



Sheng Lijun, China and Taiwan, Cross-Straits Relations Under Chen Shui-bian

London & New York, Zed Books, 2002, 164 p.

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- 1 This is a very useful account of the latest developments in Taiwan concerning cross-strait relations and the evolution of Taiwan's mainland policy. Sheng Lijun's book presents a huge amount of detail and information on the period between Lee Tenghui's announcement of the "two states theory" (*liangguolun*) in mid-1999 and, roughly speaking, the end of the first year of the Chen administration. It also lays out the basic obstacles to a peaceful solution of the Sino-Taiwanese conflict by recalling the development of bilateral relations and the different concepts of cross-strait *rapprochement* since the early 1990s. The main chapters of the book deal with former president Lee's gradual transformation into a promoter of de facto-Taiwanese independence (and the concurrent story of growing disappointment and frustration with Lee on the part of the Peking government), the puzzle of Chen Shui-bian's mainland policy, and the PRC leadership's reaction to this policy so far. They follow a brief analysis of the military capabilities of both Taiwan and the PRC intended to assess the probability and outcome of a future war in the Taiwan Strait. The author comes to the conclusion that the current state of low intensity, short of war, serves Peking's interest best and is likely to hold for some time to come. The PRC leadership will try hard to prevent Taiwan from becoming a regional economic centre, a status that would only give it international leverage to further postpone unification. Much more, Peking—while not being able to force any solution on Taiwan for the time being—will continue to contain any effort made by Taipei to internationalise the cross-strait issue. The author's realist perspective on cross-strait relations is obvious as is his critical stand on Chen Shui-bian's mainland policy, which he positions more to the left ("independence fundamentalists") than in the middle (the advocates of a status quo). Rather uninformed is a sub-chapter on "Taiwan's Weaknesses" that tries to give evidence of a "fragile democracy" by pointing to deficient civil society structures and societal core

values, weak state-building and governance, economic malaise and internal thrift within the ruling DPP. This is far too negative a picture of contemporary Taiwan, misleadingly evoking the image of a country that will sooner or later have to give in to a perseverant China. The author neglects at this point the strong sense of national identity that makes Taiwan a strong opponent of the PRC in times of crisis. However, all the author's points have to be taken into serious account when it comes to a proper judgement of Chen Shui-bian's first year in office and the limits of Taiwan's ongoing striving for internationally recognised sovereignty. For that reason, the book is a must for all those interested in the intricacies of cross-Strait relations and the debate on how best to strike a deal between Peking and Taipei.