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Forum



Delimiting ‘Cross-Strait Studies’: *Kua’an* (跨岸) vs. *Liang’an* (兩岸)

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**Position Paper: Delimiting 'Cross-Strait Studies': *Kua'an* (跨岸)
vs. *Liang'an* (兩岸)**
Gunter Schubert

In this short forum article, I argue that empirical research on the multifaceted reality of interaction between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese over the last three decades has brought about a new research field which exists in all but name: the field of 'cross-strait studies'. 'Cross-strait studies' are characterised by a specific analytical perspective which I call *kua'an* (trans-strait, 跨岸). *Kua'an* must be distinguished from *liang'an* (cross-strait, 兩岸), the dominating perspective taken in the Taiwan studies field. To substantiate my argument, I will first highlight the social science literature which I deem relevant to the field of 'cross-strait studies'.¹ I will then clarify what I mean by a 'research field' and, thereafter, present my argument for delimiting 'cross-strait studies' as a research field *sui generis*. My concluding remarks will focus on the analytical surplus value of such a field and explain why we must distinguish between *kua'an* and *liang'an* as two different, though complementary, approaches to the cross-strait relationship.

Relations between China and Taiwan have become increasingly dense and interwoven over the course of the last 30 years. Although a political solution to the sovereignty conflict between both sides has not yet been found, we have witnessed a rising intensity of economic and social interaction across the Taiwan Strait throughout the period. This process has gone hand in hand with a rising scholarly interest in the political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics of cross-Strait exchanges and their long-term consequences for the relationship between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan. A substantial amount of knowledge has been produced by Taiwan and Western scholars over the last 15 years or so, including studies of social interaction and everyday contact across the Taiwan Strait.²

Empirical studies on the *political economy of cross-Strait relations* has gained considerable momentum in recent years, with scholars looking at Taiwanese

1 Although I focus on the social sciences due to my academic limitations, 'cross-strait studies' naturally cover the humanities as well. For example, literature, cinema, and music are all areas of interest within the field of 'cross-strait studies'.

2 The literature is far more abundant than this selection demonstrates. However, as a scholar of the 'cross-strait studies' field, I focus on studies based on empirical data gathered by systematic fieldwork.

businesspeople (台商, *Taishang*) operating in China;³ Chinese capital investment in Taiwan;⁴ the formation of cross-Strait capital groups;⁵ and China's preferential policies for attracting Taiwanese investment and human capital.⁶ The same holds true for the study of social relations across the Taiwan Strait, focusing on issues such as Chinese marriage migration to Taiwan and its political and social consequences;⁷ the social (non-)integration of Taiwanese in mainland China and social interaction between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese in China;⁸ Taiwanese high-skilled migration to China,⁹ the impact of cross-Strait student and scholarly exchange;¹⁰ the effects of cross-Strait

- 3 Research on *Taishang* has been one of the central interest areas in the 'cross-strait studies' field. See e.g. Schubert, R. Lin, and J. Y.-C. Tseng (2017); S. S. Lin (2016); Schubert (2016); C.-Y. Lee (2014); Keng, R.-H. Lin, and Shu (Schubert) (2012); Keng and Schubert (2010).
- 4 There are only a few scholars so far who have tackled this sensitive topic from a *kua'an* perspective as discussed in this article. See e.g. C.-Y. Lee (2018); C.-Y. Lee and Yin (2017). For a predominantly descriptive account of the official policies in Taiwan and the PRC concerning Chinese capital investment in Taiwan, see J. Y. S. Cheng and Mo (2008).
- 5 Studies in this area of interest often take (or criticise) a political or ideological position on 'cross-strait' capitalism with little empirical research on the actual behaviour and thinking of 'cross-strait capitalists', which I would rather suggest pertains more to cross-strait relations written from a *liang'an research perspective*. See e.g. Beckershoff and Schubert (2018) and J.-M. Wu (2016, 2017). Strictly empirically oriented and, arguably, more in line with a *kua'an* perspective, see Z. Lee (2016).
- 6 See e.g. Keng, J. Y.-C. Tseng, and Yu (2017) and J. Y.-C. Tseng (2015), the latter for China's early preferential policies vis-à-vis Taiwan launched after Ma Ying-jeou came to power in 2008. A new 'generation' of preferential policies was put forward by the Chinese government after the change of ruling parties in Taiwan in 2016, with the aim of attracting new Taiwanese investment and human capital. They have recently been 'repackaged' in 31 and 26 preferential policies, promulgated in February 2018 and November 2019 respectively. This author and his team currently conduct research on the response of different Taiwanese constituencies to these measures in southern China.
- 7 Research in this area has focused on the political agency (and political participation) of mainland spouses leading to, for instance, adjustments of Taiwan's immigration policies and conceptions of sovereignty, and bringing about new organisational patterns within Taiwan's civil society. Moreover, studies have focused on the strategies of mainland spouses for economic survival in a complicated Taiwanese environment in which they experience high levels of discrimination. See e.g. Zani (2018a); Momesso and I. Cheng (2017); I. Cheng (2016a, 2016b, 2017); Y.-C. Tseng, I. Cheng, and Fell (2014).
- 8 This literature is mainly concerned with long-term Taiwanese residents in mainland China. See e.g. R.-H. Lin, Keng and Hu (2014); H.-L. Wang (2009); P. Lin (2009).
- 9 High-skilled migration from a *kua'an* perspective looks primarily at the experiences of Taiwanese professionals and white-collar workers who have chosen a career path in China. See e.g. Nakahara (2017); Y.-F. Tseng (2014a, 2014b, 2016).
- 10 This area of interest is mainly concerned with the experiences and thinking of Taiwanese students in China and Chinese students in Taiwan. See e.g. C.-C. Wang (2018a, 2019a); H.-L. Wang and Ke (2018); Chen (2017); Lan and Y.-F. Wu (2011, 2016).

tourism;¹¹ and the (change of) mutual perceptions across the Taiwan Strait, including the controversial issue of (national) identity and the question whether a specific 'cross-strait identity' has been coming to the fore.¹²

1 What is a Research Field?

A research field is a delimited 'space' of scholarly inquiry and investigation concerning phenomena which are grouped together as a result of *common sense-thinking* or *intentional connectedness*. Scholars in a specific research field may work in different *areas of interest* (subfields) or academic disciplines within this field but share the conviction that their work is linked by an overarching interest for the field. They share the desire to accumulate knowledge to develop the field and build theories which explain phenomena identified or defined as relevant to the field. Most importantly, a research field is delimited from *adjoining* fields by a shared opinion among scholars that it constitutes an (epistemological, theoretical, empirical) 'proprium', meaning that it produces knowledge and offers analytical perspectives on reality notably different from knowledge production and analytical perspectives in other (or adjoining) fields. More precisely, the gathering of empirical data in the 'cross-strait studies' field departs from those research questions commonly asked in other fields, and research in this field results in new insights or even the discovery of new phenomena than research in other fields. Put differently, I argue that making 'cross-strait studies' a separate research field *sui generis* enriches our understanding of the current dynamics of the cross-strait relationship in a way that otherwise could not be attained.

2 Defining and Delimiting the Field

How should 'cross-strait studies' be defined? As mentioned above, research in the field of 'cross-strait studies' investigates the manifold dimensions of everyday contact between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese, and the consequences

11 Scholars in this subfield have studied the changing attitudes of mainland Chinese tourists who have visited Taiwan. See e.g. Pan, W.-C. Wu, and Chang (2018) and Rowan (2016).

12 On the issue of mutual identity change due to increased cross-strait contact or more generally on negotiating different 'cross-strait identities', see e.g. Momesso and C.-Y. Lee (2019); Chen (2018); C.-C. Wang (2016; 2017; 2018b; 2019b); T. Y. Wang and S.-F. Cheng (2017); C.-L. Wu (2017); Lan and Y.-F. Wu (2016); Schubert (2010).

of such contact in terms of behaviour, thinking, and identity. Geographically spoken, 'cross-strait studies' focus foremost on cross-Strait interaction between Taiwan and China's south-eastern and eastern provinces—Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu (including Shanghai). However, interaction does also happen in other places in China, in the wider Asian region, and overseas. 'Cross-strait studies' are therefore not confined to a particular geographical space.¹³

'Cross-strait studies' addresses different 'flows' between the mainland and Taiwan, including people (人流), commodities (物流), capital (金流), information (資訊流), technology (技術流), business (商流), and—as a generic term—culture (文化流). From a different perspective, 'cross-strait studies' highlights interaction in 'social action fields'¹⁴ (or 'contact zones') such as companies, industrial parks, residential compounds, or other settings in which mainland Chinese and Taiwanese (as businesspeople, employees, residents, spouses, students or just tourists) interact. This interaction arguably generates a 'third space' of mutual communication and understanding, which may question or defy the ideological orthodoxy and established imagery of cross-strait relations shared and promoted by political elites on both sides.¹⁵ The 'third space' describes a 'contact zone' where Taiwanese and mainland Chinese—including Chinese local state officials—meet and negotiate their interests and identities but also 'perform' in order to satisfy the political and ideological requirements of the official cross-Strait relationship (兩岸關係, *liang'an guanxi*). They do this for the sake of protecting their respective positions in social action fields; that is, safeguarding their interests in a highly politicised environment. At the same time, it is in this 'contact zone' where both sides demonstrate their respective positions as human beings who struggle to find a way to reconcile these political and ideological requirements with their everyday life.¹⁶

13 For instance, the interaction between Taiwanese and Chinese overseas communities in the United States or Europe may be as much a part of 'cross-strait studies' as interaction between Taiwanese and Chinese entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia. The same is true for Taiwanese and Chinese couples living in third countries, i.e. neither in Taiwan nor in mainland China (see Y.-C. Tseng, 2017).

14 I borrow this term from Fligstein and Macadam (2015).

15 'Third space' thus means a space beyond the antinomian positions defined by Chinese and Taiwanese political ideology. I am grateful to Taiwanese anthropologist Michelle Tsai who directed my attention to the concept of 'third space' when she gave a presentation at the ERCCT in February 2019.

16 Lan and Y.-F. Wu (2016) have used the concept of 'contact zone' in their study on the identity negotiation of Taiwanese students in mainland China.

Taiwanese and Chinese constituencies may also, by way of regular contact and communication over time, constitute (informal) ‘cross-strait linkage communities’ with the potential to influence official policy-making, a concept that has been probed, for instance, in the case of Taiwanese businesspeople and students on the Chinese mainland (see e.g. Davidson, 2015; Keng, 2011; Keng & Schubert, 2010).¹⁷ Hence, ‘third space’, ‘contact zone’, and ‘linkage community’ are central concepts addressed in ‘cross-strait studies’.¹⁸

Against this background, the research field of ‘cross-strait studies’ may be described as an intersection between the parallel fields of Taiwan and China studies with which it communicates (see Figure 1). It is constituted and delimited by an arsenal of specific research questions informed by a *kua’an* perspective that are foremost concerned with the political, social, economic, and cultural reality defining everyday practices of interaction between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese. Such a definition is purely descriptive, of course, but is there anything more—discursive, theoretical, methodological—to the field of ‘cross-strait studies’ which suggests that it is reasonable to separate it from the Taiwan and China studies fields?

First of all, ‘cross-strait studies’ does not privilege any particular disciplinary approach, though it would privilege approaches stemming from the social sciences due to their focus on human interaction in different social settings, political contexts, and institutional environments. This implies, secondly, that ‘cross-strait studies’ are utmost empirical. However, this does not convincingly delimit them from the Taiwan studies field where, as previously mentioned, ‘cross-strait studies’ could be simply incorporated as an area of interest or sub-field particularly concerned with empirical research on cross-strait human interaction.

What makes ‘cross-strait studies’ different is their invocation of *kua’an* (rather than *liang’an*) to capture a *specific cross-strait reality* engendered by

17 According to an often-quoted definition by Taiwan scholar Yung Wei, ‘linkage communities’ are ‘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).

18 Moreover, the concept of ‘social distance’ might also be addressed in ‘cross-strait studies’, which ‘refers to the extent to which people experience a sense of familiarity (nearness and intimacy) or unfamiliarity (closeness and difference) between themselves and people belonging to different social, ethnic, occupational, and religious groups from their own’. See *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, 2014 online edition, retrieved 18 January 2020 from https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4614-5583-7_559. I am grateful to my colleague Yu-chin Tseng for pointing this out to me.

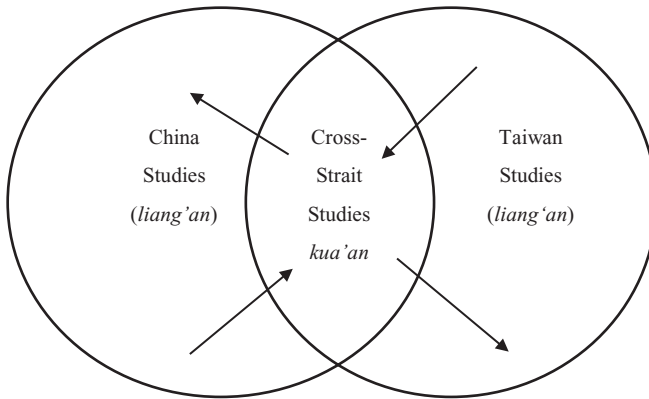


FIGURE 1 Cross-strait studies: Addressing the 'third space' by taking a *kua'an* perspective.

intensive exchange and interaction over time, which manifests in distinctive ways of political thinking, social practice, identity formation, and feelings of solidarity and human empathy on the part of Taiwanese and mainland Chinese whose lives are determined and shaped by complex and multidimensional mutual relations. This is a perspective that, arguably, contradicts, modifies, corrects, or at least enriches the established perception and understanding of a 'cross-strait divide', which suggests irreconcilable antinomies and conflict across the Taiwan Strait—the perennial subtext to the signifier *liang'an guanxi* (兩岸關係) by which cross-Strait relations are usually denoted in Mandarin Chinese and addressed in the Taiwan and China studies fields. The 'high politics' of the cross-strait relationship, usually investigated in these fields by international relations (IR) scholars and political scientists interested in elite politics, requires a parallel analytical approach which focuses on 'low politics' and is foremost concerned with human thinking, interaction, and practice in everyday relations between 'ordinary' Taiwanese and mainland Chinese.¹⁹ This particular epistemological perspective is the major reason for which it makes sense to speak of a distinct research field of 'cross-strait studies'.

3 By Way of Concluding

'Cross-strait studies' looks towards the local and/or civilian realm—the so-called 'third space'—of cross-strait interaction and exchange. This approach

19 Certainly, political agency in the realm of cross-strait 'low politics' can turn into 'high politics' when it impacts on state policies and even changes them. I am grateful to Isabelle Cheng for noting this to me.

does not question the relevance of the political and ideological dimensions of the official cross-Strait relationship but confronts them with an alternative analytical perspective focusing on everyday interaction between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese. Translated as *kua'an yanjiu* (跨岸研究) in Chinese, 'cross-strait studies' interrogates the social relationships between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese (and between different subgroups within both constituencies), the consequences of that interaction for the shaping of the political context they face and must cope with, and their understanding of what it means to be 'Taiwanese' and 'Chinese'.

The analytical surplus value of such an analytical perspective is both empirical and political. Empirically, it requires the systematic gathering of data stemming from extensive field research in order to assess the 'everyday dimension' of the cross-Strait relationship. Politically, it asks to what extent this relationship may be read differently from what is usually assumed and framed on the basis of the signifier *liang'an*: a cross-strait divide that does not only bespeak ideological cleavage and political confrontation but also ontological differences in terms of identity. This does not mean that 'cross-strait studies' can claim that there is more unity than difference across the Taiwan Strait; neither does it subscribe to an inevitable logic of cross-Strait integration—or 'unification', for that matter. It rather demands a thorough and coherent empirical investigation of the human dimension of cross-strait interaction to properly describe and interpret the reality of the full range of relations across the Taiwan Strait in contemporary times. As such, 'cross-strait studies', by taking a *kua'an* perspective, critically assesses and complements the knowledge produced by the *liang'an*-perspective belonging to the Taiwan studies field.



Response 1

Shelley Rigger

Gunter Schubert's suggestion that we differentiate studies of interactions among Taiwanese and PRC people and organisations (*kua'an guanxi*) from studies of interactions between Taipei and Beijing (*liang'an guanxi*) calls attention to an important distinction, one that has been blurred by the catch-all phrase 'cross-Strait'. What I find most exciting about this development is the way Schubert is opening the phrase '*liang'an guanxi*' to interrogation. This term is actually quite problematic; it elides the central question of *liang'an guanxi* itself: What, precisely, are these 'an'?

As a concept used by scholars, *liang'an guanxi* is a dodge. It enabled decades of research on relations among entities and individuals in mainland China and Taiwan without forcing scholars to 'take sides' in the political debate over Taiwan's status. It is scholars' version of the 1992 Consensus: we agree that there is something to study here, but we each have our own (usually unspoken) idea about what we are studying.

Schubert is correct that 'the established perception and understanding of a "cross-strait divide", which suggests irreconcilable antinomies and conflict across the Taiwan Strait—[is] the perennial subtext to the signifier *liang'an guanxi* (兩岸關係). However, it is not the *only* perennial subtext: Another is the normalisation of unification. By calling them 'an', or 'sides', we are accepting Chinese nationalists' claim that they cannot be called something else. States, for example. As we develop cross-strait relations as a field, I hope we will strive to challenge and problematise both these subtexts.

Liang'an works so well because 'an' is purely geographical; it says nothing about the political identity of either *an*. It allows us to study cross-Strait relations *as if* it were international relations without referring to states.

But avoiding the necessity to specify what the 'an' are has allowed politics to sneak back. Work on cross-Strait relations—both *liang'an* and *kua'an*—is infused with the notion that Taiwan's unification with mainland China is the expected (inevitable?) outcome, and the absence of unification is the aberration that needs to be explained. Even people who do not favour unification sometimes argue in this way.

The expectation of unification is less evident in work informed by a Realist IR perspective, but it is not absent.²⁰ Because Realism takes states as the unit of analysis, Realists working on cross-Strait relations apply their concepts as if the PRC and Taiwan were states. But they, too, hide behind the ambiguous terminology of 'cross-Strait relations'. Their position is a more anodyne formulation of Lee Teng-hui's *Liangguo Lun*: it is a special state-to-state relationship—an *an* to *an* relationship, if you will. You analyse as you would a state-to-state relationship, but you can avoid political complications if you stick to the 'cross-Strait' lingo.

For scholars writing from the Liberal IR tradition, this 'unification as endpoint' is a bigger problem. Most of the Liberal writing about cross-Strait relations focuses on interdependence theory, which aims to understand

20 The distinction between Realist and Liberal work is similar to the distinction Schubert draws between 'high politics' and 'low politics'.

how economic and social interactions between states translate into interdependence, and how interdependence affects inter-state relations. Studies of cross-Strait interdependence typically treat the two sides as states making what we would call 'foreign policy' in any other context.

Interdependence theory argues that interdependence (especially symmetrical interdependence) tends to make states more friendly to one another. Cross-Strait relations is often posed as a challenge to this hypothesis, not because interdependence has not accompanied improvements in cross-Strait relations, but because it has not produced progress towards *unification*.

Nowhere in the interdependence literature does it say that when two states become economically interdependent, we should expect them to dissolve their political borders, yet this is the expectation for Taiwan and the PRC. Just because two contemporary states that share a common history, language, settlement pattern, border, and culture also happen to be among one another's largest trading partners does not mean they will unify politically. If that were the case, the United States and Canada, separated since 1783, would have 'reunified' long ago, yet no one ever asks why they have not.

Even studies of domestic politics are subject to this teleological logic. Investigations of the domestic politics of cross-Strait relations often try to ascertain whether cross-Strait interactions are making unification more or less likely. But as Schubert points out, there are much more interesting things we can learn from these interactions: 'research in the field of "cross-strait studies" investigates the manifold dimensions of everyday contact between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese, and the consequences of such contact in terms of behaviour, thinking, and identity'.

Fundamentally, the terminology of '*an*' suggests that the nature of the *liang* entities is ambiguous, so we need to choose a 'neutral' label. Does this privilege the Chinese nationalist narrative that the relationship between these two entities is unique, presumably in the way Chinese nationalists understand it to be? Schubert says no: 'This does not mean that "cross-strait studies" can claim that there is more unity than difference across the Taiwan Strait; neither does it subscribe to an inevitable logic of cross-Strait integration—or "unification", for that matter.' Still, I wonder whether viewing cross-Strait relations as a *sui generis* manifestation of human interaction risks doing precisely that. Given that so many people already view it this way, how do you avoid the unificationist teleology from creeping back in, even unconsciously?

I do not know whether Schubert's idea can liberate us from the unificationist teleology, but at a minimum it gives us an opportunity to talk about it, to re-examine our approach to the study of cross-Strait relations from this perspective. A new field of cross-strait studies could ask researchers to be

more explicit about their definitions and assumptions. Another way to resist the unificationist teleology would be to look for comparisons and parallels to the cross-Strait case. Are there other transborder relationships that affect national politics in regions with contested sovereignty? Ukraine, for example? Disciplinary logics may be helpful here.



Response 2

Beatrice Zani

Professor Schubert endeavours to delimit the scientific and epistemological boundaries of a research field *sui generis*. By doing so, he continues the relentless work done in the past few decades by the growing number of international scholars who focused on the expanding social, political, economic, and moral interconnections between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. In essence, Professor Schubert delimits the theoretical, epistemological, and empirical dimensions of a transnational (跨岸, *kua'an*) approach to cross-strait studies. But what are the implications of such a *kua* perspective? How can this new approach be beneficial to our analyses? In my response, I will attempt to critically assess Professor Schubert's position paper here. Drawing on my ethnographic work on women's mobilities across the Taiwan Strait, I shall point out the relevance of a *kua* perspective in cross-strait studies and sketch a few methodological and epistemological considerations for further debate.

Schubert firstly delimits this research field based on its *sui generis*²¹ dimension. This lies in its positioning, scope, and epistemically 'distinctive nature' (Durkheim, 1937). Far from objectivation, *sui generis* refers to the specific 'dynamics of the transnational social world' (Faist, 2000: 53), which emerges *in situation* through heterogeneous processes of transfer, transition, and translation (Hanks & Severi, 2014) of norms and orders between China and Taiwan as spatial, political, moral epistemological spaces. Thus the position paper urges to focus on the 'exchange and interaction over time' of the plurality of actors who dialogically *transfer* unique practices, experiences, norms, and imaginaries. These are forged *in motion*. Consequently, this research field is also *mobile*. Reflecting on the circulation of practices and knowledge, I would like to raise

21 See the notion of '*sui generis* capitalism' by Aglietta and Bai (2012).

a second crucial point: how can we overcome the traditional dichotomies between the two research fields? How to produce a dialogic and mobile knowledge (Urry, 2000) of the everyday cross-strait reality?

Distancing ourselves from a methodological cosmopolitanism (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1994), it rather becomes a matter of providing a 'cosmopolitan outlook' (Beck, 1999: 14) on the mutable social, economic, political, and moral interactions across the strait. What Schubert proposes is a methodological transnationalism (Nishihara, 2013) that considers the everyday situations, practices, and experiences 'performed' within the social microcosmos of the cross-strait reality. For Schubert, we entered a transnational (*kua*) epistemological space, where the unit of analysis shifted from states perceived as containers (Beck & Sznaider, 2006) to the dynamic micro-social interactions of a plurality of actors. Thereby, an analysis of the circulation and mutual construction of social, economic, political, and moral flows or *scapes* (Appadurai, 1999) might be more appropriate to look at such an intertwined reality. But how so?

To answer this theoretical question, it may be useful to start with an empirical example. Let us look at the socialisation processes, economic activities, digitalised entrepreneurial practices, and emotional circulations produced by Chinese female migrants between China and Taiwan.

The case of the biographical, social, and professional careers of Chinese migrant women who move from the countryside to the Chinese cities to work in urban factories, remigrate through marriage to Taiwan, and circulate around these different spaces on a both physical and digital level (Zani, 2018b) is a vivid example of the 'human' and 'everyday' dimensions of cross-Strait interactions. Marcus's lesson taught us that 'follow the movement of actors, objects, cultural scripts and artefacts' (Marcus, 1995: 98) is a powerful analytical tool for the investigation of the heterogeneous configurations produced within a transnational space. It enables us to 'imagine the whole' (Marcus, 1989); hence to pursue the connections on the micro level as a manifestation of macro-level phenomena. Following women, their movements, and their experiences 'here' and 'there' and 'here and there at the same time' (Tarrus, 2002; Vertovec, 2009)—that is, on both sides of the Strait—reveals the everyday lived and performed experiences of multi-situated, multi-scalar, and trans-local mobilities occurring *in-between* the spaces (Zani, 2019).

There cannot be neither an empirical nor an epistemic divide between these physical and virtual, material and emotional transnational spaces. The co-articulation between what is local and what is trans-local (Ong, 1999) needs to be considered to seize the 'complex and multidimensional mutual relations' (Schubert, position paper) among diverse temporalities, spatialities, and scales

of mobilities. Yet could such an empirical consideration be transposed to the level of transnational knowledge production? Schubert answers affirmatively. Epistemologically speaking, a *kua perspective* builds a bridge between differently situated knowledge (Bhargava, 2013). Once again, would it be appropriate to explore, as stated by Appadurai (1999: 36), how the cultural flows mutually constituting each other sustain the production of an empirically based, situated knowledge on the everyday reality of cross-strait life? Schubert moves into this direction. A *kua perspective* on cross-strait studies can resolve a reductive political and epistemological cross-strait divide (兩岸, *liang'an*), through back-and-forth movements, scientific exchanges, academic debates, and conceptual continuities and discontinuities (Roulleau-Berger, 2015) between the China and the Taiwan studies fields. It performatively invests a heterotopian 'third space' (Bhabha, 2002) emerging from the daily life, inter-actions, and practices forged and performed by a plurality of actors across the borders. Therefore, inside this 'third space' it might be possible to open a creative laboratory of discussion and study of 'manifold dimensions of everyday contact between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese' (Schubert, position paper). A *kua perspective* encourages the scientific debate, supporting the reconfiguration of the geographies of knowledge in cross-strait studies; that is, 'the continuities and discontinuities, the conjunctions and disjunctions among knowledge spaces' (Roulleau-Berger, 2015: 6). To my understanding, it stretches the boundaries of a future scientific and interdisciplinary project. Could not this 'transnational outlook' constitute a fresh opportunity to overcome an anachronistic and reductive research approach focused on dichotomic geographic areas? Would not this 'third space' be a chance to renew fundamental research and interdisciplinary connections (Bhambra, 2007), as well as innovative theoretical and methodological debates? The inherently multidisciplinary transnational perspective might be a resource to forge an active dialogue among disciplines, towards the emergence of a cosmopolitan, *kua* 'speech community' (Kuhn, 1962/2012) *across and beyond* the Taiwan Strait.



Response 3

Syaru Shirley Lin

Since the opening of relationships across the Taiwan Strait, initially among individual residents of Taiwan and mainland China, then between political parties in both places, and finally between governments of Taiwan and the

PRC, the research covering all such interactions has focused on the policies of the two governments, rather than on providing an empirical analysis of the social interactions between individual Taiwanese and mainland Chinese. In Gunter Schubert's position paper, 'Delimiting "Cross-Strait Studies": *Kua'an* (跨岸) vs. *Liang'an* (兩岸)', he argues that current research is dominated by discussions of elite institutions and interactions rather than individuals, and such work really belongs to 'China studies' or 'Taiwan studies' because it privileges the perspective of one of the two sides. Schubert advocates redefining and broadening the analysis from 'cross-Strait' (translated as *liang'an*) to 'pan-Strait' or 'trans-Strait' (which he calls *kua'an*), which can complement mainstream research on cross-Strait relations focusing on high politics.

Schubert sees a gap to be filled in three separate dimensions. First, there is need for more interdisciplinary work that includes the humanities (literature, cinema, music) as well as the entire range of social sciences. Second, he argues for more emphasis on the empirical rather than the theoretical. He believes that it is important to understand the complex reality of everyday cross-Strait economic and social interactions, and to induce patterns and concepts from this empirical research. Third, he believes that social interaction between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese should be analysed as an end in itself, without an obsession with the political or economic spill-over they may generate. In short, 'low politics' should be as important as 'high politics'. I completely agree with his description of the field today and that cross-Strait relations cannot be understood through the lens of any single discipline.

Existing research on cross-Strait relations is abundant but lacks integration. The most human-intensive interaction between China and Taiwan comes from tourists in both directions, students in both directions, mainland spouses moving to Taiwan, and *Taishang* (Taiwanese businessmen) moving to China. Furthermore, there is also the exchange of commodities, capital, information, technology, and ideas. There is ample research on all these subjects, which also shows that such interactions or flows can affect policy and can therefore be an important driver for institutional changes. However, as Schubert points out, it is more often true that the political and economic context within which these individuals or groups operate constrains their actions and interactions. Understanding when that context is changed, and when it limits the individuals working within it, is yet another gap that needs to be filled.

In this way, Schubert identifies an issue that affects not just cross-Strait studies but also many other aspects of today's academia, where research is increasingly specialised, theoretical, and divorced from the complex nature of society's problems and the possible solutions to those problems. Working within narrow disciplines confines the way we think and limits the research

questions we ask. Most social scientists analysing cross-Strait interactions ask questions that only address the academic concerns of their fields. What they neglect is that the citizens of the two sides, through their everyday interactions, have developed a distinctive culture and identity, which deserves more attention and documentation. Most importantly, as Schubert points out, this interdisciplinary approach to cross-Strait interactions should not assume that, because those interactions produce ‘solidarity and empathy’, they will reduce the differences between the two sides and will ultimately lead to unification. Schubert argues for a new field where scholars take a bottom-up approach to research, collect data in the field, and draw on that data to appreciate and understand what studies of elite interactions may have missed. This *kua’an* approach will not replace but complement and enhance our understanding of cross-Strait relations drawn from the more traditional *liang’an* research in ‘China studies’ and ‘Taiwan studies’. And Schubert’s approach may be useful not only for scholars of cross-Strait relations but also for all scholars of international relations.

In order to define the field of ‘trans-Strait’ or ‘pan-Strait’ (or *kua’an*) studies, Schubert believes that it is important to define the field and its subfields with epistemological, theoretical, and empirical components. What will make this a distinctive field except for its focus on the empirics of everyday interactions? What are the epistemological and theoretical differences between this new field and the more conventional study of cross-Strait relations? Most importantly, what are the research questions that should be addressed? Schubert points out that we must look at the empirics because the contexts within which each actor operates vary considerably—whether it is by geography (e.g. Shanghai vs. Fujian), by role (e.g. mainland spouse vs. Taiwanese students), or by sector (e.g. business owners in export vs. retail). But precisely because these contexts vary so widely, scholars must have a framework that enables them both to find patterns and commonalities and to make sense of the empirical variations; otherwise, they will simply be offering ‘rich accounts’ or unique narratives.

In order to analyse these contacts among people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, the empirical should lead to the development of concepts and theories. Schubert cites more than 40 articles that he sees as primarily taking a *kua’an* approach and therefore qualifying as pan-Strait studies. However, although many of the articles study the same subjects, they lack a common methodology or analytical framework. Some research focuses on how mainland spouses, Taiwanese students, or *Taishang* affect policy;²² some look at

22 See I. Cheng (2016b); Davidson (2015); Schubert, R. Lin and J. Y.-C. Tseng (2017).

how such interactions give way to a new social or political identity;²³ and many simply give accounts of the impressions one group has about another group or the other government.²⁴ But these studies lack not only a common analytical framework but also a comparative perspective. For example, are the ways in which Taiwanese manufacturers negotiate between the political reality of ideologically driven regulators in different provinces in China similar to challenges facing Google or Facebook in China, whether at the central or local levels? And are they similar or different to how American businesses operate in Russia? How private actors are pressured by foreign governments is already extensively covered in business school literature. Another example is the study of how Chinese students studying abroad change their way of thinking, whether in Europe, the United States, or Taiwan. This has also been well researched for decades by sociologists, political scientists, historians, and anthropologists with many surveys and polls, but again often without systematic comparison.

Overall, Schubert's paper points out an important problem that has plagued academia for a long time: should scholars focus on the urgent issues facing the world in addition to addressing narrowly defined academic questions specified by disciplines? Should they not focus on issues facing ordinary people, the lives they live, and the identities they develop, as well as the perceptions and decisions of political, economic, and social elites? Schubert's interdisciplinary 'trans-Strait studies' will surely complement what academics in specific disciplines study. For example, understanding how *Taishang* in China develop their own sense of identity may help us understand why some eventually cosy up to Beijing while others return to Taiwan to support more autonomy for Taiwan. And appreciating what mainland spouses in Taiwan think about their own values and economic future may be important in understanding why they organise political parties and seek to have an impact on Taiwan's civil society and immigration policy. But to become more problem-oriented, do we really need to invent a new field of research? Will that solve the issue that academics do not analyse problems in a comprehensive way? Or will it simply exacerbate that problem by creating yet another discipline whose members will work in relative isolation from others?

Finally, even if one were to disagree with the proposition that academic research should have practical application, what will be the conceptual or theoretical value of Schubert's new approach to cross-Strait studies? After we

23 See I. Cheng (2016a); Lan and Y.-F. Wu (2016); H.-L. Wang (2009).

24 See Chen (2017); T.-Y. Wang and S.-F. Cheng (2017); C.-C. Wang (2017).

have gathered the data, collected the stories, and analysed the empirics, can we develop a new framework for the study of what he calls the ‘third space’ occupied by the ‘local and the civilians’? And can we extend this study of the Taiwan Strait to a more general understanding of how people on the ground shape their environment and how their everyday lives are constrained by elites? Schubert has raised important questions that can be addressed by such a framework, but the work of defining that framework is still in its infancy.



Response 4

Chih-Jou Jay Chen

This position paper argues for a name of the field of ‘cross-strait studies’, denoting the empirical research on the multifaceted reality of interactions between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese over the last three decades. It reminds me of one of Confucius’s teachings that I learned during my childhood: ‘名不正則言不順，言不順則事不成’ (When a name is not given correctly, what is said is not accepted; when what is said is not accepted, matters are not accomplished). In this light, a name does matter. But when considering the field of cross-strait studies, it is more important that a wide range of research issues are recognised as a subject of its own and not individual issues scattered around with no connection. Equally important, elements and activities that compose this field should not disappear due to some external factors. If the multifaceted reality of interactions between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese is highly sensitive to, or contingent on, certain external factors, say, the high politics of the cross-strait relationship, to what extent can the field of ‘cross-strait studies’ still maintain its character and identity? Conceptually, if propositions of ‘cross-strait studies’ are highly conditioned on the results from China studies or Taiwan studies, to what extent can this field actually claim its own boundaries and characteristics? I strongly support the call for assessing the ‘everyday dimension’ of the cross-strait relationship. However, I am not sure we should insist on ‘cross-strait studies’ being a ‘field’, instead of a ‘subfield’ of China studies or Taiwan studies. Is treating ‘cross-strait studies’ as a ‘field’ necessary and critical? Does it make a difference or more sense to think of it as a ‘subfield’ of China studies or Taiwan studies? Do the name and its boundary really matter that much? Before delving into a deeper discussion, let me start by reviewing two of my own research projects in ‘cross-strait

studies' to illustrate my concerns regarding the challenges of establishing a self-sustained field under that name.

In recent years, I began focusing my attention on the topic of Taiwanese students and Taiwanese youth going to China for employment. With the 2014 Sunflower Movement and especially the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) electoral victory in 2016, attracting Taiwanese youth to go to China for higher education and work opportunities became the Chinese government's latest and most important united front policy. In 2018 and 2019 China officially released what they called '31 measures' and '26 measures' for Taiwan. The key points regarding young people in Taiwan include: pursuing entrepreneurship in China, technology incubators, cultural and creative industries, professional licenses, Taiwanese students studying in China, young athletes, and so forth.

The number of Taiwanese students going to China for their studies increased every year from more than 1,400 in 2011 to more than 2,500 in 2017. This can, of course, be considered a typical 'cross-strait studies' research topic. I interviewed young people who went to China to understand their motivation and decision-making process for studying and seeking employment in China. In particular, to what extent had they been affected by popular discourse, family, relatives, friends, teachers, and classmates? What do their living and working environments, social interactions, and information access look like in China? To what extent is this influenced by official Chinese politics? How do they handle discussing or taking a stand on political issues? Are there any corresponding changes in their political identity and career development?

Another subject of my research are the Chinese and Taiwanese peoples' attitudes towards cross-strait issues and the mechanisms influencing them. For example, with regard to Taiwanese and Chinese peoples' attitudes towards cross-strait policies, do people tend to embrace closer cross-strait economic and trade exchanges and more active and open social exchanges? Or are they more conservative and close-minded? How have the impressions of Chinese scholars and students coming to Taiwan changed over the past ten years? What are the differences in the attitudes of different classes and social groups in Chinese and Taiwanese society towards relevant Taiwan and China policies?

The above topics are undoubtedly topics in the area of 'cross-strait studies'. Empirical phenomena such as Taiwanese students and youths going to China and popular attitudes of people on both sides of the strait towards cross-strait policies are both directly affected by cross-strait political relations. Since the DPP came to power in 2016, Beijing's policies towards Taiwan have become much stricter. In 2019 Beijing banned Chinese tourists from coming to Taiwan. In 2020 Xi Jinping's announcement of the Taiwan model of 'one country, two

systems' (一國兩制台灣方案) and Beijing's repressive policies in Hong Kong helped increase Taiwanese people's resentment against the Beijing regime. With the Covid-19 outbreak in the spring of 2020, cross-strait civil exchanges almost came to a complete standstill; however, online hostility between people on both sides of the strait has escalated. Taiwanese hostility towards the Beijing regime has spilled over and now often includes Chinese people in general, while Chinese netizens—under the influence of their government—have for their part been calling for violence against Taiwan. One could argue that over the past ten years, the formerly peaceful cross-strait interactions under the banner of 'two sides, one family' (兩岸一家親) have evolved into a tense confrontation characterised by mutual distrust and suspicion.

This shows that the increase and decrease of cross-strait empirical phenomena is directly affected by high politics between Beijing and Taipei. High politics would even be enough to make them stop or disappear completely. In other words, the empirical experiences in the field of cross-strait studies are subject to influences stemming from outside the field of cross-strait studies (but within the field of China studies or Taiwan studies). We understand that the empirical experiences in the field of cross-strait studies tend to be influenced by China studies or Taiwan studies, but if the empirical phenomena in this field are always affected by factors outside the field and change as a result thereof, to what degree can we claim it to be an independent field at all? To study cross-strait affairs and interactions, it is impossible to explain the evolution and mechanisms of cross-strait issues without investigating existing research on China or Taiwan.

A reason why an area of research becomes its own field must be that its research objects have common characteristics. Take area studies as an example. There are Southeast Asian studies, Latin American studies, Taiwan studies, and China studies. It is clear what these fields are referencing; they research people and their behaviour in a certain geographical area and are exclusive to one another. When we consider the field of cross-strait studies, we know this field does not refer to a geographical territory but is rather composed of 'group identity or group interaction'. The people in this group also have other group identities (such as being Taiwanese or Chinese) and as the position paper's diagram (Figure 1) shows, the space for intersections between them is subject to change.

Sometimes people with such a cross-strait identity may no longer continue their identity (for example, they give up on becoming a Taiwanese student in China or graduate and leave China). Therefore, in terms of empirical phenomena, the situation of the field of cross-strait studies is that the members of or behaviours observed in this field are naturally overlapping with other fields,

but the identities in other fields tend to be permanent. Only members in this field fluctuate, or even disappear (e.g. Chinese tourists in Taiwan may disappear in this field). Does this characteristic pose a challenge to cross-strait studies becoming its own research field? How do we justify it? Maybe, for example, the alumnus is a social identity shared by graduates of the same school, and those who once studied in the United States or Japan also share a common identity. If the imprint of this identity is large enough to evoke a clear label or enhance a collective identity, it may surely strengthen such a social identity. To what extent does this 'cross-strait identity' possess stability and collectivity, just like alumni and people from the same city of a province (同鄉, *tongxiang*)?

On the other hand, in terms of conceptual architecture and theoretical propositions, can the field of cross-strait studies stand on its own and not require China studies or Taiwan studies? The propositions that determine the human dimension of cross-strait interactions, or the variables or mechanisms that explain the conceptual propositions in this field, still mostly stem from Taiwan or China; they are not just a category of cross-strait interaction. The conceptual framework and theoretical propositions of China studies may have nothing to do with Taiwan or cross-strait studies whatsoever. Yet, the conceptual proposition of cross-strait studies is bound to be related to China or Taiwan. For example, changes in China's political system and economic development may not necessarily be influenced by Taiwan. But for the field of cross-strait studies, for example, to explain the characteristics of cross-strait social interaction, it is often necessary to consider social or political influence mechanisms in China and Taiwan.

For me, the empirical phenomena and theoretical propositions of the field of cross-strait studies are all real and palpable. I am very empathetic, understanding, and supportive of the arguments of this position paper regarding the changes in our current international society and the propositions of the social sciences.

I hope that, upon further clarification, the questions I raised in this response will help strengthen the legitimacy of the field of cross-strait studies and for it to resonate with a wider audience. Even if current cross-strait political relations are not conducive to the expansion of cross-strait people-to-people exchanges, or even to the mutual understanding and trust of cross-strait civil society, it is for this very reason that cross-strait studies highlight the existence of other important social and economic aspects of cross-strait relations apart from politics. These cross-strait economic and social interactions involve hundreds of thousands of people on both sides of the strait; they are not political derivatives. Their qualities need to be researched and highlighted. They will also affect the development of political relations between the two sides.

Hopefully, consolidating the field of cross-strait studies may also improve the current political relationship of mutual distrust between the two sides.



Concluding Remarks

Gunter Schubert

I am deeply grateful to my respected colleagues, who have taken the time to deal with the intellectual exercise of arguing for a research field of ‘cross-strait studies’ to complement the established Taiwan and China studies fields. Reading their comments has greatly helped me to further organise my thinking. Although I may not have convinced them that such a new research field is due, they all have made affirmative comments on the necessity of a specific ‘cross-strait perspective’ to understand the full range of phenomena affecting the relationship between mainland China and Taiwan. In the following, I would like to address a few issues in their responses which I deem important for future discussion on this topic.

To begin with, I think Shelley Rigger is going too far in claiming that both *liang’an* and *kua’an* suggest the inevitability of unification, as both notions work around de facto state sovereignty on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. To my understanding, *kua’an* transcends the political battle of ‘unification vs. independence’, which belongs to the realm of high politics, by highlighting the ‘transnational dimension’ of relations across the Taiwan Strait. This analytical focus does not take an ideological stance on the issue of sovereignty; it just departs from the simple empirical fact that sovereignty is contested across the Taiwan Strait. Therefore, I question Rigger’s statement that “*an*” suggests that the nature of “*liang*” entities is ambiguous, so we need to choose a “neutral” label. The former, rather, offers a different epistemological perspective and hence does neither question nor replace the latter. If such a perspective reinforces an ‘unificationist teleology’, as Rigger claims, is an issue of debate. I would hold that it does not.

I subscribe to most of what Beatrice Zani has put forward in her comment. I particularly like her point that by taking a ‘multidisciplinary transnational perspective’ we might be able to inquire as to the existence of a ‘cosmopolitan, *kua* “speech community” that exists as much *across* as *beyond* the Taiwan Strait. In fact, if such a community, which may have developed a ‘distinctive culture and identity’ (see Shirley Lin’s remarks), exists, or of what it consists, is probably the core question addressed in the field of cross-strait studies.

Syaru Shirley Lin points at the critical question of what would make a research field of cross-strait studies different from the Taiwan studies field in terms of epistemology, theory, and research questions addressed. I think that my position paper has offered a number of thoughts on these issues, particularly with respect to the change of perspectives (epistemology) concerning the interaction between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese, and research questions which should address the (institutional, political, economic, social) contexts and everyday practices of that interaction. More importantly, Lin emphasises the lack of a common methodology or analytical framework, and a comparative perspective to connect the work within the field of 'cross-strait studies' which renders this field too eclectic. However, I think that by locating the phenomena of everyday cross-strait interaction between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese in a research field we start to compare and think about plausible analytical frameworks to make sense of what we see. My claim that a 'cross-strait studies' field exists is also based on the assumption that it *should* exist because there is sufficient data out there to make systematic comparison possible. Finally, I do not think that a new research field established as a complement to existing ones (Taiwan studies and China studies) will produce more intellectual parochialism, as Lin suggests. Cross-strait studies intersect with Taiwan and China studies, and scholars in these fields must think beyond each field by changing their research perspectives constantly and critically interrogating the scientific knowledge they have generated by mirroring it in the research of other scholars. Working in isolation from one another is, in the end, bad scholarship.

Chih-Jou Chen has raised the question of whether a 'cross-strait studies' field can be successfully delimited when interaction between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese is strongly contingent on the high politics of the cross-strait relationship. There is no question that high politics (foremost studied in the Taiwan and Chinese studies fields) shapes the political environment of the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, influencing their thinking and behaviour. But does this preclude the possibility of an alternate reality involving mutual perceptions, brought about by different strategies of coping and shirking when negotiating the pressures of high politics so that Taiwanese and mainland Chinese can live their lives? Put differently, studying cross-strait everyday interaction brings in a new perspective that is not taken in the other two fields due to their respective ideological restrictions. Besides, to what extent must a research field be 'non-sensitive to' or 'non-contingent on' other fields to legitimise its existence? All research fields are contingent on impacts from outside their boundaries of scholarly inquiry. Chen further points out that 'cross-strait studies' also include the study of online interaction. However, netizens on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have engaged in a degree of hostility

that rather bespeaks the internalisation of antinomic discourses pertaining to high politics than any increase in mutual understanding. Here I would emphasise that the effects of high politics on Taiwanese and Chinese who meet each other *regularly in the real world* are different from those who *take notice of one another in the digital world*. In fact, Taiwanese living in mainland China negotiate the ideological pretensions of high politics to maintain a mutual relationship on the grounds that they want to remain, as much as possible, unscathed by the official cross-strait rough and tumble. In other words, 'cross-strait studies' start by resisting the ideological demands from both Chinese and Taiwanese high politics. Negotiation means, for instance, that the Taiwanese do not give up their identity in an ideology-laden environment on the mainland but rather compromise on expressing their political stances openly—a behaviour often criticised in Taiwan, quite simplistically, as opportunist or 'selling out Taiwan'. Chen raises another interesting issue, which is related to his critical comments on the delimitation of a 'cross-strait studies' field: if certain constituencies, like mainland Chinese tourists in Taiwan, fluctuate or even suddenly 'disappear' because of the effects of high politics, does this not pose a challenge to 'cross-strait studies' as a distinct research field? Certainly, tourists as a group may (temporarily) disappear. But at the same time, cross-strait interaction is constantly evolving, with a steady number of Taiwanese settling on the mainland each year. Fluctuation is ephemeral, interaction is continuous.

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