STRAIT TALK:
YOUTH-LED CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUES
ACROSS THE TAIWAN STRAIT

Tatsushi Arai

The inaugural issue of Asia Pacific Peace Studies *journal features a selection of publications and public initiatives sponsored by the Asia Pacific Peace Studies Institute (APPSI) in the three years since its inception in 2013. APPSI and its sister organization JPRI (Japan Policy Research Institute) prioritize student-centered programs in an effort to help cultivate the next generation of peacebuilders. Since 2009 JPRI has supported the Strait Talk peace dialogue, the innovative student-led conflict resolution workshop that is the subject of the present article; similarly, APPSI has collaborated with JPRI and the Asia Society to host the opening ceremony and keynote talk for the northern California meetings of this workshop in 2013 and 2014. Below, Dr. Tatsushi Arai—Strait Talk's lead conflict resolution facilitator—explains the rationale and methods undergirding this initiative, and analyzes several important outcomes of the workshops during its first decade.*

Abstract

This article analyzes patterns of inter-group dynamics among young Taiwanese, Mainland Chinese, and American civil society participants in weeklong interactive conflict resolution workshops. The author focuses on dialogues from twelve such workshops on cross-Strait relations that he facilitated between 2005 and 2012 in order to analyze (i) how college-educated Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese young adults understand the history of the conflict across the Taiwan Strait, (ii) the multi-faceted ways these young adults perceive Chinese group identities and sovereignty pertaining to cross-Strait relations, and (iii) their capacity for empathizing with counterparts from the other side of the Strait, even to the extent of crossing boundaries of political correctness within their own society. The article contends that this youth-led initiative called "Strait Talk" presents a promising model of civil society exchange that builds on ongoing trends in political, economic, and cultural interactions across the Taiwan Strait.

Tatsushi (Tats) Arai, Ph.D., is a scholar-practitioner of conflict resolution, multi-track diplomacy, sustainable development, and cross-cultural communication. He is associate professor of peacebuilding and conflict transformation at SIT Graduate Institute in Vermont, fellow at the Center for Peacemaking Practice at George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution in Virginia, and research associate of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research in Hawaii. Dr. Arai is the author or editor of five books, including *Creativity and Conflict Resolution: Alternative Pathways to Peace* (Routledge).

Introduction

This article examines lessons learned from twelve weeklong peace-building dialogues among young civil society delegates from Mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States that this author facilitated between 2005 and 2012.[1] Established in 2005 by a group of students at Brown University in Rhode Island, USA, these interactive dialogues—called "Strait Talk"—have annually brought together five participants from each of the three societies to experience a joint analysis of the historical conflict across the Taiwan Strait, explore long-term visions of conflict resolution, and build sustained relationships. In addition to the dialogues at Brown, another series of U.S.-based annual dialogues was added in 2009 and sponsored jointly by the Japan Policy Research Institute and the University of California, Berkeley.[2]

Dialogue participants are mostly university students and often include young professionals. They are annually selected from a pool of candidates who voluntarily respond to a public call for applications. Selection criteria include academic and social skills, commitment to cross-Strait relationship-building, and proficiency in English. The goal of this initiative is to create an informal, non-partisan forum of civil society exchange that welcomes diverse perspectives on cross-Strait relations, humanizes these perspectives with empathy despite disagreements, and explores practical yet imaginative visions that will transcend the disagreements over time. Strait Talk holds no political agenda on Taiwan's status, and advocates peaceful cross-Strait relations by supporting the next generation of peacebuilders from the three societies.

The basic framework of thinking that guides this initiative is conflict resolution. As a field of interdisciplinary research and practice that has expanded globally over the past several decades, conflict resolution provides a participatory, interactive process for understanding the sources and dynamics of social conflict in a systematic, multi-angled manner, and for using that understanding to develop sustainable ways of nonviolent coexistence. At the heart of this process is a philosophical and methodological commitment to seeing conflict parties as human beings, identifying interdependence inherent in their relationships, and acting on

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[1] In this paper, the terms Mainland China and Taiwan refer to communities on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. In other words, the terms are not intended to denote any specific sovereignty arrangement over another with respect to cross-Strait relations.

[2] Two more series of annual dialogues were subsequently added—one in Hong Kong since 2011 and the other in Taipei since 2012. These dialogues are held in Mandarin Chinese. This article will focus on the U.S.-based dialogues that the author has facilitated.

the interdependence to build a culture and structure of reciprocity, equity, and nonviolence. As will be explained below, Strait Talk applies these principles to the conflict across the Taiwan Strait through a series of highly experiential, interactive exercises.[3]

In-depth dialogues guided by these principles have enabled this author, as their facilitator, to observe repeated patterns of group dynamics across twelve cohorts of fifteen participants each in the period 2005 to 2012. These patterns, moreover, suggest useful hypotheses as to how highly-educated young people across the Taiwan Strait experience: (1) contested worldviews on the history of cross-Strait relations, both experienced firsthand and inherited from past generations, (2) the negotiability of Chinese sovereignty, (3) the enduring relevance of their deep-rooted large-group identities and their emotional attachment to them, and (4) their capacity to empathize with each other, sometimes to the point of crossing the boundaries of political correctness.

Recent developments in cross-Strait relations—from the advent of direct flights to the growth of commercial relationships and tourism connecting Mainland China and Taiwan—have provided an unprece-dented opportunity for civil society exchange to deepen and expand. Weeklong conflict resolution dialogues among young delegates from Mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States in U.S.-based impartial academic settings present a potentially useful model of cross-Strait relationship-building that may be replicated in the region and utilized to activate the peace potential inherent in the deepening civil society ties across the Strait. At the same time, these dialogues also offer an excellent vantage point to observe how young civil society delegates—who have grown up many decades after the end of the twentieth-century Chinese Civil War—negotiate the contested meanings of this historical conflict. Lessons learned from these cross-Strait dialogues, therefore, are likely to contain valuable insights into the future of the conflict that rarely appear in the growing literature on the formal diplomatic relations over the Taiwan Strait.[4]

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[3] On conflict resolution, see Galtung (2004, 2010), Kriesberg (2007), Lederach (1997, 2005), Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim (2003), and Wilmot and Hocker (2010).

[4] Notable studies on the security, political, and economic relations across the Taiwan Strait include: Romberg (2003), Bush (2005), Wachman (2007), Tucker (2011), Blanchard and Hickey (2012), and Wei (2012). While these studies vary greatly in focus, they generally point to the decisive roles that macro-structural dynamics play within Mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States, as well as in the larger regional and global contexts in which the three societies interact. The present article complements the above works by analyzing—at the micro level of individuals and small groups—the historical memory, identities, and group dynamics of young Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, and U.S. citizens who openly and thoroughly discussed *diverse meanings* of macro-structural forces that bind them.

To define the scope of this inquiry, two points deserve mention at the outset. First, the term civil society is used here in its broadest sense. The concept commonly refers to realms of social interactions that are not led by the government or by the forces of the market. This definition is more a vision of an ideal state than an empirical reality, especially in current cross-Strait relations regulated by the two governing authorities and driven by the powerful forces of the market. The position adopted in this paper, however, is that despite all these constraints established by the government and the market, there exist emerging realms of people-to-people encounters whose intent and consequences cannot be *reduced* to single-minded pursuits of official government agendas or market-driven, profit-seeking activities. Examples of such encounters include educational and scholarly exchange, voluntarily organized tourism, and exchanges in sports and the arts. This study will focus on the ever-evolving, dynamic boundaries of civil society's influence on both sides of the Strait, pushing and pulling the spheres of countervailing force created by the government and the market. It will contextualize the on-going dialogues among young delegates within this broad conceptualization of civil society, and attempt to draw potentially generalizable lessons.

The second point worth noting is the geographic scope of the analysis. The fifteen delegates undergoing a forty-hour dialogue include not only five Taiwanese and five Mainland Chinese representatives, but also five Americans committed to learning about this conflict and taking action to generate positive impact on cross-Strait relations. Although their contributions to the dialogues are significant, especially as informants of American society (a critical stakeholder in cross-Strait relations), this essay will view the U.S. participants in the supplementary background of the inquiry and place the two-party relations between Taiwan and Mainland China in the foreground. This analytical focus is intended to keep the discussion manageable in scope while also reserving a basis for a future inquiry into the role of the U.S. government, business communities, and civil society in cross-Strait relations.

With this scope of inquiry in mind, the discussion that follows will be organized in three parts. First, a brief analysis of the conflict across the Taiwan Strait will be presented. Second, the rationale and the method of Strait Talk will be outlined as a potentially useful model of civil society exchange across the Strait. Third, a series of four working propositions that have emerged from the dialogues will be discussed in connection to their possible impact on the future of cross-Strait relations.

Conflict Analysis in Brief

The unique contribution that Strait Talk aspires to make in cross-Strait relations is explored in the macro-historical context of the conflict. Despite the informal, unofficial nature of the dialogue process, its participants, together with this author as their facilitator, are constantly confronted by the fundamental question that those holding the highest political positions on both sides have been grappling with for decades: *In a nutshell, what is this conflict about at its very core?* Part of the answer, informed by the cumulative experience of Strait Talk, is summarized as follows:

For Mainland China, the stated goal of reunification under One China is ultimately about building and restoring a historical coherence to its nationhood and inviolable territorial integrity. This commitment, in essence, is a search for a rightful place that the People's Republic of China (PRC) seeks to occupy and consolidate in the contemporary world, while at the same, coping with both unforgettable historical traumas and glories that it is driven to reenact in times of crisis and hardship. Such collective traumas, some more conspicuous than others, include the "Century of Humiliation" spanning from the mid-nineteenth century, when China lost the Opium War to the British and started falling on the slippery slope of Western and Japanese invasions and colonial exploitation.[5] The most salient national glories, on the other hand, include the establishment of the PRC in 1949 under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), having defeated the Japanese imperial army and driven out the Chinese Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), from the mainland. Failure to achieve One China due to the independence movement in Taiwan—the island to which some two million KMT soldiers and followers fled—would mean a failure to acknowledge CCP's historical victory in the Chinese Civil War (*ca*. 1927-1950). Such a failure, by implication, is tantamount to a denial of the rightful status of the PRC, a state built on the unspeakable suffering and sacrifice sustained by its founders, who had paid the ultimate price to save their beloved motherland from colonialists, imperialists, and domestic oppressors.

From the Taiwanese perspective, the conflict is not only about policy options such as reunification under One China, Taiwanese independence, or the status quo of the Taiwan-based Republic of China (ROC) occupying an unsettled status of diplomatic ambiguity with the mainland.

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[5] Historians debate whether the discourse of the Century of Humiliation has evolved from China's actual experience in the mid-nineteenth century or in fact, it has been constructed more recently by the rise of contemporary Chinese nationalism (Gries 2004). While this essay does not seek to settle the debate, it acknowledges the active presence of such an emotionally charged discourse as an authentic reality to work on, regardless of the exact nature of its historical origin and its dynamic evolution.

More fundamentally, the conflict is about how twenty-three million inhabitants of diverse ethnic and historical backgrounds—either immigrants from the mainland during the Chinese Civil War or descendants of historical Taiwanese communities that predated the war—can choose their political future on their own, without interference from the mainland. While the search for a contemporary meaning of the Chinese Civil War and the flight of KMT leaders and followers to the island is still alive and will continuously evolve in the Taiwanese national consciousness, a diversity of local Taiwanese identities that are distinct from those of Mainland Chinese are more salient and decisive today than ever before in terms of shaping and reshaping their outlook on the nation's destiny. Therefore many on the island—and most certainly the young Taiwanese delegates joining the Strait Talk dialogues—view the CCP's reunification policy as fundamentally incompatible with the Taiwanese reality on the ground and simply unrealistic. The historical evolution of Taiwanese multi-party democracy, its ever-deepening immersion in the Western-style free market, its dependency on the bilateral security ties with the United States, and the enduring legacy of Japanese colonialism and post-colonial ties have all contributed to crystallizing distinct Taiwanese identities striving for freedom of political choice and greater security from perceived threats, imagined or real, from the mainland.

A deeper look into the root causes and dynamics of the conflict over the Taiwan Strait, along this line of thinking, invites us to transcend the oversimplified image of the conflict's essence, which is often reduced to a binary way of pursuing *either* Taiwanese independence *or* reunification under One China. A more fruitful way of exploring future scenarios opens up when we ask: How can we envision the kind of cross-Strait relations in which *both* the Mainland Chinese quest for coherent nationhood and territorial integrity on the one hand, *and* the Taiwanese aspiration for the freedom of political choice and security from perceived Chinese threats on the other, may be fulfilled at the same time? Put another way, what would an acceptable, sustainable mechanism of cross-Strait relations look like that can flexibly accommodate and effectively facilitate these parallel search processes until they come to a mutually respectful way of coexistence?[6] Weeklong dialogues between young civil society delegates from both sides of the Strait, joined by their American counterparts, tackle these questions in a frank and interactive manner that diplomats and government officials might have been unable or unwilling to replicate. And here lies the significance of Strait Talk's vision and the unique method it employs.

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[6] This line of future-oriented thinking that applies the theory of conflict resolution to cross-Strait relations has been explored by some regional experts. See, for example, Bush (2005) and Saunders and Kastner (2009).

Strait Talk: Its Rationale and Methodology

Strait Talk, as mentioned in the introduction, was established in 2005 by student volunteers at Brown University in Rhode Island, USA.[7] It has been held every fall on the Brown campus, and since March 2009, was expanded to include an annual spring workshop at the University of California, Berkeley, cosponsored by the Japan Policy Research Institute. During the eight-year period analyzed in this paper (2005-2012), twelve workshops were conducted, eight at Brown and four at Berkeley.

For each workshop, Strait Talk—which subsequently became a U.S.-based non-profit organization in 2008—recruits highly-qualified English-speaking university students, five from each of the three sides, through open advertisement and rigorous selection. Selected participants typically come from top-ranking universities. Special care is taken to assure diversity among them in terms of gender, regional background, and self-reported political orientations in each of the three societies. Selected participants also include recent university graduates already working as young professionals (for example, as business consultants, lawyers, and journalists) who aspire to contribute to cross-Strait relations through their own professions. In the absence of sustainable official talks across the Taiwan Strait, especially before 2008, the vision of Strait Talk has been to bring together carefully-selected, highly-qualified young civil society delegates with significant academic and professional potential as "pre-influentials"—individuals with a good chance of becoming influential contributors to civil society exchange, business, academia, and govern-ment service in a near future.[8]

The fifteen delegates go through up to forty hours of intensive, confidential dialogue that seeks to create a safe, inviting atmosphere for an honest, authentic exchange of ideas and feelings. The dialogue incorporates comparative case studies, in-depth conflict analysis, role reversal between parties, joint brainstorming of future visions, and the use of metaphors, rituals, and storytelling. The weeklong dialogue is interwoven with occasional intervals featuring informal activities for socialization, as well as speakers' series and expert panels on cross-Strait relations. Immediately after these public events, each of the speakers and expert panelists is invited to an additional small-group session that is usually open only to the fifteen delegates and the dialogue facilitator.

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[7] The founder of Strait Talk, Johnny Lin, was a nineteen-year-old undergraduate student at Brown University at the time of the workshop's inception in 2005. He currently co-leads the nonprofit organization as its president.

[8] See below for different functions of conflict resolution workshops, such as relationship-building and capacity-building, for these functions illustrate a working theory of social impact that Strait Talk aspires to make by engaging pre-influentials.

The delegates may pose questions to these subject experts about pressing issues and controversies that they may have been debating in their conflict resolution dialogue.[9]

Though the dialogue process itself is confidential to create a safe and mutually supportive atmosphere, an end product is a final consensus document with concrete proposals for the future of cross-Strait relations. The document, which typically consists of political, security, economic, cultural, and civil society components, is presented jointly by the fifteen delegates in a public forum at the end of the event and made available for broader circulation afterwards.[10]

Finally, let us consider Strait Talk's contribution to the theory and practice of interactive conflict resolution (ICR). Following Saunders (2000: 225), ICR is defined as "a well-defined and systematic approach used in small unofficial meetings of persons in tension or violent conflict to stimulate their task together about the problems that divide the groups they identify with and the relationships that underlie those problems."

Among a number of different functions that ICR has been used to practice, Strait Talk focuses on the following three.[11]

Relationship-building: [12] This task is achieved by bringing potential youth leaders from the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, along with their American counterparts, and forming informal tri-national networks for sustainable relationship-building.

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[9] One of the opening exercises invites Taiwanese participants to be in the Indonesian shoes and their Mainland Chinese counterparts to be in the East Timorese shoes as they explore possible solutions to the East Timor-Indonesian conflict of the late 1990s. In this exercise, perceived power relations are reversed between the two sides. American participants split into two subgroups and work with either one side or the other. Arai (2012: 203-208) describes this method of experiential learning, which builds on the conflict parties' own identities to elicit empathy and creativity, as cross-contextual case studies.

[10] On completion of a weeklong workshop each year, fifteen Strait Talk participants travel together to present their consensus document at such U.S.-based organizations as the Council on Foreign Relations, Asia Society, and Asia Foundation, engaging senior scholars and policy-oriented practitioners in attendance.

[11] There is a much broader range of functions that ICR has been used to serve than what this essay has considered. For a useful overview of these functions, see Rouhana (2000).

[12] ICR has been used to build and transform human relationships across many conflict-affected societies. See, for example, Saunders (1999, 2000), Diamond and Fisher (1995).

Capacity-building:[13] This task consists of introducing basic skills in conflict analysis and resolution through exercises of experiential learning and encouraging the participants to practice the acquired skills in other contexts of civil society exchange.

Learning and transfer of new insights for long-term macro social change:[14] This process involves enabling the participants to learn new ways of understanding and tackling the cross-Strait conflict and assisting them in their long-term application of new insights to influence a broader scope of stakeholders through final consensus documents, public presentations, their own vocational commitments, and other civil society activities they may choose to undertake.

As a youth-led civil society initiative, Strait Talk is primarily concerned with relationship-building (Function 1). As a secondary goal, it provides opportunities for capacity-building (Function 2). Contributions to policy-oriented learning and immediate transfer to influential decision makers (Function 3) is limited in scope because the participants, as university students and young professionals, are not engaged in policymaking or large-scale social change. Learning and transfer, therefore, is a long-term aspirational goal of Strait Talk.

  Having described the expected impact and scope of Strait Talk with caution and pragmatism, it must also be emphasized that this initiative was started in the wake of China's 2005 Anti-Secession Law, which threatened a "non-peaceful" response in the event of a declaration of independence by Taiwan. Strait Talk, as of 2005, likely represented the only systematic application of ICR to the cross-Strait conflict. With the expansion of cross-Strait interactions in business, education, and cultural affairs since 2008—the year Ma Ying-jeou assumed the presidency in Taiwan—the social climate has shifted considerably in favor of the kind of civil society exchange that Strait Talk had advocated since 2005. Consistent with the political atmosphere of détente, there has since been a steady presence of Chinese Communist Party members joining each of

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[13] ICR's contribution to capacity building has been well researched and documented. Based on his extensive experience in the facilitation of Israel-Palestine dialogues, for example, Kelman (1995) observes that the ICR workshops that he and his colleagues have carried out helped prepare cadres of Israeli and Palestinian leaders, who subsequently negotiated or otherwise influenced various aspects of the Oslo peace accord in 1993.

[14] The research and practice on ICR has focused primarily on how to generate solutions to social conflicts (*learning*) and how to convey the solutions to policymakers and influential stakeholders within each of the societies involved in the conflicts (*transfer*). See Burton (1986), Kelman (1997), and Mitchell and Banks (1996).

the Strait Talk dialogues held at Brown University and at the University of California, Berkeley. Moreover, in 2011 Strait Talk held the first dialogue in Hong Kong based on preparations carried out by a mainland participant of the 2009 Berkeley dialogue. This Hong Kong dialogue, in turn, inspired its Taiwanese participants to organize an annual Taipei-based Strait Talk symposium in 2012. In response to important shifts in cross-Strait relations, Strait Talk is growing into a civil society movement comprised of four concurrent annual dialogues that take place in the United States, Mainland China, and Taiwan.

Four Emerging Trends Observed in the Dialogues

Each of the twelve workshops from 2005 to 2012 brought together a different set of delegates but was moderated by the same facilitator following more or less the same method. The author of the present essay, who facilitated all the workshops, observed differences and similarities in the group dynamics across these twelve tri-national groups. This section will highlight four trends reflecting repeated patterns of behavior and attitudes demonstrated by the participants over the years:

(1) The participants' contested perceptions about which historical events matter most as decisive turning points in the history of cross-Strait relations.

(2) Their readiness to question and unpack the seemingly non-negotiable basis of sovereignty, including the rationale of One China.

(3) The enduring relevance of collective historical attachment to both Chinese nationhood and distinct Taiwanese identities.

(4) The participants' ability and willingness to empathize deeply with seemingly incompatible narratives of the other side, often to the point of defying their own worldview of political correctness and challenging their own taboos.

It is hypothesized that these patterns are not random occurrences and that they are likely to have social roots. These recurring phenomena, it is further hypothesized, are likely to reflect some larger, deeper trends among the younger generation of well-educated Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese people in terms of how they view cross-Strait relations today.
  The presentation of each trend below is based on concrete episodes of group dynamics observed during the dialogues. Though these episodes are context-specific, they illustrate broader patterns recurrent over the years. Having said this, it is duly noted that the empirical validity of what

follows should not be elevated uncritically beyond the status of a practitioner's field notes, which must be subjected to rigorous empirical examination. These trends are promising, one may nonetheless argue, as areas of social scientific inquiry that merit attention.

Trend 1: View of Cross-Strait Conflict as Contemporary Phenomenon

Careful observation of the dialogues enables one to hypothesize patterns in how young Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese delegates conceptualize the history of the cross-Strait conflict. These patterns have manifested most clearly in terms of which historical events they choose to highlight as they explain why and how the conflict has come to be shaped the way it is today.

One of the exercises introduced at a relatively early stage of the weeklong dialogue is a "walk through history," a method of experiential learning popularized by Joseph Montville and used widely by practitioners of conflict resolution.[15] The way it is applied to Strait Talk is summarized as follows: (a) Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese delegates each form a national team of five individuals, and separately come up with seven to eight significant historical events that, in their collective judgment, have shaped the nature of the conflict over the Taiwan Strait; (b) each team writes in large characters the nature of each event and the year of its occurrence (e.g., "1949 the People's Republic of China established") on a notebook-size sheet of paper; (c) seven to eight sheets recording the events selected separately by each team are placed in chronological order on the floor along a single line, with Mainland Chinese delegates' version of events on one side of the line and Taiwanese delegates' version on the other. The purpose of this display is to show two conflict histories side by side, with a physical distance between two consecutive chronological events (e.g., 1949 coming after 1945) created in such a way as to be roughly proportionate to the actual number of intervening years (four years of interval in this example) between them; (d) all the delegates are asked to stand and form a single line following the facilitator, who is standing at the beginning of the chronological line. The group follows the facilitator, and slowly and silently walks on the line through the two parallel chronologies, looking to the right and looking to the left. While walking, the delegates are asked to imagine what it might be like to live not only one side of the conflict history but also the other side's; (e) after experiencing the walk, the group sits on the floor surrounding the two chronologies and shares discoveries and reflections on how their views of conflict history have been shaped in comparison with the alternative view, and why.

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[15] Joseph Montville offers a synopsis of walk-through history and its application to conflicts in American society at: www.hopeinthecities.org/node/23241.

A question under study is: Are there any patterns emerging over the years as to how the delegates choose particular historical events to nominate over others? A short answer is *yes*. Comparing the chronologies that different national teams have come up with over the years, one may recognize recurrent events that overlap across the generations of Strait Talk delegates.

A sample chronology from the 2006 workshop is provided below in the appendix. The chronology reflects the highly unique group dynamics and perceptions of the conflict held by the particular individuals who participated in the dialogue that particular year. When juxtaposed with the chronologies developed by the delegates of the other years, however, one realizes that this 2006 version is similar in some important respects to how other Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese teams have demonstrated their interpretations of the conflict history.

At the core of this similarity is the shared perception that the history of the cross-Strait conflict starts in 1895, when the Treaty of Shimonoseki concluded the Sino-Japanese War and instituted Japanese colonial control over Taiwan. The fact that the delegates on both sides have repeatedly started their chronologies with the same event without much questioning is potentially significant because the young generations on the two sides have acquired their views on this conflict through different history textbooks and different political experiences for identity formation. Though the two sides attach different meanings to 1895— with the Taiwanese often asserting that their nation was abandoned that year by the mainland—they both share the worldview that the history of the cross-Strait conflict is time-bound, thus not open-ended, and that this conflict has its genesis in that same year and in that same trauma-inflicting event.[16] By implication, these young delegates choose *not* to go further back into pre-modern history to seek its origin, at least within the parameters of the exercise that require them to select only seven to eight events of their choosing.

Such a bounded nature of conflict history that started in 1895, however, was sometimes broken when the delegates chose much older events to start their chronologies with. For example, the Mainland Chinese team of 2005 chose as a starting point the establishment of the Qin (秦)Dynasty (221 BC), which first attained central government control of much of the vast territory that constitutes contemporary China. The rationale presented by the mainland delegates was that the Taiwanese search for independence breaks the historical unity of China that dates back to antiquity, at least up to 221 BC, and therefore it requires serious

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[16] Reflections on the meaning of 1895 offered by a 2009 delegate right after a weeklong dialogue capture this feeling metaphorically: "some see it as a woman being separated from a man while others see it as the birth of a new consciousness."

reconsideration within this larger historical context. Another example of expanding the conflict history beyond 1895 is the 2007 Taiwanese delegates' reference to 1683, when Qing (清) forces from Mainland China captured Taiwan. These Chinese forces, the Taiwanese participants argued, came to Taiwan to establish nominal control there and prevent the island from falling under foreign rule or otherwise from becoming an anti-Chinese outpost of local rebels. A series of anti-Chinese revolts that had ensued in Taiwan, they argued, sharpened distinct indigenous identities against the mainland conquerors and therefore challenge the assertion that Taiwan has been part of China since antiquity.

Despite these occasional references to events preceding 1895, the general trends of group dynamics among the Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese participants over the years are in favor of defining the cross-Strait conflict as a *contemporary* phenomenon. This implies that they are less inclined to seek its origin in antiquity. It also means that they are less likely to mythologize its genesis and dramatize their ancestors' commitment to the deeply-entrenched official positions being held, namely, One China vs. Taiwanese independence. From a practical standpoint of conflict resolution dialogue, this tendency manifests most conspicuously when these young delegates demonstrate their readiness and capacity to treat the conflict as a set of contemporary issues and grievances, which one may argue are more negotiable and malleable than unexplainable myths carried over from time immemorial. This contemporary nature of the conflict, however, is still saturated with seemingly irrational emotions, as demonstrated by other propositions that follow.

Trend 2: Negotiability of Sovereignty

Conflict resolution dialogues over the years have also demonstrated the young Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese delegates' willingness to reflect on the nationalistic fervor in their respective communities' claims of sovereignty. Through self-reflection exercises—and sometimes through personal confessions of their inner thoughts—each of the national teams has endeavored to interpret for the other team a deep-seated emotional basis of their notion of inviolable sovereignty. They have also unpacked the multi-faceted nature of sovereignty, especially in the context of discussing both One China and Taiwanese independence. And through such a thorough process of unpacking and self-reflective sharing, annual dialogues have arrived at final consensus documents that lay out a wide range of possible political arrangements that transcend the conventional zero-sum mode of thinking that is characteristic of this conflict.

In the 2009 dialogue at Berkeley, for example, Mainland Chinese delegates responded to their Taiwanese counterparts' questions about the basis of One China and Chinese nationalism underlying that policy. In

the author's experience as a dialogue facilitator in different parts of the world, an emotionally-charged exchange about conflict parties' essential positions, like One China, most often degenerates into antagonistic posturing and position-taking. Yet what emerged from this particular exchange in 2009, as was often the case in other years, was a self-reflective attempt by multiple Mainland Chinese delegates to help their Taiwanese colleagues see and feel the Chinese inner dilemmas.

The Mainland Chinese narratives shared on this occasion may be summarized as follows. Contemporary Chinese nationalism underlying their sovereignty claims is fundamentally irrational but this Chinese version of irrationality has its own internal coherence and rationality. Chinese nationalism becomes most manifest when the nation is faced with great obstacles such as foreign policy crises, natural disasters, and economic recessions. This dramatized sense of national cohesion has little to do with a desire for territorial expansion; it has more to do with the desire for dignity and respect in relation to the world around them. Ordinary Chinese people are not necessarily attached to the Anti-Secession Law of 2005, for they see it as elite politics at the government level. Nor do they necessarily link the proposed reunification of Taiwan and Mainland China to their own economic incentives, despite what many Taiwanese may suspect. What the Chinese fear most is the loss of their dignity and respect as a result of mishandling these sovereignty issues in general and the secessionist movements in particular. Therefore, the Beijing government, and perhaps many ordinary Chinese people as well, strongly condemn what they see as the manipulative secessionist movement within Taiwan—especially under the eight-year rule from 2000 to 2008 of former President Chen Shui-bian and his DPP party— that challenges the dignified status of Mainland China.

This example of a Mainland Chinese narrative may not represent a consensus view of Mainland Chinese delegates who have joined Strait Talk. But it does illustrate the basic *tone* of authentic, self-reflective storytelling that they have offered repeatedly. It is significant, one may argue, that these views have been offered repeatedly in the presence of their Taiwanese counterparts, often to the point where the Taiwanese unreservedly verbalized a sense of surprise—or even a complete shift in their image of the Mainland Chinese—at hearing these self-reflections.

Another example of growing negotiability over sovereignty was observed in the 2006 workshop, in which mainland delegates endeavored to unpack the meaning of One China for Taiwanese participants. They distinguished between two levels of sovereignty to explain a multi-faceted meaning of One China, namely, legal sovereignty and cosmo-logical sovereignty. Their explanation is summarized as follows. *Legal sovereignty* emphasizes territorial exclusivity, as well as the legitimacy and capacity of One China to conduct international relations as its sole representative. This is akin to the Westphalian tradition of exclusive

sovereignty in Western society. From this perspective, sovereignty is monolithic, non-negotiable, and non-divisive. China, on the other hand, has also internalized and exercised what may be termed as *cosmological sovereignty* throughout its long history of nation-building. This function of Chinese sovereignty emphasizes respect for a China-centered worldview, with a harmonious, integrated image of China as a collectivity of diverse peoples. Cosmological sovereignty represents the Chinese collective consciousness of nationhood that seeks respect from other nations and from its own constituent communities. It highlights inclusivity of different communities under the umbrella of the same Chinese cultural family. Historically, such a "soft" aspect of Chinese sovereignty has been manifest when its central government provided security assurances to nations in its peripheries that regularly paid tributes to the Chinese central authority, thus becoming its suzerains. The central government, while flexible in its exercise of territorial control, has remained firm on one principle: the need to *save face* vis-à-vis its suzerains and the outside world surrounding China.[17]

Stimulated in part by this exploratory mode of inquiry into Chinese sovereignty, the Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese delegates, together with their American counterparts, then brainstormed a wide range of possible future scenarios that both accommodate and transcend the zero-sum, binary thinking that juxtaposes One China against Taiwanese independence. They sought not to commit themselves to one scenario or another but to broaden their horizon of future scenarios. In their final consensus document, the 2006 delegates conceptualized Chinese nation-building as a dynamic, ever-evolving process comprised of one or more of the following phases:[18]

* One China, as *unitary state*.

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[17] A Mainland Chinese delegate in 2008 even went as far as arguing that the whole notion of sovereignty, especially in line with the Westphalian tradition, is alien to Chinese society. He stated that the Confucian tradition underlying the Chinese ideal of good governance sees a nation in the mirror image of a family. Viewed from this perspective, he continued, the nation-citizen relationship in China is more akin to a father-son relationship bound by lineage and loyalty than to the Western notion of social contract between a state and its citizens who have given consent to its authority. This perspective, though not necessarily shared by all the mainland delegates, is worth noting because it illustrates how far the cosmological basis of sovereignty can possibly expand to override the conventional legal argument, with which Americans, as well as a growing number of young Western-leaning Taiwanese, are more familiar.

[18] A list of possible sovereignty arrangements presented here is simplified for brevity and modified for clarity from the 2006 consensus document.

* China, with *Special Administrative Regions,* such as Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, under the central government's authority to intervene when necessary.

* *Chinese federation*, with a single constitution and a central representative government presiding over component states and provinces.

* *Chinese confederation*, with separate semi-autonomous governing bodies in Taiwan and Mainland China coordinated through a shared central governing mechanism in terms of defense, foreign, and fiscal policy, while each body presides separately over other matters within its own jurisdiction.

* *Chinese commonwealth*, comprised of separate independent governments entering an international framework, like the British Commonwealth, to affirm their common heritage and promote goals of common interest; this option, in effect, accommodates Taiwanese independence.

A similar approach to conceptualize a range of sovereignty arrangements was adopted by a different team at Berkeley in 2009 in its final consensus document, through another dynamic, exploratory process. It is significant, from the dialogue facilitator's point of view, that *all* the Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese delegates, along with their American counterparts, could *unanimously* agree on such a broad spectrum of future political arrangements, while choosing *not* to veto or exclude any of them as a non-starter after hours of often-heated exchanges.

   These examples of the young Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese delegates' readiness to reflect on the less visible logic of Chinese sovereignty and to explore alternative futures are illustrative of numerous other episodes experienced throughout the seven years of Strait Talk dialogue. The flexibility and openness to unpack their boundaries and taboos, however, were often challenged by their own inner commitment to what they see as unchangeable core identities within them, as the next theme illustrates.

Trend 3: Strong Emotional Attachment to Collective Identities

The conflict resolution workshops have provided a window to witness how the deeply-rooted collective consciousness of Chinese nationhood, on the one hand, and ever-evolving, distinct Taiwanese identities, on the other, manifest as they come face to face with one another. When these two identities collide through emotional exchanges, the collective sense of who they are as Chinese and Taiwanese, respectively, emerges in their physical expressions as an assertive and seemingly non-negotiable identity inherited from the past. At these moments, young dialogue

participants, despite their informal status that does not officially represent any constituency back home, are compelled to embody their home communities and their large-group identities, often with tears and emotional outbursts.

A Taiwanese-Mainland Chinese exchange observed during the joint conflict analysis exercise in 2007, among numerous other episodes, illustrates this point cogently. Given the floor first to share their perspective on the roots of the cross-Strait conflict, the Taiwanese delegates, led by one female spokesperson, started their presentation with a symbolic expression of their inner feelings:

> Once upon a time, there was a new-born baby. Somebody came to take the baby but then left her. The baby was again picked up by somebody else and abandoned again. The baby girl eventually grew up, making an effort to become a truly independent person on her own. But her biological parents suddenly appeared at that point and asserted to reclaim her custody.

One way of interpreting the underlying message of this metaphoric expression is the following: a nebulous, burgeoning sense of Taiwanese collective identity began to sprout, like a new-born baby coming into existence, in response to the Qing Dynasty's conquest of the island starting in the late seventeenth century. At the end of the nineteenth century, Japan emerged as a self-declared "liberator" in East Asia, seized the island from the mainland through the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, but abandoned it after pursuing an exploitive, colonial agenda for half a century and being defeated in the Second World War. Mainland China, represented then by the Republic of China under Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) Party, took the island as a new liberator. But the KMT rule soon revealed its true nature when it led the systematic massacres of local opponents in the February 28 incident in 1947, generating a widespread popular sentiment that mainland rulers betrayed the Taiwanese again, reminiscent of what the Taiwanese had experienced in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War. As Taiwan had sought to develop as an independent nation for decades and gradually built a prosperous democracy, the mainland government under CCP rule, now distinctly different in character from the Taiwanese offspring growing up, claims its inalienable right to integrate Taiwan back into the Chinese family, often citing its ancient ties to Taiwan, imagined or real.

After these introductory remarks filled with metaphoric expressions, the Taiwanese participants moved to a more formal, systematic account of what they saw as the roots of the current cross-Strait conflict, emphasizing that at the core of their grievances was the frustrated need to attain greater respect and self-actualization in relation to the mainland.

The mainland delegates, in turn, offered another conflict analysis, highlighting that, historically, lack of unity within the Chinese state has often led to foreign invasions and to the disintegration of China. After detailed historical accounts by his team, one mainland delegate concluded the mainland team's remarks: "The most important reason for us, the Mainland Chinese, to want Taiwan to be part of One China is that *we love you*, our Taiwanese people."

This concluding remark by one mainland delegate was followed by another mainland delegate, who was looking intently into the eyes of the Taiwanese counterparts, and added, "yes, the bottom line of all of this is that *we love you and we want you to come back to us*." These remarks by the mainland delegates invited the Taiwanese delegates' equally emotional responses, with one Taiwanese participant raising her voice and saying, "We don't want to be part of you. Leave us alone. Let us become who we truly are as an independent community." All the intellectual analyses of the conflict that the two sides had presented up to this point were thrown out of the window through this emotional exchange. The group dynamics had then begun to focus squarely on how passionately individual members of each team could display their large-group identities as if they embodied their national communities.

This episode of 2007 illustrates a manifest pattern of group dynamics that have been recurrent throughout the seven-year history of Strait Talk. This pattern is characterized as a personification of the participants' large-group identities, especially their national identities, which become predominant when these young delegates choose to take up their nations' historical traumas and glories on their own. Interestingly, such a process of personification of their large-group identities was often expressed through, or at least triggered by, the use of family metaphors, as in the reference to parent-child relations in the episode just described.

It is significant that the hardening of the delegates' attitudes through the embodiment of their large-group identities recurred persistently over the years despite the other two concurrent trends of "softening" described earlier, that is, the greater negotiability of perceived conflict history (Trend 1) and sovereignty (Trend 2). It is inferred from these trends that well-educated young "pre-influentials" like the Strait Talk delegates are now growing accustomed to communicating with each other their views on political taboos and boundaries in cross-Strait relations, yet at the same time they do carry their share of nationalism inherited from the historical past. Raised in the third and fourth generations of the post-Civil War era, these young delegates embody a unique mixture of the present and the past, change and continuity in their respective societies. And there is one more conspicuous trait that they frequently exhibit and that is worth highlighting, for it is likely to complement our understanding of this intricate mixture.

Trend 4: Deep Empathy Beyond Political Correctness

Empathy is a capacity to put oneself in the shoes of others and look at relationships from the other side's perspective. While carefully facilitated workshops are generally known to generate empathy between parties, the depth of empathetic exchange between young Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese delegates is arguably unique from the perspective of comparative peacemaking. This unique quality of empathy-building, it seems, has been facilitated in part by the delegates' readiness to take extra steps to examine their own articles of faith and sometimes go as far as demonstrating clear signs of identity shifts.

  In the 2009 workshop at Berkeley, for example, a Taiwanese delegate drew on her team's presentation on conflict analysis and added a personal story about how much she regretted her treatment of fellow Taiwanese students of non-Han minority backgrounds in her classrooms at an earlier stage of her education. Her comment was slightly off-track because the discussion was supposed to focus more on the relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China. Yet her storytelling about her own discriminatory treatment of Taiwanese minorities, which was intermittently interrupted by her sobbing, introduced silence in the circle of dialogue. Other delegates listened intently. A few minutes into this Taiwanese participant's storytelling, a Mainland Chinese delegate seated in front of her offered her reflection on her Taiwanese counterpart's storytelling, summarized in field notes as follows:

> Growing up in Beijing and educated at mainland schools, the Mainland Chinese delegate has always believed that, despite the tumultuous relationships with Taiwan and her awareness of the Taiwanese long-standing grievances, the small island nation will be integrated as part of One China sooner or later. She came to this dialogue with this worldview, which had been an integral part of her national identity. She could not foresee any circumstances under which such a deep-rooted belief within her could be changed. But having witnessed her Taiwanese colleagues sobbing with regret and reflecting on what they saw as their mistreatment of their own Taiwanese minorities, she now felt compelled to reflect on how her own society, Mainland China, should treat Taiwanese. "Taiwanese people have their own feelings, and we need to respect them," she remarked. "Maybe the way we have been treating the Taiwanese has not been totally right." While she was sharing her reflections, another mainland delegate, seated next to her, started sobbing quietly.

This episode from 2009 was unusual in terms of the highly conspicuous nature of self-reflections transferred from one side to the other. But it is arguably quite common in terms of the way in which Strait Talk dialogues over the years have opened up an unconventional, interactive space for mutual learning in which the participants have voluntarily chosen to reevaluate and transform their deep-seated assumptions on their own, with radical empathy.

The method of dialogue facilitation and the informal atmosphere of relationship-building have likely helped enhance the level of empathy-building. Yet having facilitated dialogues in other parts of the world still undergoing systematic, active violence—from Rwanda to Israel-Palestine relations—the author also hypothesizes that part of the young Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese delegates' readiness to empathize deeply with one another comes from the fact that they belong to the generation that has no concrete, tangible memory of active warfare with one another. Six decades after the active fighting in the Chinese Civil War, the origin of the cross-Strait conflict is becoming increasingly more abstract and less tangible. Precisely because of the less tangible nature of the conflict, the immediate, tangible experience of in-depth, face-to-face dialogue has more promise than ever before as a way of transforming each other's images that have been considered unchangeable for much of the long history of the cross-Strait conflict.

Conclusion: Envisioning a Way Forward

This article has explored lessons learned from eight years of experience with Strait Talk, a program intended to bring together young civil society delegates from both sides of the Taiwan Strait and from the United States for weeklong workshops in interactive conflict resolution and sustainable relationship-building. At the heart of this cross-Strait conflict is the Mainland Chinese search for coherent nationhood and territorial integrity on the one hand and the Taiwanese desire to determine their own political future and to give full expression to their diverse and distinct communal identities without Chinese interference on the other. The election of the KMT president Ma Ying-jeou in Taiwan in May 2008 led to unprecedented civil society exchange, including an increasing number of ordinary Taiwanese and Mainland Chinese people crisscrossing the Strait through direct flights. (The January 2016 victory by Democratic Progressive Party candidate Tsai Ying-wen in the Taiwan presidential election has raised fears about the resurgence of tensions but Tsai has so far vowed to "maintain the status quo" in cross-Strait relations.) As explained above, Strait Talk seeks to develop a viable model of cross-

Strait civil society exchange that activates peace potential inherent in these historical trends.[19]

Moreover, Strait Talk, through its emphasis on highly interactive, experiential learning, offers a unique opportunity through which young "pre-influentials" who belong to the third to fourth generation of the post-Civil War era come face to face with each other across the Strait, and also with the history of the conflict that they have inherited from generations ago. Recurrent patterns of their group dynamics suggest at least four potentially generalizable trends on how these generations of college-educated people have internalized the conflict: (1) both sides view the conflict as a relatively *contemporary* phenomenon, thus not timeless or mythologized; (2) the two sides are ready and able to unpack the seemingly nonnegotiable nature of sovereignty—which confronts them either in the form of One China or Taiwanese independence—by reflecting on the rationality underlying the seemingly irrational attachment to sovereignty; (3) contrary to these two trends, however, the young delegates also carry with them a strong emotional attachment to their large-group identities and display them in a highly personalized way when their identities are challenged; (4) young delegates on both sides are also ready and able to extend deep empathy with one another when invited to do so through tangible, impactful experience, even to the point of crossing the boundaries of their political correctness.

These emerging trends demonstrated by the young delegates in a safe, academic environment are not immediately evident in the more complex reality of macro-political dynamics. However, considering the history of peace processes in other parts of the world, these new trends arguably carry significant potential for shaping the broader publics' readiness to accept or reject major policy choices governing authorities make in the future. From a macro-historical perspective—with decades to generations of gradual transformation in mind—it is critical to promote concerted efforts to bridge the Taiwan Strait and create robust, self-adaptive, and sustainable mechanisms of civil society interactions that deepen inter-dependence and make war unthinkable. Taking concrete steps toward these visions is in the best interest of both sides of the Strait seeking greater regional stability, not only in terms of civil society and business interactions but also at the government level. Viewed in this context, Strait Talk surely represents a significant form of political pragmatism that takes the voices of coming generations seriously.

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[19] On the election of Tsai Ying-wen and potential impacts on cross-Strait relations, see Romberg (2016).

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APPENDIX

Walk-Through History: Parallel Chronologies Presented by the 2006 Delegates

Mainland Chinese chronology	*Taiwanese chronology*
1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, ceding Taiwan to Japan.	1895-1945 Japanese colonial rule of Taiwan.
1943-45 Cairo Declaration and Potsdam Proclamation, both stating the Chinese right to reclaim Taiwan from Japan.	
1947 February 28 incident—Taiwanese uprising met with massacres by the Chinese Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT).	
1949 People's Republic of China (PRC) established.	1949 KMT, under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership, retreated to Taiwan.
1979 Sino-US communiqué	1979 The US established diplomatic ties with PRC, away from the Republic of China (ROC).
1989 June 4th Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui condemned PRC for the Tiananmen incident.	
	1994 The Qiandao Lake incident. Taiwanese tourists killed in China. Taiwan dissatisfied with response, leaning more toward independence.
	1996 First direct vote for Taiwanese national election, triggering a crisis across the Strait, with intensive Chinese military exercises.
	1999 President Lee proposed a special state-to-state relationship with the mainland.
2000 Chen Shui-bian of Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected as Taiwanese president.	2000 DPP came into power with pro-independence slogan, ending half a century of KMT rule.

Note that in the actual exercise of walk-through history, each sheet of paper recording an event was much simpler than the entries into the above matrix. For example, the entry for 1895 was simply "1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki," assuming that all the delegates were intimately familiar with the event.