

INTERVIEW

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*Professor Shirley Lin is a member of the founding faculty of the master's program in global political economy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and teaches political science at the University of Virginia. Her book, *Taiwan's China Dilemma: Contested Identities and Multiple Interests in Taiwan's Cross-Strait Economic Policy*, was published by Stanford University Press in 2016. For more information on the book, please visit www.shirleylin.net.*

The following interview was conducted by the Journal's staff editor, Gene Kim, after a joint presentation by Professor Lin and Professor Harding at Yonsei University's Graduate School of International Studies on April 24, 2017. This interview continues the discussion on national identities and cross-strait dilemmas.

Y: Professor Harding, could you tell us about your research?

HH: The main focus of my teaching and my research is US-China relations, and I am starting a new book that picks up the story from where my previous book left off: the impact of the Tiananmen Crisis. It is the story of how the two countries tried to get beyond that very strained period—a period that I characterized as a “fragile relationship”—and build a cooperative relationship, or even a “constructive strategic partnership,” as it was described at the time. My new book will describe and evaluate the various strategies they have used to build a cooperative relationship, and unfortunately, my conclusion is so far none of that has been fully successful. I think the two countries can avoid military confrontation, but I think overall their relationship is becoming more competitive and I want to tell the story of what went wrong with the

efforts to build a cooperative relationship.

Y: Could you give us a sense of your joint presentation with Professor Shirley Lin?

HH: Basically, it is a talk about how Taiwanese identity has changed, particularly since democratization began in the mid-1980s. Based on Shirley's research, we describe how Taiwan has increasingly become "Taiwanese" in two ways. First, in terms of self-identification, fewer people define themselves as "Chinese," or even "both Chinese and Taiwanese," but rather simply as "Taiwanese."

The second dimension is what is called preferred future national status. There was a time when a majority of Taiwanese preferred the eventual reunification of Taiwan with China, but now a very small number of people support unification *even if* the gap between Taiwan and the mainland in terms of wealth and political systems were to decline. Instead, they prefer continued autonomy, with some of course preferring outright independence.

Our argument is that this fact poses dilemmas for all three key parties in this dispute: mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States. How do you adjust policies that had once been based on the assumption that unification was going to be the eventual outcome? In the early 1990s, when Taiwan and the mainland began to expand their economic ties and engage in political dialogue, there was the perception that economic integration was going to have a very deep political spillover, namely unification. That does not seem to be happening. Instead, all three sides face dilemmas because this fundamental change gives no easy choices to any of them.

Y: Could you explain what you describe as the three choices facing the parties on the cross-strait issue?

HH: For China, we see three broad options. One, that we describe as "stay the course," assumes that what matters is money and blood. What will eventually bring the two sides of the Taiwan Strait together is the combination of a common ethnicity and the economic benefits that greater trade and investment relationships will bring. That is what China has been trying so far. So far, as I have said, it does not seem to be working, but maybe it just has not been given enough time. So that is the argument for staying the course.

The second group of options for Beijing is to increase the pressure on Taiwan. It could be military pressure, by demonstrating or threatening of force. It could be economic pressure, such as cutting back the number

of Chinese tourists going to Taiwan unless Taiwan recommit itself to unification. It could be discrimination against Taiwanese businesses, especially if their owners are believed to favor the now ruling party. And there could be diplomatic isolation as well, reducing the number of Taiwan's "diplomatic allies"—the countries that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan—or restricting its ability to even participate unofficially in international organizations. Those kinds of pressure constitute the second option.

And the third option, which is the one that Shirley and I think is the only one that has much of a chance of success, unless they actually want to escalate the use of force to the point of invading Taiwan, which would be a very, very tragic outcome, would be to narrow the gap and create a mainland China that is more committed to the same kinds of civic values and democratic political institutions that Taiwan has created and values so highly. That would basically mean going down the same path that Taiwan did. Do not forget that the Kuomintang in Taiwan was organized as a Leninist political party, as was the Communist Party. The two sides have very similar political heritages. But starting in the 1970s, you began to see gradual political reform in Taiwan that gradually evolved to full democratization. What would happen if China begins that process? Would that have some impact on Taiwan? That is the third option for Beijing, but it would obviously be very difficult for the present leadership in Beijing to adopt this option.

Y: Particularly with relation to that third choice, how does Taiwan figure in Chinese identity? Do you see any changes?

HH: You are talking about a third dimension of identity that Shirley and I are just beginning to think about. We have talked about self-identification; we have talked about preferred future national status. This third dimension would entail the national narratives, the stories about the past that both sides tell themselves. I think Shirley would say that Taiwan's national narrative is, "We are an island society that has been colonized twice: first by the Japanese (though actually there were Dutch, Portuguese, and others as well) and later by mainland China through the KMT. We have been struggling for independence or autonomy from those colonizers." That is Taiwan's national narrative.

For China, one prevalent national narrative is first the century of humiliation and now the Chinese Renaissance; the narrative that "we were one of the world's greatest civilizations that, when it began to decay in the nineteenth century, was carved up by the Western powers and

the Japanese, and that we need to overcome that humiliation.” An even longer-standing historical narrative is summarized in the opening passage of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, “Empires wax and wane, states cleave asunder and coalesce.” According to this narrative, China has regularly alternated between unity and division, but eventually a strong dynasty emerges from disunity and produces unity. So, this would not be just the end of the civil war against the Nationalists, but the end of the period of territorial division that occurred as a result of the collapse of the Qing dynasty. So, China has two historical narratives—overcoming disunity and overcoming humiliation—and Taiwan is central to both of them.

Y: Do you see any reconciliation between the different narratives of the two parties?

HH: I think that as part of bridging the gap, maybe there is a sub-narrative that the Chinese might think about overcoming: that is that unification has to be under a strong, centralized government. The obvious alternative, not a perfect one and not an easy one, would be confederation or federation of some sort. The difference between those two possibilities would be in terms of how much power the central government has over the provinces. The interesting thing is that when the Communists came to power in 1949 and turned to the Soviet Union for advice on how to run their country, they copied almost everything except for one thing: a federal political system. Remember that the full name of the Soviet Union is the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It was at least nominally a federal system, though controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. But the Chinese never adopted that model because they believed federalism was contradictory to a strong, unified state. Federalism equals weakness, and therefore federalism is not a solution. That is a part of China’s narrative that may need to be reconsidered, especially as it relates to Taiwan.

Y: We are joined now by Professor Shirley Lin. Professors, what is it like to research when things are so unpredictable?

HH: There is a very simple answer, and that is to understand history. Although my degree is in political science—I basically do analytical political history—I believe that history is not, as someone once said, just “one damn thing after another.” I want to find patterns in how history has evolved.

Of course, I also write about the future, but these days I talk more about how to think about it rather than forecast what it is going to be. My

basic answer is that we do not know the future. It is too complicated to forecast. The only way to think about the future is in terms of possibilities, probabilities, contingencies, and conditionalities. That is the only way to think about the future. Too many of our political pundits believe that they know with certainty what is going to happen. And then, almost all of them, except for a very small number, predicted Hillary Clinton was going to win.

SL: When environments are unpredictable, research becomes even more relevant and meaningful. The situation on the Korean peninsula today is one of the most unpredictable in the world, and understanding history and patterns, as Harry said, is important. If you study only economics, or only politics, or only sociology, you cannot fully see the complexity of the situation. As I said to the students at Yonsei today, as scholars and analysts, you can really imagine a different future for your country, which you can participate in creating. The more unpredictable the situation is, the more likely you are part of the solution. This is certainly the case in terms of young people making a difference in cross-strait relations, inter-Korean relations, US-China relations, Korea-Japan relations. As a student of international affairs, you can see that nothing is pre-determined, and everyone can make a difference.

Y: Professor Lin, could you tell us about your book, and what your argument is?

SL: My book looks at the puzzle of why Taiwan's economic policy towards China has been so inconsistent and, at times, rather extreme after Taiwan democratized and deepened its economic interdependence with China. After years of research, my conclusion is that it is all linked to national identity. When national identity is polarized, which is what happened in Taiwan at the beginning of democratization—Taiwanese could not decide who they were as a people and what values were important to them—then it is very likely that extreme policies, extreme options, and extreme candidates become very appealing to a large number of voters. And as the community's sense of identity becomes less divided and more consolidated, voters start focusing on the economic impact of economic policy, for example, how many jobs are created, how much growth is created by specific preferential trade agreements, or how distribution in the gains of trade and investment are uneven. In 2010, Taiwan and China entered into a bilateral agreement, the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, which institutionalized trade and investment across the Strait. Prior to the signing of the agreement, the

Taiwanese went through a very emotional debate about what impact it might have on Taiwanese society, but people were concerned about the economic impact it might have on Taiwan, rather than how it might threaten Taiwanese identity. This is because Taiwanese identity had been consolidated, and many people thought that the agreement could make Taiwan stronger and more competitive. I think that is a very healthy, positive sign of the consolidation of Taiwan's democratic culture.

But identity can always become salient again, especially if it becomes under threat. The United States is one of the most successful multi-ethnic societies that has embraced civic values and consolidated its identity. But the recent election reminds us all that identity evolves. Americans started to ask the question of do we really know who we are as a people? In both Taiwan and the United States, economic liberalization had created economic problems which led to social tension. In the US, some believe that American identity is being threatened by immigrants. In Taiwan, young people embrace civic values such as democracy and freedom of speech and press, and they see cross-Strait trade and investment as potentially diluting those values. In all countries facing what I call the high-income trap, inequality has risen, wages have stagnated, and welfare entitlements are burdens on the younger generations. Everywhere in high-income countries, the haves and have-nots look at each other and realize they do not share the same destiny or values. The Taiwanese may have consolidated their national identity, but that sense of identity is fragile and can easily be threatened by the Chinese, who have become more militarily assertive and economically dominant. Young people in Taiwan see what is happening in Hong Kong, and they do not want to be under such pressure. They want to preserve their hard-fought democracy and values. Therefore, the students led the largest protest in Taiwanese history in 2014, protesting against the ratification of a service trade pact that would have allowed China to invest in many industries in Taiwan.

The essence of my book is that identity is important. Having a consensus on identity allows policies to be discussed rationally, and having a divided society will lead to extreme policies and leaders. Even when identity is consolidated, it is still hard to find a consensus among different national interests—whether people want their society to be equitable, or militarily secure, or environmentally sustainable. Prioritizing national interests is challenging even when identity is not polarized. Brexit is a good example of how economic policy discussions are linked to an underlying identity debate. Many of the older generations who felt marginalized wanted to leave the EU because they wanted to “feel British” again.

HH: Or English again.

SL: English, yes, especially because many Brits are reconsidering whether they want to be part of the United Kingdom. The generational divide is a theme in Europe, the US, and Asia, but there is a difference in that the younger generation in high-income countries in Asia is less satisfied with the results of economic globalization. Again, there are underlying economic reasons. For example, housing in Seoul, Taipei, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Beijing, and Shanghai has become unaffordable. An increasing number of graduates live at home and delay marriage or children. While I am asking students in Korea, mainland China, and Taiwan to care about the world and contribute to geo-political issues, young people are weighed down by the inability to find a good job, buy a home, or have a family. If they cannot have a promising future, how can we ask them to solve problems facing the world today? This is one of the implications of my research on cross-Strait relations. Economic polarization leads to identity polarization. The political consequences of economic problems have driven many leaders of free trade to become protectionist. Stewards of free trade—the US, the UK, and France—have seen the emergence of leaders such as Trump, Farage, and Le Pen. The rest of the world will suffer if these high-income countries do not solve their problems. In Asia, many older generations are opposed to students mobilizing to support the impeachment of President Park, for example, but they must realize such grievances have specific causes. Understanding the underlying socio-economic causes is what we scholars need to do, so that the future is better for the next generation.

Y: How do you think global education fits into this? Both of you have had extensive experience with this firsthand.

HH: This is an idea that I have seen emerge in my lifetime.

SL: Harry has been an educator, a teacher, and administrator for more than four decades.

HH: Basically, everybody now acknowledges that education has to be more global, so that the curriculum in both the high schools and colleges cannot just be the history of the West, as it was in the United States. In China, it cannot just be the history of China. You need to have a global outlook. Now, the issue is how to do it when resources and, above all, time are limited. So, what do you take out of your curriculum if you are going to put in a more

global dimension? To what extent do you try to build in global experience as well as global content in instruction? At the same time, the world is getting more complex, so that increases the problem. I would say it is very important, but it is not easy. Students today are more and more focused on how to find a job. If they believe that global education is going to distract them from learning the skills that they will need to find a job, they are not going to want to do it. So, that is another complication. In the United States, we find that fewer students are studying abroad, when globalists would want to see more students studying abroad. It is important to do, but there are a lot more choices and strategic decisions that have to be made that are quite difficult.

SL: Education has become more global in terms of content. However, education has also become more commoditized in that many universities are playing the same ranking game to compete for students. As part of this ranking game, education and research have become more narrowed and homogenized by discipline. There is a defined number of academic journals which are top-rated, and academics need to publish in those journals to get promoted or get tenure. Most of the respected journals are English-based, and professors in Korea, Japan, or China all need to publish in these journals to advance their careers. So, we have this top-down, standardized approach to research topics, with a strong tilt toward quantitative analysis at the expense of understanding the context. But the world is becoming so much more complex than ever before. With more economic interdependence and globalization, the more people realize how they are different from one another. As research becomes more centered around the academic disciplines, so has undergraduate education, and students are not benefitting from more inter-disciplinary or comprehensive approaches to understanding the real world. Just because we are all using iPhones and just because we are all speaking English do not mean that the world is becoming more homogeneous or closer. Therefore, we cannot use one theoretical framework and apply it to every situation. In terms of education in Asia, high-income countries like Taiwan, Japan, and Korea are moving from manufacturing to services, and students need more skills than the last generation to prepare for this knowledge economy.