unification suggests that a “significant amount of gradual cumulative integration” may be necessary to catalyze political relations, but it is important to avoid historical determinism as a predictive strategy. Integration is necessary as a prerequisite to unification, but it may not be sufficient *per se*.

Responding to the interdependent situation in the Taiwan Strait, Yung Wei looks optimistically on the unification of East and West Germany as an example of how a long period of people, goods, and information flowing between two sides of a “multi-system nation”

precedes political unification.⁶ Wei argues that in the German case, economic and cultural integration preceded political unification and that “formal-structural arrangements are not as effective as informal and interpersonal contracts [sic] and interactions” (Wei 1997, 6). To understand how these “informal but functional” contacts might precipitate eventual political unification, Wei proposes the concept of “linkage communities,” “group[s] of people who have had such extensive social, cultural, commercial, or other types of contacts with the people and society of the opposite system that they have developed an understanding, sensitivity, and empathy with the people and society across system boundaries” (Wei 1997, 7). Linkage community members are connected both to the society on the opposite side of the political divide and “people of similar orientations and experiences within their own political system” (Wei 1997, 7). Wei argues that by measuring the size (both in absolute terms and relative to the total population) of the linkage community—the number of people who have substantial contacts with individuals and groups on the opposite side—it is possible to determine the potential for political unification.

The linkage community conceptual framework has been further developed by Keng Shu, who argues that the PRC’s Taiwan policy under Hu’s leadership was focused on direct appeals to the people of Taiwan as a response to the situation of “political separation with economic integration” that has developed since the mid-1990s (Keng 2011).⁷ Given this situation, Keng argues that integration theory falls short of the mark by failing to establish a link between societal actors with an interest in cross-Strait transactions and governmental policy outcomes. A model of state-society relations that links pro-integration interests to policies is necessary to fully understand the potential cross-Strait interdependence needed to precipitate political integration. This shortcoming is also apparent in Wei’s linkage community framework. Keng enhances the analytical utility of the linkage community framework by proposing three distinct levels of variables.

The first, or “group,” level is concerned with the capacity of linkage communities; it measures the size, resources, and organizational effectiveness of a linkage community. Size (membership) of a linkage community is divided between “core” and “peripheral” members. Core members are those whose identities and interests have been “reshaped through cross-Strait contacts/exchanges” to the point that they can be considered “pro-integration interests” who “advocate the political agenda for unification” (Keng 2011, 165). Peripheral members have less contact with people on the other side of the Taiwan Strait and make up the larger portion of any linkage community. However, as they can be rapidly transformed into core members, their potential for driving integration is still significant. Resources of a linkage community include financial, political, and symbolic assets collectively owned by the community’s members. Organizational effectiveness is a measure of how “consolidated” the group identity is within a linkage community and the ability of the community to bring about collective action to express shared concerns and defend communal interests. While the size and resources of linkage communities have increased in recent years, “there are still formidable limitations to the organizational strength” of linkage communities (Keng 2011, 166).

The second, “state-society,” level variables include the structure of access to the state’s decision-making processes, the relative power of allied and rival social groups, and the interests of the state itself (Keng 2011, 167). The first variable is related to the nature of the political system and state-society relations in general. In the case of Taiwan, the state has little insulation from the interests of the business community, which Keng argues has made it easy for the “pro-integration community” to achieve its policy objectives. However, as no single actor has been able to dominate the making of Mainland policy in Taiwan, the rela-

tive power of allied and rival social groups is also important, as are the interests of the state itself.

The final variable is the “international” level, which measures systemic influences on the cross-Strait relationship. This includes security and economic concerns. Keng notes that in the security realm the post-Cold War context has driven the pace of integration; competition and cooperation between the United States and China “sets limits on how far cross-Strait integration can go” (Keng 2011, 168). Economics are also a double-edged sword for cross-Strait integration:

Key variables in the “linkage communities” framework.

Group level (people with shared identity and interests)	<i>Scale of linkage communities</i>	<i>Resources of linkage communities</i>	<i>Organization of linkage communities</i>
State-society level (politics of the policymaking process)	<i>Structure of access to the state</i>	<i>Influence of rival/affiliated groups</i>	<i>Interests of the state itself</i>
International level (outside constraints on domestic politics)	<i>International security concerns</i>	<i>Global economic competition</i>	

while globalization pushes the two sides together, economic downturns can put pressure on the Taiwanese government to pull back from economic integration.

While Wei and Keng seem to intend that the linkage community framework be used to analyze business communities engaging in economic transactions across the Taiwan Strait, there are other social groups coming in contact with the other side of the strait that could be considered part of new and developing linkage communities. Students constitute one group that is increasingly coming into contact with its counterpart in the opposite society.

Integration theory suggests that high levels of interdependence between parts of a divided nation will facilitate political integration and, ultimately, unification. Despite more than twenty-five years of advanced economic integration across the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan and Mainland China remain highly isolated politically. To better understand the potential of economic interdependence and societal links across the Taiwan Strait to precipitate political unification, we need to analyze the identity and interests of people with significant economic, social, and cultural ties to the opposite side of the strait and measure the extent to which this group is able to influence policymakers on both sides. The linkage community framework is a potential model for such analysis. In this paper I examine the community of Taiwanese students attending university in Mainland China to determine whether or not Taiwanese students are a driver of political unification between Taiwan and Mainland China, and evaluate the effectiveness of the linkage community framework generally.

III. BACKGROUND

Mainland authorities first officially announced their intentions to recruit Taiwanese students (台灣學生 *Taiwan xuesheng*, commonly abbreviated to 台生 *Taisheng*) to Mainland universities in 1979, but it was not until the resumption of nongovernmental exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in 1987 that young Taiwanese began to cross the strait seeking educational opportunities (Lin 2012). Between 1987 and 2000, 3,759 Taiwanese pursued degrees (either graduate or undergraduate) at Mainland universities (Cai 2002). This number climbed rapidly from 2001 to 2004, during which time there were 5,641 Taiwanese students pursuing degrees at Mainland institutions. In 2005, the Mainland authorities standardized the tuition rate of Taiwanese students so that it was level with local students, making university in the Mainland a more affordable option than ever before. At

the same time, they opened positions in the public sector for Taiwanese graduates from Mainland universities. As a result of these changes, by 2006 there were nearly 6,000 Taiwanese studying at Mainland universities (Lin 2012). The application process for Taiwanese students was simplified significantly in 2009, when the Mainland Ministry of Education announced that Taiwanese students would now be able to use their General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT, the Taiwanese college entrance examination) scores to apply to Mainland universities (Taiwan Today 2009). Prior to this change, Taiwanese students had to either take part in the Mainland college entrance examination or take a separate test for Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan students. In September 2010, the Taiwan authorities announced that they would recognize degrees from forty-one Mainland universities (although medical degrees were not included in this blanket recognition for political reasons) (Lin 2012). The number of Taiwanese students entering Mainland universities grew from 1,058 in 2010 to 1,433 in 2011 and 1,714 in 2012 (Statistics and Postgraduation Measures of *Lusheng* Coming to Taiwan and *Taisheng* Going to the Mainland 2013). In 2012, there were a total of 8,316 Taiwanese students studying at Mainland universities (Cao 2013). An official at the Taiwanese Ministry of Education said that the ministry believes that growth would be even steeper if not for the sharp decrease in applicants interested in studying medicine in recent years.⁸

Throughout this period, PRC authorities have actively developed policies promoting greater cross-strait interaction among students. One notable policy has involved recruiting Taiwanese youth to visit the Mainland for short-term exchanges during summer and winter vacation. Keng Shu and Jean Yu-chen Tseng found that while these interactions have had a notable impact on the stereotypes of Mainland China and the CCP held by Taiwanese youths, it is not clear that they have caused any transformation in political identity (Keng and Tseng 2010). However, these students' contact with Mainland society is minimal; longer-term stays in the Mainland, living and studying alongside Mainland peers, have even greater potential to impact the identities and interests of students.

DESCRIPTION OF TAISHENGHUI

Taiwanese Student Associations (台灣學生會 *Taiwan xueshenghui*, commonly abbreviated as 台生會 *Taishenghui* or TSA in English) is the collective name for a number of student organizations founded by *Taisheng* in the last decade to represent the collective interests of Taiwanese university students in Mainland China. The earliest *Taishenghui* represented only the *Taisheng* of a given university, but the organizations have grown rapidly in recent years, starting up affiliated clubs at neighboring universities and establishing regional "governing body" organizations that claim to represent *Taisheng* across wide geographic regions. While these organizations were originally founded as social clubs for *Taisheng*, as they have grown in membership and capacity alongside the growth of the community of *Taisheng* and *Taisheng* alumni, they have taken on a number of roles, including providing information to Taiwanese youth interested in attending university in Mainland China, helping *Taisheng* network with alumni and the larger community of Taiwanese in Mainland China, and representing *Taisheng* interests in lobbying the Taiwanese government.

While there are numerous *Taishenghui*, this paper focuses on the two primary *Taisheng* organizations: the Taiwan Students Society (中華兩岸教育暨就業發展協會 *Zhonghua Liang'an Jiaoyu ji Jiuye Fazhan Xiehui* or TSS) based in Shanghai and the Taiwan Students Union (台灣留學大陸青年發展協會 *Taiwan Liuxue Dalu Qingnian Fazhan Xiehui* or TWSU) based in Beijing/Taipei. It is safe to call these two organizations the "primary" *Taishenghui*, as they have the largest memberships among *Taishenghui*, claim to represent

Taisheng residing in large geographic areas, and have been active in both Taiwan and Mainland China. Both organizations are officially registered with the Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior.

The Taiwan Students Society was established in October 2010 by the then-president of the Fudan University Taiwanese Student Association, a Fudan doctoral student named Lonely Chiu, with the objective of facilitating cooperation and communication between *Taisheng* at universities in Shanghai. While it is officially registered with the Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior as the “Chinese Cross-Strait Education and Employment Development Association,” it is commonly referred to by members as the “general organization” (short for Taiwanese Student Fellowship General Organization 台灣學生聯誼總會 *Taiwan Xuesheng Lianyi Zonghui*). At the time of its founding, Fudan was the only university in the Shanghai area with an organized *Taishenghui*; in subsequent years, the TSS has assisted students at several other universities to establish school-level *Taishenghui*. It now has a membership of around seven hundred *Taisheng* and claims to represent the two to three thousand *Taisheng* in Eastern China. As its official name suggests, the TSS is interested not only in the educational development of *Taisheng*, but also in their employment prospects after graduation.

The Taiwan Students Union was officially established in 2004, although its roots run back to informal *Taisheng* organizations at universities in the Beijing area and a small online forum created by a small group of *Taisheng* in 1997. The original purpose of this forum was to provide information on the process Taiwanese students must go through to apply to Mainland Chinese universities. In 2001, the scope of the forum was expanded to be a general online community for *Taisheng*. Members of this community were concerned about the Chen Shui-bian administration’s opposition to official recognition of degrees earned from Mainland Chinese universities, and registered the TWSU with the Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior in 2004 as the “Taiwanese Studying in the Mainland Youth Development Association” (台灣留學大陸青年發展協會 *Taiwan Liuxue Dalu Qingnian Fazhan Xiehui*) in response. Since then, their activities have been divided between “online operations”—providing an online community for *Taisheng* and information for Taiwanese interested in attending university in the Mainland—and “social operations”—organizing social activities for *Taisheng* and advocating *Taisheng* interests to authorities on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. While the TWSU only has around one hundred formal members, it has a network of connections at dozens of schools throughout China and hosts regular events that have an average turnout of between one and two hundred. Its online forum has around three hundred regular users and more than five thousand registered users.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative data for this paper was gathered between September 2012 and June 2013. During this time period, the author conducted semistructured interviews with *Taisheng*, both those enrolled full-time at Mainland universities and exchange students attending a Mainland university for one or two semesters, as well as graduated *Taisheng* still involved in the *Taisheng* community. The primary source of data for this paper is interviews with 37 *Taisheng* (ten of whom were exchange students and four of whom have already graduated but remain connected to the *Taisheng* community) attending Fudan University, the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Peking University, Renmin University, Tsinghua University, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, and Communication University of China. Interviews were conducted primarily in coffee shops; despite the public nature of the interview space, informants chose the locations themselves and did not appear to be uncomfortable talking about sensitive issues in these locations. The language used for

conducting interviews was primarily Mandarin, with the exception of one informant, who had studied as an undergraduate student in the United States and chose to speak English. Several interviews were conducted in a group setting, as informants often brought fellow *Taisheng* to accompany them to our meetings.

Discussions usually lasted one to two hours and covered a wide range of topics, including the informants' reasons for coming to the Mainland to study, perceptions of the Mainland prior to and after attending university there, relationships with Mainland classmates, perceived differences between Taiwan and Mainland China, informants' political identity, the degree to which informants felt they had assimilated into Mainland society, the amount of assistance provided to *Taisheng* by the university, and informants' participation in Taiwanese Student Associations.

A second important source of data for this paper is participant observation by the author of the activities and procedures of *Taishenghui*, bolstered by interviews and email correspondence with association leaders as well as review of *Taishenghui* publications and websites.

The final source of data for this paper consists of semistructured interviews with officials at the Straits Exchange Foundation and Taiwanese Ministry of Education whose work primarily deals with educational and cultural exchanges across the Taiwan Strait, and a KMT member of the Legislative Yuan interested in educational exchanges across the Strait.⁹ These interviews dealt with the informants' understanding of the status of *Taisheng* in Mainland China and their connections to and past dealings with *Taishenghui*.

V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

DO *TAISHENG* CONSTITUTE A LINKAGE COMMUNITY?

According to Keng, a linkage community is comprised of individuals with "shared identity and interests" that have been "reshaped through cross-Strait contacts/exchanges" (Keng 2011, 165). The stated objectives and past collective action of the *Taishenghui* suggest that they represent shared interests that can be operationalized and that are shaped particularly through cross-Strait contact. Shared identity is harder to determine, but conversations with *Taisheng* suggest that there is a cohesive *Taisheng* identity that is shared by both those affiliated with and independent from the *Taishenghui*.

About half of the students I interviewed expressed either an inability or a lack of desire to integrate into Mainland society. According to these students, the upbringing, economic background, and education of their Mainland peers is so radically different from their own that it is difficult to relate. Furthermore, these students generally have a very negative view of the Mainland and Mainlanders, using terms like "backwards" (落後) and "low-quality" (素質低) in their descriptions. As a result, when initial attempts to connect with Mainland peers fail, these students socialize almost solely with other Taiwanese and have little contact with Mainlanders outside of the classroom.

F002: When I first came [to the Mainland], I'd frequently ask Mainland classmates if they wanted to go out to eat, or to sing [KTV], or to get a drink, but they'd always say no. As a result, I feel like I can't assimilate ... Mainlanders' quality (素質), education, and judgment are all different.

R006: One time, some Mainland classmates asked me, "Well, if being in love isn't for getting married, what's it for?" For me, this is a really surprising question. It's

just to feel good, just for being in love! Why would it have to be to get married? Here, they start thinking about marriage much earlier. I think a huge part of this is family planning and the One Child Policy. It's led to this focus on reproduction and the expectations of the parents for their children, an expectation that they'll have a good future.

R001: Taiwanese college students are really free. They decide if they want to go to class or not, and their life outside the classroom is really enriched (豐富). But my Mainland classmates... the entire atmosphere requires them to compete, so they have to work really hard if they want good grades. Only if they get good grades will their resume look good. And what they do outside the classroom is just to make their resume look good. They're very goal-oriented (有目的性).

F008: When you're chatting [with Mainland classmates] a lot of things aren't the same, so you can't become friends with them through [shared] interests. Their point of view is also different, and they have different habits (生活習慣) from Taiwanese.

L001: [Before I came] I thought I'd meet lots of new friends, but my friends here are all internationals (國際部的). It's very hard to be good friends with [Mainlanders]. We all just know Taiwanese and international students (留學生).

F005: I mainly spend time with other Taiwanese, but I don't think this is strange, it's just because we all come from the same place. We don't need to explain a lot about our background, things from our childhood, TV shows, people, etc. We have shared experiences.

Some students I spoke with do not feel as alienated from Mainland society. According to these students, similarities in language and culture make it easy to integrate into Mainland society and build relationships with Mainland classmates. These students often said that the Mainland is much better (more developed, cleaner, etc.) than they had expected, and that they feel stereotypes of the Mainland are driven by the mass media in Taiwan. These students occasionally criticized their fellow *Taisheng* for not trying hard enough to make friends with Mainlanders.

P001: I've already been here for two years; I think I've assimilated. In my doctoral program there aren't any other Taiwanese, so I spend a lot of my time with Mainlanders ... about half and half. ... There's cultural difference, but it's not too big and it can be easily overcome.

R003: The main difference between Mainlanders and Taiwanese is habits (生活習慣), the things we say and the things we eat. We're more like Southerners (南方人), quite similar in fact. It's only in the North that we feel there's a difference.

R002: Taiwanese media isn't that great, it doesn't have much objective information, or much information at all, to allow us to understand the real situation here. So what they always tell us, it's just a secondhand fragment, telling you, "Oh, it's like this over there, it's like that over there, and they're different from us in this way and that way." It's a single source of information telling us what this place is.

R001: A lot of Taiwanese go to the Mainland and make friends, but they don't understand Mainlanders. If you want to really understand them, though, you don't need to change your own identity. If you go to really understand them, this is integration (融入). If you don't really want to understand them, you're just going to window shop (逛一逛).

The claim that “Mainlanders don't understand Taiwan and Taiwanese don't understand the Mainland” was repeated by several informants, with the most frequent explanation for this phenomenon being the limited contact each side has with the other. In my conversations, students frequently differentiated themselves from Mainlanders and other Taiwanese because of their dual understanding of both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Additionally, several students explained how coming to the Mainland had caused them to reflect on their own identity:

R006: When I came here, I had to be able to introduce to Mainlanders what life in Taiwan is like, which is good because it has caused me to reflect on Taiwanese life, and think about how things really are and what it really means to be Taiwanese. And being here has caused me to want to think through exactly what history means for me, and it's made me want to look through all this information, and go and find different people to have conversations with. In this process, I'm simultaneously introducing Taiwan to people and trying to understand why the situation is the way it is. And I think that it has strengthened how I feel about my home.

With few exceptions, the students I spoke with uniformly expressed a strong Taiwanese identity, although they were split almost evenly between those “for” and “against” Mainland China: on the one side, there are those who feel that Mainlanders are very different from Taiwanese, spend most of their time in the Mainland with other *Taisheng*, and have generally negative views of the Mainland; on the other side, there are those who say that Mainlanders are not very different from Taiwanese, spend most of their time with Mainlanders or split between Mainlanders and *Taisheng*, and have generally positive views of Mainland China. Regardless of their perceptions of and feelings towards the Mainland, however, informants all strongly identified as *Taisheng*, with the specific interests that identity entails. As *Taisheng*, the informants seem to feel differentiated from other Taiwanese as a result of their new understanding of the “real situation” in the Mainland, but simultaneously alienated from Mainlanders because of their distinct identity and way of life. Caught between Mainland China and Taiwan, *Taisheng* identity is clearly distinct from both. *Taishenghui* are formed not only as the result of shared educational, occupational, and economic interests, but also out of the cohesive group identity of *Taisheng*.¹⁰

GROUP LEVEL ANALYSIS

On the group level, we must determine the scale, resources, and organizational effectiveness of the *Taisheng* linkage community. At this level, *Taishenghui* are relatively limited in scope. In November 2012, there were 8,316 *Taisheng* enrolled in Mainland Chinese universities (Cao 2013), a very small number in the context of Mainland Chinese or Taiwanese society. Even in relation to the estimated one to three million Taiwanese living and working in Mainland China, *Taisheng* constitute a very small population. Furthermore, as students, the resources of *Taishenghui* officers and members are limited. Both organizations have substantial social capital, however. Many *Taisheng* are the children of Taiwanese entrepreneurs, and both *Taishenghui* have built on existing relationships with the Taiwanese business com-

munity in Mainland China by helping staff events hosted by Taiwanese Business Associations (TBAs). In the past, the *Taishenghui* have leveraged these relationships to acquire financial support from TBAs and allow members to network with Taiwanese entrepreneurs to find employment opportunities after graduation.¹¹

Taishenghui demonstrate a relatively high level of organizational effectiveness. The *Taisheng* I spoke with who were less active with *Taishenghui* tended to be those at universities without a school-level *Taishenghui* or with a less active school-level *Taishenghui*, and they generally cited this fact as the reason for their inactivity, rather than a disconnect between their personal identity and interests and those of the *Taishenghui*. From my observations, inactivity or nonexistence of a *Taishenghui* at a university is correlated with the size of the *Taisheng* community at a school; schools with fewer *Taisheng* had less active *Taishenghui* or no *Taishenghui*. For those *Taisheng* at universities with active *Taishenghui*, participation in the organization was often explained in instrumental terms, with informants citing the experience of helping run an organization or the connections with the Taiwanese business community developed in the process as their reasons for involvement. This suggests that *Taisheng* identity is highly consolidated; there are no differences of identity or interests that would be barriers to nonmembers, and inactive members rapidly become highly active “core” members as the opportunity presents itself.

STATE-SOCIETY LEVEL ANALYSIS

According to the linkage community framework, a linkage community must have access to the state and be able to influence policymakers’ decisions. The extent to which this is possible is measured by the structure of access to the state, the influence of rival and affiliated social groups, and the interests of the state itself.

As a pluralist democracy, the Taiwanese state has little insulation from societal interests, and social groups have a high degree of freedom to organize and lobby the government. Political mobilization of *Taisheng* in Taiwan is primarily accomplished through the formal organization of *Taishenghui*. Likewise, the structure of *Taisheng* access to policymakers in Taiwan is chiefly predicated on a formal relationship between government agencies and *Taishenghui* as officially registered civil society organizations. In interviews, leaders of the TWSU and TSS said one of their primary reasons for registering their organization with the Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior was a desire for legitimacy and access to the state. The legitimacy earned by official registration has allowed *Taisheng* to garner significant media attention in the past decade. In particular, public statements by the TWSU and its leaders are frequently cited by online media in both Taiwan and Mainland China.

Officers of both the TWSU and TSS participate in a two-day “*Taisheng* orientation camp” hosted annually in Taipei by the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), a semiofficial organization established by the Taiwanese authorities to oversee the day-to-day matters of cross-Strait relations. The purpose of the camp is to provide Taiwanese youth and their families with information about the situation of *Taisheng* life in Mainland China (Ni 2013). At past camps, officials from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of National Defense, and Executive Yuan have provided information about degree recognition, military conscription, and various other topics of concern to *Taisheng*, and representatives of the *Taishenghui* have shared their experiences of living, studying, and working in Mainland China.

Through this event, leaders of the *Taishenghui* have developed personal relationships with officials at the SEF and Ministry of Education. When the Ministry of Education holds talks on issues of concern to *Taisheng*, it typically invites the leadership of the TWSU to attend as representatives of *Taisheng* interests.¹² One SEF official told me he regularly

refers Taiwanese youth interested in studying in Mainland China and their families to the *Taishenghui* for detailed information about the application process and daily life at Mainland universities. The SEF also depends on the communication channels of the *Taishenghui* to contact the broader *Taisheng* community. Because the support the SEF can provide to *Taisheng* while they are in the Mainland is limited, the same official said that *Taisheng* have to rely on the *Taishenghui* to provide such services.¹³

While the TSS has not engaged in political activity and has avoided making public statements of support or opposition to governmental policies affecting *Taisheng*, the TWSU is highly active politically. In the 2008 presidential election, the TWSU mobilized members in support of Ma Ying-jeou. Prior to the 2012 presidential election, the group released public statements opposing Democratic Progressive Party candidate Tsai Ing-wen, claiming her election would hurt cross-strait relations (“Vice-president of *Taishenghui*: Tsai Ing-wen’s election will set back cross-strait relations” 2011). Members of the TWSU established a political party in 2011—the Taiwan Youth Union Party (台灣青年聯合黨 *Taiwan Qingnian Lianhe Dang*)—headed by TWSU vice-chairman Chen Cheng-teng (Taiwan Youth Union Party).

Since 1999, the TWSU has actively lobbied the Taiwanese government for recognition of Mainland degrees, releasing numerous public statements, organizing protests of Ministry of Education events, and mobilizing members to support the political campaigns of Kuomintang legislators who support degree recognition.¹⁴ Many *Taisheng* of voting age claim to have supported Ma Ying-jeou in the 2008 election because of his campaign promise to recognize Mainland degrees, going so far as to fly back to Taiwan just to vote in the election; when complete degree recognition failed to materialize, they felt betrayed.¹⁵ In subsequent years, as recognition has gradually expanded to include 121 schools, the TWSU has publicly called the Taiwanese Ministry of Education’s degree recognition policy “unjust” and “a form of discrimination.”¹⁶

The partial success of TWSU advocacy of Mainland degree recognition is undoubtedly also due to the connections both the TWSU and the TSS have established with the Kuomintang (KMT). At least two former TWSU leaders have served on the KMT Central Committee,¹⁷ and a current TSS leader is a member of the KMT Youth League Committee. While government officials have stated that “public health is the main consideration” at stake in the decision to not recognize Mainland medical degrees (Wang 2009), conversations with officials at the SEF and Ministry of Education have revealed that Taiwan’s strong medical lobby is actually the primary factor.¹⁸ Furthermore, the most important element of the degree recognition policy’s failure is likely the opposition of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which has argued that such a policy would only encourage more Taiwanese youth to attend Mainland universities, leading to brain drain in Taiwan (Wang and Ko 2010). It is probable that the DPP would oppose other measures that *Taisheng* might advocate. In any case, *Taisheng* represent only one small group of the many thousands of interests clamoring for the attention of the Taiwanese government.

In Mainland China during the postreform era, state-society relations have traditionally been understood as a zero-sum relationship; where the state is strong, civil society is weak, and vice versa (Gu 2010). In recent years, however, a corporatist model—an “institutional arrangement for linking the associationally organized interests of civil society with the decisional structures of the state”—has become the predominant method for analyzing state-society relations in China.¹⁹ The corporatist state-society relationship is characterized by one state-recognized/licensed organization with a representational monopoly for a given social group, membership of which is typically compulsory and over which the state

exercises control of select internal affairs.

Within this framework, there is little room for *Taishenghui* to access the state. School-level *Taishenghui* are not formally recognized by university administrators because of a national regulation forbidding any kind of regional student organization. As a result, these organizations are unable to access university resources: for example, reserving space for club meetings must be done by a member of the organization as an individual student rather than as a representative of a student group, with the frequent result that venues must be changed and events cancelled when the university overrules the individual's request at the last minute.²⁰ Furthermore, as the university does not provide the *Taishenghui* with a list of Taiwanese students enrolled in the university, they are often unaware of all the Taiwanese on campus.²¹

Some universities have established official "Hong Kong-Macao-Taiwan Student Associations" administered by the university's Hong Kong-Macao-Taiwan Affairs Office and led by Mainland students. These organizations are focused on assisting *Taisheng* (as well as students from Macao and Hong Kong) and promoting exchange and understanding between Mainland and Taiwanese students. The university provides these organizations with a list of enrolled *Taisheng* and assists them in registering space for events and procuring transportation for outings. Existence of such organizations obviously precludes the development of a school-level *Taishenghui* run by and for *Taisheng*. It is possible that this kind of top-down organization may become more prevalent at universities throughout Mainland China in coming years as the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office becomes aware of the "problem" of autonomous school-level *Taishenghui*.²²

Although they lack official recognition, *Taishenghui* have had *some* dealings with local officials in the PRC. While most school-level *Taishenghui* are not provided with a list of enrolled *Taisheng*, the Hong Kong-Macao-Taiwan Affairs Office of Fudan University annually provides the Fudan *Taishenghui* with such a list. Furthermore, after officers of the club dispatched a formal account of their situation to the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office in December 2012, administrators in charge of student organizations at Fudan University called a meeting to address the concerns of foreign students and students from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan; officers of the Fudan *Taishenghui* were invited as representatives of the school's Taiwanese students. At the meeting, the university committed to being more active in attending to *Taisheng*.²³ In July 2013, the TSS worked with the Taiwan Affairs Office of Shanghai to welcome and assist Taiwanese youth visiting the city for a state-sponsored short summer exchange. The TWSU is likewise in contact with local officials in Beijing: last year, city education officials invited officers of the group to a meeting to discuss the status of *Taisheng* and potential services that universities could provide them. The TWSU requested that *Taisheng* be able to access state medical insurance. This request was largely met: many universities have begun helping *Taisheng* access state medical insurance in the past year.²⁴

Largely barred from political mobilization in Mainland China, *Taishenghui* have primarily focused on providing assistance to *Taisheng* in nonpolitical ways. The TWSU and TSS both collaborate with local Taiwanese Business Associations in Beijing and Shanghai, respectively, to host annual job fairs for graduating *Taisheng* to network with Taiwanese entrepreneurs and learn about career opportunities at Taiwanese enterprises in the Mainland. The head of the TSS told me that, apart from organizing social events for *Taisheng*, aiding *Taisheng* in career development is his primary activity.²⁵ Similarly, conversations with *Taisheng* revealed that postgraduation employment was a much larger concern for most students than political activism. Almost all informants said that the rapid development and large size of the Mainland economy was an important factor in their decision to come to

the Mainland. Approximately a third of informants said their primary reason for attending university in the Mainland is to build connections with Mainlanders and Taiwanese entrepreneurs and gain a better understanding of the Mainland so that they can do business or seek employment there after graduation.

VI. CONCLUSION

While their perceptions of the Mainland vary, Taiwanese students at Mainland Chinese universities have shared interests and a cohesive group identity. To represent these interests and identity, *Taisheng* have collectively organized into Taiwanese Student Associations, or *Taishenghui*. With one foot planted in Taiwan and one resting in Mainland China, I argue that *Taisheng* constitute a “linkage community” of people with significant economic, social, and cultural ties to both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

At the group level, the *Taisheng* linkage community has a high degree of organizational effectiveness, but is small in number and has minimal resources. At the state-society level, while it can use political means to pursue its collective interests, it has a limited ability to achieve its goals, particularly as its interests run counter to more powerful societal groups in Taiwan. This is doubly true in Mainland China, where its ability to interact with and influence the state is almost nonexistent. Perhaps more importantly, the *Taisheng* linkage community is not interested in pushing a pro-unification agenda. The past political and nonpolitical activities of the *Taishenghui* and the statements of *Taisheng* paint a picture of interests similar to those of university students around the world: indifferent to politics and focused on social life, school, and postgraduation employment.

Disinterested in unification and unable to effectively advocate for pro-integration policies even if they were concerned about them, *Taisheng* are not currently drivers of unification across the Taiwan Strait. While the *Taisheng* community continues to grow, both in absolute numbers and group resources, it is unlikely that even with additional resources it will promote a pro-unification agenda, as members remain conflicted in their opinions of the Mainland and primarily focused on their immediate self-interests.

What does this tell us about the value of the linkage community framework as an evaluative method? The framework assumes that identity and interests shared by members of the linkage community are necessarily bent towards a pro-unification stance by individual economic interests and through interaction with Mainland China. My findings suggest that this is only half of the picture. Better understanding of how identity and interests are created and shaped is necessary in the cross-Strait context for the linkage community framework to be an effective method for analyzing the potential unification of Taiwan and Mainland China. Furthermore, these findings raise questions about the way in which scholars of cross-Strait relations approach the issue of unification. While unification has traditionally been viewed as a predetermined conclusion, my findings suggest that the actors most closely involved in functional cross-Strait interactions do not approach the issue from this perspective. Formulating models for understanding cross-Strait relations that approach such interactions from the perspective of actors “on the ground” may enable scholars to be less often surprised by the way their theories diverge from data on the cross-Strait situation.

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NOTES

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- Ibid., 200-201. Deutsch et al. also suggest establishing more institutions for promoting government-to-government contact, but communications theory is society-centric, on the whole.
- O'Neill 1996, 41-42. Note that the primary neofunctionalist critique of functionalism is its overemphasis on the role played by governing elites (at the cost of ignoring other elites with political power, such as leaders of transnational businesses, trade groups, unions, etc.); despite this, elites are still more important to neofunctionalism than to communications theory: O'Neill points out that neofunctionalists acknowledge "the stark fact that political elites determined the outcomes of international integration" (38).
- Haas 1958. An example of functional spillovers in the cross-Strait context can be found in the education sector. Following the opening of Mainland universities to Taiwanese students, there has been a gradual process of expanding educational integration across the Taiwan Strait. As the number of Taiwanese students in Mainland China increased, the number of schools open to Taiwanese students were expanded, applications and tuition were standardized with Mainland applicants, schools on both sides increased interschool cooperation and programming with the opposite side, and an increasing number of Mainland degrees were recognized in Taiwan.
- It is important to note that the linkage community framework for understanding how integration might lead to unification rests on the assumption of shared nationhood between the two sides.
- For discussion of the situation of "political separation with economic integration," see Zhao, Suisheng. "Economic Interdependence and Political Divergence: A Background Analysis of the Taiwan Strait Crisis." In Zhao, Suisheng, ed. *Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan, and the 1995-1996 Crisis*. Routledge. 1999.
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23. Wu, Xiangxian. Email correspondence with author. February 4, 2013.
24. Chen, Cheng-teng. Interview by author. Taipei, July 23, 2013.
25. Chiu, Lonely. Interview by author. Shanghai, June 5, 2013.